



Transform a Mundane Task
into Something Artfully Creative in
7 EASY STEPS

AN INVENTIVENESS WORKOUT

By Marisa Mott

"All the arts we practice are apprenticeships. The big art is our life."

M.C. RICHARDS

Is it possible to make something that is mind-numbing into something uplifting? I perform repetitive, mind-numbing tasks each day. Over the years, the list of tasks has morphed, but it has included drudgery in the form of changing kid's diapers, styling my hair, driving 30 minutes to and from work, washing dishes, doing the laundry, bookkeeping, grading papers, counting inventory, etc. As a creative soul, I crave survival techniques for those mental sludge moments.

While teaching Creative Thinking at an art college, I built a writing and exploration exercise to convince students that any mundane task (of their choice) could be transformed into something artfully creative. It was my dream that students would reach two conclusions: 1. Everyone has, at least, a few creative genes 2. These creative magic beans can be coaxed and revived as needed.

Just for giggles, a few definitions (ala' Dictionary.com):

1. mundane - lacking interest or excitement; dull.
2. creatively - having the quality or power of creating.
3. artfully - in a skillful or expert manner.



PICK A MUNDANE TASK (PICK IT GOOD)

Mundane to Artfully Creative – Step One

*"...And when the morning light comes streaming in,
you'll get up and do it again. Amen."*

JACKSON BROWNE

Do you have an activity fighting for first place in the mundane task competition? When developing this exercise, I have found more value in picking a task that is repeated daily. For sure, there are seasonal, weekly, or monthly tasks that came to mind, but daily tasks win *Most Tedious*, hands down. Pick your winner (one daily task) and move on to the next step.



HOP OUT OF THE VICTIM'S SEAT AND DRIVE THIS TASK

Mundane to Artfully Creative - Step Two

"Most of American life consists of driving somewhere and then returning home, wondering why the hell you went."

JOHN UPDIKE

Shed some light on the reasons you choose to do this task. Explore the options and affirm: performing this task is truly a choice, your choice. Start with these exploratory steps to bring about full ownership. Below each question is a personal entry from my mundane task: 30 minute hair styling sessions.

1. Is there any blame storming associated with this task?

Example: "My male co-worker spends about two-seconds on his hair. American society dictates that woman must have their hair styled. Thanks to Hollywood, wild, unkempt hair is a sure sign of crazy/crazed. I wouldn't have to spend all this time on my hair if these "rules" didn't exist." (These were my perceptions at the time, not necessarily based on fact)

Warning! Responses can expose hidden, lurking martyrdom connected to the task. By blurting out blames and laughing at your finger pointing skills, you risk admitting that maybe (just maybe) nobody is forcing you to do the task.

2. What would happen if I chose not to do it?

Imagine and describe the worst case scenario. Example: I could spend the extra 30 minutes picking debris and vermin from the brier patch, formerly known as my hair. My thick, unruly tresses would probably extend outward, rather than longward- covering my face - covering new wrinkles - obscuring my view out - obscuring views in....I would be given more personal space when walking in public. People would move aside to allow my hair to pass.

Presto Extendo! Apply humor to this step and begin to stretch your creative muscles. This warm-up will promote flexibility in your inventiveness workout.

3. Can I take full credit for the making this choice?

Example: Yes, I want my hair to look a certain way. I choose not to shave my head (which would be faster than blow-drying, ironing and fluffing). My hair is one of the few physical features I can change or manipulate on a whim.)

Being! Responses can be springboards for developing an affirmation. To begin the transformation, the focus needs to be on what you can do - not how you can get someone else to do it for you or how someone else needs to change before the task can improve.

4. Now write the task as a simple affirmation.

Example - I, (YOUR NAME) , choose to spend time on making my hair look its best.

Write it, say it, believe it. Repeat. Use your affirmation as a tool to keep your perspective right sized.

The next step will have some suggestions for crafting challenges for this process.



GO DOG, GO!

Mundane to Artfully Creative - Step Three

"Life is like a ten speed bicycle. Most of us have gears we never use."

CHARLES M. SCHULZ

Create a time challenge: I will do this task faster, I will do this task less often, I will allow more time to do this task, I will not put off this task and do it as soon as needed, etc.... After specifying a time goal, measure and record improvements. Set a beginning and end time for improvement as an additional motivator.

Example (based on cleaning dishes): I timed myself and found that each time I unloaded the dishwasher it took ten minutes to put away the dishes. Rather than spend at least thirty minutes a day doing dishes after every meal, I challenged myself to use the dishwasher once a day (and

conserve on water as well). Be careful not to create a dangerous or unsafe goal - such as driving faster or changing diapers less! Vrrrrrrrrrooom.

The next step will have some suggestions for banishing filters that discourage invention.



MORE, MORE, MORE, HOW DO YA LIKE IT?

Mundane to Artfully Creative – Step Four

“Unlikely adventures require unlikely tools.”

MR. MAGORIUM'S WONDER EMPORIUM (2007)

Here are some stirring questions to play with and ponder. Expose crazy, bizarre, funny, quirky, colorful, eccentric ideas and allow them safe harbor on paper. Banish filters and concerns about how others might interpret your solutions. Quiet any self judgement, then quickly write down any and all ideas (you're more likely to get vivid solutions).

Questions:

- How can you make your task more visually pleasing?

- How can you make this task more appealing to your sense of sound, taste, smell, or touch?
- How can you make your the task more graceful?
- How can you make your task more efficient?
- How can you make your task more fun?
- How can you make your task more elegant?
- How can you make your task more inspirational?
- How can you make your task more_____?

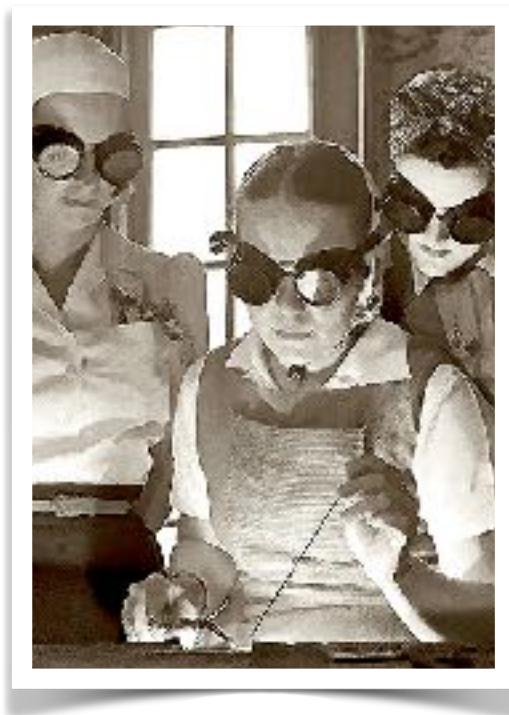
Exploration:

From your answers, select 3 to 5 methods for experimentation. Assemble together supplies needed and keep it simple. I recommend collecting, borrowing, rediscovering, repurposing, or up-cycling items as much as possible to make the experimentation process easy on your wallet. If an experiment has a positive outcome, purchase items as needed to continue practicing the method.

Okay now, commit to giving these wild ideas a try. Determine how much and when to experiment, then do it. The sooner your experimentation starts, the closer you are to making this task an art form.

Example:

In the past, several students shared about changing diapers artfully. Insights about how the experimentation developed the task into a more meaningful, bonding interaction was moving. One mother made the most of the eye contact that came with her child's face close to hers. She would sing to the child and repeat a "diaper changing mantra" of sorts. It evolved into a ritual that she and her baby relished.



WALK A MILE IN THEIR SHOES

Mundane to Artfully Creative – Step Five

“Everybody, everybody everywhere, has his own movie going, his own scenario, and everybody is acting his movie out like mad, only most people don’t know that is what they’re trapped by, their little script.”

TOM WOLFE

Break away from your own ideas and schemes. In this step, it is beneficial to seek, consult and execute someone else’s game plan. Don’t be afraid to step out of your genre. If you are “rulesy,” seek out someone that is “ballsy.” I am more of a mediator, so I look for people that practice activism. Sample mentors with expertise different from your own. A painter might gain something from a computer developer, an accountant might immolate the habits of a poet, etc.... Start by consulting your

mentors or muses. Imagine: How would (mentor/muses' name here) do it? Challenge yourself to find 3 to 5 ways someone else would make your mundane task artfully creative. Write them down. Plan. Try!

My Favorite Mentors & Muses:

1. Risk Failure with a Smile

Jamie Oliver, chef, author and activist. Oliver's culinary adventure, [Jamie's Great Italian Escape](#), contains a bundle of aspirations. His foodie undertaking (in a temperamental, blue VW van) is a visual instruction manual for starting with a general plan, meeting changes to that plan with courage and optimism, risking failure with a smile, and graciously accepting the present's presents. Although Oliver reveals moments of doubt and questioning along the way, he trudges through to his final goal. Demonstrating another behavior I would like to build upon in my own creative process.

2. Use Challenges as Stepping Stones

Chuck Close, painter, and photographer. Close's photorealistic paintings made quite an impression on a younger me when I was lucky enough to see them in person. Close continues to "WOW" the older me with both his artistic and human being skills. He was offered additional challenges by-way-of a catastrophic spinal artery collapse in 1988 that left him severely paralyzed. Today, he continues to paint and produce large-scale portraits that are made up of intricate color patterns. Close faced a difficult fight to regain movement and, through his creative solutions, was able to develop

new methods for painting. Much of this process is revealed in Director, Marion Cajori's, compelling documentary, [Chuck Close: A Portrait in Progress, 1988](#). Worth a quick view, words of wisdom from the artist himself via CBS News production, [Note to Self: Artist Chuck Close](#)

"Every idea occurs while you are working. If you are sitting around waiting for inspiration, you could sit there forever." **CHUCK CLOSE**

3. Self-Discipline into Action

Tom Wolfe, writer and author. Another inspirer with a similar creed, Wolfe wrote standing in the kitchen, using the top of the refrigerator as his desk. [More about Tom Wolfe](#)

"What I write when I force myself is generally just as good as what I write when I'm feeling inspired. It's mainly a matter of forcing yourself to write." **TOM WOLFE**

4. Rely on Creative Prompts

Roger von Oech, creativity guru and author. Von Oech's guide, [Whack On the Side of the Head](#), began influencing my approach to creative problem solving when I was introduced to it as a textbook. His enlightened concepts and simple techniques are easy to use. His daily creative thinking prompts are a click away: [Von Oech's Whack of the Day](#)

"Look for the second right answer - This has been my guiding principle for over thirty years." **ROGER VON OECH**

5. Mash-up chaos and restraint

Martin Facey, artist and teacher. As a college art professor, Facey introduced me to a drawing technique which dances back and forth between surrendering to complete intentional chaos with free expressive complexity then pulling back to restrained + edited + controlled simplicity. This method is amplified in the opposing processes of Rube Goldberg and Steve Jobs (discussed next). [More about Martin Facey](#)

6. Tickle Complexity

Rube Goldberg, cartoonist, sculptor, and author. Using the character, Professor Lucifer Gorgonzola Butts, Goldberg would illustrate extremely complicated devices that execute straightforward tasks in complex, indirect ways. The inventions are better known as "Rube Goldberg Machines". Goldberg's illustrations of absurd machines *"did the complete opposite of what most machines do - instead of making difficult things easy, he made easy things difficult."* [More Rube Goldberg.](#)

7. Bring About Simplicity

Steve Jobs, entrepreneur, marketer, inventor, co-founder, chairman, and CEO of Apple Inc. Jobs expressed his belief in simplicity in the quote below. [More about Steve Jobs.](#)

"That's been one of my mantras – simplicity. Simple can be harder than complex: You have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it's worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains." **STEVE JOBS**

8. Invoke Irrational Frivolity

Alexander Girard, Designer, Artist, Collector. Because I am more familiar with Alexander Girard's work, rather than his theories or methods, his art and cultural contributions are my creative inspiration.

"I am a reasonable and sane functionalist tempered by irrational frivolity." **ALEXANDER GIRARD**

9. Shut Down your Editor

Demetri Martin, actor, director, cartoonist and musician. Martin began filling up notebooks with ideas for jokes, a practice that paid off. A few of his techniques that might be worth a try: writing jokes at a treadmill desk and learning ambidexterity just for the heck of it.

[More about Demetri Martin.](#)

"Somewhere along the line, I stopped being so hard on myself about how good each idea was, and just started writing down anything that seemed like it had potential. And out of that, I found a lot of drawing and story ideas, and different kinds of jokes with different material." **DEMETRI MARTIN**



CHERRY PICKING

Mundane to Artfully Creative – Step Six

"There is nothing that 'Sesame Street' can't teach you if you let it."

SARAH CHURCHWELL

To cherry pick is to selectively choose (the most beneficial items) from what is available. Seek and find your best resources for improving the task. These can be online searches including Pinterest boards or blogs. Uncover printed resources like appliance manuals, cookbooks, home improvement guides, magazines etc.... Recently I stumbled upon two in-depth stories (online and on tv) about tackling laundry and loading the dishwasher! When *Googling*, "Real Simple - Dishwashing," I was directed to more than eight sources. The topics ranged from, ["The Secret Life of Your Dishwasher,"](#) to ["Bob Blumer's Dishwasher Salmon!"](#)

For this step, start building your creative reserve by cherry picking two to three additional resources.



CATAPULT

Mundane to Artfully Creative – Step Seven

"I read in a book once that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but I've never been able to believe it. I don't believe a rose would be as nice if it was called a thistle or a skunk cabbage."

L.M. MONTGOMERY, Anne of Green Gables

Launch! Choose at least 3 ideas from the exploratory steps and put them into action. For best results, implement them for at least a week. If you journal, include a daily entry about what you tried and how it worked. Begin each journal entry with the affirmation you wrote in step two.

Once you have adopted the artfully creative version of your mundane task, size-up your experience by asking:

- Is your perception of your creative abilities any different?
- Did you uncover hidden creative strengths?
- Did you stretch or revive your creative muscles?
- Do you enjoy doing the mundane task more than before the exercises?
- Are there any other mundane tasks you would like to make artfully creative?
- Is it now possible to apply these steps on stubborn creative blocks?

STEPS IN REVIEW

1. **Pick it Good.** Pick a mundane task that you repeat daily.
2. **Hop Out of the Victim's Seat.** Shed some light on the reasons you choose to do this task. Create an affirmation focusing on the task being a choice, your choice.
3. **Go. Dog GO!** Create a time challenge.
4. **More, More, More!** Experiment with unlikely tools.
5. **Walk a Mile in Their Shoes.** Seek, consult, and execute your mentor's game plan.
6. **Cherry Pick outside resources** to find additional methods for improving the task.
7. **Catapult!** Choose at least 3 ideas from the previous steps and put them into action. Evaluate your experience with the process.

