



# IDEATION TECHNIQUES

# RULES FOR IDEATION



**Time needed:** a maximum of 90 minutes for a session, otherwise cognitive limits are reached and quality goes down.

**Set-up:** a creative question or prompt, an inspiring space, some great people with different points of view and lived experiences (individual work can be okay too!), a designated facilitator, appropriate supplies, wall space, and a series of short + structured ideation exercises to encourage people to dive deeper into possibilities.

**Source:** Adapted from IDEO

## Rules:

- Set a time limit
- Go for quantity
- Defer judgement - verbal and non-verbal
- Encourage wild ideas
- Build on the ideas of others
- Stay focused on the topic
- One conversation at a time
- Listen well
- Have fun and be playful



# UNICORNS AND HORSES

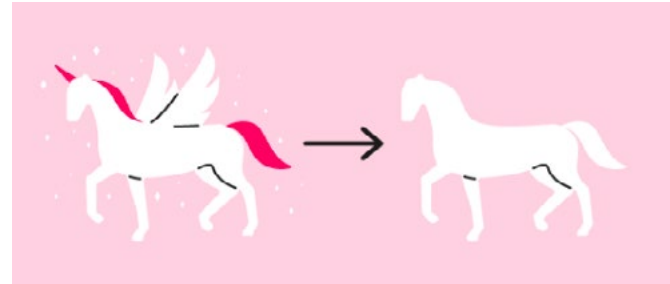


**Time needed:** 20-30 minutes

**Set-up:** groups of 3-6 people, markers, post-it notes

**Source:** HubSpot, "Brainstorming Techniques"

**Description:** This technique encourages your team to let imaginations run wild, and generate "unicorn" ideas. These are then translated into "horses" - applicable, real-world solutions uncovered through your team's wildest wishes. Given the opportunity to have their thoughts and ideas thoroughly expressed and considered by the group. This avoids the loudest or most extroverted people unintentionally dominating the sessions.



## How it works:

- Working quietly and individually, participants are asked to dream up the most unattainable, extreme, and impractical solutions they can think of to the question they are working on. They write one unicorn idea on each post-it note.
- After about 10 minutes, participants read their unicorn ideas out loud to their teams, and post them on the ideas wall.
- The group considers and discusses the unicorn ideas that are most interesting and provocative for them. What makes this idea so impossible?
- Through the discussion, participants work together to turn these unicorns into “horses” - a more feasible and workable idea. What is a more realistic concept to pursue? How can the unicorn idea be scaled down? Which features of the unicorn idea could we integrate into another approach?
- Write each of the horse ideas on a post-it note, and share on your ideation wall.

# WHAT WOULD BEYONCE DO?

**Time needed:** 20-30 minutes

**Set-up:** groups of 3-6 people, markers, post-it notes, image set ([here is a set to use and adapt](#)). Pro-tip: if you plan to use these frequently then consider laminating an image set. If you have a big group, it's okay to have repeats of the same images.

**Source:** Adapted from THINK School of Creative Leadership

**Description:** "What Would Beyonce Do?" helps you to expand the possible solution space, before normalizing into a more practical idea. This technique uses images that prompt people to ask themselves the question "What would [...] do?" Images of widely known public figures (i.e. Beyonce), character archetypes (i.e. a cranky toddler), brands, and others can get the creative juices flowing.

It's a lively, and usually very funny, ideation prompt that can lead to some great lateral thinking. It will help you stretch your thinking, leaving reality and logic behind to come up with totally new ideas.

## How it works:

- Prepare an image set that gives a lot of choice for the group size. Print images on 8.5 x 11 and in colour so that people can easily see what the options are. Full page powerpoint slides are an easy shortcut - they don't need to be fancy. Make sure that the images give you good diversity, of all types, and also that you're not choosing images that require too much interpretation just to get started - make it easy.



- Ask each ideation group to choose ~3 images, depending on your group size and the amount of time you have for this activity.
- Use the images to answer your creative question from a different perspective - How would the mafia solve this problem? A toddler? What solution would happen in a fairytale? What would be the science fiction solution? How would Homer Simpson approach this?
- Take about half of your allocated time for this first part. About 5 minutes per image is a good guideline, and write down every idea that comes to mind. Don't overthink it – you should be producing a long list. If you are laughing, you're on the right track. If not, keep pushing to go wilder! Write each of these down on sticky notes and put them on your ideation wall.
- About halfway through your time, and once

the group has shared some stretch ideas, shift into working through how these ideas might be translated to those that are more relevant, plausible, and feasible. Select ~4 ideas that have the most energy - those which made you laugh most or you can't get out of your mind. Look for the essence behind your wild idea and convert it into a more realistic solution to your creative question. For example, solving a problem as Wile E. Coyote to get your kid out of bed to make it to school on time could become an "alarm clock bed" that tilts 10 degrees every time the snooze button is pushed.

- Keep both sets of notes for your work later. Sometimes insights take a little while to land, and you might find a spark of inspiration when you come back to these later.

# PERMACULTURE PROMPTS



**Time needed:** 20-30 minutes

**Set-up:** groups of 3-6 people, markers (different colours), large post-it notes, permaculture prompt cards (see link in “more info”)

**Description:** Permaculture is a set of design principles and practices inspired by patterns observed in resilient, self-sufficient, and regenerative ecosystems. It is most often applied in designing and developing human habitats that are in deep relationship with the land, and it’s also an inspiring and provocative ideation technique. Particularly when solutions that we are seeking to a variety of different complex challenges must be healthy, resilient, and in right relationship with land, water and people. It is a great ideation prompt to connect earlier systems thinking, being and doing work into the ideation phase of an innovation process.

**More info:** [Cards](#) (By-donation downloads or printed card decks with a large variety of permaculture prompts)



## How it works:

- Purchase a Permaculture Design Deck, or use the by-donation downloadable version and print some provocative prompts. It's a big card deck and set of prompts, so plan to spend some time in advance to curate them a bit. Or if you have a full printed deck you can go with the flow of what is happening with the group, and pull a smaller set of prompt cards that will provoke the groups' thinking in a useful way.
- Ask each ideation team to choose ~5 cards. Encourage them to spend a few minutes reading the cards together and discussing them, so that they can develop some shared meaning about what they are about, and what they mean. The concepts will be unfamiliar to many, and although it's not important that the "get them right" for the purpose of this exercise, it is important that they get into the systems frame of mind before beginning to produce potential solutions.
- The group then spends the rest of the allocated time grounding the ideation prompts in their specific creative question, and suggests potential solutions in response.
- This ideation prompt is more dialogic by nature, and often the potential solutions that are produced are drawn rather than written, so encourage people to take that option.
- Write/draw each idea on a sticky note and post it on your ideation wall.



# ASSUMPTION DUMPTION



**Time needed:** 20-40 minutes

**Set-up:** groups of 3-6 people, 11x17 paper, pens, markers, post-it notes

**Description:** This is a technique where participants state their assumptions about a situation or a problem. They then try to reverse or reframe the assumptions to see if new opportunities are revealed. By reversing assumptions, individuals and teams are encouraged to explore fresh perspectives on ideas, values and beliefs. Not unlike standing on one's head, this activity should generate rich discussion that helps team members to understand each other's point of view and explore the origins of those beliefs. In turn, this unpacking of assumptions helps the team dive more deeply into the problem to discover its true source. Another feature of this technique is that it makes sure everybody is given

the opportunity to have their thoughts and ideas thoroughly expressed and considered by the group. This avoids the loudest or most extroverted people unintentionally dominating the sessions.

**More Info:** Adapted from Moura Quayle, Strategic Design Toolkit



## How it works:

- Each participant begins by folding an 11x17 piece of paper into thirds.
- Working individually and silently, in the first column each person writes an assumption about the question you are working on. Write "Assumptions" as a title to this column.
- The papers are then passed one person to the right, and the next person builds on this assumption. They can amplify, expand upon, or further detail what is written there with related assumptions.
- Try to keep the papers moving, and to work quickly, don't dwell too long and follow your instincts.
- Once each person has written on each paper, and the papers are back the original writer, in the second column we are going to invert these assumptions. What if the opposite was true? These don't have to be real or feasible, they can be extreme to make a point. Write "Inversions" as the title for this column.
- The papers then make another circuit around the team.
- In the third column write "Solutions" as a heading. What potential solutions emerge to the question that you are working on by surfacing assumptions and their inversions? Papers should make a final circuit around the team, with each person adding the solutions that are being sparked. People can add as many solutions as they like.
- Once the papers end up with the original person, have a discussion about insights that emerge.
- Write each promising, provocative and interesting solution on a post-it note and add them all to your ideation wall.