

# Need a Creativity Boost? Try This Easy “7 Ways” Exercise.

There is a popular saying that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over while expecting different results. But it's easy to get stuck when you need new ideas. Your brain may keep circling around the same old thoughts and solutions.

Give yourself permission to think differently. One easy way to do this is a technique called "seven ways:"

- Depending on what needs creative thinking, challenge yourself to come up with at least seven different ways of approaching it.
- Go fast and write down as many possibilities as you can no matter how far out the ideas feel.
- Typically, the first few ideas are the usual solutions you would come up with anyway. Then your brain has to work harder and start coming up with new possibilities.
- Do you need to stop at seven? No way. Keep going if your brain is really warming up and getting out of the usual thinking ruts.
- Once you have a list, consider which ideas show the best potential for solving the problem at hand. Even impossible-sounding ideas can have useful nuggets to consider. And you might combine a few different ideas to get you started in a new direction.
- You also can take an intriguing idea and do a second round of 7 ways to drill down further.

"Seven ways" is useful in a variety of situations, whether you're writing or trying to solve a problem at school, work or home. A few examples are on the second page.

**Situation:** *I'm writing a story and need more conflict/excitement involving the main character.*

**Brainstormed list of at least 7 different ways to approach it:**

1. Give character a bad habit that frustrates others
2. Have character make a series of bad choices (sabotages self)
3. Have character sabotaged by others making bad choices
4. Have character experience a string of good luck; can it last?
5. Character has to make a life-changing decision; will it work out?
6. Character is impacted by a major event or disaster--how do they cope?
7. Character is suddenly all alone and must cope
8. Character is suddenly surrounded by a ton of people (could be good or bad) and must cope
9. What else?

*Hint: You could then take any of these ideas and do a second round of 7 ways to come up with details.*

**Situation:** *I can't keep my room picked up and it's causing battles with my parents. I get into a groove for a bit, but then it falls apart and I'm back to messy "clean your room!" debates.*

**Brainstormed list of at least 7 different ways to approach it:**

1. Figure out what's the biggest problem in keeping it clean and focus on that
2. Get agreement about what really matters and what I won't be hassled about
3. Always do a quick tidy up before going to bed or first thing in the morning
4. Declare a "no piles" approach--invest an extra minute to put back things immediately
5. Make it easy to keep clean...free up space and get organizers, baskets and holders that work for my stuff
6. Tidy up something every time I walk in the room so it's always fast and a habit
7. Create a monthly cleaning day that's fun with music, snacks and time to sort out stuff I don't need
8. "Hire" a sibling or parent to help; trade chores as one payment idea
9. Invite a friend to help. Make it an exchange where we go to each other's house to hang out and help clean up each other's room
10. What else?

**Situation:** *I can't find time for a favorite activity; I'm always getting interrupted or distracted.*

**Brainstormed list of at least 7 different ways to approach it:**

1. Declare 5 minutes a day that will be protected time
2. Stop doing something else to free up time
3. Combine it with another activity
4. Ask a friend to join in
5. Join a group focused on the activity
6. Declare a day per month for enjoying this activity
7. Create an "activity zone" with no interruption agreements
8. What else?