



## CURIOSITY

*“I don’t mean to give you a Zen koan, but the work I did is the work I know, and the work I do is the work I don’t know. ... And it’s the not knowing that makes it interesting.”* —Philip Glass

### WHAT IS IT?

Curiosity is the fuel of creativity and entrepreneurship. It’s the spark that ignites a question and the desire to solve a problem. Many entrepreneurs cite their curiosity as the root of their success because it’s what enables them to look at a familiar situation with fresh eyes. This ability leads entrepreneurs to push boundaries rather than accept the status quo.

### WHY TEACH IT?

As musicians, many of us often start out with a healthy dose of curiosity, but over time our practice can turn into a series of routines. While routines help us to improve our technique, maintaining a sense of curiosity is often what leads to breakthroughs in our musical ideas. It also helps us to approach our work with a positive and productive attitude and to apply creative problem-solving to other situations.

### LESSON PLAN: “100+ QUESTIONS” (Duration: 20 minutes)

This exercise is all about looking at a familiar place with fresh eyes. We’ll focus on actively engaging with our environment rather than passively taking it in.

### MATERIALS:

- Paper
- Pen/pencil

### INSTRUCTIONS:

- Go to a favorite café or shop, somewhere that feels familiar to you.
- Set a timer for 15 minutes.
- Using your pen and paper, generate at least 100 observations and/or questions about your environment. The idea is to really notice all the different elements of the familiar environment – its physical appearance, its atmosphere, your relationship with it, etc. Feel free to use the following prompts:
  - How does the appearance of the location make you feel? What kind of expectations does the design set?
  - Are there specific objects that catch your attention? Are there others that you easily overlook?
  - What kind of relationship does the shop develop with its customers?
  - What senses are involved in the experience?
  - See how many you can come up with before the timer runs out!

*continued on back*

**REFLECTION**

What happened when you approached this familiar place with an inquisitive eye? Did you notice something you'd never seen before? Did one question spark several others?

How do you think you could apply this exercise to current challenges in your musical life?

**APPLICATION**

Hopefully, this exercise helped you reconnect with your sense of curiosity, which will allow you to approach any situation with an open and inquisitive mind. When I recently found myself getting stuck on designing a promotional website for a concert series, I took a break and reframed the project in my head. Instead of feeling frustrated that the website didn't look the way I wanted it to right away, I started thinking of the project as an exploration of different ways to present the material. In doing so, I ended up finding a better layout which, as a bonus, saved me time later on!

The next time you're working through a tough musical passage or struggling with a grant application, you'll likely find that this simple change in mindset can lead to a difference in approach. Often, the solution is hiding in plain sight!

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

[David Kelley on Designing Curious Employees](#)

[Curiosity is Jet Fuel for Creativity](#)

[Interview with Chris Anderson, the curator of TED](#)