



"Engaging in simple external tasks that allow the mind to wander may facilitate creative problem solving."
Baird et al., Psychological Science, 2012

**Made for you,
Moments of Pause**

The Curious Afternoon

Your guide to one hour of fresh ideas and sensory engagement, based on 'the incubation effect': that people generate more creative solutions after doing a mind-wandering-friendly task than they did when staring at the problem directly.



More creative ideas generated after walking vs. sitting (Marilyn Oppezzo & Daniel Schwartz, Stanford University, 2014).



The Inspired by Distraction study found that just one undemanding, hands-busy task measurably boosts creative problem-solving (Baird et al., 2012).

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- 1 Block the hour** in your calendar.
- 2 For the Broaden Your Inputs session:** Pick an option and gather what you need.
- 3 For the Make Something session:** Choose between the three activities and gather the materials you need.
- 4 Pour something good.** Tea, sparkling water, a proper coffee. The drink is part of the ritual; the ritual is part of the science.
- 5 Set your phone to Do Not Disturb.**

EXTENDING THE MOMENT

A single Moment of Pause produces one or two ideas worth keeping. More regular Moments of Pause will open up those creative pathways in more permanent ways. Make a commitment to come back and try the other activities.

00:00

Broaden your inputs

10 minutes

The aim is to put fresh material into your brain, not to be productive. Pick one:

- Long-read from *The Guardian* or *The New Yorker*: the headline furthest from your what you would normally click on.
- Ten-minute podcast episode outside your usual list: history, science, food, design.
- A poem or two you haven't read before.

WRITE A LETTER By hand, to someone who'd be surprised to get it.

Writing by hand forces your brain to choose words more carefully. It's also associated with stronger memory encoding and more reflective thinking than typing.

Write to someone you haven't spoken to in a while. You're going to post it to them, so make sure it's someone for whom your letter would be a positive thing, and whose address you have. Start with: "I was thinking about you the other day..."

10:00

Make something with your hands

30 minutes

Pick one of the activities below.

COOK An Ottolenghi-style salad.

Yotam Ottolenghi's recipes work for this kind of pause because they're structured around layers, so you're building something. Go to theguardian.com and search "Ottolenghi salad".

SKETCH Simple enough for anyone.

You don't have to be able to draw. The point is that the sketching forces you to slow down enough to really see the shape of a thing, which is the kind of attention that loosens creative pathways. Pull three objects out of your bag and take 10 minutes to draw each one. Draw what you actually see: A pair of glasses is not two circles and a line; it's a specific set of angles, shadows, and shapes. Don't lift your pen for the first two minutes. After that, draw normally. Don't worry about likeness.

40:00

Notice what surfaced

10 minutes

Sit somewhere different and scan through the last 40 minutes, thinking about what your mind did. Where did it wander? These wandering thoughts are where the creative work often happens. Most people miss them because they don't stop to notice.

50:00 Capture one idea worth keeping

10 minutes

Write down just one idea from the last hour worth holding onto. It might be a thing you learnt and want to read more about. Or it might be an answer to a work-related problem.