Chapter 2. Fostering Invention and Creative Idea Generation for Publication

Part I: Crossing the Threshold

Threshold Concept: *Writing for publication requires the development, evaluation, and effective presentation of novel ideas which form new human knowledge.*

Scanning a major journal in any field or examining peer review guidelines from top journals demonstrates a key threshold concept for writing for publication: writing for publication requires the development, evaluation, and effective presentation of novel ideas which form new human knowledge. The production of new human knowledge starts with a creative idea and proceeds with exploring that idea, situating that idea in the field and ultimately, writing about it. We began to see this distinction in the list of the difference between writing for courses and writing for publication in Table 1.1 and we explore those distinctions further in this chapter. A goal of publication is to produce new human knowledge—and that is not an easy or quick process!

One of the ways we can think about crossing the threshold for this chapter's concept comes from Kellogg's (2006) conception of three stages of writing expertise, described in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Kellog's Three Stages of Knowledge

Definition	**Writer Focus**	**Writing for Publication Stage**
Knowledge telling	Writer-focused	Writer's goal is "telling" known information and rehashing existing knowledge. This may be instrumental or performative writing to share what the writer has read for the purposes of grading.
Knowledge transforming	Writer-focused	Writer uses writing to deepen thinking, engage in analysis, synthesis, and original thinking for themselves—ideas may be "new to them" thinking but not often new to the field (see Edward C. Bowen, 2004's H vs. C creativity, this chapter). This is often the initial stage that graduate students begin in before learning how to write for publication.
Knowledge crafting	Audience-focused	The writer shifts to crafting novel knowledge by producing reader-focused prose that builds on original research and new-to-the-field knowledge.

While all of the chapters and threshold concepts in this book touch on the developmental stages that emerging scholars make from novices to experts, and thus, all apply to Kellogg's framework to some degree, I share his framework in this chapter because crossing the threshold begins at the idea generation stage (2006). From Kellogg's categories, we can see that crossing the threshold has to do with two related tasks relating to idea generation. First, you have to orient your perspective away from yourself as a learner and writer and begin orienting yourself towards specialized audiences. This includes thinking about the things that other members of the discipline may value, think, need, or do. While expert knowledge and experience come into play, this is also a mindset that you as an emerging scholar need to adopt: taking on the perspectives of others in the field to assess usefulness and value of your ideas.

These two stages are critical to cross the threshold so that you can both generate and pursue writing for publication ideas. From this we can see the ways that emerging scholars move from idea generation and evaluation in coursework and into writing for publication in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Crossing the Threshold

Generating and Evaluating Ideas in Coursework	**THRESHOLD**	**Generating and Evaluating Ideas in Writing for Publication**
Generating ideas often takes place in short periods of time due to the limitations of coursework and semester schedules.		Idea generation for publications may evolve over months or years, often tied to social settings (conferences, writing groups, conversations).
Ideas are evaluated for best fit to achieve success in a course and on individual interest.		Ideas are evaluated for the best fit to further the field; tied to the expectations of disciplinary audiences.
Knowledge generated is for the purposes of one's own learning or growth.		Novel human knowledge is generated for the purpose of building the field (and satisfying a scholar's own curiosity!)

One of the key terms we see show up in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 for crossing the threshold is novelty. And for that, we need to briefly turn to a discussion of creativity. Amber Yayin Wang (2012) describes creativity in writing as "the ability to see things in new and original ways, to learn from experience and relating it to new situations, to think in unconventional and unique ways, to use non-traditional approaches to solving problems, and creating something unique and original" (p. 39). Creativity is defined in the neuroscientific community as the generation of useful and novel ideas (Beaty, et al., 2016). As we'll explore in this chapter, the combination of usefulness and novelty is a major factor in successful academic publication. Developing novel ideas for publication requires three key steps:

- **Conception:** Coming up with a good idea, which requires innovation, creativity, and thinking in directions that have not been considered before or that expand beyond previously established boundaries.
- **Evaluation:** Evaluating whether or not the idea might be publishable or workable in the context of your field; this requires deep enough knowledge of the field to know if the idea is publishable. The evaluation of the idea has both individual aspects (explored in this chapter) and social aspects (explored in Chapter 9).
- **Presentation:** Writing about this idea through effective positioning, presentation and describing idea within the existing knowledge of the broader field.

Neuroscientific research demonstrates that creativity is a two-stage process: it includes both idea generation and idea evaluation (Beaty, et al. 2016). One must be open enough and innovative enough to generate ideas, and these generated ideas must be evaluated to see if they are worthy of pursuit to contribute to a human body of knowledge. The third bullet point is all about the writing itself—how innovative ideas are presented and situated within the fields existing knowledge. These three things cannot be easily separated; potential ideas for publication are generated within the landscape of the knowledge of the field, and thus, are bounded by the field's methods, values, and paradigms (Kuhn, 1962).

As an emerging scholar, you have a serious edge in idea generation, as you are relatively new to the field and thus, may have novel perspectives not shared by more senior members of your discipline! You may think about things from a different perspective, offer fresh angles on old problems, or bring an interdisciplinary body of experience to the table. But you often do not have the scope of knowledge of the field, so you may have more difficulty in evaluating and presenting ideas in a way that audiences in the field will value. This is where mentoring and peer support can be very effective (see Chapter 9).

For now, we are primarily concerned with bullet point numbers 1 and 2: how are good ideas developed and evaluated? To begin to answer this question, we examine creative practices that both emerging and expert scholars use. Creative practices are defined by Sarraf (2020) as "writers' working or daily activities, behaviors, or practices that may, either directly or indirectly, support creativity" (p. 3) which may include yoga, dialogue, or cultivating flow (for more on flow, see Chapter 4). As Sarraf (2020) notes, writing studies has a dearth in research exploring how professional writers in a variety of fields creatively generate ideas and a range of conflicting definitions on what creativity is. This is in part because in writing studies, creativity is frequently associated with creative writing (Sarraf, 2020). But as Sarraf argues, we need research that explores how professional writers use creativity, generate novel ideas, and enhance their thinking—in the case of writing for publication, this is because ultimately, what has publishable and scientific merit is what makes novel contributions to human knowledge.

Sarraf offers a range of options from broader literature on generating creative ideas including brainstorming, convergent thinking, dialogue, divergent thinking, flow, freewriting, incubation, mindfulness/meditation, intuition, and play. Many of these were expressed by writers engaged in writing for publication, as we will now explore.

Part II: Exploring Emerging and Expert Scholars' Creative Practices to Generate Ideas

Creative idea generation needs to take place both for the initial idea for a publication to come forth, but also once writers have the idea, they need to continue to generate ideas as they draft, revise, and respond to peer feedback. All writers describe a range of strategies for idea generation during drafting, and many of these are borne out by research in psychology exploring relativity and creative idea generation. In order to generate this list, I coded all 34 interviews for places where writers talked about how they had the ideas for their articles, including specific questions about idea generation and invention; I also examined the writing journals of the six expert scholars. Table 2.3 represents the most common practices for idea generation that successful emerging and expert scholars employ. Table 2.3 offers evidence for the first part of our threshold concept on development of ideas.

Ideas are generated through the act of writing for publication. All six of the expert writers in the study describe how the spark of inspiration for a new work is generated out of their previous experiences, writing projects, previous data collection, and so on. Alice describes her current book project, *Literacy Heroines,* as follows:

> This is really an outgrowth of the earlier book, *Literacy Then and Now*. I was struck as I was putting that book together at these women who had done these amazing things. And I thought, "I think there's another book here that wants to be written, about women who are heroines of literacy." … in the prior book, I saw these characters and I thought these people distinguish themselves by being examples of people who use literacy for really specific purposes, and they were teachers and mentors … So the sponsorship thing also really struck me and that's kind of how my approach took shape.

One thing to note about Alice's discussion is that this seed of a new book idea is not only rooted in her ongoing scholarly identity, but also noted in ways that Alice identifies as ideas that "wanted to be written." When struck with a particularly strong idea, some authors describe ideas as speaking directly them as authors having their own agency to be brought into the world (for more on writing as agentive, see Lindenman et al., 2024).

Table 2.3 Table of Idea Generation Strategies for Expert and Emerging Scholars

Creative Idea Generation Strategy	**Who uses this strategy?**
Ideas are generated through the act of writing for publication.	Expert scholars
Ideas generated through coursework conversations, dissertations, or writing in coursework.	Emerging scholars
Ideas are generated through conversation with others with writing groups, collaborators, mentors and at conferences.	Expert and emerging scholars
Ideas are generated through reading, freewriting and notetaking on previous work in the field or related areas of inquiry.	Expert and emerging scholars
Ideas are generated through deep thinking about challenging problems.	Expert and emerging scholars
Ideas are generated by identifying needs and/or gaps in the field tied to professional practice.	Expert and emerging scholars
Ideas are generated through questions and curiosities raised empirical data collection.	Expert and emerging scholars
Ideas are generated with incubation time in non-writing related activities.	Expert and emerging scholars
Ideas are generated through flow states.	Expert and emerging scholars
Ideas are generated through dreams, daydreams, and mind wandering practices.	Expert and emerging scholars

Ideas generated through coursework conversations, dissertations, or writing in coursework. Conversely, emerging scholars who were still in graduate school or in their first one or two years of their careers most frequently find the ideas for their initial articles for publication in their experiences in graduate school. This might be articles that started as course papers or articles written from segments of their dissertation. For example, Gina, an emerging scholar, uses a process she calls the "brain dump" to generate ideas. She creates "brain dump" files that are full of quotes, notes, and free writings. She brain dumps not only for articles she's reading in coursework but also brain dumps when she attends conferences (see next point). She describes how her brain dump document helps generate creative ideas, "Yeah, the brain dump document is key. It helps me feel like I've started and gives me something to work with and put everything in one place." Later she says, "I generate a lot of ideas while I read. I think it's more during the brain dump that offshoots will come to me."

Ideas are generated through conversation with others with writing groups, collaborators, mentors and at conferences. As writing is inherently a social practice (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015) conversations, mentoring, peer review

groups, and conferences are all places where ideas are often sparked, explored, and evaluated. Emerging scholar Gina also shares "I think talking with my peers about ideas and being invited to present with them at conferences gives me a lot of creative ideas because all of a sudden it's not just my research or my project, it's how do all of these connect which gives you a prompt." As we will explore more in Chapter 9, both emerging and expert scholars make extensive use of peer support networks, mentors, and writing partners prior to submitting work for publication.

Ideas are generated through reading, freewriting and notetaking on previous work in the field or related areas of inquiry. Tied closely to coursework, reading, notetaking, and freewriting are a set of approaches that are critically tied to the production of human knowledge, when one of the goals of is to engage in a scholarly conversation with previous work. Stephanie, an expert scholar who is writing on an area that she has published extensively in, uses freewriting and notetaking to reflect on readings, noting that readings often deepen her engagement with her topic. She describes a long process where reading one book led to another, and she eventually found Stephen M. North's (1987) *Making of Knowledge in Composition*, which has her radically shift gears partway through drafting, she says, "So I looked at that and thought: now I need to do that for what I've done with creative writing. … But that was going back to square one for me almost." So, while Stephanie had an initial idea rooted in her own expertise, reading North (1987) radically shifted her purpose and changed the entire trajectory of her article.

Ideas are generated through deep thinking over time about challenging problems. Participants also report thinking about their projects intensively, both before they start to write and as they are writing. Brita, an emerging scholar says, "As far as generating the ideas, I usually think about it in my head for a long time. … I have a journal beside my bed or have my laptop and I'll just jot down whatever is in my head. … My best writing comes from the things I think about as I'm going to the grocery store, listening to the radio. … Nothing starts when I write—if I'm sitting down to write it's already been thought through." While every scholar describes thinking about their work at various stages in the writing process, I will note that those who show a preference for planning and hybrid composing styles (Chapter 3) much more frequently describe thinking through things as a necessary step before they begin to write.

Ideas are generated by identifying needs and/or gaps in the field tied to professional practice. Inspiration also can come directly out of needs and practices in daily professional life. Alice describes that a number of her books and articles stemmed from issues that stemmed from her work as a teacher or writing program administrator (WPA). She says, "In the ten years that I was WPA and ran the program in Oakland, issues would come up and I'd say there's got to be work on this and there wouldn't be work on it. So, it's like okay, I'm going to do the work on this and publish it." She describes how her "Definitive Article on Class

Size" (Horning, 2007) came about because her associate dean asked to prove that smaller class sizes were more effective. She couldn't find what she needed so she wrote it. In Alice's case, this is a nice example of both novel ideas and evaluation—she has a clear need for the information she is looking for, she did some of this work as part of her role was WPA, and published on it as she knew others would need this information too. However, working on these issues from the angle of lived professional experience can be a challenge for novice scholars who aren't yet in these professional roles.

Ideas are generated through questions and curiosities raised through previous empirical data collection. For participants who are working with qualitative or quantitative data or engaging in other novel research, data itself can be a rich source of ideas and can often generate more questions than answers. Kathy, an emerging scholar, describes this specifically, "I think that talking with my co-researchers, my participants, gives me new ideas all the time." While the specifics may look different in different fields, the idea of research generating new ideas is a common theme.

The points presented above are used both to generate the spark of new ideas for publication as well as idea generation during drafting and revision. These last three examples are primarily used once a writer has settled on a project and begins to think through where the project is heading and as an active part of drafting or revision:

Ideas are generated with incubation time in non-writing related activities. Brita's discussion of being at the grocery store and thinking is an example of incubation. Incubation, or stepping away from an immediate project to allow ideas to "incubate" is an incredibly important part of generating creative ideas and has been demonstrated to be effective in a range of disciplines and has been well studied within neuroscience and creativity studies (Crawford & Willhof, 2013; Gilhooly et al., 2019). Many participants reflect on their use of various mindless activities (walking, doing the dishes, cleaning the house, swimming) to generate ideas, as they were starting to think about a new project, and most frequently during drafting sessions. For example, Alice frequently uses her swimming time at the local pool to reflect on the morning's writing session and plan for the next session, "Sometimes I'm not actively actually consciously saying, 'Yeah, I need to think about that more.' An idea will just pop into my head. … But when I get out of the pool, I do have in my pool bag a pad and a pencil. … More often I don't actually write anything down, but I have a problem in the draft that has worked itself out in the pool and then when I come back to the computer, it's like, okay so I know what to do."

Ideas are generated through flow states. Flow states, or the state of being deeply embedded, focused and immersed in one's writing was a common way in which ideas flowed forth for writers. While in these states, writers were deeply immersed in their writing and this allowed creative ideas to flow forth and problems within drafts to be solved. In fact, flow is such an important, yet

understudied part of the writing process that we have an entire chapter dedicated to flow (Chapter 4).

Ideas are generated through dreams, daydreams, and mind-wandering practices. Dreams may seem like an unlikely place to find inspiration and ideas for ongoing articles, but in fact, the research on dreaming and creativity demonstrates strong links between dreaming and generating novel idea and solving problems (Aspy, 2020; Saunders et al., 2016; Walker et al., 2002). Further, mind wandering and daydreaming are effectively leveraged by professionals to solve advanced problems (Gable et al., 2019). Two expert participants specifically wrote in their journals about their dreams as part of their drafting process. For example, Matt shares, "I woke up early because I had this strange dream about my colleague Zach. I don't know that the dream is important, but it made me remember that we had a conversation a few days ago about Wikipedia as a game …" He goes onto describe re-thinking conversations with his colleague that were prompted from his dream. This allowed him to make an important conceptual shift in his draft.

Idea generation and research constraints. Alice's example about her work as a WPA speaks to the constraints that many scholars face in terms of publication and a research agenda. Some academic fields—particularly those that do not typically seek larger funding or where funding is tied to teaching assistantships such as in the humanities or social sciences—allow people more flexibility and freedom. Fields in the sciences, professional fields, or medicine may have different constraints based on funding structure, access to necessary equipment, and more. Even within the limits placed on an emerging scholar for funding, focus, and equipment, the other ideas in this chapter may be useful in developing a novel idea within a narrower scope.

One of the important takeaways from both above lists is that academic professional writers actively and purposefully foster creativity not only in the narrow scope of their writing time but in broader life. This allows them to generate and capture insights, novel ideas, and solve problems in their manuscripts. This work is creating fertile soil for ideas to germinate.

Expert and Emerging Scholars' Evaluating Potential Ideas for Publications

Generating ideas is the first step in publication—but what allows you to decide whether or not an idea is good enough to pursue for publication? This is where tacit knowledge, expertise, and mentorship come in. Emerging scholars frequently expressed difficulty in determining which ideas were particularly fruitful or worth pursuing and thus seek out mentors and others for guidance.

To see idea evaluation in action, we turn to Alice, who serves as an editor of a major book series and is a prolific writer with a long career in the field of writing studies. Alice describes how one knows an idea is good, and it ties

to synthesizing what she knows to anticipate and understand the needs of the audience:

> When you write a proposal for a book project, one of the questions that's asked is that question where does this fit in the grand scheme of who's the audience, how is this going to get used, who wants to read this, who wants to know about this. … So, when I'm working with authors on proposals, I'm always saying to them, "The audience question is really a crucial question, you have to think about that, you have to think about how you see this project fitting into the field at large."

Alice then provides a specific list of all the things that help her evaluate a good idea, both as book series editor and as an author. The other expert participants all shared similar sentiments in the process of describing their articles, how they thought they would be received and the decisions they made about them. A graphic of Alice's list is offered in Figure 2.1.

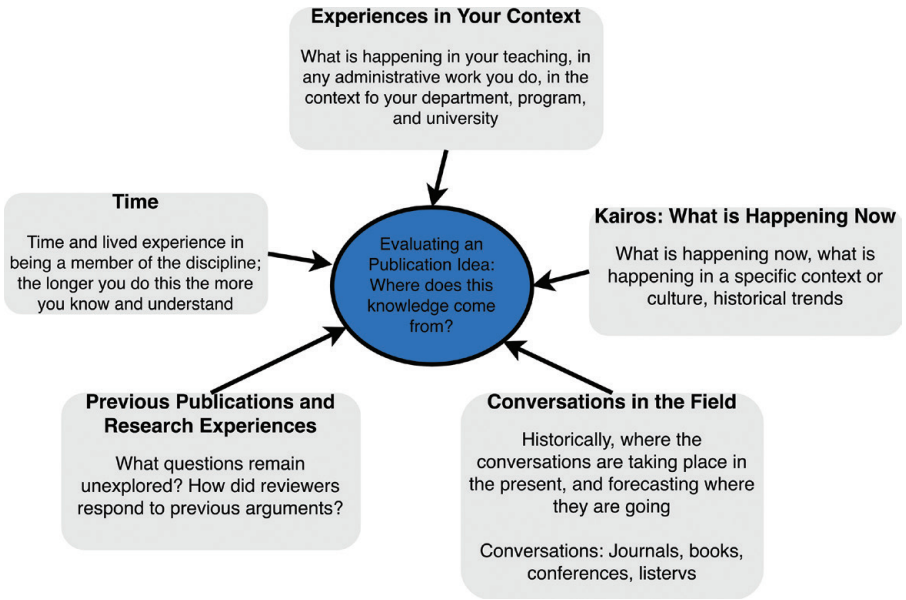

Figure 2.1 Evaluating a publication idea.

For emerging scholar Khaled, an assistant professor, he uses large existing datasets to find the most interesting and innovative data to offer in an article and uses that analysis to help spark the idea of where the article will head. He says, "I have all this interview data, I have all this text . … While I'm reading these things, one of the things I want is to participate in the scholarly conversation … so I have several themes or several agendas or projects I'm interested in, and I want to contribute to that. … When I'm doing my analysis, I'm particularly honed in on,

'Okay, these are the things that are going on there'… then, I use the opportunity to submit to a reviewer to get a sense from the audience or my target audience, what is interesting story … I pick up that thread and articulate that essay or that article, send that to the journal and see where they fall on it."[2] We see in Khaled's example that he's not just thinking about data that he has but also how members of the field—his "target audience" may evaluate and respond to the data. This helps him decide if the particular argument and data presentation is worth pursuing—crossing Kellogg's (2006) barrier between knowledge transforming and knowledge crafting.

One of the challenges that emerging scholars have is in evaluating the potential of an article idea is that they do not have a large body of experience in the field to draw upon. What emerging scholars need to do is cultivate their sense of what a good idea looks like. This includes immersing themselves in the conversations of the field, which is part of what doctoral programs help do as a form of social apprenticeship (Beaufort, 1999). Additionally, emerging scholars also seek extensive support from mentors (usually faculty) who can provide the expertise and mentorship to help them evaluate ideas and move towards publication (see Chapter 9).

Part III: Key Concepts and Activities for Fostering Invention and Creativity in Writing for Publication

Threshold Concept: *Writing for publication requires the development, evaluation, and effective presentation of novel ideas which form new human knowledge. This threshold concept was explored through our examination of creativity and idea generation through the following stories and information from participants:*

- To cross the threshold, emerging scholars need to orient their perspective towards the needs and values disciplinary audiences, rather than simply their own needs or learning. This includes generating ideas that are of value to the field but also evaluating those ideas in line with the broader field.
- Emerging and expert scholars use a very wide range of creative idea generation strategies including writing, reading and coursework, conversations

2. I will note that examining a large dataset and finding meaning is a common practice for qualitative data, especially for people who gather large datasets over time. This approach is also widely used in the field of data analytics, which takes large existing sets of data to look for patterns. It is less common in quantitative research and may result in accusations of "cherry picking" data. The point here is that there are lots of ways to explore data and generate ideas through data.

with others, free writing and note taking, deep thinking, asking questions, and being curious. These are often beyond what is taught in writing courses and include novel things such as exploring ideas in dreams or daydreaming.
- As we will explore more in Chapter 4, writers use flow states to help immerse themselves deeply in their creative process and generate ideas.
- Expert and emerging scholars also "incubate" ideas in non-writing times where they are exercising or doing mundane tasks—these scholars have methods of capturing their ideas so they can productively be used when they write.
- Expert scholars realize a need to evaluate their ideas for their potential for contributing to the field and successful publication—not all ideas are good ideas to be seriously pursued.
- Evaluation of ideas comes through a range of practices including their own positionally, identity, and experiences in their context; understanding the field and what is happening now; having conversations with others in the field and leveraging their knowledge and previous experiences in publishing.

As this chapter has explored, writing for publication requires deep engagement with ideas—developing novel and innovative ideas, ideas that no one else has thought about in the same way before. To facilitate this, writers employ a range of strategies, some well-known in the field (collaboration, freewriting, outlining, conversation) and some relatively unexplored or underexplored in the field prior to this study (dreaming, mind-wandering, incubation, flow). Emerging scholars who are seeking publication for the first time may not realize how critical idea generation and novelty are to publication because these concepts have not been stressed in coursework.

Thus, scholars actively engage in multiple creative practices to generate novel ideas both before and during the writing process, some of which are internal and some of which are social and connected to broader work in the field. Expert scholars also recognize the importance of critical evaluation of generated ideas to understand if they are both new ideas to the field and will be publishable/well-received by the field.

One of the distinctions of these two principles is described by Bowen (2004), who identifies two kinds of creativity: psychological creativity (P-creativity) and historical creativity (H-creativity). P-creativity are ideas that you come up with that are new to you but not necessarily new to the broader scope of human knowledge. P-creativity can be cultivated, and we can train ourselves to think in creative directions through engaging in many of the practices above—and this creativity is useful to us in different areas of life.

H-creativity represents ideas that are novel and relevant not only for you but also for your field. While P-creativity can be done with anyone of any knowledge

base, H-creativity requires expertise, that is, it requires knowledge of the history of scholarship, experience, and a broad knowledge base—and this is what Alice demonstrates with her evaluation heuristic. In Chapter 1, Figure 1.1 shows "idea generation" in the center of the audience, writer, and field spheres. To effectively evaluate ideas in writing for publication, those ideas must be placed in the context of broader knowledge. The idea has to be contextualized within the broader conversation to ask: Is this actually a new idea? Is it an idea of use to the field? Does it solve a problem for the field? H-creativity requires you to build a large body of knowledge about the scope and boundaries of knowledge in the field—and that requires reading, reflection, notetaking, and conversations with others over long periods of time.

The distinction between P-creativity and H-creativity are part of crossing the threshold, recognizing that expert scholars need to develop creative ideas and evaluate those ideas in line with their discipline.

Activity 2.1: Reflecting on Your Own Creativity in Academic Practices

Review the list that expert and emerging scholars offered for creative idea generation in academic settings:

- Creative ideas as seeds for previous projects or publications.
- Ideas rooted to exposure to knowledge in coursework and dissertations, and scholarly conversations.
- Conversation with others through conferences, writing groups, collaborators, and mentors.
- Reading, freewriting and notetaking on previous work in the field or related areas of inquiry.
- Thinking through problems and generating ideas.
- Identifying needs and/or gaps in the field tied to professional practice.
- New ideas generated through questions and curiosities raised empirical data collection.
- Incubation time in non-related activities.
- Writing as a method to generate new ideas and cultivate flow states.
- Exploring ideas raised in dreams, daydreams, and mind wandering practices.

Reflect on this list. You can reflect on or discuss the following:

- Which of these do you have experience within other areas of life or other expertise areas outside of academic writing?
- Which of the items on the list most appeal to you for the possibility of idea generation?
- Which are you already using and possibly can take a conscious effort to use more?
- How might you cultivate more creativity in your life?

Remember that these are active processes that can be cultivated, grown, and established as part of your own growing expertise. After you reflect, make a commitment to consciously build one or more of these ideas into your regular professional practices.

Activity 2.2: Transferring Creativity from Broader Life

Creativity and openness are habits of mind that we can learn to better express and explore not only in our academic work, but in our broader daily lives. These larger habits of mind can then then be productively tied to the generation of novel ideas for publication and academic work. Thus, you can work to cultivate creativity in your life in a variety of directions and work on creative thinking as a larger part of your self-expression. Consider the list above and make a commitment to explore one of these practices in non-academic settings.

Activity 2.3: Inspiration and Curiosity Notebook

To start collecting potential ideas for future publication and build creative and idea generating practices into part of your growing professional practice, consider keeping a notebook of ideas. This can be a digital file, a small physical notebook, a note-taking app, or any other method that works for you. Make sure you always have access to that notebook, app, or file—you never know when an idea might arise. As new ideas, questions, and thoughts come to you, make sure you document them in your notebook. When you are looking for new ideas to spark a publication or new project, you have everything you need in your idea notebook.

Another important part of this notebook is knowing how to ask good questions—questions that you (or your field) do not yet have an answer to. Perhaps you aren't the only one with this question, and that kind of curious question asking can lead to an eventual publication. So, ask yourself: what pressing questions are arising for you in your professional practices? What pressing questions are arising for you in public life? Does the field have answers to these questions? Recall that for Alice, a lot of the publications she generated while working as a writing program administrator were related to questions that the field had not yet answered, questions generated as part of her everyday professional practice. Keeping a running list of good questions is a critical part of fostering curiosity and creativity about the world around you.

When I was in graduate school, I kept a file on my computer called "Ideas for future inquiry" that functioned as my inspiration and curiosity notebook. It continues to be a source of inspiration to me well into my professional career. It also amazes me that all these years later, I can look back at some of my pressing questions as a graduate student and see how I eventually designed studies to answer them, but also how many I still feel that there aren't good answers to in the field and thus, may help me come up with novel ideas for publication!

Activity 2.4: Group Idea Generation Using Convergent and Divergent Thinking

Some of the most interesting ideas for many scholars came through conversations with others: at conferences, in writing groups, or even over coffee. But busy schedules mean that there is rarely open space just to discuss concepts and ideas. Making space to simply talk about ideas—without an agenda—is one way to generate ideas. Consider having a regular space to talk about ideas in the field with a group of colleagues in a less structured way. This can be through shared lunches, writing groups, brown bags, or even hanging out around a fire!

One activity that you can use in a group setting or as an individual is using the principles of convergent and divergent thinking (Beaty et al., 2016), which are cornerstones of creative thinking. For this activity, choose a theme, research question, or professional problem (such as a wicked problem to focus on).

Divergent thinking. In the divergent thinking stage, your job is to simply generate as many ideas as you possibly can, with no limitations or barriers. Simply generate ideas, with the goal to get as many ideas as possible down. Do not think of the difficulty or feasibility, simply generate ideas. Do not let naysayers tell you what can and can't be done. Allow your creativity to flow.

Convergent thinking. In the convergent thinking stage, you shift to evaluating the quality of the ideas that you generated and narrow your list of ideas down to a small number of the best, most feasible, and most useful ideas. This is when you can bring in all of the evaluative tools in this chapter, including Activity 2.5 below.

This process works because it allows us to get out of our own way. Emerging scholars may often struggle with imposter syndrome and self doubt, and simply creating a judgement free space to be creative and put anything on the table is extraordinary generative and useful.

Activity 2.5: Heuristic for the Evaluation of Article Ideas

As we've explored in this chapter, evaluating ideas that you have generated is a critical stage in the process of developing as an expert writer and allows you to cross the threshold. In order to contribute to new human knowledge, you must understand if an idea is worthy of pursuing and/or in what ways the idea may need to be developed. Based on Figure 2.1 and the data above, the following is a heuristic that can help you evaluate a potential idea for publication:

1. **Identifying the potential "problem" or "issue" your potential article idea seeks to solve.**
    a. *Why is this a problem?* Consider both now and historically—what makes this an important problem? How does this problem align with the values and practices in the field?

   b. *Why is this a problem now?* Here we can think about the rhetorical concept of Kairos, which suggests that there are right times to pursue courses of action. Is this a problem that is particularly pressing, and how so? How do larger social trends or trends within the field make this a good problem to explore?

2. **Generalizing ideas and exploring audiences and their needs.** As we explored in the *Crossing the Threshold* section of the introduction to this chapter, one of the challenging aspects of writing for publication is to take the issue or problem you are addressing out of your *immediate context* and consider its broader appeal. This can be a challenge for many emerging scholars because much of coursework and teaching in graduate school focuses on them, their learning, and their very specific contexts. Articles for publication are not about the individual, but about their contributions to the field. Re-orienting ideas in this way can help you identify publishable work.
   a. *Who is this a problem for?* One of the things to evaluate is whether or not the topic of your article is a problem that is a very local problem or if it is a problem that goes beyond your immediate context. This directly ties to your understanding of the audiences who will be reading your piece—one of your jobs as a writer is to ensure that the specific problem you are framing is tied to the work of the field and potential problems others are facing too.
   b. *How many other practitioners may have this problem?* Some problems are uniquely local while others may be experienced by those in many different contexts. Problems that speak to multiple contexts are better for publication than those that speak to only one.
   c. *What kinds of people/institutions/programs/instructors/writing centers, etc. may be interested in this work?* Those who are reading your work need to see the applicability of your work to their own contexts, teaching, circumstances, and so on. This gets to the critical idea that Alice shared in terms of understanding the audience, their needs, and why they may be reading.
   d. *How serious of a problem is this?* The larger the problem for the more people, the greater your publication impact.
   e. *If you can, talk to some of these practitioners.* Hear their thoughts and consider things from their perspective.

3. **Contextualizing the idea in the broader field.** Publishable work offers some form of novelty and new contribution to an existing knowledge base—this is how the field expands, grows, and builds. Newness and contribution can mean a lot of different things: new perspectives from diverse voices, new data or studies, adapting new knowledge from other fields to solve problems in our field, exploring foundational assumptions in the

field with data, new insights, studying new populations, exploring current events and offering new analysis, offering a fresh spin on an old idea, and so forth.

   a. *How does this idea connect with the broader field?* Is there an existing body of scholarship? What is already known or unknown? Where are the boundaries of this knowledge and how might your idea build new knowledge?
   b. *What is "new" in this idea that builds beyond previous work?* What does this work offer that hasn't been offered in other places?

4. **Exploring how this idea ties to any previous work, your scholarly agenda (or aspirational agenda), and identity.** All writing is based on that intersection between a writer, the piece of writing, and the field/audience. Thus, you should also consider if you are the right person to pursue the idea.
   c. *How does this problem tie towards a larger agenda or commitment you have towards a field or area of study?* You may have an agenda based on your mentor, funding, or personal interests—does this idea fit the vision and trajectory of your broader career?
   d. *Why are you a good person to write this?* How do your own experiences, previous work, expertise, positionality, and/or identity support writing in this? Will you be able to draw upon any of that with this idea?
   e. *How might this idea help you further your agenda/goals?* How does this idea tie to your goals for your own work and contributions? How might it meet a larger agenda you are working toward? How does it support you as a scholar?
5. **Evaluating the timing of the idea.** Consider how broader cultural patterns, social movements, and other issues relating to both the field and the broader context may matter (they don't matter for all projects, but they matter for some quite a bit).
   f. *Why is this a good problem/idea to write about now?* Why now and not some other time? What has changed to make this a good time?
   g. *Does your work align with the direction and areas of current interest to the field?* How so and in what ways? If not, is there a way to tie your unique topic to broader conversations? You might think about recent conversations at conferences, calls, conversations in the field, and so forth, for understanding where the field is heading and how your idea might fit (or be properly framed) at this time.
6. **Evaluate the scope of the project.** A final consideration is the scope of the project. Articles or book chapters have limitations (anywhere from 1500–10,000 words) and thus have physical limitations about what they can offer. Monographs/book-length works are harder to publish but offer an opportunity to go in much more depth.

h. Can this work be fit into an article-length project? (Or perhaps, two or more articles?)
i. Is this something you want to accomplish on your own or would you want collaborators?
j. How big is the potential scope, and how can you make it both publishable and manageable?

Perhaps you have generated ideas using the other activities in this chapter or already have article ideas you want to pursue. Using the heuristic above, you can evaluate potential ideas you have for an article and/or directions you may want to take. You can do this individually, with a peer or mentor, or with a class or writing group. For a writing group or class setting, create a list of some possible ideas people have been considering for pursuing for publication. Evaluate each of the ideas using the heuristic as a guide.

Before you pursue article ideas and after you have personally evaluated them, share them with a mentor or more experienced member of your field. This person's tacit knowledge and expertise in the field can help you frame, shape, and adapt the idea to your field's audiences and specialized knowledge.

Activity 2.6: Understanding Audience Dice

A fun activity you can do in a group setting is to create a set of audience dice with multiple kinds of practitioners in your field and consider your ideas in relationship to these individuals. These dice can look differently for different fields, and part of the activity is deciding the different audiences for the dice.

For example, in my field, writing studies, the dice might describe the different roles that people take on and the kinds of professionals who read my field's journals (I am assuming a six-sided die):

1 = Writing program administrator at a small liberal arts college
2 = General member of the public who wants to write
3 = Adjunct instructor teaching multiple sections of first-year writing on multiple campuses
4 = Doctoral student
5 = Department chair
6 = Full time faculty in another discipline at a technical community college

Roll the dice. Consider your potential idea from the perspective of these different audiences. What does this teach you about adapting and shifting to the needs and perspectives of different audiences?