

# Four Phases of the Creative Brain



## PREPARATION

PHASE 1



## INCUBATION

PHASE 2



## ILLUMINATION

PHASE 3



## VERIFICATION

PHASE 4

Our brain operates like a well-tuned orchestra, with different sections playing harmoniously at various times. Achieving the right balance is crucial; if any part is too loud, too quiet, out of sync, or off-key, the overall result isn't quite right. Finding harmony among brain networks is the key to optimizing creativity.

### PHASE 1: PREPARATION

Generating a broad spectrum of ideas requires divergent thinking—a free-flowing generation of concepts linked to the creative task. This process depends on quieting your brain's cognitive control network and enabling your default mode network, which stimulates your imagination to roam freely. This phase is about exploration, collecting data, and embracing the randomness of brainstorming.

### PHASE 2: INCUBATION

After brainstorming numerous ideas, it's time to LET IT GO. Step away from your problem or project and let your brain work behind the scenes. You can engage in relaxing activities like sleeping, showering, or spending time in nature. Exercise is also great! These activities allow your subconscious brain to organize memories and prepare for a creative breakthrough.

### PHASE 3: ILLUMINATION

The "Aha!" moment arrives suddenly and mysteriously. This is the flash of creative insight when seemingly unrelated concepts connect in an unexpected way, captured briefly by your brain's salience network, which spots this fleeting spark of insight.

### PHASE 4: VERIFICATION

Lastly, it's time to refine this raw insight with convergent thinking. Here, your brain's cognitive control and attentional networks work together to analyze, evaluate, and polish your concept/insight into something both novel and practical.

## MINDFULNESS AND CREATIVITY

Balancing 'freestyle' and 'control' brain networks is crucial not only for creativity but also for overall well-being. Jazz improvisation, for instance, involves surrendering some control while maintaining enough balance for self-expression.

Mindfulness practice helps provide this balance. Meditation strengthens both the freestyle and control networks, and, importantly, bolsters a third network—the salience network—which regulates the other two by determining which one should be active and when.

## APPLYING MINDFULNESS TO THE CREATIVE PROCESS

**Preparation:** Mindfulness meditation enhances divergent thinking. Meditate before brainstorming to increase focus and generate better-quality ideas.

**Incubation:** Mindfulness helps you unwind, reducing anxiety and stress. A short meditation session can clear your mind and promote relaxation, allowing insights to emerge naturally. Walking meditation or sleep can also reduce stress and help ideas crystallize.

**Illumination:** By sharpening awareness, mindfulness ensures that when a bright idea surfaces, you won't miss it amid mental clutter.

**Verification:** Stay positive and focused as you refine your idea. Even setbacks add value to future attempts. Meditation and exercise sharpen attention, fostering clearer thinking as you choose the best solutions.