

Step 1: HOW TO TELL IF YOU ARE CREATIVE. TAKE THIS EASY QUIZ AND FIND OUT!

- | | YES | NO |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • WHEN YOU WERE A LITTLE KID (OR EVEN NOW) DID YOU EVER SING SONGS? DID YOU MAKE UP SONGS? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • DID YOU DANCE AROUND YOUR ROOM OR BACK YARD? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • DID YOU MAKE UP STORIES FOR YOUR TOYS TO ACT OUT? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • DID YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS PRETEND TO BE ACTION HEROES OR YOUR FAVORITE CARTOON CHARACTERS? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • DID YOU EVER DRAW A PICTURE LIKE THIS? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |



If you didn't answer YES to **any** of these questions, you should probably put this book down, because you may be a dog or a houseplant and you cannot read.

This is a footnote. It means I have something extra to tell you at the bottom of the page. Sometimes it's fun, sometimes it's more information.



That's because humans are creative. We are *addicted* to Making The Thing That Is Not.¹

We cannot help ourselves.

So yes, you are creative. Unless you are a dog or a houseplant.

1. Think about it: where there wasn't a poem, now there is. Where there wasn't a song, now there is. Where there wasn't a painting or a drawing... You get the idea.

WHAT IS LICHTENBERGIANISM?

Don't worry about that right now. We'll talk about it later.



Right now I want to talk about Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. You probably know his name; I hope you know his music.²

Mozart was one of the few absolute geniuses that we humans have ever produced. This is just fact. You will not find anyone who will argue

W. A. Mozart (1756–1791) against this fact.

When he was five years old, he had his first public appearance performing in concert, on both the violin and the piano.

When he was eight, he wrote his first symphony.

When he was twelve, he wrote his first opera.

When he was 26, he got married against his father's wishes.

When he was 30, he wrote his most popular opera, *The Marriage of Figaro*.

When he was 36, he died.

2. If you don't, what a grand adventure you have before you! Start with his wind concertos: clarinet, bassoon (my favorite), flute (2), French horn (4). You won't regret it. Search YouTube for "Mozart bassoon concerto" and go from there.

Everything we know about him indicates that the music came straight out of his head and onto the paper in one pure and perfect stream. He never seemed to stop to think what came next. He never seemed to go back to correct anything.

MUSIC NERD TALK:

When you write music for more than one instrument, you have to produce a score, which has all the instruments on one page, like this:

Mozart
Symphony No. 40
in G minor
K. 550

Allegro molto.

Oboe,
Clarinet in B \flat ,
Flute,
Oboe,
Fagotti,
Corni in B \flat ,
Corni in G,
Violino I,
Violino II,
Viola,
Violoncello
e Basso.

1 flute, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets,
2 horns, some violins, some
violas, some cellos, a string
bass or two.

...and then you have to copy out the parts for each instrument.³

Here's a string quartet:

A string quartet has a first violin, a second violin, a viola, and a cello.

The image shows a page of a musical score for a string quartet. The title is "Quartett in F für zwei Violinen, Viola und Violoncello" by Beethoven, Op. 59 No. 1. The tempo is marked "Allegro moderato". The score is arranged in four systems, each with four staves. The staves are labeled "Violin I", "Violin II", "Viola", and "Violoncello". The music is in F major and 3/4 time. A handwritten arrow points from the text above to the right side of the score page.

3. Yes, in the old days, you literally had to hand-write every part. People made a living doing this. They were called *copyists*.

We know for a fact that Mozart could write a string quartet in his head while riding in a coach, and then when he finally got to pen and paper he would write out the *parts* first, only later filling out the score.



Who does that kind of thing??

A genius, that's who.⁴

4. Also, maybe a genius who liked showing off, like Mozart.

AND WE DON'T HAVE TO DO THAT. And by "that" I mean we don't have to produce perfect work straight out of our heads, ever. That's not the way this creativity thing works.

FOR REAL, WHAT IS LICHTENBERGIANISM?

Lichtenbergianism started as a joke. One day some friends and I were arguing online about music, and one of us posted a quote:

“To do the opposite is also a form of imitation.”



G. C. Lichtenberg (1742–1799)

The author of this quote was Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, an 18th-century physics professor in Germany. He did many cool things — we have printers because of his discoveries — but he *failed* to do many other things

because he was always procrastinating. He simply put off doing the work!

My friends and I were the same way. We had a *lot* of great ideas for stories and songs and plays, and sometimes we would start on them, but we almost never finished them.⁵

So we formed The Lichtenbergian Society to celebrate the idea that procrastination was key to the creative process. No, it doesn't make sense. How can you be creative if you never get anything done? Mostly The Lichtenbergian Society was just an excuse to get together and hang out.

5. Does this sound like you and your friends? Good!

But after five years of getting together to celebrate our procrastination, we noticed a weird thing. All of us were doing *more* than we had before! Jeff was writing books — I was composing music — Mike was writing and starring in plays. How was this possible?

Here is part of the answer.⁶ Imagine some guy, some random guy. We'll call him THAT GUY.

You choose: does THAT GUY want to write music or books?

If THAT GUY wants to write music, turn to p. 11.

If he wants to write books, turn to p. 13.

6. The rest of this book is the rest of the answer.

Imagine THAT GUY decides he wants to write music, and THAT GUY decides to compare himself to Mozart.

Faced with Mozart's fearsome perfection, THAT GUY



decides he shouldn't even bother trying to write music. After all, he will *never* be as good as Mozart.

And he's right. He never will.⁷

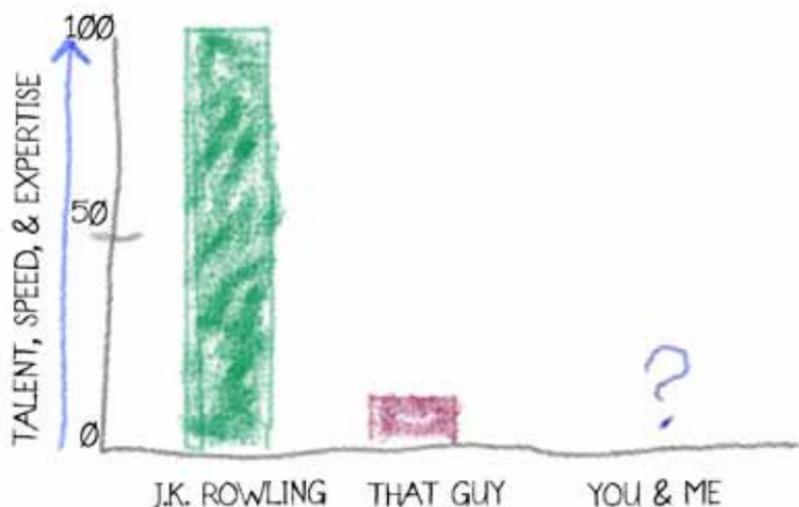
Neither will you or I, but you and I know that we don't have to be. We only have to be as good as we can be. That's what this book is about. Memorize this: **Failure is always an option.**

Plus, who on earth compares themselves to Mozart? Don't be THAT GUY.

TURN TO PAGE 15.

7. Especially if he never risks it.

Imagine THAT GUY decides he wants to write books, and THAT GUY decides to compare himself to J.K. Rowling.



Faced with Rowling's incredible creation, THAT GUY decides he shouldn't even bother trying to write books. After all, he will *never* be as good as J.K. Rowling.

And he's right. He never will.⁸

Neither will you or I, but you and I know that we don't have to be. We only have to be as good as we can be. That's what this book is about. Memorize this: **Failure is always an option.**

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TURN TO PAGE 15

8. Especially if he never risks it.

SO WHY DO WE THINK WE'RE "SUPPOSED" TO BE PERFECT LIKE MOZART OR J.K. ROWLING?

Why do so many people say they are not "creative"?

Mostly these days it's because we are surrounded by magic. Every movie or TV show we see, every song we hear, every book we read — they're *perfect*, aren't they? Just like THAT GUY, we think we cannot possibly do anything that good, and so we do not try.

We think you have to go to school to be an artist or a musician or a writer.⁹

We think you have to be a genius to be an artist or a musician or a writer.¹⁰

We think you have to be famous to be an artist or a musician or a writer.¹¹

What do people say when offered a chance to create art? "Oh, I can't even draw a straight line."¹² We just don't think we can do it. We are all afraid of failure.

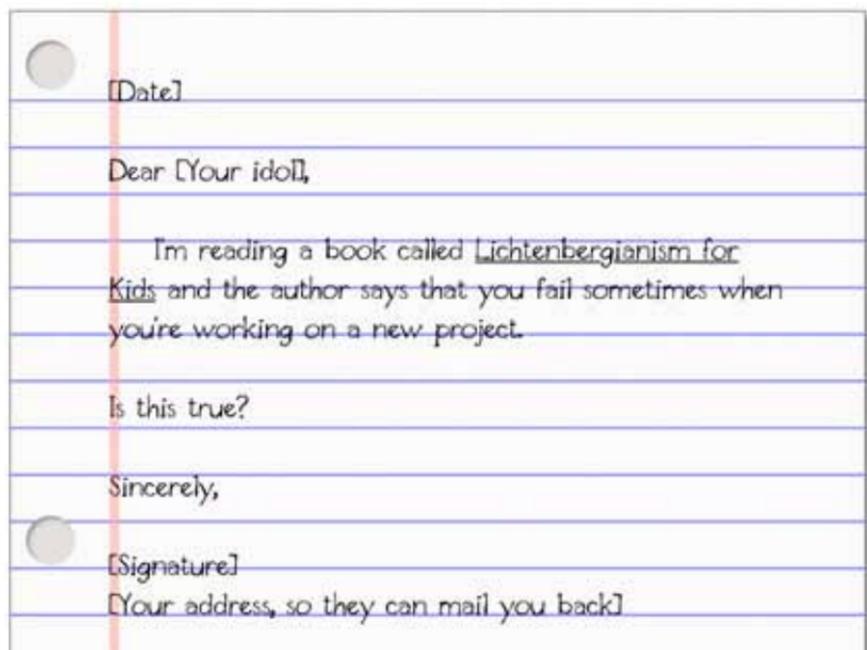
9. You don't.

10. You don't.

11. You don't. YOU'RE A KID, REMEMBER?

12. I have two answers to that: 1) No one's asking you to draw a straight line; and 2) If you need to draw a straight line, get a ruler.

Try this. Copy this letter and mail it to your favorite author or singer or artist.¹³ Go ahead. I'll wait.



[Date]

Dear [Your idol],

I'm reading a book called Lichtenbergianism for Kids and the author says that you fail sometimes when you're working on a new project.

Is this true?

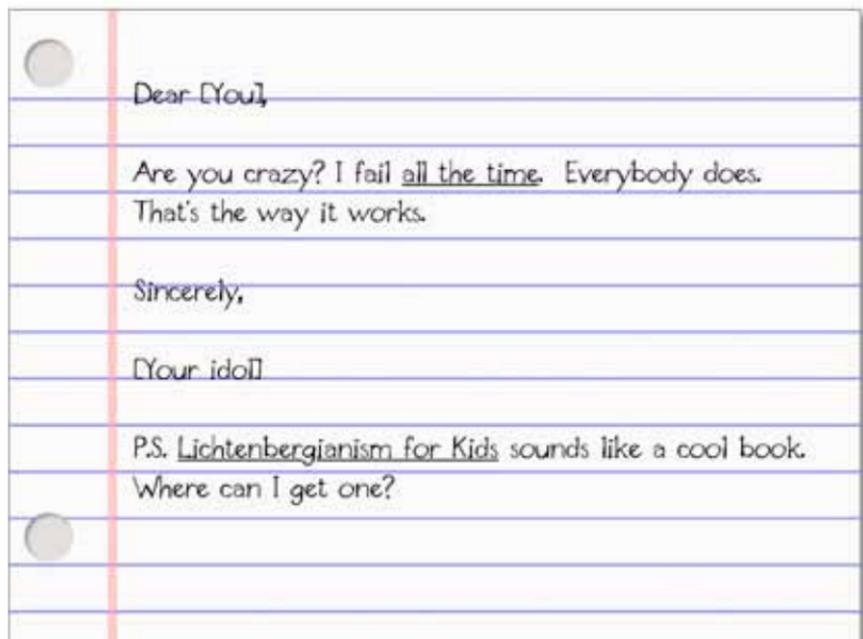
Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Your address, so they can mail you back]

13. Or email or tweet. Whatever.

What was their answer? It was something like this, wasn't it?



Don't confuse creativity with training.

Don't confuse creativity with "genius" (like Mozart/
Rowling).

Don't confuse creativity with fame.

Creativity is just MAKING THE THING THAT IS NOT.

Let's look at the Lichtenbergian Precepts.

WHAT IS A PRECEPT?

A precept¹⁴ is a general rule, a way to guide your behavior or your thinking.

We have nine Precepts. Each one is simple to understand and easy to put into practice.

1. Task Avoidance
2. Waste Books
3. Abortive Attempts
4. Gestalt
5. Successive Approximation
6. Ritual
7. Steal From the Best
8. Audience
9. Abandonment

That's just the list. Don't worry about understanding them right now.

Here's what you need to know:

You don't do the Precepts "in order."

Precept #1 is not "more important" than #9.

They are all connected to each other, and each one has more than one meaning.

14. PREE-sept

Taken together, they will give you *permission* to create without worrying about having to produce something “perfect.”

Only Mozart can do that — and he’s dead.

What I’ll do in each chapter is explain the Precept and give some examples of how artists have used it in the past. I’ll also give you some ways you can use it for your own creative work.

Ready?