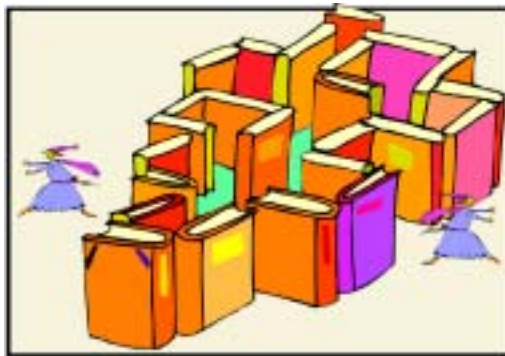




Some Go Both Ways

Creative Personality Quiz

1. Do you (a) have a great deal of physical energy or (b) are you often quiet and at rest?
2. Are you (a) smart or (b) naive?
3. Are you (a) playful and light or (b) disciplined and persistent?
4. Are you (a) grounded in reality or (b) prone to flights of imagination?
5. Are you (a) introverted or (b) extraverted?
6. Are you (a) humble or (b) proud?
7. Are you (a) masculine or (b) feminine?
8. Are you (a) rebellious and iconoclastic or (b) traditional and conservative?
9. Are you (a) passionate about your work or (b) objective about your work?
10. Are you (a) willing to suffer because you are sensitive and aware or (b) able to experience great enjoyment and pleasure?



If you found this quiz difficult, congratulations! The more you struggled to choose between a and b, the more you thought “But I’m both!” or “It depends,” the more likely you are to have what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (author of *Flow* and *Creativity*) calls the “complex personality” that distinguishes creative people.

The Creative Personality is Complex

In *Creativity*, Csikszentmihalyi defines the creative personality as the complex personality. “By this I mean that they [creative people] show tendencies of thought and action that in most people are segregated. They contain contradictory extremes.”

We are trained to see the world through an Either-Or lens. Left or right, male or female, aggressive or cooperative, playful or disciplined, right or wrong. But creative people recognize that some things cannot be reduced to an either-or. Creative people

embrace a Both-And perspective.

Csikszentmihalyi describes a creative person as “more likely to be both aggressive and cooperative [for example], either at the same time or at different times, depending on the situation. Having a complex personality means being able to express the full range of traits that are potentially present in the human repertoire, but usually atrophy because we think that one or the other pole is ‘good’ whereas the other extreme is ‘bad’.”

The complex personality is not a neutral midpoint between two poles. According to Csikszentmihalyi, “It does not imply being wishy-washy, so that one is never very competitive or very cooperative. Rather it involves the ability to move from one extreme to the other as the occasion requires.”

Complexify Your Personality

One way to expand your creativity is to identify which of the apparent opposites you don’t want to be and challenge yourself to go there. For example, if you equate being naive with being stupid and therefore strive to always be smart, you may find that you are more innovative when you challenge yourself to keep an open mind. If being ‘the smart one’ is part of your identify, you have to know the answers. And

that makes it impossible to recognize the creative possibilities inherent in asking novel questions that don't have answers yet.

Creative Polarities

The faux Creative Personality Quiz outlines the 10 pairs of apparently antithetical traits that Csikszentmihalyi says creative people integrate in a functional dialectical tension. I've observed other polarities creative people struggle to resolve in our creative work:

1. Order vs. Chaos (Do I need structure or spontaneity?)
2. Self vs. Other (Should I take care of others or take care of myself?)
3. Creativity vs. Destructivity
4. Inspiration vs. Perspiration (Should I wait for inspiration or work hard to make something happen?)
5. Input vs. Output (Should I read or write? Should I visit museums or paint?)
6. Work to earn money vs. Work to feed my spirit
7. Work that earns money now vs. Speculative work that will earn money later.

Future issues of Imagination InkLinks will explore more of these polarities. If you have observations, comments or questions about your experience with any of these polarities, please send me an email at Rosanne@RosanneBane.com.

Let's start with Order vs. Chaos or Structure vs. Spontaneity. Many writers identify it as the Outliner vs. Blank-Pager debate.

Battle of the Century: Outliners Vs. Blank-Pagers

Outliners, aka Organizers or Left-Brainers, believe in structure. They prefer the comfort of knowing where they're going when they're writing (or painting or doing any other kind of creative work). They know that working out the kinks in advance will save them time and suffering later on. They fear that the blank page (or blank canvas) will be too intimidating and shut them down.

On the other hand, Blank-pagers, aka Organic Writers or Pantsers (as in apply-seat-of-pants-to-seat-of-chair-and-let-whatever-comes-up-come-out), believe in spontaneity. They prefer the surprise of

discovering where they're going as they go. They know that deep creativity comes from the unconscious and their primary job is



Do you dive in? Or fortify yourself with a plan before you start the journey?

to get the conscious mind out of the way. They fear that too much planning will kill the creativity.

Google 'Outliner vs. Blank-Page Writer' and you'll get pages of entries debating the pros and cons of a structured approach vs. a spontaneous approach to writing. Admittedly, you can google just about anything and get pages of entries, but a simple perusal of just a few entries will reveal the intensity of the divergent views.

Comic book writer Elton Pruitt blogs, "In theory, a blank page is a wonderful thing, a great opportunity to unleash your creativity upon the world. But in reality, it's an invitation to despair and suffering and, worst of all, bad writing. Or super-mega-bold-extreme worst of all, no writing at all." (www.scrpticstudios.com)

A Battle Only the Complex Personality Can Win

In partial defense of the spontaneous approach, Pulitzer Prize winner Robert Olen Butler writes in *From Where You Dream* "Great works of art have been created this way [spontaneously], and I suspect statistically it's the more common way to write a novel. It's done because those artists understand the danger of being sucked into their heads [being too analytical]."

Still, Butler recognizes the cost of spontaneous writing: "The draft writer feels the necessity of taking the merest hints to start the novel and then plunging in, making approximations, writing rough, by any and all means continuing to write and write and write through a great sprawling draft... But they're just deferring the problem. Because once you have this great raw sprawling first draft, how do you find that leaner, more coherent second draft?" (See the Entering the Flow class info on page 4.)

In other words, the ongoing debate among many writers and other creatives is whether 'tis better to endure the slings and arrows of outrageous

unpredictable spontaneity or to take arms against a sea of uncertainty, and by outlining creative possibilities, end them. If you perceive that my liberal paraphrasing of Hamlet suggests I'm biased against too much structure as a form of creative suicide, you're on target.

But I know that despite my prejudices and natural preferences there are legitimate advantages to structure, just as there are advantages to spontaneity. I know this because I've studied what Barry Johnson has to say about Polarity Management. The key point from Johnson's work is that while either-or thinking is appropriate to solve some problems, it cannot work if what you have is not a problem to solve, but a polarity to manage. A polarity is a continuum of apparent opposites that are in fact mutually interdependent.

Inhaling and exhaling is Johnson's prime example. When you inhale, you gain fresh oxygen and your body creates carbon dioxide. When you exhale, you rid yourself of carbon dioxide, but you create a deficit of oxygen. Recognizing that breathing in and breathing out are interconnected and being willing to move between one and the other and back again makes life possible. If you were to decide that inhaling was "the answer," that inhaling was superior and exhaling was bad, you would try to inhale only. And you'd pass out. That's a silly example, I know; who would ever decide exhaling was bad? But it's not much more ridiculous than deciding that spontaneity is always superior to structure or structure always superior to spontaneity. (See the Writer's Resistance class info on page 4.)

Embracing Both-And

The challenge is to not get so invested in your approach that you deny yourself the benefits of the other way of creating. Outliners need to surrender to spontaneity at times. And blank-pagers need to plan at some point. You need to consciously identify both the pros and the cons to both sides of the continuum.

My fellow Loft Instructor Lori L. Lake says "Oddly enough, the outliners always seem so proud (almost sanctimonious) about their lists and charts and character arc templates and so forth, while the organic writers are so embarrassed to be floundering

around. I've only had two outliners in all my classes who have actually finished their books, though. Sometimes, heavy emphasis on outlining takes the joy – and the mystery – out of the story, and they lose interest and don't finish. I also think that all the focus on the left brain and being organized can sometimes overrun that soft, quiet creative voice and slow down the creative process."

Lake wisely observes "One of the things I focus on, especially with novice writers, is that there is no single, monolithic correct way to create a book; in fact, every new book may require you to write and create differently. I've created books and stories using both techniques. Sometimes one style works better than the other, and sometimes you need a combination of both to eke out the story. I can honestly say either will work, and there's no shame (or sanctimony) in using one or the other."



Advantages in Bridging Both-And

The biggest advantage I find in spontaneous writing is that it's a sure fire way to get past resistance. Thinking I had to know where I was going before I started writing used to be just one more reason to not start writing. My Improv Fiction class is all about finding

spontaneous ways to start fiction and some of the exercises I've used in that class have led to scenes that ended up in my novel. Of course, spontaneous writing requires the willingness to risk writing badly. Learning to trust my instincts and be willing to start out write badly gave me the freedom to write at all.

Like so many seasoned writers who teach at the Loft, Greg Breining has the wisdom (Csikszentmihalyi might say complexity) to gain full advantage of his preference for structure without losing track of the advantages of spontaneity.

Breining writes "I find that if I write for too long without considering the larger picture (through some kind of outline) the piece takes off on its own – and rarely in a direction that is helpful. I may write that way for awhile, but then I feel I have to consider the overall direction before I simply get lost. I find that by having a grand design in mind, I can better exploit the material, because I have a better idea of what purpose it performs in the piece."

Breining adds, “It is also a lot less nerve-wracking because I’m not trying to craft words and organize at the same time. To my mind it is a way to bypass some kinds of writer’s block – I can fiddle with structure without having to commit to real words. I also think it’s faster, an important consideration when you’re trying to make money, especially on longer pieces. The disadvantage for me? I suppose it may prevent me from seeing some possibilities in the material that may occur by accident. But I try to make opportunities for that as well.”

Mapping the Polarity

How can you best manage the Structure vs. Spontaneity polarity? My primary recommendation is to establish writing habits that allow you to be spontaneous within the structure or give structure to your spontaneity. (See the Writing Habit class info.) Beyond that, I suggest you follow these seven steps.

Step 1. Acknowledge your preference and the prejudices, sanctimony and/or shame you feel about that preference.

Step 2. List all the pros of your preferred approach.

Step 3. List all the cons of your preferred approach.

Step 4. List all the cons of the opposite approach.

Step 5. Remembering the cons of your preferred approach, list the pros of the opposite approach.

Step 6. Stay alert to when you are experiencing the cons of your preferred approach. When you start to notice you’re in the downside of your preferred end of the polarity, act as if you prefer the other approach. Do what you think people who prefer that approach do and ask them for suggestions.

Step 7: Continue doing what doesn’t come naturally to you until you start to experience the downside of this end of the polarity; then you can go back to your preferred approach for awhile.

You’ll see that these seven steps apply to managing all the common creativity polarities in future issues. I’m eager to hear what you all have to say about Csikszentmihalyi’s and my list of creative opposites, so please send an email to me at Rosanne@RosaneBane.com. If you have questions or want to talk about how my Loft classes or individual creativity coaching can help you better manage creative polarities, call me at 612-722-4139.

It’s All Happening at the Loft!

For more information or to register, contact the Loft at 612-379-8999 or www.Loft.org (click on Adult Education).

Open House: The Loft offers an amazing array of diverse classes. Thursday, May 29 from 5 to 8 pm is your opportunity to talk with and preview teaching samples from 12 fabulous instructors. Bring a friend!

NEW this Summer - Entering the Flow (starts June 18, Wednesdays, 10 to noon) Whether you’re an outliner or blank-pager, every writer yearns to write while in the ‘flow’. We’ll practice entering the flow and writing while in that blissful state in each class session. We’ll apply some of Robert Olen Butler’s suggestions as one of several launching points in our discovery of the writer’s dreamspace.

Writer’s Resistance (starts June 17, Tuesdays, 10 to noon) You love to write, so why is it so hard to sit down and do it? Polarity Management is one of the topics we’ll explore to acquire insight into the sources of resistance, the surprising forms resistance can take, what you need to overcome it and what you can do to energize your writing self and keep showing up.

The Writing Habit (starts June 17, Tuesdays, 5 to 7 pm) You’ll experiment with 3 Basic Practices to tailor writing habits that give you both the structure and the spontaneity you need. Our weekly check-in will give you safe and supportive witnesses to help you become accountable to yourself. We’ll explore the creative process, identify your priorities, generate plans, cultivate sustainable habits, and develop a support network to help you maintain your momentum.

Improv Fiction at Ridgedale Library (starts June 19, Thursdays, 1:30 to 3:30 pm) If you wait for inspiration to strike, you can spend more time waiting than you do writing. If you drive yourself to grind out pages anyway, you drain your creative energy and the writing is often flat. This class gives you a third alternative. We’ll play improv games to engage our imaginations and inspire the writing. This class is the ultimate in spontaneous writing combined with revising exercises that provide structure when you need it.