

Be A Creative Powerhouse



How To Get More Ideas,
Organize Them And
Make Them Happen

NELA DUNATO

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
How To Get More Ideas	3
You probably get more good ideas than you realize	3
What is a creative thought?	3
The idea challenge	4
Give yourself some time and space for idea creation	4
Write down your idea immediately	6
Learning keeps your brain in shape	6
Hang around people who are full of ideas	7
What to do if you're really, <i>really</i> stuck	7
Chapter 1 Insights & Actions	9
How To Keep And Organize Your Ideas	11
Record your ideas. All of them.	11
Store all your ideas in one place	11
Organize your ideas in a meaningful way	13
Review your idea storage regularly	14
Chapter 2 Insights & Actions	15
How To Take Action And Make Your Ideas Happen	18
Prioritizing your projects	18
How many projects at once?	19
Getting into the " <i>I can do it!</i> " attitude	19
Turn a big idea into actionable tasks	20
Draw a timeline	20
One action per task	22
Assign deadlines	22
Take action as soon as possible, and learn as you go	22
How to find the time for your project?	23
A note on procrastination	24
Get support from friends	25
Tracking your progress	26
Chapter 3 Insights & Actions	27
Closing Thoughts	32
About Nela Dunato	33

Introduction

Thank you for reading this guidebook! I congratulate you for taking this first step, and I'm looking forward to the exciting journey we'll go through together. It's going to be short, but packed with value.

This ebook is formatted as a series of texts in which I share tips and inspiration, followed by worksheets with exercises, so you can take action as soon as possible. The worksheets are interactive forms so you can fill them in on your computer, or print them and fill out with a pen.

As much as I love inspiring books (and I hope this one will inspire you), just reading the text changes little if we don't apply what we learned. And most of us need a little incentive to start doing our homework, so I hope the workbook format will help you with that.

Can this ebook help you at any point in your journey?

Yes it can, since each chapter covers a different phase of the idea-to-product life-cycle.

- If you're creatively stuck and haven't had many good ideas in ages, the first chapter will help you to **get flowing with creative ideas**.
- If you're full of ideas, but have a hard time keeping track of them, the second chapter will guide you to **create a system to remember your ideas**.
- If you already know how to manage your ideas, but aren't taking action on them, the third chapter will help **propel you into action mode**.

If you've already mastered all of the above, let me first give you a virtual "high five" because you are a rare gem. You may still find some helpful tips in this book – but more importantly, if you have a friend that is struggling with making ideas happen, send them this book to help them out.

To be completely honest with you, this manual was written primarily for myself. I tend to forget what it takes to be a creative powerhouse every now and then, and

this helps me to remind myself and stop procrastinating on those dreams.

A few of the techniques I describe in this book were developed as I was preparing it – I would do something related to this project, and realize “*This is great, I need to write about this in the book!*” – inception!

So in a way, this book was writing itself, and I was learning from it. I hope you will learn something valuable too.

Let's begin!

CHAPTER 1

How To Get More Ideas

Some readers of this guidebook may already have plenty of ideas, but in case you don't, in this chapter I'll share some of the practices I use to get in the mood to generate lots of brilliant ideas.

Allow me to start with an assumption about you.

You probably get more good ideas than you realize

Every human being is creative, and inspiration is inherent to all of us. But the difference is you may not be noticing the ideas you get, or you're forgetting them, or you think they're stupid and give up on them before you even gave them a chance.

I don't believe your brain is so blank and never creates anything useful. Everyone's brain is capable of creating new things.

Now while some of us have a crazy hyperactive brain that is constantly bombarding us with ideas (*shhhh, not now, brain!*), it's not necessary to be like that in order to be creative, and it certainly doesn't do you much good if you don't have the rest of your ducks in a row (which we'll talk about later in this book).

The difference between people who claim not to have any inspired ideas, and those who do, is the act of noticing creative ideas as they appear.

What is a creative thought?

Let's define first what a creative thought isn't. Some of our thoughts are unproductive, and they can be either worries (*"If that happens, I'm doomed!"*), judgements of yourself or others (*"She's so stupid"*, *"I'm worthless"*), regrets (*"Why the hell did I do that?!"*) etc. They aren't solving any problems, and create negative emotions. When you're feeling bad, you can be sure you're not thinking creatively.

Creative thoughts are any thoughts that open up new possibilities and present solutions for problems. They cause positive or at least neutral emotions which can

be joy, curiosity, optimism, hopefulness, generosity, interest, etc.

For example, creative thoughts can start with the following words:

- What if...
- If only there was a way to...
- It would be so awesome if...
- Wouldn't it be nice if...
- How could I...

The idea challenge

If you're convinced you aren't getting any ideas, I want to give you a challenge.

For the next week, do your best to pay attention to your thoughts, and whenever a creative thought occurs write it down — on scrap paper, in a notebook, on your phone, just make sure you don't lose any of them.

If you really dedicated yourself to this practice and focused on noticing your thoughts, and discerning creative thoughts from the unproductive thoughts that just create clutter in your brain, you'll probably be surprised with the list of things you came up with in a week.

It's useful to notice the unproductive thoughts as well, because you can learn a great deal about yourself that way, but this challenge is about noticing only ideas, so ignore the rest for now.

Give yourself some time and space for idea creation

One of the practices I consider very important is disconnecting from the online world. I talk about this often, I even wrote a blog post about my practice of disconnecting from social media for 9 days at a time called ["Mind Detox Retreat"](#).

While long retreats are something I only do every couple of months, I start every day with a mini-retreat that lasts for a few hours.

I don't read my e-mail until I absolutely have to, and usually that's around noon. I don't visit social media or blogs until the afternoon, when I've already completed my day's work.

My motto is "Create first, consume later".

Mornings are just for me and my creative work. The reason I do this is that I noticed that when I'm immersed in other people's thoughts all the time, I start to adopt them and my own thoughts get buried under them.

Since I've started my practice of not allowing other people's opinions inside my little bubble in the morning, I get a ton of creative thoughts. I'm just doing my routine, a bit of warm-up exercises and meditation, and the whole time I'm writing down ideas that come to me on a piece of paper.

The idea for this ebook came to me during one such morning. I asked myself, what could I do that would be a useful free gift to my website visitors, and I got an idea for this guide immediately.

When you allow yourself to have these moments of alone time and clarity, to just breathe in silence and be with yourself, it gives you more opportunities for your ideas to surface. It doesn't have to take a lot of time. Just a few minutes with a cup of tea in the morning, or a short walk in the afternoon.

While reading other people's content may be inspiring, if you're constantly consuming stuff, you're just stuffing your brain with information, and not allowing it to analyze it and combine into something original and useful to you personally.

I find mornings to be very conducive to creative thinking because you've just had your good night's sleep, when your brain did some arranging and cataloguing of all the information it stored the day before, so it's fresh and neat like a clean work desk.

Also, your logical part of the brain is still a bit foggy and confused, and while that's not good for finances or computer programming, it's excellent for generating ideas!

People often assume that you have to be in a super focused and sharp state in order to brainstorm, and this can only be achieved with a gallon of coffee. But research has found that the opposite is likely to be true — **when you're unfocused and your brain hasn't fully woken up yet, all sorts of unexpected and new things can spring up in your mind.** (Salvador Dalí knew this, and used the half-asleep state to imagine his extraordinary surrealist scenes.)

Focused brain is great at logical, linear thinking. When you want to draw a precise sketch, write an article, or code a program, you need to be focused. But in order to get the idea for the sketch, article or the app, you don't — you can get this idea even as you're drifting off to sleep, showering, washing dishes, walking or driving to work...

I'm a "night owl" so I'm more focused around noon and in the evenings, and that's when I do my actual work that requires me to focus on one task: graphic design,

writing, painting etc. But when I'm creating ideas, my brain is all over the place — I start writing one thing, and then it leads me to another thing so I sketch that down, and in the end I'm left with 4 pages of ideas for different projects. But that doesn't happen when I'm super focused, it happens when I'm hazy and my brain is still not functioning at 100%.

I suggest having your quiet time in the mornings, because in the evenings you'll probably be too tired and possibly stressed out from the daily events.

Write down your idea immediately

How many times did you get an idea and thought “*Oh that's such an awesome idea, I'll never forget it, for sure!*”, only to forget it by the following day?

It's normal to forget, there's nothing wrong with you. You may have a perfect memory otherwise, but ideas are sort of like dreams — stop thinking about them for one moment, and they're gone forever.

Have a dedicated place to record your ideas, whether it's a sketchbook or your phone. Do it *every time* because it's a shame for a good idea to go to waste. If you show respect to your ideas by writing them down, you'll never lack them.

Does it ever happen to you that you're supposed to be focused on a task, only to be bombarded by one idea after another relating to a completely different project? When that happens to me, I stop what I'm doing, write down all my ideas on scrap paper and when I've unloaded my brain enough, I can move on.

If you have a habit of getting ideas while doing something specific, like showering or walking your dog, prepare in advance by having some note-taking device handy — a piece of paper or a phone, whatever works for you.

Learning keeps your brain in shape

Learning about new things that interest you, philosophical or practical, is an excellent way to enhance your creative abilities. What I've found is that when I learn a new technique, whether it's crafts, hand-lettering or online marketing, I start getting ideas for practical applications and all sorts of possibilities open up.

It's not just the information itself that helps engage our creativity, it's the way we use our brain as we wrap our minds around new concepts. Learning triggers neural activity that's quite different from what we experience on a daily basis. Simply put, learning keeps your brain in top shape.

If you've been feeling a bit stuck, learn a new skill. Any skill. It doesn't have to be "useful" — try crocheting, dance or backgammon — whatever interests you.

Hang around people who are full of ideas

All my closest friends are very creative people. They're not all artists — some of them are musicians or writers, but others use their creativity in business, science or community projects.

Being around creative people is contagious. At first you may be a bit jealous and think "*These people are so creative and I'm not, I'm such a loser, I don't even fit in...*" That's normal, because we tend to see everything other people do as more valuable than what we do. I'm sure that if you asked some of your friends, they would tell you the opposite, how they think you're much more capable and creative than they are.

When other people show their creative abilities, they allow you to open up to them as well, because it's an encouraging environment where you have permission to share your ideas.

The problem with ideas is that if you let them marinate for too long in your own head, the judging mind will start to convince you they're stupid. You have to let them out into the world before that happens. So when you have a group of people to bounce your ideas off, you might actually get some pretty amazing feedback.

If you don't have any creative friends around you, then find an online community you can join. Just don't spend all your free time there.

What to do if you're really, really stuck

If nothing I mentioned earlier helps, you'll have to invest a bit of effort in order to dust off and grease those cogs and get your mind into a state where you create and notice ideas. This can be done by committing to a regular practice of meditation and daydreaming.

Meditation sounds like something only hardcore yogis do, but really there's nothing mysterious or difficult about it. It's just a practice of being in silence, and remaining detached from any thoughts that appear in your mind. If you have a very active mind that's busy with worrying, judging or other useless activities, a regular meditation practice helps you stop these thoughts when you notice them, and this enables you to have room for more creative thoughts.

If we compare our brain to a computer, think of going to sleep as turning off the computer, an afternoon nap is like pressing a reset button, and meditation is like closing all the programs and just sitting in front of an empty desktop doing nothing. In all three instances you've cleared the working memory a bit, but **meditation is something you can do anywhere, at any time, as many times per day as you like.**

Set a regular routine of 5-10 minutes a day, once or twice a day, and you'll be surprised with the profound effect it can have on your mind.

Daydreaming is very easy, and we've all done it. If done right, it engages your creative mind and helps you think of things that aren't currently present in your life. To daydream effectively, ask "*What if...*" questions and other questions I listed earlier in this chapter. See what comes up as a result of asking them. Ask yourself "*How could my life be better right now?*" "*What would I like to have happen today?*"

Allow your mind to detach from your day to day life, because in order to get new ideas that can take you to new experiences, you cannot be thinking about what you already have. Your day to day life is riddled with chores, difficult relationships, challenges, work you may not like, and those often prevent your mind from thinking creatively.

A word of warning, though: too much daydreaming may be harmful. Often people who are addicted to daydreaming don't actually do anything. If you are already daydreaming a lot, you don't need any more of it.

There's a technique recommended by the writer James Altucher called the **10 ideas list**. (I've seen it before in some NLP books way back, but Altucher has popularized it.) The process is simple. You posit a problem, for example "*What can I do to earn money this month?*", set a countdown timer for 3 minutes, and then write the first 10 ideas that come to mind. The timer is there to prevent you from stopping to judge the ideas – the quality doesn't matter, you just need to get as many of them out as possible. Repeat the process every day, and you'll build your idea generation muscle so you can come up with creative solutions on demand.

To recap, the three main strategies I advise to anyone who would like to have more and better ideas are:

- Have some quiet time and space every day.
- Write down every idea that comes to you as soon as it comes.
- Practice the 10 ideas list activity daily.

I hope this helps.

Good luck hunting for great ideas!

Chapter 1 Insights & Actions

1. What ideas came to you during your last week of taking notes? List them all!

2. Did you notice that you tend to get ideas as you're performing certain activities? List those activities:

3. Can you conclude based on the list above what makes you get into the mood for getting ideas?

4. How can you create more opportunities in your life to get in the mood for creating ideas?

5. Now turn that answer to the last question into an action plan! Brainstorm at least 5 actions you can take daily:

Examples: Instead of listening to podcasts all the time, drive with quiet music in the background. Instead of reading social networks and blogs first thing in the morning, take 15 minutes to ask yourself a question like “What can I do today to achieve X?”, “How can I solve this problem?” etc. and write the answers in my journal.

CHAPTER 2

How To Keep And Organize Your Ideas

People who are already getting more ideas than they know what to do with can benefit from a smart system that will ensure you can actually remember them when you need them! In this chapter, I'll share an approach that has worked well for me over the years. Feel free to build and improve on it based on your preferences.

Record your ideas. All of them.

The first thing to do when you get an idea is to write it down. This is essential, and do it *without question*.

Our memory works in mysterious ways — though you may still remember the phone number of the boy you dated back in high school, that genius idea that crossed your mind just yesterday afternoon as you were driving from work? Gone. Forever.

Don't let this happen to you. **Write down everything that comes to your mind that has any kind of potential.** It doesn't even have to be good, as long as it's new.

It's especially easy to do this today, now that everyone has a smartphone. Memory is cheap, just write it all down no matter how silly it may look at a first glance. You'll judge it later.

Store all your ideas in one place

I tend to write down my ideas in different forms, such as sketches on in my sketchbook, notes on scraps of paper, documents in Google Drive, photos and audio recordings... It's a bit of a mess, but I've found a way to keep it all in one place.

Your storage can be a notebook, binder, computer folder, app that stores data in the cloud... Whatever you prefer.

If all your ideas are in one place, you'll know where to find them when you need them. It's important to have a system that captures all of the formats you regularly use. It's also important that your system meets the following requirements:

- It has to be easy to use — otherwise you won't use it!
- It's accessible from multiple devices so you can use it even when you're not at home
- It's secure and reliable

Now, the last part is up to you. While cloud services boast on their reliability, I've heard some weird shit happen to people, like documents disappearing. That's why I recommend making regular backups of your idea storage on your computer (if it's in the cloud) or to the cloud (if it's on your computer), or on an external drive.

When it comes to choosing a service, I can recommend Google Drive, Evernote and Dropbox. I haven't used any other, but Windows OneDrive is probably good too.

Here's a breakdown of the cloud services I've tried:

- **Google Drive**

Pros: Stores all types of files, accessible from a smartphone, inline document editing (including spreadsheets & presentations), easy sharing with collaborators, completely free for up to 65 GB of space

Cons: For now no ability to record audio notes, but you can upload them. Google Keep is an alternative solution that can record audio.

- **Evernote**

Pros: Stores a variety of files including audio, accessible from a smartphone, inline document editing, easy sharing with collaborators

Cons: It's not a real storage, but the files are "attached" to your notes, free accounts are limited in terms of space and monthly upload

- **Dropbox**

Pros: Stores all types of files, accessible from a smartphone, easy sharing with collaborators

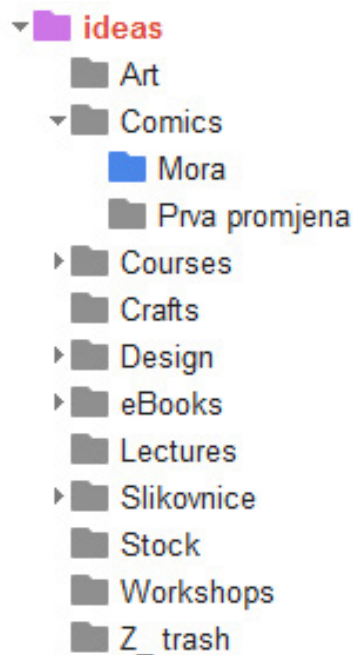
Cons: Free account limited to 2 GB (you have to invite people to get more space), no inline document editing, but you have to use other software to actually record your notes (it can be connected to Office365.)

I personally use Google Drive. I'm an Android girl so it makes sense for me to stick with Google services, but YMMV.

Organize your ideas in a meaningful way

Once you've decided on the system, it's time to set it up. Like with all things in life, it will be a hassle the first time you do it, but from then on it's mostly smooth sailing. I'll show you how I do it, feel free to adapt as necessary.

I have a folder in Google Drive called Ideas. Inside this folder there are several other sub-folders and documents with lists. Here's a screenshot of my folder structure:



The “Z_trash” is the folder where I move all the things I decide may be too silly and useless, but I don't want to delete them because it may lead to something useful some day.

Lists of ideas are pretty self-explanatory. Each category (such as “Art” or “Comics”) has its own document where I write down titles and short descriptions of projects.

When I start creating materials for a project like text documents, sketches, references, notes on paper or audios, I create a folder for that project (inside the category folder) and dump all my scans, photos and notes inside.

Before I did this, my ideas were scattered around different sketchbooks, binders and folders, on my computer and on my phone... it was a complete and total mess. I still kinda knew where all the things were, but this is infinitely easier.

Review your idea storage regularly

There's no point in collecting all this data if you'll never look at it later, right?

Schedule regular “idea review” sessions (monthly or quarterly) where you go through your lists, and see if now may be the perfect time to take one of those ideas and turn it into a real life project.

Also, when you see all those ideas in one place, you may be inspired to combine several of them into a single project and save on time and resources, while achieving multiple goals.

Some of these ideas may evolve over time. You may start with a short story, that will then evolve into a comic, that may evolve into an indie movie. Or a blog post may become an ebook, which may become a series of video classes.

As you learn new things and get access to more resources, things that seemed impossible before may become easier to do than you originally thought. That's why it's important to regularly revisit your ideas and see what else could you do with them that hasn't occurred to you before.

You can share some of your documents and folders with people you trust and get their feedback, then develop your idea further.

Chapter 2 Insights & Actions

1. Where are you currently storing your ideas? List all the ways you use:
2. Check the type of media that all these ways you listed above correspond to:
 - Paper
 - Text document
 - Picture (photos, scans)
 - Audio
 - Video
 - PDF
 - Other: _____
3. What would be the best way to keep all those types of media together?
4. Is there something that doesn't quite fit in?
5. Can you find another way to turn that type of media into a different kind?
Examples: Instead of audio use text. Instead of paper use text and scanned pictures.

6. Would that work for you?

7. No, seriously, would it? What would it take for you to use this system properly? How complicated is the process? How can you simplify it?

8. What would you need to do in order to feel safe about keeping your ideas in that storage?

Examples: Regular backup. Knowing the service won't close down unexpectedly. Knowing that I can replicate the same system elsewhere.

9. What actions do you need to take in order to set up your new idea archiving system?

Examples: Scan all paper documents. Register for a cloud service. Create a folder structure. Upload all documents.

10. Great, now put those actions on your to-do list for the following week, and set up your system!

When you're done, add a reminder in your calendar to review your ideas every 3 months.

CHAPTER 3

How To Take Action And Make Your Ideas Happen

Generating ideas all day and night is easy – it's the implementation that's difficult! (Ask me how I know that.) Sadly, our ideas won't just magically appear in front of our eyes if we just sit around and do nothing, no matter what the Law of Attraction teachers have told you.

The less glamorous part of creativity is rolling up your sleeves and getting your hands dirty (sometimes literally). Creating is a rewarding activity in itself, but humans tend to have a ton of baggage so most people don't bother creating anything of their own. I trust that since you've come all the way here in this book, you're on of the rare ones who are willing, able and eager to create. Let's examine the process of choosing your projects and following up with action.

Prioritizing your projects

If you have just one great idea, that's awesome – you already know what to do.

If you've been collecting your ideas and now have a bunch of them lying around in your idea storage, you first have to identify which ones to pursue right now.

This might be difficult when everything seems equally important, but here are some ways you can decide whether something is a priority.

- Is it fun? How much would I enjoy working on this project?
- Can this project help advance my career, find better clients, or bring me closer to my big dream?
- Can it make me money?
- Is it something that other people might enjoy or benefit from?

The order of importance of these questions depends on your current situation.

If you're currently broke, the can-it-make-me-money question is obviously the most pressing one. If money isn't an issue, but you'd like to take your career in a different

direction, then you should work on a project that will take you there.

If you can help other people at the same time, all the better, but the most important thing is that you enjoy what you're doing!

If there's a tie between a few projects, you may need to evaluate how difficult it will be to pursue the project. How long do you expect it to take? How much money will you need? Will you need other people's help?

If you're not so sure you'll have the time, money and support to finish one project, pick a less demanding one that you can do by yourself. Or if you think a project is "too easy" and you're ready for a real challenge, do that.

If you end up changing your mind later, you can always pick something else. But if you have a habit of dropping the ball on every single project you pursue, then perhaps you could commit to sticking with just one until you finish it, just to prove yourself that you can do it.

How many projects at once?

Depending on how much free time you have and how demanding these projects are, you may either stick with working on one, or do a couple of them at the time.

I personally prefer to work on several projects and switch between them because otherwise I get bored easily, but I admit sometimes I lose track of priorities so one of the projects falls into the background.

To prevent this from happening, we'll use deadlines (more on that soon).

Getting into the "I can do it!" attitude

One of the things that keeps us from working on our ideas is that they may seem "too big" for us. You may think "*I've never done it, I don't know if I can do it*", or "*Who am I to do that?*"

We don't see ourselves as people who do that kind of thing, simply because we haven't proven to ourselves that we can. So here's a little perspective on that.

Everyone has to start somewhere. **Everyone had their first big project that they feared would fail.** (And many successful people still deal with that fear. Just ask them, and they'll tell you!) No one was born driving, baking cakes, writing books and starting companies.

There is of course a chance it will bomb, and there is a chance it will work magnificently! If you don't try it, you'll never know. There's no guarantee. But if you don't have something *really* big to lose, you might as well have fun and experiment, you may surprise yourself with what you're capable of.

Turn a big idea into actionable tasks

The main problem why ideas stay just in our head (or on paper) is that ideas are vague. We have a feeling about what the final product might look like, but we're not sure what it will take to get there.

Often people have no idea where to start. "*Write and publish an ebook*" is such a vague and scary task, you'll keep putting it off because you think you can't do it all.

The key thing to do with an idea is to break it down into action steps, and put those actions on your to-do list in correct order.

Draw a timeline

I've found time lines to be very helpful with figuring out my action plan. You can start at the very end (the final product) and go backwards, asking yourself along the way "*What has to be done beforehand so this can happen?*"

You can also start in the middle with a step you know you have to take (in my example, I started in the middle with "*Write the ebook*") and then go forward and backward from there. In both cases, you're left with a clear time line of your action steps.

There is an example for this very ebook on the following page (transcribed, so you don't have to decipher my handwriting):

Finalize organization &
take screenshot of Google Drive



Procrastination blog post -
turn into actionables!



Write ebook about ideas

- introduction
- chapter I
- chapter II
- chapter III
- worksheets



Cover illustration



Create sharing graphics



Upload to website



Write blog post



Publish!



Share on Facebook
& Twitter

One action per task

Once you've made your main outline of the project, you'll have to make sure to break down all the phases into actionable steps. As you can see, some of my project phases have a little list next to them that's an actual to-do list. Some phases are an actionable item in themselves.

If you're not sure whether something is an action, here's a hint: if the task includes a verb like "write", "draw", "design", "call", "ask", "record", "upload", "register" etc. it's a legitimate action. If it uses a very general verb such as "make", "create", "do", it's a little fuzzy so try to replace that word with a more specific one. If it's not possible, then it's not a real action and you have to break this step down further.

My time line is a bad example because I've omitted verbs in some steps, but in my actual to-do app I try my best to use verbs whenever possible.

Assign deadlines

As soon as you figured out your time line and broke it down into actions so you know what you're dealing with, set a project deadline. **If you allow yourself to work with no deadline, you may put it off indefinitely.**

Next, assign deadlines to every single step on your to-do list. This way you'll insure you're making consistent progress toward your goal, and not just looking at the final deadline, hoping that something will magically happen on its own and complete your project.

Your strategies for dealing with deadlines may differ from mine. You may be a "plodder" who happily works on their project in little chunks every day, making slow but consistent progress.

I prefer to work in short, intensive bursts, so I usually throw myself into the project and work intensely as much as my free time allows until I've completed it. (This usually means I have to take a long break afterwards because I've burnt out. Do not try this at home unless that's your natural way of working — you know who you are.)

Take action as soon as possible, and learn as you go

If you're doing something for the first time, you've probably been postponing it because you think don't know everything you need to know in order to complete

the project on your own. The mistake we sometimes make is to assume we need to know everything there is to know in advance in order to get started on it. That's not true. If you've made a time line of your tasks, examine the first step. **Do you know everything you need to know in order to complete just this task?**

If the answer is yes, great, then do it. If the answer is no, go research and learn what you need to complete **just this task**.

When you've learned enough to do it, get on with the task, and after you've crossed it off your list look at the following task and ask the same question again.



WARNING!

Asking yourself about “what you still don't know” in regards the entire project can throw you into a loop of endless learning, and no doing – it's a trap!

If you're just writing scripts for your video tutorials, you don't need to know how email auto-responders work *right now*. If you've got questions about the process, write them down next to the corresponding task and keep doing the work that's on your schedule right now. You'll take care of these issues when you get to them, don't worry.

When I started working on this workbook, there was quite a few things I didn't know. But I just went on to write the darn book first, and learned the things I didn't know as I needed them.

How to find the time for your project?

You may feel like now is not the right time to add more things into your life because your schedule is already full. But unless you've just recently had a baby (in which case, you're probably right) it's unlikely your life will get any less hectic anytime soon.

Unexpected things come up all the time, and one thing I've learned is, **nobody else is going to give you permission to work on your own passion projects.**

I sometimes get frustrated when I plan out my day perfectly, and then get an urgent project request from a client that throws my schedule off track. But my happiness is my own responsibility – I have to find a way to do what's important to me regardless of what comes up.

I know it's hard. At some points in my life I was juggling a day job, freelance work and personal art, and tried to maintain my social life at the same time. It can get crazy. But the truth is, you'll always find the time for things that are important to you. If you make your project a non-negotiable priority, you'll have to find things that can handle being put on the back burner for a while.

When I'm in "launch mode", my house is a mess, I skip exercise and avoid social gatherings. I get up early to work on my project first thing in the morning, and I fall asleep early tired from all the work I've done. That usually lasts for a couple of weeks, until my project goes live. To me, that's a small price to pay because when I finally see my project finished, I know it was worth it.

Sometimes it takes getting up a little earlier. Sometimes it just takes less fooling around on social media (blocking apps help a lot with that).

Take a look at your schedule, and see where you can squeeze in an hour a day to work on your project. First thing in the morning might be best if your days are unpredictable. Working in the evenings while the rest of your family is asleep can work too, if you're not too tired by then.

Don't sacrifice important things (like quality time with your family), but do think twice about watching TV, or reading books or blogs. Books are awesome, but they can wait for a time when you're not busy working on your project!

A note on procrastination

Procrastination is the top project killer, and all the workbooks in the world won't help you if you don't actually follow through on those plans you made.

Procrastination may happen for various reasons:

- you may be doubting your expertise or skill, and you're afraid you'll somehow ruin the project and/or be made fun of
- you're not sure it's worth the effort
- you're not sure if your idea is even that good
- you're afraid of what others might think of you

These are just some examples, but the common thread among them is **fear and feelings of inadequacy**.

Ask yourself, is staying safe from these fears more important than the rewards you may gain if you do it? Are you willing to stay where you are indefinitely, or are you ready to take a risk and possibly move faster toward your goals?

What's the worst thing that could happen if it doesn't work? You will have spent a lot of time, possibly months, on “nothing”.

What's the worst thing that could happen if you don't even try? You'll have spent a lot of time, possibly months, on *literally nothing*, and on top of that you'll be wondering what it would be like if you tried it.

Even if it doesn't work out the way you planned, it's not “nothing”. **You'll get a lot of experience and valuable lessons out of it**, and you'll know what to do differently on the next project. Of course there'll be a next project! You wouldn't let one failure stop you, would you?

At the end of day, it's a choice between staying where you are and moving forward. On some days staying where you are may seem more attractive. On other days you may get sick and tired of staying in your little box, and would give up anything to get what you really want.

Every time you find yourself not working on your project, just ask yourself: **is what I'm currently doing worth giving up on my goal?**

Beginnings are the hardest. People call it “starting friction”, because the resistance is the strongest before you start. But everything that follows after the bumpy start will be easier. Soon enough you might find yourself in a state of flow, truly enjoying the process!

If you need more tips about beating procrastination, read my blog post [“Productivity tips from a hopeless procrastinator”](#).

Get support from friends

I hope that with these worksheets you'll clear some initial resistance, but let's not kid ourselves, there will be times when the resistance will creep back up. In that case, I advise talking to friends who will encourage you to continue.

Think of a couple of your friends who are supportive towards you, and would be excited to hear about your project. Tell them what you're doing. This not only improves your relationship with them because you're showing them that you trust them, but also creates accountability. They will want to know how your dream project is going and will probably ask you about it later.

When you start procrastinating and doubting yourself, contact at least one of your friends and tell them what you're going through. **Don't be afraid to ask for help!** You're not imposing on anyone, and you definitely deserve to get support from your friends.

If you have no one to cheer for you, send me a tweet @nelchee and I'll send you some loving support! ;)

Tracking your progress

In order to keep track of where you are on your project, you need some kind of system for that as well. We want to make it really doable and easy.

What you need is an overview of where you are currently, how far you've come, and how much work is left, so you can plan your future activities. We also want you to be focusing only on what is your immediate next step, so you don't feel overwhelmed.

Whether you use a paper planner like a Filofax, a Moleskine, a bullet journal, or an app like Todoist or Trello, that's up to you. But once you commit to a system, it will work only if you actually put all of your tasks and deadlines into it.

I personally use Trello to organize *all* my personal and business projects. If you'd like to try that as well, I've published a few articles on that subject on the Freelance to Freedom blog that can help you get started:

- [How to manage your freelance business with Trello](#)
- [Trello workflow examples for your freelance business](#)

If you don't want to complicate things, or prefer a traditional approach, all you need is a sheet of paper, a wall calendar and post-its. (I actually still use post-its on my yearly wall calendar for "big picture" planning.) You can list all your tasks on paper ordered by date, write the tasks on the post-its and stick each of them on your calendar on the corresponding date. Once you finish a task, cross it out and throw the post-it away. If you postpone the deadline, simply move the post-it to another date.

It may be helpful to keep your crossed-out to-do lists until you're done with the project, instead of throwing them away immediately. That way, if you have a bad day when you feel like you have so much to do, and aren't making progress as fast as you planned, you can take a look at all the things you've already done. It's probably more than you were aware of, and it just may be what you need to get your optimistic attitude back.

Chapter 3 Insights & Actions

1. List the projects you find most attractive at this moment:

2. What would you like to achieve in the next 1, 3 and 12 months? How would you like to live? How would you like to feel?

Which of the projects you listed can help you get there in that time frame?

Your goals and desired feelings	Projects that can help you achieve these goals and feelings
1 month	
3 months	
1 year	

3. Is there a way to combine some of those projects into a single one to save on time and resources?

4. If there were no time or money or knowledge barriers, which project would you most love to pursue right now?

5. What can you realistically do about this project with the time, money and knowledge you have? Is there a way to scale down this project to make it possible now? Brainstorm!

6. Now that you've done a some thinking and evaluating, which project(s) have you chosen to work on right now?

Try to limit yourself to two at most at any given time so you don't get overwhelmed with too much work.

Great! Now we'll get down to breaking down your big project into tasks. If you have several goals, take an additional sheet of paper for the other ones.

7. Use the space below to draw a time line of your tasks. You have two options:

A) Start from the end of the project (final product) and go backward, asking yourself the question "*What needs to be done before this can happen?*"

B) Start with the step that's first on your mind. It may be somewhere in the middle so leave plenty of space above and below it. Proceed forward and backward from this step.

8. Take a look at each step you wrote down, and ask yourself: is this step a single action? If it's not, break it down into smaller tasks that are a single action. Write this list of actions next to the corresponding step.

9. Now that you have a clear vision of what is needed in order to complete your project, assign a deadline to the project, and all the steps.

If you're using an app like a to-do list or a planner, transfer all those tasks into it.

10. Write down your tasks below, and as you get to the task, answer the question for *that task only*. **Only move onto the following task after you have completed the previous one.** If you have questions and concerns, feel free to write them down next to the corresponding task, and forget about them until you get to it!

Task	What gaps in knowledge do I need to fill in to complete this task? Who can I ask for help?

11. List a couple of your friends that support you and would be excited to hear about your project.

12. Commit to calling at least one of them up for a drink, or just talk to them over the phone or chat. Let them know what you're doing and that you'll probably need some support along the way.

13. Take a look at your schedule for the upcoming weeks, and determine when you'll be working on your project. Put it in your calendar, as you would a meeting with another person – it's a serious thing! Do your best to respect this schedule. If the time slot you picked at first doesn't work for you after a couple of days, test a different time.

14. Last but not least... how will you celebrate and reward yourself once you finish the project?

Sounds great. Now start working on your project!

Closing Thoughts

Congratulations on completing this guidebook.

I hope it's been useful to you, and that it will soon result in a new project being released into the world. When you finish your project, you can use the exercises again to choose and plan the next one.

If you have any comments or success stories, please send them to me via e-mail or social media:

- E-mail: hi@neladunato.com
- Facebook: [Nela Dunato Art & Design](#)
- Twitter: [@nelchee](#)
- Instagram: [@nelchee](#)

Feel free to share this resource with your friends, colleagues, business buddies, blog readers and followers. Here is the page where they can get all the information:

<http://neladunato.com/blog/free-ebook-be-a-creative-powerhouse/>

Thank you!

About Nela Dunato



I'm a multi-passionate mixed media artist, brand designer, teacher and writer. I've been a professional designer since 2005, and my focus is on helping service professionals craft expressive brand identities and exceptional client experiences.

I also teach graphic design as an Adobe® course instructor, lead in-person workshops, and publish branding, marketing and business advice every week on [my blog](#).

My [artwork](#) and [illustrations](#) have been published, exhibited and awarded internationally, though nowadays I prefer to just paint and draw for my own pleasure.

I'm a huge sci-fi and fantasy nerd, lover of Victorian and Art Nouveau aesthetics, cat person and a dedicated shadow worker.



Nela Dunato

ART & DESIGN