

Chatterbox #206 – Creativity

Episode description

Everyone is creative to some degree, but what makes some people more creative than others? This question has fascinated artists and thinkers for centuries. In this episode of Chatterbox, Andrew and Morag add their own two cents.

Fun fact

Not everyone thinks creativity is important. In fact, Plato didn't even believe in it! He proposed that artists didn't create things, but rather that they discovered them.

Expressions included in the study guide

- Expertise
- To make it [one's] own
- Totally
- Succinct
- To hone
- Out of thin air
- Innate



Transcript

Andrew: You're listening to the Culips English podcast. To download the study guide for this episode, which includes the transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-world examples, and a quiz, visit our website, Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Hey, everybody. My name is Andrew.

Morag: And my name is Morag.

Andrew: And you're listening to Culips.

Hey, Morag.

Morag: Hey, Andrew, how's it goin'?

Andrew: I'm doin' not too bad. How about yourself?

Morag: I'm all right, gearing up for a day at work pretty soon here. You know, exciting things.

Andrew: Morag, you work in a creative field, don't you?

Morag: I do, I write for a living. Yeah, a lot of it is sort of creative and some of it is marketing, although that can be, maybe, creative too, I don't know.

Andrew: Yeah, I think so. That's great, because today the topic of our Chatterbox episode is creativity. So maybe you'll be able to speak with some **expertise**. That's great.

But before we get started in our discussion about creativity, I would like to let everybody know about the study guide for this episode. It's available now on our website, Culips.com. So if you would like to study with the study guide, head on over to Culips.com to give it a download. It includes the transcript for this episode, also some detailed vocabulary explanations and examples, a quiz, and also some prompts that you can use for conversation practice or writing practice. So yeah, check out the website for the study guide.

OK, Morag, creativity. Let's start with a definition and then, this might be hard.

Morag: Yeah.

Andrew: Even for English speakers to define. But if you could briefly and simply describe in your own words—now it sounds like a test question.

Morag: It does. OK.

Andrew: Creativity. What would you say?

Morag: I'll give this a shot. So, I think that creativity is the skill or ability or facility to make things that are new, to come up with ideas that are new and different. Or to make art, which is sort of the same thing, because you know you don't just copy someone exactly when you're making art or you're writing. You have to create something from new, you have to create something that has never existed before, **to make it your own**.

Andrew: **Totally.**

Morag: So it's that ability to make those things, or come up with those ideas. But there's a lot of different avenues that people can be creative in. So, not just a painting or writing. People also need to use their creativity to think new thoughts and creative thoughts in other areas as well.

Andrew: Very good definition.

Morag: Maybe not so **succinct** though, I'm sorry.

Andrew: Well, if I were to boil that down, then I guess I could just say that creativity is the skill to make something that didn't exist before or to do something differently, think in a different way than previous. Right?

Morag: Yeah, that sounds good.

Andrew: All right.

Morag: I agree.

Andrew: Cool.

Morag: Thank you for the summary.

Andrew: So I think it was an interesting distinction that you said just a moment ago, about there being, kind of, two different types of creativity. What immediately pops in my mind is the arts when I think of creativity, like a painting or music. But there's also creativity like problem-solving, coming up with a more efficient way to do something. This is creativity, too, right?

Morag: No, I mean a lot of science can be very creative because they have to try to think of something new, something that, a way that something might be done in nature or in whatever, and then test it. So that's quite creative, to come up with this idea of something that might be possible.

Andrew: So would you consider yourself a creative person?

- Morag: At this point, I would say yes because other people consider me to be a creative person. I've done jobs where people will be, like, oh, we need somebody creative, we need somebody who can, you know, come up with this stuff, so. But I don't feel super-creative. I write for a living, but I will spend a lot of time looking at a blank page, not having any idea what I should put on it, you know?
- Andrew: Yeah, I get that feeling a lot as well. And, yeah, actually, you know, one of the adjectives that I used to describe myself on my resume is creative. So I kind of market myself as being creative, too. And I do think from time to time I have spurts of creativity. It kind of comes in waves for me, I don't know.
- Morag: I think a lot of the things that people consider to be creative, those are things that can, or you need to learn how to do, you need to **hone**, you know? So nobody's born knowing how to paint.
- Andrew: Right.
- Morag: There's still something you need to do. Something you need to learn before you can use all that creatively and paint. A lot of people, the creative things they've done have also been things they've learned.
- Andrew: Right, it's almost like it's a skill.
- Morag: Yeah, **totally**. I wouldn't be able to write if I didn't know how to write, you know? The physical ways of writing and reading, you know, you could maybe be able to think up all the most amazing things in the world, but if you don't know how to put it down, that's a problem. So, but, like, what are some of the creative things that you've done?
- Andrew: Some of the creative projects I've done, for example?
- Morag: Yeah.
- Andrew: Well, yeah, I think the way that I think of myself as being creative is musically, 'cause I've played music my whole life and have written a lot of songs. So in a way, that's kind of cool, right? Because it's really weird how it works writing a song, you know? You just, 20 minutes previously you have nothing, and then an hour later you have something and you're like, wow, that's so weird. Like, where did the idea come from? I don't know, but at the end of the day, you have this thing, you have a song where you didn't have the song earlier. And so it's kind of a mystery to me.

- Andrew: I know some people, some songwriters really work their craft, right? They're really sitting at the piano every day pounding out a song or refining it. It's never how it worked for me, it's not like I'm a great, amazing songwriter or anything, but songs just appear **out of thin air**. You're walking around or you're in the shower and you have a melody in your head and there's the song, so. I think when I think of my own creativity, it's mostly based around music, yeah.
- Morag: That's really cool. But I'm envious, though, 'cause I always have to work for the ideas. And put out a lot of bad ideas before I get to the good ones.
- Andrew: Well, actually, you know, that's a huge part of the process, too. For every song that I've written, that I think is any good, there's a hundred that I've thrown out 'cause they've been terrible, so.
- Morag: Yeah, it's also, I mean that's something to think about too, is it's not just about being able to make all of these things, but also having the judgment to know which ones are good.
- Andrew: Yes, yeah, yeah.
- Morag: Which ones to keep, yup.
- Andrew: So what kind of creative things, then, do you do, Morag?
- Morag: Basically, just write. I loved playing music when I was younger. But I am, like, anti-music creative, I am anti-musically creative. Yeah, I could only play music if it's sheet music, written out in front of me.
- Andrew: Ah, you're the opposite of me.
- Morag: Yeah, no, if you tell me just to make sounds, I will freak out and run away. It's so scary, yeah. But, yeah, I never really drew or anything that like, didn't do drawings or art. No, I just always put words on paper.
- Andrew: I see, well, that's very cool. Now, a big question around creativity is if some people are more creative than others or if we are all born with the same amount of creativity. And, actually, in doing some preparation for this episode, I watched a YouTube video with a speaker called Matthew Jervis, and he's a designer and an instructor at The Academy of Art University in San Francisco, California. I thought we could listen to a clip of him answering the question if some people are more creative than others. So why don't we take a listen to that clip now.

M. Jervis: But, essentially, what it is, it's a survival skill, it's a survival set of skills. And you would have a really difficult time not being creative. And that's one of the things that a lot of people, you know, when you go to these creative workshops, everyone's like how am I going to be more creative, how am I going to get better ideas and blah blah blah. But the truth of the matter is, you're already creative when you wake up in the morning, and your car's in the shop and your bike has a flat tire, how are you going to get to work? That's a creative challenge. Parenting is a creative challenge. The idea there are some people who are creative and other people who aren't is false.

Andrew: OK, Morag, so Matthew Jervis seems to think that everybody is creative, right? He said that creativity is a set of survival skills and, if you aren't creative, you actually can't live, you won't have the knowledge to make it through your day. What do you think about this? Do you agree?

Morag: I actually really like his definition of creativity, because it's mostly about problem-solving and being able to put two things together or make decisions on the fly. And definitely what he was saying about how you'd have a really difficult time not being creative, at least, also even in my, like, creative work life, a lot of it feels like I wouldn't have a job if I didn't do this. So I better do it. So I do, you know? And then it happens because it must.

Andrew: Right.

Morag: You know, at least I learned that, with university, like writing papers and that sort of thing, you have to do it. You need to do it, so do it. And that's, but you also have to come up with something, and so you have to, and you do, and that is a creative thing. So, yeah, figuring out, I think getting dressed in the morning is a creative statement.

Andrew: Yeah, definitely can be.

Morag: Yeah, it's for every person, 'cause you're either always making a statement about who you are, how you want to be seen, what your values are, you know what I mean? Like you're always showing that even if you just look like you decide to dress like everyone around you, or you know, you're still making decisions about the whole look of who you are, which sounds very creative.

Andrew: Yeah, yeah, for sure. Maybe this is one of the reasons that I'm really drawn to the idea of a uniform, is to take that element of thinking about what I have to wear out of the equation of my morning routine.

Morag: Yeah, I'm sorry to bring you down on this one, but I had to wear a uniform for a lot of high school.

Andrew: What did you think about it?

Morag: No, it doesn't stop that, because everyone still wears things slightly differently. You know what I mean? It's impossible to have everyone perfectly pressed in exactly the same way all the time, and there's things like, you know, what shoes you choose, and how you do or do not do your hair, or, you know, what if you're wearing glasses, you know what I mean? And then all of a sudden there just becomes a lot more emphasis on those tiny little details. People always need to differentiate each other and themselves.

Andrew: To go back to Matthew Jervis' statement, I think this is a really nice way to think about creativity, because we sort of have this idea that creative people are better than noncreative people and it creates a hierarchy in this society. Like, we think creative jobs are better than manual labour jobs, for example. But what I like about this definition and Matthew Jervis' answer is that it levels the playing field. He's saying that everybody's creative, and I think that's a nice way to think about society.

Morag: Yeah, no, I think it's really cool and I think it's, sort of, could be seen as an extension into adulthood in this sort of belief that we often have that, like, all children are inherently creative, like, all kids are crazy creative and coming up with ideas all the time and doing all kinds of crazy stuff and that you have that. You have that **innately**, but you stop doing that at a certain point, most people, so it's, you know, but I like that Matthew Jervis says that it's still actually going and you're still creative in everything, you know? That's really cool.

Andrew: Yeah, those juices never stop flowing.

All right, Morag, I think we should wrap things up here so that you're not late for work this morning.

Morag: Oh, thank you.

Andrew: Everybody, I wanna remind you about our website. It is Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com. It's the place where you can listen to past episodes of Culips and also download the study guide for this episode. So when you get a moment, check out our website, Culips.com.

Morag: We would also love to hear from you guys, so if you want to drop us a line and give us an idea for an episode, send it our way. You have two options to do that: you can either contact us through our Facebook page, Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast, or you can email us at contact@Culips.com.

Andrew: That is it for us, we'll catch you next time. Bye everybody.

Morag: Bye.

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Detailed Explanations

Expertise

Noun

To have **expertise** is to have a high level of talent or skill, especially in a specific field. It is often used in the phrase “area of **expertise**.”

Here are a couple more examples with **expertise**:

Walter:	Thank you for seeing me, Doctor.
Doctor:	No problem. What can I do for you?
Walter:	I’ve been having blurred vision in my right eye.
Doctor:	As you know, I’m a heart and lung specialist. It’s not exactly my area of expertise .
Walter:	I understand, but can you take a look anyways?
Doctor:	I can, but I’ll refer you to a specialist afterwards.

Interviewer:	Next question: What skills will you bring to our company?
Applicant:	I have certificates in welding and carpentry.
Interviewer:	That’s impressive.
Applicant:	And I’m also working towards getting my electrician’s licence. I’m trying to widen my areas of expertise .

To make it [one's] own

Idiom

To make it [one's] own is to take something that already exists and change it to the point of it becoming your own creation. A common way of doing this is to take someone else's song but play it in your own style. That way, you are **making it your own**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to make it [one's] own**:

Samira: This cream pasta is amazing! You need to give me the recipe.

Clara: Oh, I never follow the recipe. I always try **to make it my own**.

Samira: I wish I could do that.

Clara: I could show you, if you like.

Teacher: No, no, no! Your playing is too stiff.

Guitarist: I'm just following the notes on the page. What else can I do?

Teacher: **Make it your own**. Never mind the notation on the page. Play how you feel it should be played.

Guitarist: OK, I'll try.

Totally

Idiom, informal

Saying **totally** is one way of completely agreeing with someone else. It's a shorter way of saying, "I **totally** agree with you" or "You're **totally** right."

Here are a couple more examples with **totally**:

Rich:	I think we should move the couch to the side.
Olive:	And put the coffee table in the middle?
Rich:	Yes. It'll open up the design of the room. What do you think?
Olive:	Totally —then we'll have more space to walk around.
Rich:	That's right. Let's do it.

Jill:	Right now, who do you think is better, Ronaldo or Messi?
Nathan:	These days? Ronaldo, for sure.
Jill:	Totally . He's dominating the Champions League and scoring so many important goals.
Nathan:	Exactly. That said, Messi isn't bad either!

Succinct

Adjective

To be **succinct** is to speak using very few words. It can have a positive meaning, like when you want a brief version of a story, or it can be negative, like when someone is being cold, mean, and **succinct** with you.

Here are a couple more examples with **succinct**:

Dale:	Did you speak with the manager?
Vicky:	Yes. He was very succinct . He said, "No dogs are allowed in the hotel."
Dale:	Did he say it nicely?
Vicky:	Not at all.
Dale:	Then we have to find another hotel for the night.

Boss:	I found this report on my desk this morning. Why hasn't the problem in sector G7 been fixed yet?
Employee:	It's a complicated issue, sir.
Boss:	Then explain it to me. I don't have much time, so please be succinct .
Employee:	Like I said, it's rather complicated. I don't think I can explain it in just a few words.

To hone

Verb

To hone is to make something sharper. You can make a knife or an edge sharper but, when talking about skills, **to hone** is to make your skills sharper and better. It is often used in the phrase “**to hone** your skills.”

Here are a couple more examples with **to hone**:

Dave:	Nice to see you again. Hey, where's Steve?
Julie:	He's down in the basement. He's been there all day.
Dave:	Doing what?
Julie:	Just practising the guitar.
Dave:	That's just like him. He's always honoring his skills. Do you think he'd mind if I went down to listen?

Ballerina:	So that's my routine. What do you think?
Teacher:	It's a good try for your first time. You still need to hone your technique.
Ballerina:	OK. In what sense?
Teacher:	Your plié is a little stiff and your jeté is not high enough. We should work out stretching first. Come over here.

Out of thin air

Idiom

If something comes **out of thin air**, it appears all of a sudden, especially without you knowing where it came from. Think of a magician pulling out a surprise bouquet of flowers. Before there was nothing but air, but now, all of a sudden, there are flowers—and you don't know where they came from! They came **out of thin air**.

Here are a couple more examples with **out of thin air**:

Patrick:	We went out with Jack the other day, and you know how Jack never has any money, right?
Ben:	Of course.
Patrick:	So when it came time to pay the bill, Jack stepped forward and took out \$100.
Ben:	Just like that?
Patrick:	Yeah. Out of thin air ! We were quite surprised. But he paid for everything and he was really happy about it, too!

Kathy:	The other day, I was behind the house with my friend. We found a pack of cigarettes and thought we could try some.
Vicky:	Sounds like a bad idea.
Kathy:	Nobody was home, so I thought it would be OK.
Vicky:	Still a bad idea.
Kathy:	Then I looked up and, out of thin air , my mom is standing over me. She was not happy.
Vicky:	I can imagine.

Innate

Adjective

In this episode, Morag talks about the idea that creativity is **innate** in children. If something is **innate**, you are born with it. The ability to learn things is something **innate** in humans. People often use the word **innate** to refer to natural skill.

Here are a couple more examples with **innate**:

Crissy:	Hey, there's a show playing in the suburbs this Friday.
Fiona:	Who's playing?
Crissy:	My friend Brett. She's such a good pianist.
Fiona:	I know her! I saw her play the guitar at a school function. She plays the piano too?
Crissy:	Yeah, she has this innate talent for musical instruments.

Dean:	Do you think children are born with a sense of fear?
Will:	No, I don't think it's innate .
Dean:	Then how do we acquire a sense of fear?
Will:	It's most likely learned behaviour. I think they learn it from people older than them. What do you think?

Quiz

1. If you have expertise in a certain sector, you are _____.
 - a) a specialist
 - b) a parent
 - c) a decent skier
 - d) a good friend

2. Which is NOT the opposite of succinct?
 - a) verbose
 - b) wordy
 - c) terse
 - d) long-winded

3. True or false: The ability to speak English is innate.
 - a) true
 - b) false

4. Which is the best example of honing your skills?
 - a) watching soccer on television
 - b) jogging
 - c) attending a chess seminar
 - d) watching a movie

5. If something appears to you out of thin air, it comes to you _____.
 - a) from a cloud
 - b) from a gas
 - c) unexpectedly
 - d) unwillingly

Writing or Discussions Questions

1. When do you come up with your best ideas?
2. Are people born creative, or is it something they need to be taught?
3. Are you creative? Of course you are! What kind of things do you create on a daily basis?
4. Can you be a good musician without being particularly creative?
5. If you're cooking from a recipe, how do you like to make it your own?

Quiz Answers

1.a 2.c 3.b 4.c 5.c

Episode credits

Hosts: Andrew Bates and Morag St. Clair

Music: *Something Elated* by Broke For Free, *Step On* by Jahzzar

Episode preparation/research: Andrew Bates

Audio editor: Andrew Bates

Transcriptionist: Heather Bates

Study guide writer: Matty Warnock

English editor: Stephanie MacLean

Business manager: Tsuyoshi Kaneshima

Project manager: Jessica Cox

Image: Kevin Jarrett (Unsplash.com)

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