

How to Steal Like an Author

Success in Writing Books Through Increase Creativity

By Dean Giles

Chapter 1

Robin Hood

“Every new idea is just a mashup or remix of one or more previous ideas.” -- Austin Kleon

Where Did They Steal Their Ideas?

Harry Potter flashed onto existence from the mind of J.K. Rowling. She readily admits to taking ideas from local folklore. Stephanie Myers, the author of the *Twilight Series*, found the seeds of her stories in the classics, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Wuthering Heights*. Disney based his movies on so many well-known children’s stories. The seeds of creativity in authorship are found in many places. It is important to note, that ideas just don’t exist in a vacuum, they are usually spawned from the seeds of earlier ideas.

I love this quote, quoted by Austin Kleon, in *Steal Like an Artist*.

Immature poets imitate, mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling that is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn.

--T.S. Eliot

So it is with writing. Capture every good idea, combine them together, add to them, take the ideas further than when you found them, then send them out into the world in a work that is unique and very much the essence of yourself, the writer.

Brandon Sanderson, author of *Mystborn*, *Elantris*, and many other books, says that he takes ideas from history and weaves them into his books.

Other writers, when asked where their ideas came from revealed the following: ¹

“They’re everywhere. I’m inspired by people and things around me.” Gwendolyn Brooks.

“Ideas come to a writer, a writer does not search for them.” Patricia Highsmith.

“They can come from anywhere.” Robert J. Conley.

Ideas for books, articles, and other writing can be found in many places and in many ways. Each person may find that the idea process is somewhat personal, that it happens for them in a way that is as unique as their writing style.

The number of ideas and the breadth of those ideas are only limited by each person's individual creativity.

Creativity, therefore, was something that intrigued me, something that enticed me to study it over a number of years. Austin Kleon's work, *Steal Like an Artist*, influenced my thinking greatly. You will see a number of quotes from his book here. Many of the concepts that he explores I had come in contact with from previous works that I have read. However, his application of the ideas is unique. He also articulates the concepts and their application very well, and he demonstrates his imagination and creativity in the actual format of his book. The format of his book is in a style completely his own.

I hope that readers of this book realize that promoting "stealing ideas" doesn't condone using them without doing something to those ideas to develop them, to make them better, and ultimately to make them unique.

Building on the Ideas of Others

Isaac Newton acknowledged the intellectual contributions of his idea predecessors in this unique and powerful way, "if I have seen further than others, it is because I was standing on the shoulders of giants."

I humbly have to acknowledge innumerable others from whom I have learned and borrowed ideas. Ideas that have ultimately come together to form this book. The back of this book has a very incomplete list of many books, articles, and resources that I have pulled ideas from. Truly, I am standing on the shoulders of giants, borrowing liberally from their ideas, and I hope that my perspective can be useful to many others out there. Take some time to browse the bibliography in the back of this book, and perhaps you will find interesting reading to add to your pool of knowledge.

CREATIVITY

Creativity

How to Increase the Creativity in Your Life

"If we're free from the burden of trying to be completely original, we can stop trying to make something out of nothing, and we can embrace influence instead of running away from it."

—Austin Kleon

A Beautiful Mind

“Most of the things that are interesting, important, and human, are the results of creativity.”
--Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi



Figure 1 Creativity

When I first started delving into creativity, a number of the books that I read seemed to divide people into the “haves” and “have-nots.” Creativity was glorified, and those that exhibited it honored and set on a pedestal. I desperately wanted to be part of that group, but I let my own insecurities whisper doubts into my ears and my mind.

I often came up with creative answers to problems and responded to miraculous inspiration, but I let myself believe that the events were flukes, just lightning flashes, that would fade and disappear. I could plainly see those creative breakthroughs that I had experienced, but I felt like they were inconsistent, and let myself believe that I really wasn't very creative.

Over a number of years, however, I found places where I could apply my creativity, and was astounded at how many ideas I had when I started to capture those ideas and put them down on paper, and how much better I was able to work through problems by relying on what I came to believe was, “out of the box” thinking.

I also realized that innovation and creativity seemed to be all around me. In looking back I am amazed at how the stories of creative people and events emphasize the flash discoveries while skimming over the years of study, preparation, hard work, failure, and disappointment that often preceded the amazing light-bulb experiences that pave the way to unbridled success.

In more recent years the tables have turned. There is a vein of study that looks at creativity from a different perspective, it has been called on occasion, generative research.

Robert Epstein, Ph.D. conducted 25 years of research. In his book, *The Big Book of Creativity Games*, he explains, “Generative research shows that novel behavior in individuals (read creativity here) is orderly and predictive, and that new ideas come from the combinations of old ideas. Creativity can be learned and fostered.”

Read this again--Creativity can be learned and fostered! It can be coaxed out of most any fertile and working grey matter that exists between the ears of every person!

Among the ideas that Robert Epstein explores is the concept that everyone has pretty much the exact same creative potential, and that each of us can improve our creativity with simple exercises and games.

Through my years of study, I collected exercises meant to enhance creativity. Project management and self-development books are full of these types of exercises. In this book I want to present many of those ideas, activities, methods, and processes that have brought creative success to other people. I also want to share the lessons that I learned along the way, share some of the wisdom of others that made an impression on me, and share my enthusiasm for opening up your world to the creative potential inside of you that is yearning to get out.

In the final section of this book, I attempt to apply creative exercises directly to writing. There isn't a field in this world that requires more creativity, innovation, and persistence than the field of writing. Your success as a writer will depend on how well you can creatively combine and develop ideas and concepts that are specific to the themes and subjects of your books and articles.

The up-side of this situation is that writers often have better creative habits than other people, they tend to grasp the concepts easily, see their greater application, and they usually find immediate improvement in their writing when they integrate just a few of the many creativity activities into their current methods and processes. This book is for everyone wanting more creativity in their lives, but it has been carefully tailored to specifically help authors and writers.

Creativity Starts from the Inside

One of the quotes from Star Wars that I hear referred to often is from Yoda, “Do or do not, there is no try.” Creativity is an action, it comes from inside. It won't be perfect, and there will ever be something more you can do to it. But, it is an action pure and simple. Just do it. Don't try to put it off, don't defer it to someone else, just get out of your comfort zone and do it.

A fable or object story that I heard from my father went something like this. Two frogs fell into a bucket of cream. The other frogs gathered around and watched. The two frogs swam, and kicked, and tried desperately to get out. As some time went on, the other frogs began to mock their efforts. “You'll never get out. You just aren't strong enough. There's just no way you will get out of this mess.” One of the frogs heard the spectators, and finally just gave up and sank to the bottom of the bucket. The other frog, however, was a little deaf. He could hear the commotion up above, but couldn't understand a word that was being said. He figured that the other frogs were shouting encouragement to him, so he worked all the harder. Over some time, the cream began to turn to butter. The frog was able to get up on a little bit of solidity, and finally jump out.

Every adventure into creativity will be accompanied by a cacophony of voices. The voices will be all around you. Some will be encouraging voices, others will be full of criticism, and some filled with envy.

Choose carefully the voices that you listen to, but realize, that the voice that makes the most difference is the one that comes from inside of you. When that voice has clarity, it will quiet all of the outside voices, and will lead you to the creative successes you desire.

Understand and never doubt that you are creative! Remind yourself that you are creative often, it reaffirms that truth again and again. Often the only real difference between a creative person and a not-so-creative person is their own beliefs. Any person, that believes he or she is creative, can tap into that part of their mind that contains solutions that are only available through creativity.

Creative people can find ways to:

Generate ideas at will

Find new ways to make things work

Know where to look for the best ideas.

Create new book ideas

Improve old book ideas to create new ones.

Develop powerful solutions to current problems

See problems as new opportunities.

Be the idea person that other people come to.

Manipulate and modify ideas until they come up with the most innovative and powerful ones to work with.

In the next chapter I discuss the foundation of creativity.

“You’re Never Gonna Slow Me Down”

How to Remove Roadblocks to Creativity

Doubt, fear, and confusion are the anti-thesis to creativity. You must work to counter your own fears. Here is an activity that is a good way to remove fear and doubt, I call it “Counter Point.”

Crush Fear and Doubt with this counterpoint activity.

Write down every fear or doubt. Then write a counterpoint to it that answers every fear or issue.

For example:

Fear

I might as well not bring up my ideas, no one really listens to me any way.

Counter Point

I have great ideas. My ideas often make a difference. People will listen to me, and like my ideas.

Fear

This idea is so different that I’ll be laughed at if I suggest it.

Counter Point

Even if others reject my idea, they will respect those who try to show creativity and innovation. Others will see that I am trying to improve the situation. Sometimes the riskier the idea, the greater the reward when it works.

Fear

I'll never be able to do it.

Counter Point

I'll take it a little bit at a time. I'll set up a schedule to do a little bit every day. When I see how much I have accomplished, I will be amazed.

Any time a doubt or fear raises up its ugly head, smash it flat with a counter point. You will be surprised at how quickly you will squelch those fears, and let your creativeness loose on your projects and problems.

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