

more often than we know. Talk to any successful professional and they will tell you how many times they have failed.

There is a Zen saying, “Fall seven times, get up eight.” Most people assume that success is a straight line when in reality success is a meandering, noisy cacophony of ups and downs and struggles and strife. I say, fail forward. If jumping into challenge was easy, most people probably wouldn’t bother to jump. There’s something tantalizing about struggle. We’re a little attached to it in some ways, maybe even addicted to making things hard. What if being creative is easier than you think?

To solve our individual and collective problems, it helps to understand how creativity works. As nebulous as it seems, the creative process has distinct steps. And similar to the Chinese five elements, there’s a natural progression, each leading into the next. That process to creativity is as natural as our seasons. Although, there are many schools of thought on how many steps, I condense them to six.

1. **QUESTION:** Ask “*What do I need to solve?*” Then ask your big question around it. Asking a question lies at the center of your process. Everything else spirals up and out from there. Think of this step as a character role or *archetype of a child* who is always asking questions. It wants to know who, what, where, when, how, and why. It always sees things brand new and holds no attachment to story or meaning. It’s just curious.
2. **OBSERVATION:** Start by observing what’s around you. Your dig for research and resources starts here. Consider this step as the *archetype teacher* that acts like a guide, teacher, or sensei. It watches everything.
3. **GATHERING:** Next begin to gather data, stuff, materials, even other people’s ideas. Fill your creative gas tank so something new can be fueled. Let no thing get discarded prematurely. It may be valuable even though it seems odd or unrelated. Hold no judgment or assumption while gathering. If it inspires you even a smidge, pop it in the basket. Baskets can be digital, paper, or physical like a folder, drawer, or actual basket. YOU decide. Think

of this step as the *archetype scientist* who loves to collect data. It also holds no judgment and views all information it collects as interesting and useful.

4. **DIVERSION:** Get away from what you're doing. Overworked ideas don't work. Go for a walk, jump in the shower, or take a drive. Stepping away is key to letting any concept or creation ripen. Think of this stage as the cooking or incubation stage where your efforts won't help, so step away and let happen what needs to happen. Think of this step as the *archetype dreamer* who's cool, laid back, and has better things to do than worry.
5. **AH-HA:** Here's where your greatest idea ever magically emerges from the fog. With no effort, it'll just show up. When it does, grab it! Think of this stage as the *archetype genie* that just pops up out of nowhere.
6. **VERIFICATION:** Share it with others, test it out, prototype it. Even if this creative bubble is just for you, by golly—get it out of your head! Write it down, draw it out, say what must be said. Don't let ideas fester. They'll come back to bite you later. Holding back creativity will eventually lead to suffering. The dam will break. Let the trickle flow now. You'll be glad you did. Think of this stage as the *archetype presenter* who always has something important to share. Share your ideas.



