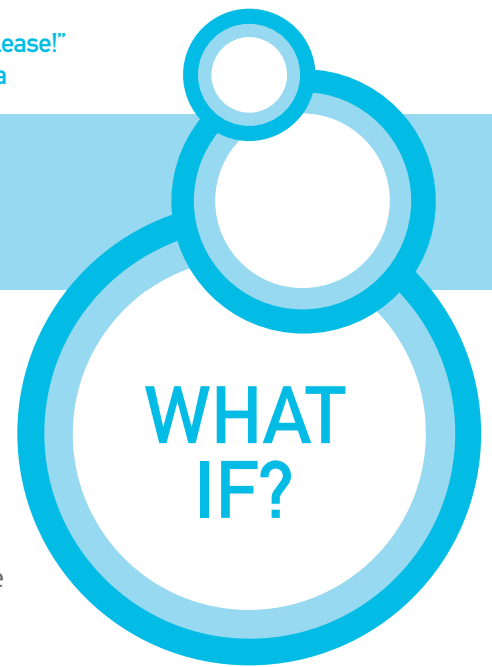


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Cage-rattling questions can change the way you look at the world... So put your perceptions on hold and expand your ideation toolbox with the incredibly simple – and simply incredible – technique of asking: "What if..."

There isn't one huge secret to being creative but there are a thousand little ones... And asking 'What if...' is one of the great little ones! You can ask 'What if...' to inspire ideas for books, films, new technologies and solutions to problems! How? Just by habitually asking in different contexts...

Ask 'What if...' creatively: Whether you know it or not, this is the source of all fiction! Asking 'What if...' helps you to envision scenarios without the constraints of facts! As far as we know, there are no "cowboys in space"; no Spanish noblemen are reviving ancient chivalry and no one aboard RMS Titanic fell in love the day it sank... But these facts haven't stopped people asking 'What if...' and creating 'Star Trek', 'Don Quixote' or the blockbusting movie 'Titanic'!

Ask 'What if...' generally: Generating new perspectives is the essence of creativity! So asking and answering general – even random – 'What if...' questions stretches your mind, provokes thought and evokes curiosity... "What if pandas could breed more easily?"; "What if there were no shoes?"; "What if politicians in the House of Commons were to conduct themselves with respect and decorum?"

Ask 'What if...' to solve problems: Presupposing that there are ways to solve or work around any problem allows for fast, hypothetical thinking! A clear example of this came when a mail order department needed to distinguish orders coming in one week from orders that came in the next; the team began by asking themselves questions like these...

"What if we could spot old orders from across the room?"; "What if we attach something to new orders?"; "What if we have different in-trays for each day?"; "What if every week of the year has a different colour paper printout?"; "What if we rotate four colours of paper – one for each week in a month?"

After just a little thought and exploration, the problem crumbles away! The four colours idea actually proved to be a very practical, low cost solution: staff can now see orders printed on a yellow piece of paper among a pile of reds from anywhere just as, the following week, they can spot a red one among a sea of green!

Ask 'What if...' to challenge reality: Imagine how different the world would be if people didn't ask 'What if...' to change their reality! Steve Jobs effectively asked Apple: "What if we blend art and technology?"; Barack Obama asked America: "What if you could have a black President?";... NASA asked a question that would have been unimaginable 10 years earlier: "What if we can put a man on the moon?"!



These are ridiculously simple but cage-rattling questions from people that broke moulds to create new realities! As soon as you get into the habit of asking 'What if...', your perception of what's possible alters! So to wrap things up, here are a few questions to rattle your own cage...

What if you wrote down the exact opposite to all of your ideas for a week?

What if your career depended on making a colleague smile today?

What if, whenever your instinct is to say something can't be done, you list the parts that can be?

What if you had the confidence to do one thing you've always wanted to? What's the first thing you do?

What if, for three days, you ran everything through a 'What if...' filter?

What if you made the thing you're working on bigger? Smaller? In a different material?

What if it was in different colours? A different medium?

What if you had double the budget?

What if you had half the budget?