



Creative Ideas Generator #4: Uncommon Answers

Background: A lack of creativity is a lack of skill, not a lack of knowledge. You can find knowledge in a book. You need to practice a skill. Practicing creative thinking every day is an important step to improving your creative skills.

The Problem: We all suffer from the 'expected answer syndrome' i.e. we give the commonly held answers to almost every puzzle or mystery we are given. Problems can be classified into 2 types: *puzzles* and *mysteries* (riddles).

Puzzles can be solved using a system of logical steps e.g. start by sorting the colours into piles, then look for the corners and edges to give you a framework to work with. Mysteries are not logical games – they require a different type of thinking. Mysteries require *critical thinking skills* – “*it’s elementary, dear Watson*”. Try critically thinking and solving a standard puzzle! Doesn’t make sense does it – unless of course it is a crossword puzzle, which is actually a series of interlinked riddles.

The Solution: Practice makes perfect. You need to stretch your critical thinking muscle every day. You need regular exercises for your team and for your own mind to wrestle with. Try sending a daily email with a riddle attached – create a prize for the person who responds the quickest and with the most correct answers (more on the *right answer syndrome* in another Creative Ideas Generator).

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There are two parts to this exercise:

Part 1: Use your *imagination*: imagine you are on the Moon. That should be easy enough. Now *create* a way of getting back to Earth without using a rocket. That is not an easy task.

NB: *The point here is that imagination and creativity are not the same thing.* Most of us have imagination but we are constrained by our personal experiences in grasping concepts beyond these experiences. Creativity is nothing more than the production of new scenarios given pieces of information that were there all along: think music and the constraints of octaves and note sequences and the ability to combine those in interesting ways that make ‘new’ music.

Part 2: The 3rd Eye Problem: if you were able to attach a third eye to your body, where would you locate it?





Think about this – we are quite constrained by having two eyes that face forward. You effectively have less than 180 degrees of vision without moving your head. Imagine being an owl. They are not constrained by their inability to almost rotate their necks fully. If you have ever suffered a neck or back injury then you'll know how your field of vision is compromised without the ability to rotate your head.

Prospective answer: Most people say the back of the head – that's the standard, commonly held answer. We even have an expression for it that means a person has 360 vision – almost magical vision e.g. "*eyes in the back of his/ her head*". The back of the head answer does make a lot of sense though and doubles our field of vision.

That solution has limits though: it is static, allowing only 160 degrees of field of vision (give or take). What if you put the extra eye on the end of your finger which gives 360 field of vision. Which finger though? That creates problems, too. Think about it. How many times a day do you use the underside of your finger? Almost constantly – imagine trying to type without damaging your 3rd eye.

The more elegant solution is putting it on the back of your hand. That would solve the problem completely – a not so sensitive part of the body, a part not used that often and complete freedom to see whatever you want to see – complete 360 degrees.

Takeaway: Critical thinking is a vital part of the creative process. You need to practice every day. You also need to look for more than one solution to the problem.

