Questions for Creativity: A Guide

**By Raymond Veon**

**(Includes excerpts from his text, Understanding Creativity: A Cognitive Approach)**

*Note: The goal of asking questions is dependent on purpose and timing – a single question can operate in different ways at different times and in different arts subjects*

**These following essential questions summarize the goal and objectives for each stage of creativity:**

Stage 1 Essential Question: Did you Risk and Reframe?

Stage 2 Essential Question: Did you question, intersect, and connect? Did you explore and exploit points of tension?

Stage 1 Essential Question: How does this come out of your own creative stance—your personal, creative DNA?

**Five Core Questions for Creativity Development:**

The following 5 core questions address the essential questions above and are phrased so that they can and should be used at every grade level, K-12.

1. What more can you do?
2. Did you take a chance?
3. What else can you connect it to? (What more can you add?)
4. What is another way of doing it? Can it be better?
5. Are you letting your personality come through?

**Below are more specific questions for each stage of creativity. All of the questions below flow out of the three essential questions above.**

***Stage 1 Questions: Risk and Reframe***

* What ideas could I incorporate?
* What processes can be adapted?
* What different contexts can I put my concept in?
* What ideas outside my field can I incorporate?
* What ideas or parts can be combined?
* Can I combine or recombine its parts’ purposes?
* Can I combine or merge it with other objects?
* What can be combined to maximize the number of uses?
* What materials could be combined?
* Can I combine different talents to improve it?
* What else can it be used for?
* Can it be used by people other than those it was originally intended for?
* How would a child use it? An older person?
* How would people with different disabilities use it?
* Are there new ways to use it in its current shape or form?
* Are there other possible uses if it’s modified?
* Can I compact or make it smaller?
* Can I transpose positives and negatives?
* Should I turn it around? Up instead of down? Down instead of up?
* What if I consider it backwards?
* What if I try doing the exact opposite of what I originally intended?
* Can I transpose cause and effect?
* What was the context? What were you thinking about when you were doing it?
* What ideas were running through your head?
* What images, sounds, movements went through you mind?
* Did you risk and reframe?
  + Did you take a chance when you were doing it?
  + Did you make it a little bit different?

***Stage 2 Questions: Connect and Critique***

* What else is like it?
* Is there something similar to it, but in a different context?

How can it be improved?

* What can be magnified or made larger?
* What can be exaggerated or overstated?
* What can be made higher, bigger or stronger?
* Can I increase its frequency?
* What can be duplicated? Can I make multiple copies?
* Can I add extra features or somehow add extra value?
* How can I simplify it?
* What parts can be removed without altering its function?
* What’s non-essential or unnecessary?
* Can the rules be eliminated?
* If I knew nothing about it, would I figure out the purpose of this idea?
* What feature can I understate or omit?
* Should I split it into different parts?
* What other arrangement might be better?
* Can I interchange components?
* Are there other patterns, layouts or sequences I can use?
* Can I change pace or change the schedule of delivery?
* Why is this important? Who says? Is it important for you, for the audience, or both? What can help make it better?

The model of creativity designed by Veon aligns specific cognitive skills to each stage in the creative process. The following groups questions according to the cognitive skill they are designed to develop in STAGE TWO.

Elaborating

What more can you say or do?

Relating

How do the parts go together?

Inferring

Given what you have done, what does this imply? Given your new \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (insight, melody, image, idea, sound, etc), what other associations can you make? Looking back, on what basis did you make them? What does it make you think of? Past experiences? The skill it took to make it? Other people’s reactions? How does it affect each of your 5 senses? Connect each way that it affects your senses to a response, thought, or feeling.

Generalizing

Is this an example of a larger class or group of sounds, melodies, objects, patterns, experiments, ideas, products, drawings, etc?

Organizing

What principles can you use to arrange the elements of your work in different ways?

Classifying/reclassifying

Can it be related to or grouped with something unusual?

Analyzing

Can you discover something new about your work by breaking it down into parts and examining how they work together?

Establishing hierarchies

Which is more important and why? How can you tell which is better, good, more important? Given your situation, which works best? If you could change the situation, what would work best? What principles of composition, unity, etc. are you using? Can you use alternative strategies?

Identifying errors and correcting inconsistencies

Using your judgment, feelings, aesthetic responses, intuition, etc., what doesn’t fit? What is out of place? Does it belong somewhere else? Does it need to be changed or deleted?

Evaluating systems of logic and value

Which sets of reasons apply? What is the best way to think about this? What kind of person could solve this problem best? What discipline or subject could help illuminate, expand, or solve the problem best? Who would you go to for the best answer—how do you think they would make a decision? Can you apply their decision making process on your own? How can you decide what is most important? What musicians/artists have faced similar problems? How did they solve them? Why did they solve them that way? What do you think was most important to them? Could their way of solving these problems help you, or is your situation, goal, or intent different?

What are the implications if Option A is the most important consideration? Option B? What is the difference between the two? What does this judgment imply? What does an alternate judgment imply? Which do you prefer?

Verifying

How can you decide if this is the best solution? Come up with variations and determine the best solution.

Establishing (personal) standards – Overlaps with Stage 3: when one questions hierarchies

of value and logic, it is often out of an existing or emerging set of personal standards or

world view.

What do your feelings tell you? Is it important what your friends or family would think? Is it important what a stranger would think? Which option makes you happier, more satisfied? Which looks/sounds best to your eye/ear? What values move you? Does it need to be bigger, louder, softer smaller, more exciting, more subdued?

Who or what is it for? What impact should it have? Who or what will find this significant or important? Family, friends, a church, individuals, an ethnic group, a particular age group, people with certain abilities/disabilities, a political party, an interest group, collectors, a gallery or orchestra, a museum, a business, kids, the general public? Which of these will find it important and why? Or, are you doing it primarily for yourself, without a specific audience in mind. What are your standards and values? How will it impact you?

Can you do this better using a using abstraction, minimalism, realism, romanticism, jazz, baroque, or a hybrid? Can you borrow from an already established method, strategy, or practice—either from the contemporary arts world or from the past?

Personal Ism – Overlaps with Stage 3

Is your art, dance, theatrical or musical work about establishing relationships where none have been seen/heard before?

***Stage 3 Questions: Creative Stance***

In Stage 3 is centered on the student’s ability to:

* Reflect
* Recognize patterns in past and current work
* Independently formulate objectives
* Choose working methods
* Orchestrate previous skills and learning
* Revise and adjust objectives and working methods
* Make independent decisions
* Complete a coherent body of work
* Write a summative musician’s/artist’s statement\*

Does the past offer any lessons with similar ideas?

* When did your own personality come out?
* Was there a moment that you took ownership and allowed your own ideas to take control?
* What were you aiming for?
* What is the unique process you went through?
* With unlimited resources, what kind of work would you do? What do you want people to understand or experience most through your work? What do you want to understand or experience most? What unusual or surprising thoughts and insights have come to you while working? Is there something that you haven’t been able to capture yet in your work? Do you feel that your medium or working methods sometimes hinder what you really want to say?
* List the characteristics of your work. What occurs over and over again? If we changed \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_<FILL IN BLANK WITH ASPECT OF STUDENT’S WORK> would everything change—would it still be “your work”? What can be altered without changing the essence of your work?
* What do you enjoy most and keep coming back to? What keeps you “fired up” the most in your work?
* Pretend that you have one chance to create or say something vital to the world. What would it be? If there was something only you—and no one else--could create, what would it be like? Even if it is only a vague or ambiguous feeling, do your best to describe it in broad, general terms.
* What were you feeling when…? What was going through your mind when…? What drives or excites you? How might this relate to your future work?
* Imagine you are with a group of friends or family members. What are the ideas, comments, insights, or actions you contribute to the group that no one else does?
* What are you best at? What seems like second nature? Do you have a unique way of going about it? Is there a material or instrument that helps you think in ways that nothing else does?
* Why is it important to do it this way instead of that way?
* Think big. If there were no or only a few limitations, what would you really want to do? What kinds of things would you need to know in order to accomplish it?
* What are the options? What areas are unclear? Who or what could help make it clearer? Even if you are not sure which elements you want to use, are there any that you know you don’t? Why?
* \*\*Pick what feels right and use it as a starting point. What do you expect will happen? What do you want to keep the same, and which things do you want to play around with until they are just right? What would it be like in a perfect world? What would its opposite be like? Is there something you can think of that is almost like it?
* Is it important that your work looks/sounds a certain way, and if so, why? What does it mean to do it perfectly, and is it important? Are there other ways of doing it that achieve the same result?
* What can you change to get back on track? Is it working out the way you hoped? If you are dissatisfied, is it a problem with the concept or with its execution? Is it really ready to be presented to the public? Why or why not? Would you present it to your artistic hero?
* Does the venue and way that you are presenting it really match your ambition? What parts will stick out in the viewer’s/audience’s mind as not being integrated? What will make them ask the wrong questions, i.e. the questions you don’t want them to ask? What features of your work will lead them to ask the right questions? What will make their experience of your work perfect? Is their anything that will distract them? Is there any part of your work that is still unresolved, vague, or ambiguous? Is it intentionally ambiguous, or is it something you need to do more work on?
* How does this way of working reflect the way that you think, feel, relate to people, relate to yourself, relate to your home/job/activities? What instruments/sounds/materials help you organize your artistic thoughts best? How do they do this? Why?
* What is guiding you? What ideas are guiding you? What is essential? What criteria have to be met and which are less important? What procedures or processes have to be used—or are they all important? What values, feelings, materials, forms have to be included? What connections or relationships have to be present?

The model of creativity designed by Veon aligns specific cognitive skills/strategies to each stage in the creative process. The following groups questions according to the cognitive skill they are designed to develop in STAGE THREE.

Identifying attributes, characteristics, relationships, and patterns

What patterns of relationships do you see? Detect? Can you weave these \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (things, sounds, ideas, images) into a pattern? Can you organize these insights, products, experiments, ideas, new techniques into a pattern? How strong are the connections that relate or make a pattern out of these things?

What is the justification for relating these things? What is the basis for relating them? Are they related visually, conceptually, on the basis of sound, through feeling, through cultural meaning, through whimsy?

Establishing (personal) standards – Overlaps with Stage 2: when one questions hierarchies

of value and logic, it is often out of an existing or emerging set of personal standards or

world view.

What do your feelings tell you? Is it important what your friends or family would think? Is it important what a stranger would think? Which option makes you happier, more satisfied? Which looks/sounds best to your eye/ear? What values move you? Does it need to be bigger, louder, softer smaller, more exciting, more subdued?

Who or what is it for? What impact should it have? Who or what will find this significant or important? Family, friends, a church, individuals, an ethnic group, a particular age group, people with certain abilities/disabilities, a political party, an interest group, collectors, a gallery or orchestra, a museum, a business, kids, the general public? Which of these will find it important and why? Or, are you doing it primarily for yourself, without a specific audience in mind. What are your standards and values? How will it impact you?

Stage 3 calls on all of the cognitive skills used in Stages 1 and 2 in addition to the following tasks:

Identifying and formulating (synthesizing) essential questions

With unlimited resources, what kind of work would you do? What do you want people to understand or experience most through your work? What do you want to understand or experience most? What unusual or surprising thoughts and insights have come to you while working? Is there something that you haven’t been able to capture yet in your work? Do you feel that your medium or working methods sometimes hinder what you really want to say?

Identifying conceptual/aesthetic constants, parameters, and variables in past and current work.

List the characteristics of your work. What occurs over and over again? If we changed… would everything change—would it still be “your work”? What can be altered without changing the essence of your work?

Recognizing conceptual and aesthetic patterns/themes in past and current work.

What do you enjoy most and keep coming back to? What keeps you “fired up” the most in your work?

Formulating a target or personal creative objective

Pretend that you have one chance to create or say something vital to the world. What would it be? If there was something only you—and no one else--could create, what would it be like? Even if it is only a vague or ambiguous feeling, do your best to describe it in broad, general terms.

Identifying the motivations/rationales and articulating their relevance

What were you feeling when…? What was going through your mind when…? What drives or excites you? How might this relate to your future work?

Synthesizing a perspective based on beliefs, attitudes, fragmentary insights, etc.

Imagine you are with a group of friends or family members. What are the ideas, comments, insights, or actions you contribute to the group that no one else does?

Identifying and adapting disciplinary and personal working methods (including procedural,

technical, and conceptual methods)

What are you best at? What seems like second nature? Do you have a unique way of going about it? Is there a material or instrument that helps you think in ways that nothing else does?

Synthesizing and applying systems of value and standards of coherence, correspondence,

consistency, and/or completeness in relation to proposed new body of work.

What are the best ways of making it work together? Why is it important to do it this way instead of that way?

Formulating and implementing a research agenda

Think big. If there were no or only a few limitations, what would you really want to do? What kinds of things would you need to know in order to accomplish it?

*Cognitive Skills and Strategies: Proposing and producing a new body of work aligned with the creative stance*

Reasoning through counterfactual case studies

Please see below; also see text for a description\*\*

Reasoning within the context of a creative stance

Cognitive Mapping and Conceptual Slipping: Please see below; also see text for a description\*\*

Identifying indeterminate constants, parameters, and sets of variables

What are the options? What areas are unclear? Who or what could help make it clearer? Even if you are not sure which elements you want to use, are there any that you know you don’t? Why?

Stipulating constants, parameters, and sets of variables in relation to a creative stance through counterfactual case studies and cognitive mapping

\*\*Pick what feels right and use it as a starting point. What do you expect will happen? What do you want to keep the same, and which things do you want to play around with until they are just right? What would it be like in a perfect world? What would its opposite be like? Is there something you can think of that is almost like it?

Define an artistic problem and/or identify potential solutions in terms of stipulated constants, parameters and sets of variables

Please see above

Setting disciplinary, interdisciplinary and personal standards

Why is this important? Who says? Is it important for you, for the audience, or both? What can help make it better? Is it important that your work looks/sounds a certain way, and if so, why? What does it mean to do it perfectly, and is it important? Are there other ways of doing it that achieve the same result?

Clarifying and revising goals, values, methods of reasoning, and strategies for expression

What can you change to get back on track? Is it working out the way you hoped? If you are dissatisfied, is it a problem with the concept or with its execution? Is it really ready to be presented to the public? Why or why not? Would you present it to your artistic hero?

Identifying patterns of relationships within and across personal, disciplinary, and interdisciplinary systems

What is this idea like in another context? How is it similar? How is it different? Can you take an idea from another context and apply it in your work? How and why do other people use this idea? How would you change your work if you were to present it in a different venue for different people?

Synthesizing the results of exploration and research in a culminating body of work

Does the venue and way that you are presenting it really match your ambition? What parts will stick out in the viewer’s mind as not being integrated? What will make them ask the wrong questions, i.e. the questions you don’t want them to ask? What features of your work will lead them to ask the right questions? What will make their experience of your work perfect? Is there anything that will distract them? Is there any part of your work that is still unresolved, vague, or ambiguous? Is it intentionally ambiguous, or is it something you need to do more work on?