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Tom Ward senior research fellow in the Center for Creative Media at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, and editor of the *Journal of Creative Behavior*

"Merge two previously separate concepts that are in conflict with one another. For example, combinations such as 'friendly enemy' and 'healthful illness'. The more discrepant the concepts, the more likely they are to result in novel properties."

Margaret Atwood novelist, Toronto

"I have a great big cupboard stuffed with ideas and when I want one I open the door and take the first one that falls out. Alternatively, if you want an idea, do the following. Close your eyes, put your left hand on the ground, raise your right hand into the air. You are now a conductor. The ideas will pass through you. Sooner or later one will pass through your brain. It never fails, though the waiting times vary and sometimes lunch intervenes."

Lee Smolin theoretical physicist at the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics in Waterloo, Ontario

"The main ingredients in science are intensive immersion in a problem, fanatical desire to solve it (big problems are rarely solved by accident), familiarity with previous attempts leading to an original critique of where they went wrong, reckless disregard for what other experts think, and the courage to overcome your own doubts and hesitations, which are much scarier than anything anyone else can say because you know best how vulnerable your new idea is."

Tracey Emin artist, London

"Get a really good part-time job, preferably to do with something you like. For example, if you like reading, work in a book shop and do lots of evening classes."

Lisa Randall professor of physics at Harvard University

"Think about the big problems while working on the small ones and vice versa. A larger perspective can be the best guide when approaching a detailed problem. On the other hand, details can reveal profound insights about larger questions. Listen carefully and pay close attention. You might learn more than people, or the objects you're studying, superficially reveal."

Dean Simonton professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis

"Know your stuff: creativity requires expertise; but don't know it too well: overspecialisation puts blinders on. Imagine the impossible: many breakthrough ideas at first seem outright crazy; but you have to be able to impose your idea: crazy ideas remain crazy if they cannot survive critical evaluation. Finally, be persistent: big problems are seldom solved on the first try, or the second, or the third; but remember to take a break: you may be barking up the wrong tree, so incubate a bit to get a fresh start."

Allan Snyder director of Centre for the Mind, Australian National University, Canberra, and University of Sydney

"Creativity demands that you leave your comfort zone, that you continually challenge yourself and be prepared to confront conventional wisdom. When you become an expert, move on. Especially, engage in that for which you have not been schooled."

Robert Stickgold associate professor of psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

"Creativity is fostered by a particular, if poorly understood, brain state. It often seems to be induced when you feel under pressure to perform and at the same time free to let your mind wander. Some authors go to the mountains or the seashore, others take a walk in a park. But this might be easiest to do by simply going to bed. As our brain cycles through REM and non-REM sleep, it appears to go in and out of this state."

F. David Peat author and physicist, director of the Pari Centre for New Learning near Siena, Italy

"Hold the intention or the question. Trust it and it will happen. Leave a space - daydream, relax, doze...you'll be amazed because you are not doing it."

Alan Lightman novelist and physicist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

"Creativity is enhanced by having a prepared mind, and then being stuck on a problem. I also need a space of silence and calm, where I am free from distractions."

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