

Writing and the Creative Life: Why Staring Into Space Is an Important Strategy for Success

[Scott Myers](#)

“In the shower we are simply staring into space, washing our hair on autopilot. We aren’t checking our messages or Twitter feed, or writing a report. We’re just day dreaming.”



Via Psychology Today:

Think about the last time and place you got a great

idea, or solved a problem that had been plaguing you. Where were you?

The answer is a cliché: You were probably in the shower. Creativity doesn't come from the bathroom, but it sure does seem highly correlated with it.

To wit [this](#):

Oscar-winning screenwriter Aaron Sorkin takes up to eight showers a day whenever he suffers from writer's block to help revive his creativity. The Social Network and The Newsroom scribe has installed a small shower unit in his office to keep his creativity flowing after realizing a quick refresher allows him to collect his thoughts.

Why a shower?

In the shower we are simply staring into space, washing our hair on autopilot. We aren't checking our messages or Twitter feed, or writing a report. We're just day dreaming.

We may — mistakenly — think that nothing much is happening in our brain when we aren't consciously doing something, certainly nothing much of importance is going on. But our brain actually lights up like a Christmas tree when we're daydreaming. Many brain regions become active in this situation, far more than when we are focusing.

Why?

When we daydream or relax our focus, our brain begins drawing connections between all the things that it previously didn't see as being all that connected. Most importantly, the brain networks responsible for creative insight come online.



This dude knows a little something about being successful.

If he can stare into space, so can we!

Sometimes the way to solve a story problem is through pure intention. Other times, just stare out the window and let your mind roam.

When we are focused on something or using our willpower to do something, the task-positive attentional network is on. (And the task negative — mind wandering, daydreaming, “time wasting” — network is

off.) We give credit to our task-positive attentional network for all the great work we do in the world. When we are focused, we write books. We build bridges. We raise children. Our culture tells us to focus because it's the only way to get anything done.

But when you're staring out the window into space, relaxing, or driving (and not listening to the radio) and you let your mind wander, the task-negative brain becomes active. All of those neurons start making connections between things you didn't see before, usually at an unconscious level. This is where our creative insight comes from. We can't solve problems or do much of anything without the insights that come from that downtime. We certainly can't fulfill our potential if we don't fill our need for creative insight without nurturing our ability to draw connections. This is why we often get our best ideas in the shower: It's the only remaining place in the world where we let ourselves do nothing!

Two takeaways:

Creative insight is at the very heart of the sweet spot, that place of power and ease where we humans hit our home runs. Nothing is easier than an "aha moment" that pops effortlessly into your awareness, and nothing is more powerful.

This means that you will not find your sweet spot, find

flow, or do your best work, without cultivating stillness in your life and without spending a good part of each day just staring into space.

The other takeaway: Next time somebody sneers at you for staring into space instead of working, tell them your 'task-negative brain' is on duty... then go back to staring... or head to the shower.

For the rest of the Psychology Today article, go [here](#).

Writing and the Creative Life is a weekly series in which we explore creativity from the practical to the psychological, the latest in brain science to a spiritual take on the subject. Hopefully the more we understand about our creative self, the better we will become as writers. If you have any good reading material in this vein, please post in comments. If you have a particular observation you think readers will benefit from and you would like to explore in a guest post, email me.

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