How to Generate More Ideas for Designs:
A Step-By-Step Guide for 3D Professionals

Why is idea generation so important?

How many times have you sat down at your computer only to find that there's been a change in the project your working on? Now you have to figure a new set of ideas to adapt your original design and meet the new requirements. Sometimes it's an easy adjustment, but most of the time it requires some critical thinking in how to put the new pieces of the puzzle together.

We've all been there. Sometimes it's hard to come up with new ideas, but it doesn't have to be. Contrary to popular belief, coming up with great ideas isn't something you either can or can't do. It's not an innate ability that only certain people are born with. It's a skill that can be learned.

> "The way to get good ideas is to get lots of ideas and throw the bad ones away."
> **- Linus Pauling, Scientist**

Building this skill is important because not every idea is a homerun. In fact, few of them are. Most ideas get tossed. There's no silver bullet of inspiration that leads to a great design. You go through a ton of ideas—and the more you have to start with, the better the result.

Most people don't realize there is a process for generating ideas. Like all skills, it takes practice. Lots of it. This guide breaks down the exact steps you can use to generate more design ideas.

You'll learn how to **carve out time every day** for generating ideas, **create an environment** that's conducive to coming up with new ideas, **generate the actual ideas**, **collect all the ideas** that you think of and **put your great ideas to work**.

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Step One: Take Time Each Day for Idea Generation

Idea generation is not something that only certain groups of people are gifted at doing. Everyone has the capacity to create great ideas. However, it takes time and focus. Those who are waiting for them to just come are going to be waiting a long time.

Spending 20 to 60 minutes every day on idea generation will give you the practice to improve your skills. But we get it: You're busy. Where are you going to get an extra hour?

We've got you covered. Here are some suggestions to help you manage your time.

- **Put it on your schedule.** By blocking out the time on your schedule, you're committing yourself to idea generation as an item on your to-do list, not an intangible aspiration that will happen "someday." Other things you're working on or that come up will need to be scheduled around this block of time.
- **Organize and prioritize.** Make a list of your tasks and prioritize their importance. Work on the highest priority tasks first. Also, get done with the jobs that you're dreading. Those tend to sit on your mind and become a distraction when you put them off.
- **Manage your email better.** Set your email to only update every 30 to 60 minutes. When notified instantly, many will stop what they're doing and read the email regardless of what it is. It takes lots of time to recover from these interruptions. Make yourself check email at most once an hour. When you reply, keep your answers short and to the point. It'll save you time and the reader will appreciate it, too.
- **Manage social media.** Like email, social media can be a huge time suck. Specify times that you will access social media sites and give yourself a time limit (maybe ten minutes) so that you're not "wandering" aimlessly.
- **Reduce the number of meetings you attend.** Most of us have too many meetings, many of which we don't need to attend. Check with the meeting planner to see if your attendance is necessary. In many cases, you can follow up with someone on anything you may have missed. If you have a short update, let the meeting planner know it beforehand and they can share it for you.

For more productivity advice, [check out this ebook we wrote on the subject](#).

Step Two: Create an Environment That Supports Idea Generation

Your work environment greatly impacts your idea generation. There are lots of ways to design your workspace in certain ways that make good ideas more likely. You'll want to work with your managers and colleagues to determine which ideas make the most sense for your office. Here are some suggestions to get started:

Workspace

- **The Color Blue**: A [study conducted by the University of British Columbia](#) found that when exposed to or surrounded by the color blue, test participants were able to think more creatively. The color blue boosts brain performance and activity, resulting in better creativity. You might not be able to repaint your office, but you can change your desktop background!
- **Furniture:** This is based on your taste and comfort. Ergonomic furniture will be best for working long periods at a time. [Rounded furniture has been linked to positive emotions](#), and positive emotions have been linked to better creativity. Our recommendation is to make sure the chair you use most is comfortable. However, specifically for idea generation, it may be helpful to have another small sitting area in your workspace (if there's room).
- **Decorations:** Fill your workspace with things that inspire you. Whether it's printed quotes, photos of family and friends, plants (proven to improve your mood and productivity) or small tchotchkes or toys, create the space that works best for you. One note of caution: be careful how much "stuff" you decorate your space with if you find clutter to be distracting.

Background Sounds

- **Music:** Background music at a moderate level can [enhance the creative process](#). While ambient, instrumental music seems to have the best results, personal taste can also play a role. Whether you use music services like [Spotify](#) or [Pandora](#)**,** CDs or your own mix of music on your iPhone, test to see what types of your favorite music inspires you the most.
- **Background Environment:** Maybe music's not your thing or you find it too distracting. The following are services that allow you to recreate different environments including a coffeehouse, nature or white noise:
    - o **[WhiteNoise](#):** From the sound of white noise to crowds to fire, choose individual sounds or combine them for your own custom background noise.
    - o **[MyNoise](#):** MyNoise is not just another soundscape website. This site calibrates its noises to match your hearing, audio equipment and listening environment to create a unique and ear-refreshing experience. Choose from noises like fireworks, fish tanks, cat purrs and more.

o **NatureSpace**: Designed for headphone listening, these nature sounds are captured using holographic sounds that "have the power to reach deep into your subconscious to truly relax, inspire and invigorate you."

o **A Soft Murmur**: Create your own mix of ambient sounds including coffee shop, rain, thunder, birds and more. Wash away distractions so you can focus.

Step Three: The Idea Generation Process

You've made time and created the right spot for great idea generation. Now, here come the ideas, right? Well, hopefully. But first you may need some inspiration. Inspiration can come from anywhere, but we've listed some of the best ways to jumpstart that idea spark.

- **Websites**: You likely have some favorite websites where you go to check out new designs. It could be designs from your friends or a company's projects. Maybe you can create a similar design but go off in your own direction. Here are some sample websites that may give you a jump start:
    - o **Thingiverse:** The world's largest 3D printing community for discovering, making and sharing 3D printable things.
    - o **Sketchfab:** The leading platform for publishing and finding free 3D content.
    - o **GrabCAD:** Easily manage and share your CAD files. Be inspired by the designs in the Community Library or by downloading ebooks or videos in the Resource Library.
- **Influencers**: Who are the designers or artists that inspire you? Take a look at their work and see where it takes you. Or, think about a current idea and imagine how your idols would create it. Many of the top designers are on social media: for instance, check out our list of *8 Engineers You Need to Follow on Twitter*.
- **Read**: Books, articles, blog posts, social media posts, etc. Read anything that interests you. Ideas come much easier when you have a lot of thoughts going on in your head. For a comprehensive list of CAD and design blogs, check out TenLinks.com's list. Or, we've included some of our favorites in the following blog posts:
    - o 8 of the Best CAD Sites Online
    - o 8 More of the Best CAD and Design Sites Online
- **Talk to people**: Talk to friends, family or people that would use whatever you're brainstorming ideas for. Can you create something that would solve a problem for them? Can you improve upon something they enjoy? Listen for clues of what would make their lives easier.

The Ideation Process

As we mentioned in the introduction, ideation comes easier when you have a process. Sometimes it might just be a small change in habit that opens your mind. Consider the following options (which are by no means all that are available to you):

- **Set a goal**. Just the fact that you set a goal gives you something to work towards. A simple goal might be coming up with ten ideas a day. You want to set a goal that lies just outside of what is comfortable for you. If you can easily come up with ten ideas, make the goal twenty. If you get stuck, remember: they don't all have to be good ideas. Sometimes coming up with a bad idea frees your brain to continuing moving. And, that may lead to the great idea!
- **Carry a notepad always**. You never know when you're going to get a great idea and you don't want to lose it. Carry a notebook so you can always write it down (or note it on your phone). How many great ideas have you forgotten because you didn't write things down? Don't let that happen again.
- **Change your thinking**. To come up with new, innovative ideas, you may need to [change your thinking habits](). These new techniques may spark thoughts you've never had before. Here are some ways to do it:
  - o **Change assumptions**. Many people have assumptions based on many facets of their life. It's how they can get from point A to point B without having to critically think through each minor decision. The same holds true in most businesses. Most things are done the same way because "that's the way they've always done them." However, when you question those assumptions, new ideas come out as you discuss how things can be done better.
  - o **Opposite thinking.** Instead of thinking of ideas for a specific project in the usual way, think of the opposite. If you're designing a product to accomplish X, switch the goal to accomplish Y. See what ideas are sparked to have the opposite outcome. These opposite ideas may help you see a new path to the desired goal or you may back into the idea you need.
  - o **Collaborating.** Work with someone else to share ideas and create something better than you could create alone.
  - o **Change of environment.** OK, we know we just created the perfect environment for generating ideas, but sometimes you have to switch it up. If you're stuck, try taking a walk outside or going to a coffee shop. New scenery may lead to new ideas.
  - o **Shut out distractions.** Follow the same time saving suggestions above to shut out distractions. Put your phone out of reach and on silent. Stay off of the social media sites. Don't let your mind go places other than the ideas you need to create.

Step Four: Collect Your Ideas

The ideas are coming fast and furious now. We mentioned carrying a notebook before, but that was just to get the ideas down so you don't forget them. The following tools will allow you to collect your ideas so they can be organized and ready for when you need them.

- **Evernote:** Evernote is a set of digital notebooks that syncs across devices. Its handy web extension clips articles, pictures and digital material right to your notebooks from your browser.
- **Goodnotes 4:** Handwrite notes that are searchable on your mobile device. Plus, make notes on PDFs.
- **Moment Diary:** This is your own private diary app that allows you to take notes with a timestamp.
- **Lino:** Lino is a virtual sticky note app that lets you take notes anywhere and stick them to your "board." You can also share your notes with a group you create.
- **iCardSort:** Write your ideas on virtual cards and visually organize them easily. This app is also great for brainstorming.

Step Five: Put Your Ideas to Work

The key to great ideas is executing them. Steve Jobs said, "*To me, ideas are worth nothing unless executed. They are just a multiplier. Execution is worth millions.*"

Prioritize Your Ideas

Not every idea is great, and by following the steps above, you hopefully have more ideas than you could possibly execute. Recognize which ideas need to be thrown out. One way is by prioritizing. Here are three factors to consider.

- **Need:** What is the need for your idea? Does it add value to your company and does it fit in with their strategic goals? Will it bring value to customers? Is the idea needed for the long term?
- **Complexity:** How complicated will it be to execute your idea? What resources (including costs) are required and are they available? How long will it take to execute? What's the risk if something goes wrong in the execution? Will customers easily recognize the value the executed idea offers?
- **Reality:** Is it realistic that this idea can be executed? The need and complexity may dictate that the idea will never see the light of day. Will the company support your idea? Will you be able to secure the buy-in from the key personnel that can push the idea forward (assuming you need company resources)?

Mold Your Idea

Once you determine the idea(s) to focus on, it's time to mold that idea into something that will work for your company. The best way to do that is to share your idea and get feedback. Discuss it with your boss, co-workers, friends, mentors, etc. They each will bring perspectives, and possibly challenges, that will mold it from a good idea to a great idea.

Give Your Idea Life

Now it's time to start the actual work to bring your idea to life. Add it to your project schedule (or get the project approved by your boss) and make it tangible. It's no longer just an idea. You've brought the idea generation process to fruition.

Let's Get Moving

You're now on the road to creating great ideas. Using the steps in this guide, you'll not only have more ideas to choose from, you'll recognize the great ideas from the not-so-good ones. Stop just trying to think of "stuff" and put this process in motion. Start working on projects and designs that you truly enjoy. Let's get moving.

For a deeper dive into increasing your creativity, check out **The Creativity Handbook for 3D Professionals**. This manual is packed with 25+ pages of habits, tools and hacks that will make you more creative, more often and improve your career. **Get started today**.