

8pm

Offline

Coffee

Morning

Podcast

Bathroom

Magazines

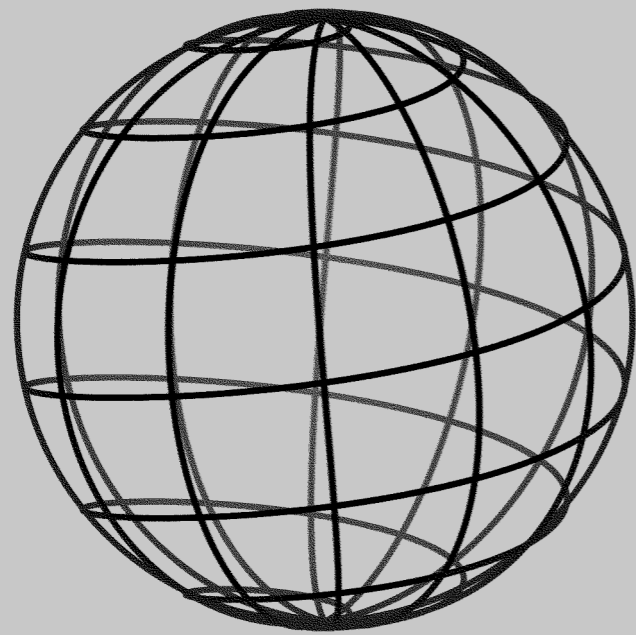
Midnight

Silence

Booze

Books

Bed



Creative ideas don't come easy.  
So we asked...

**10,128**

WeTransfer users

in

**143**

countries

**7**

**questions**

about their ideas

There is a whole inspiration industry dedicated to ideas—from magazines and books to conferences and apps.

But the discussion always seemed quite one-way. So we decided to ask the WeTransfer community about their ideas.

Working with UK-based creative powerhouse The Church of London (TCO), we created a series of questions designed to find out how ideas really work. They were:

1. When is the most creative part of your day?
2. Where do you get your best ideas?
3. What inspires your best ideas?
4. To be really creative I need...
5. How do you usually record your ideas?
6. When do you usually like to share your ideas?
7. What gets in the way of having good ideas?

This survey was pushed to WeTransfer users around the world, using a specially-designed wallpaper—i.e. a background image—you see on [wetransfer.com](https://wetransfer.com).

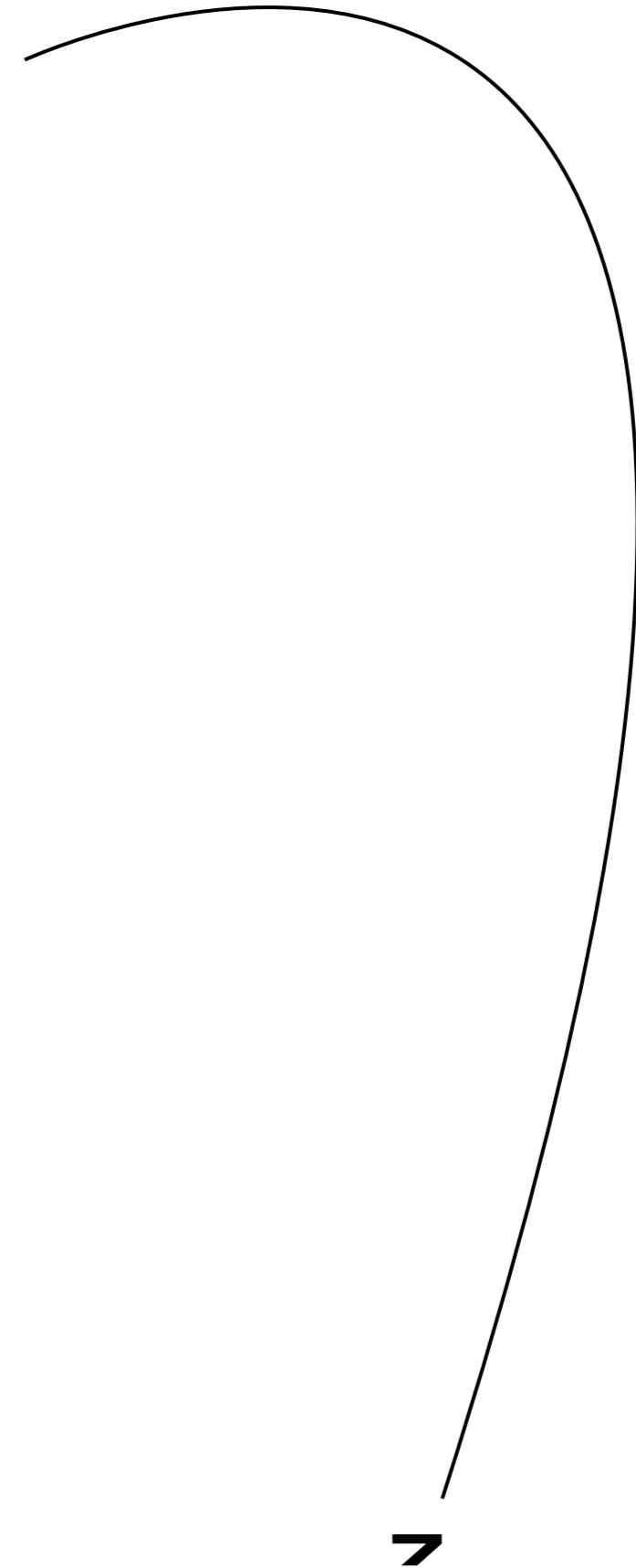
It ran between 1 June 2018 and 30 June 2018. In total we collected more than **100,000** data points, from **10,128** WeTransfer users in **143** countries.

Taking all this data, TCO lead D'Arcy Doran and WeTransfer editor-in-chief Rob Alderson spent days analyzing the results. They picked out overarching trends and narratives as well as cross-referencing different groups' answers with each other, comparing different countries, age groups and creative disciplines.

We are excited to present the first annual WeTransfer Ideas Report\*, and hope it adds something to our understanding of how creative minds work.

[\\*we.tl/ideasreport](https://we.tl/ideasreport)

# Editor's Essay



We need to talk about ideas. Or rather, we need to talk about the inspiration industry. The creative ideal has moved on since the picture of the absinthe-addled artist alone in their garret, battling their way through the creative process.

Today we have glossy magazines that promise to unlock our creative potential. We sit in over-air-conditioned conference halls and listen to inspirational talks, opening our minds and holding close our new Tote bags. Online, when the mood strikes us, we seek out talks from other conferences we couldn't be at.

There's never been more chatter about what it means to be creative, and yet I'm not sure anyone is any the wiser. The noise has increased for sure, but has our understanding?

Partly I think that's due to the nature of the creative process itself. It's maddening, mysterious and messy. There are dead-ends, wrong-turns and all manner of false starts. This is hard to distill down to a tight 20 minute presentation.

But partly I think the inspiration industry needs to ask itself a few tough questions (and I speak as the editor of a website which aims to spark creative ideas in unexpected ways). Do we

hold ourselves to high enough standards? Do we accept the clichéd and the eye-bleedingly obvious when we should be pushing for real insight?

Of course this doesn't apply to everyone. There are people and platforms that bring rigor and intelligence to their creative coverage. But I fear these are the exceptions and we've let mediocrity become the norm.

There seems to be a Creative Process Greatest Hits—pat and patronisingly simple advice that you can tick off like a banal game of bingo. Take risks. Do side projects. Work with good people. Thanks. For. That.

It felt to me that the conversation around creativity is quite one-sided. How do creatives really feel about the work they do? What insights are not being talked about? How, when and where do they develop their ideas? So, we decided to ask them.

This summer we ran a survey through the WeTransfer wallpapers that asked a series of questions about creative ideas. We were slightly overwhelmed by the response—more than 10,000 creatives in 143 countries gave us their thoughts.

What emerged was a picture of creative ideas at this moment in time. We deliberately

focused on ideas, rather than say productivity. Everything starts with an idea, a spark, but it seems this is one of the lesser-talked-about parts of the creative process (beyond the lazy, dull and genuinely useless “Where do you get your inspiration?” question).

Some of the answers confirmed our hunches. Some came as a complete surprise (I remain bamboozled that so few creatives note down ideas on their phones).

Some were less glamorous than we’d hoped. I’ve always liked the idea that ideas can strike anywhere, at any time. Not so much, we were told—the main place people had good ideas was at their desks and in their studios.

For a company that builds digital tools to help creatives, the fact that offline outperformed online as a place to have great ideas raised some eyebrows. But that’s what we were told, and the answer is not to panic, but rather to focus on how we can build better digital spaces that aid idea generation.

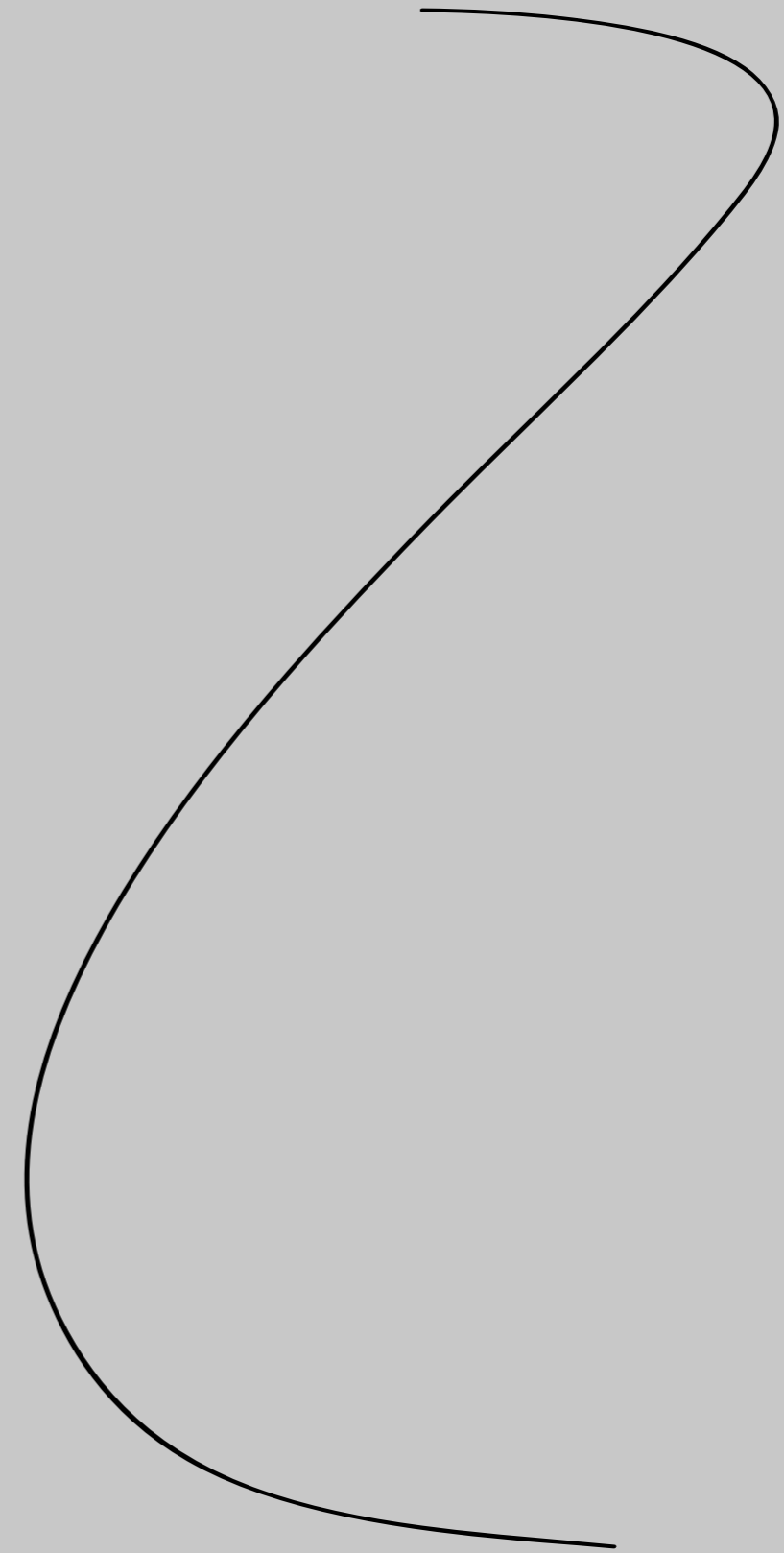
We hope that our first Ideas Report starts a conversation. We’ll certainly be spending some time working out what we can do with the insights we’ve gathered and how we can better

serve the creative community (on both a product and content level). Above all we hope it adds something to the noise and gives people pause to reflect on the gap between creativity as you know it, understand it, and struggle with it, vs Creativity, the shiny, simplistic and neatly-packaged thing we barely recognize.

Welcome to the [WeTransfer Ideas Report 2018](#).

**Rob Alderson**  
Editor-in-Chief

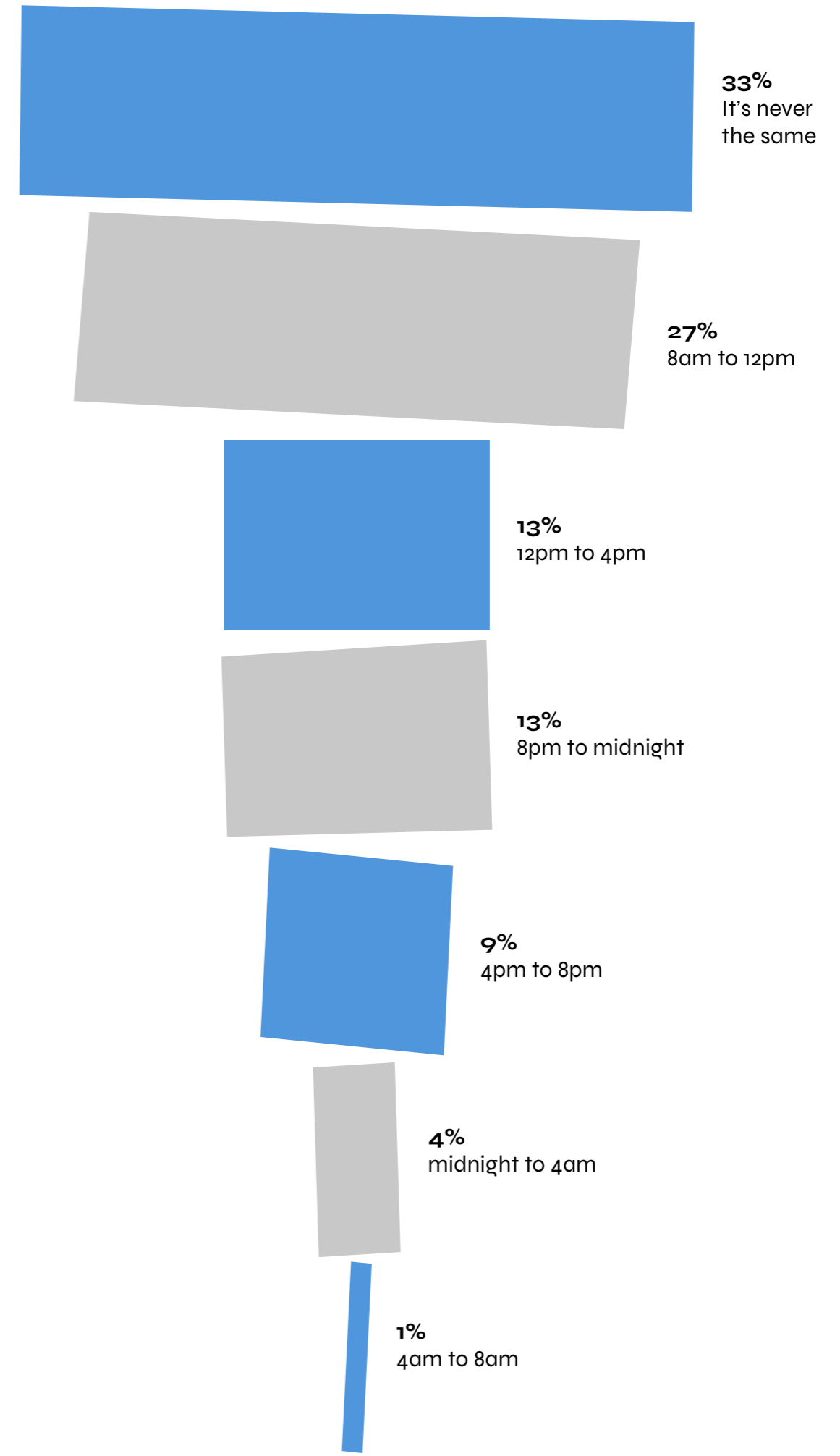
# Results





# When is the most creative part of your day?

When is the most creative part of your day?

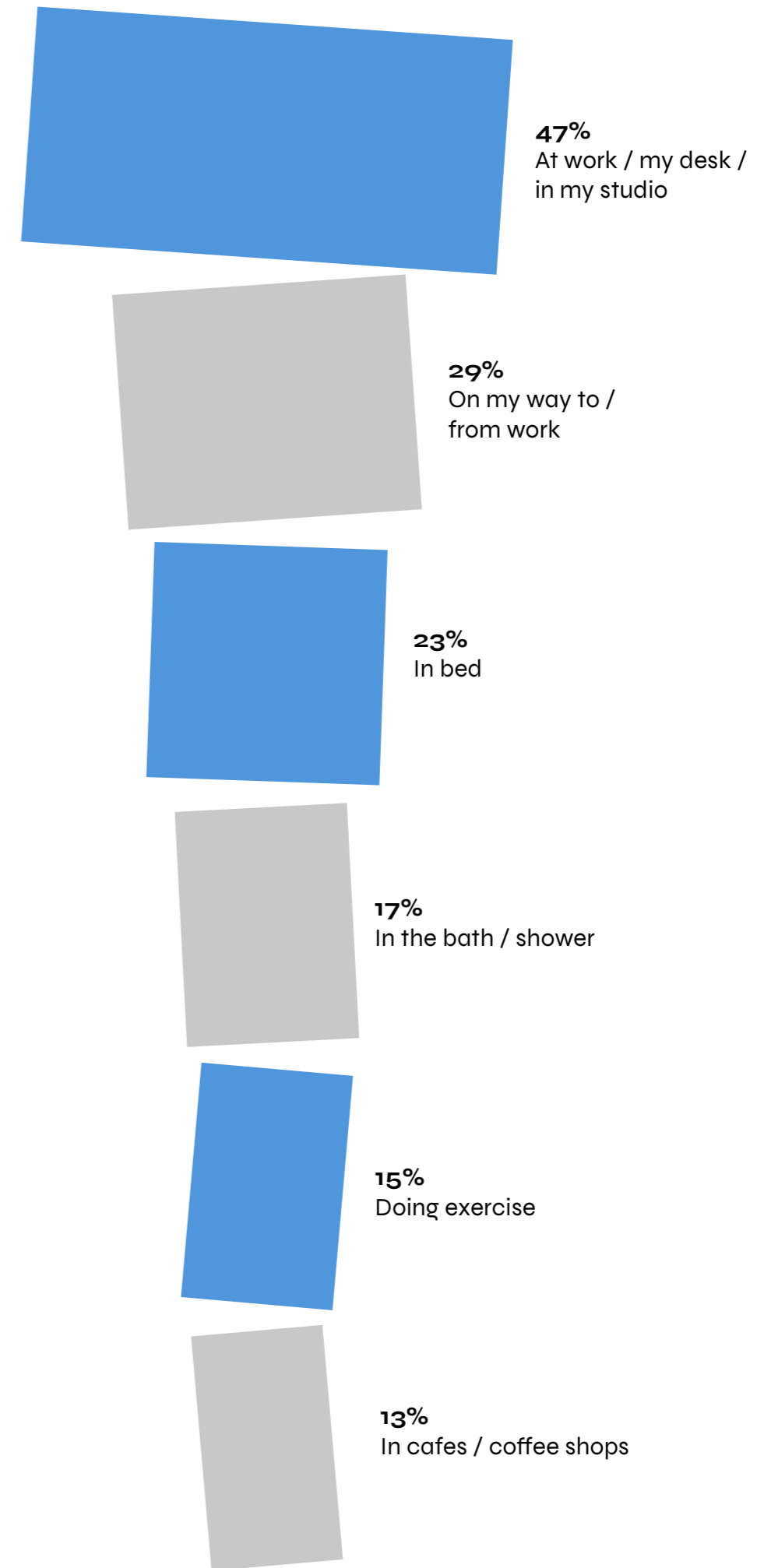


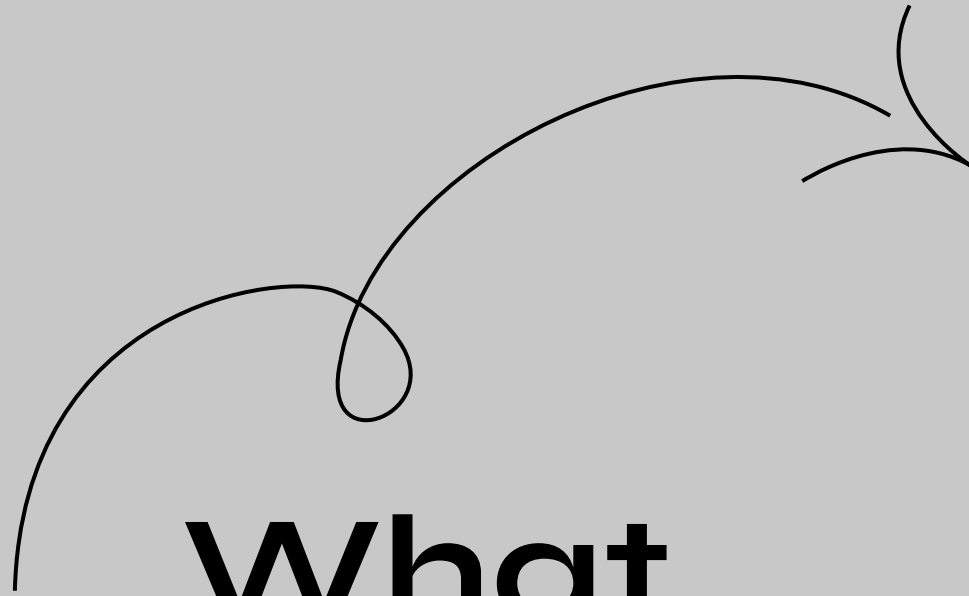


# Where do you get your best ideas?



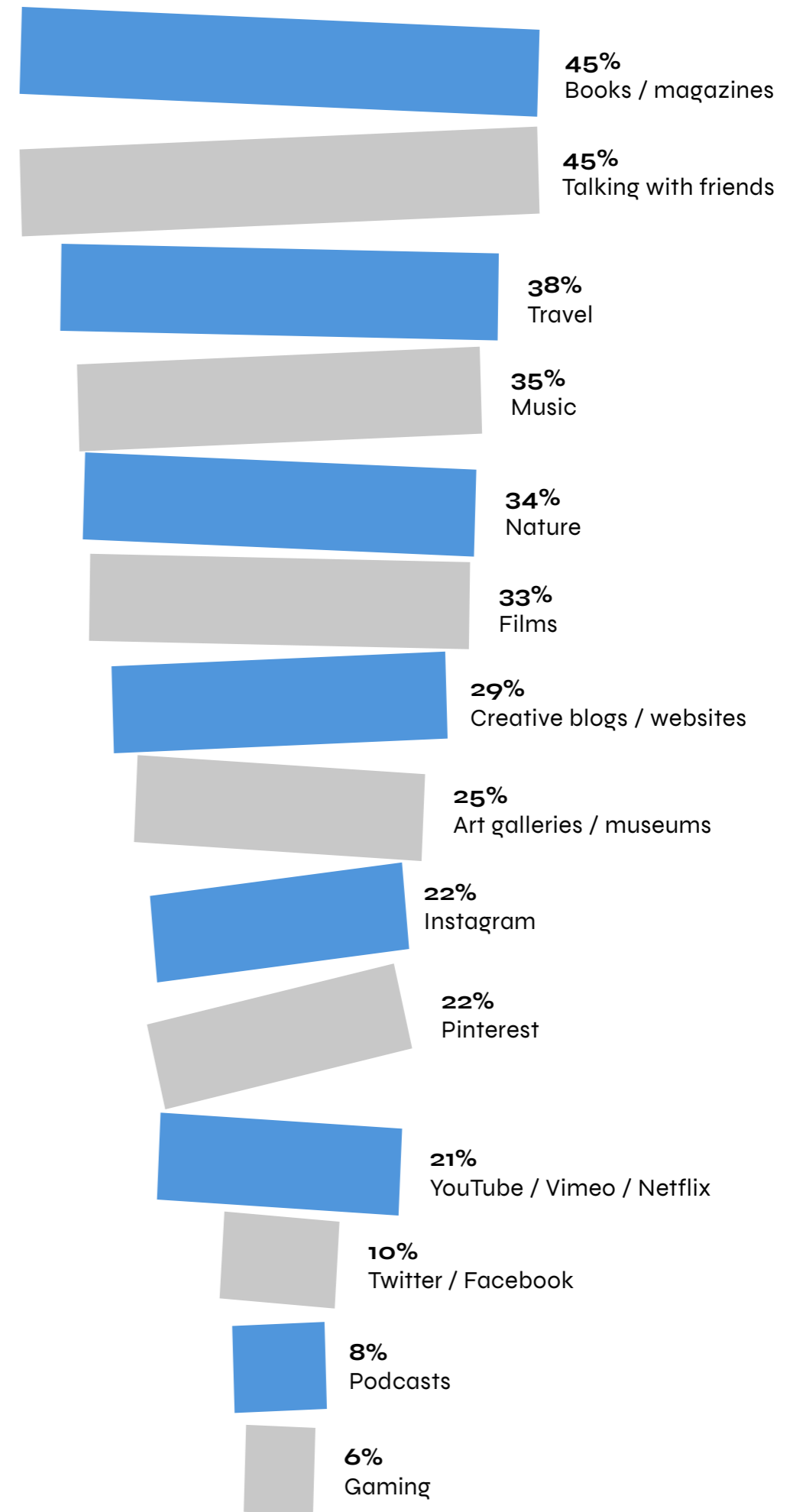
Where do you get your best ideas?





# What inspires your best ideas?

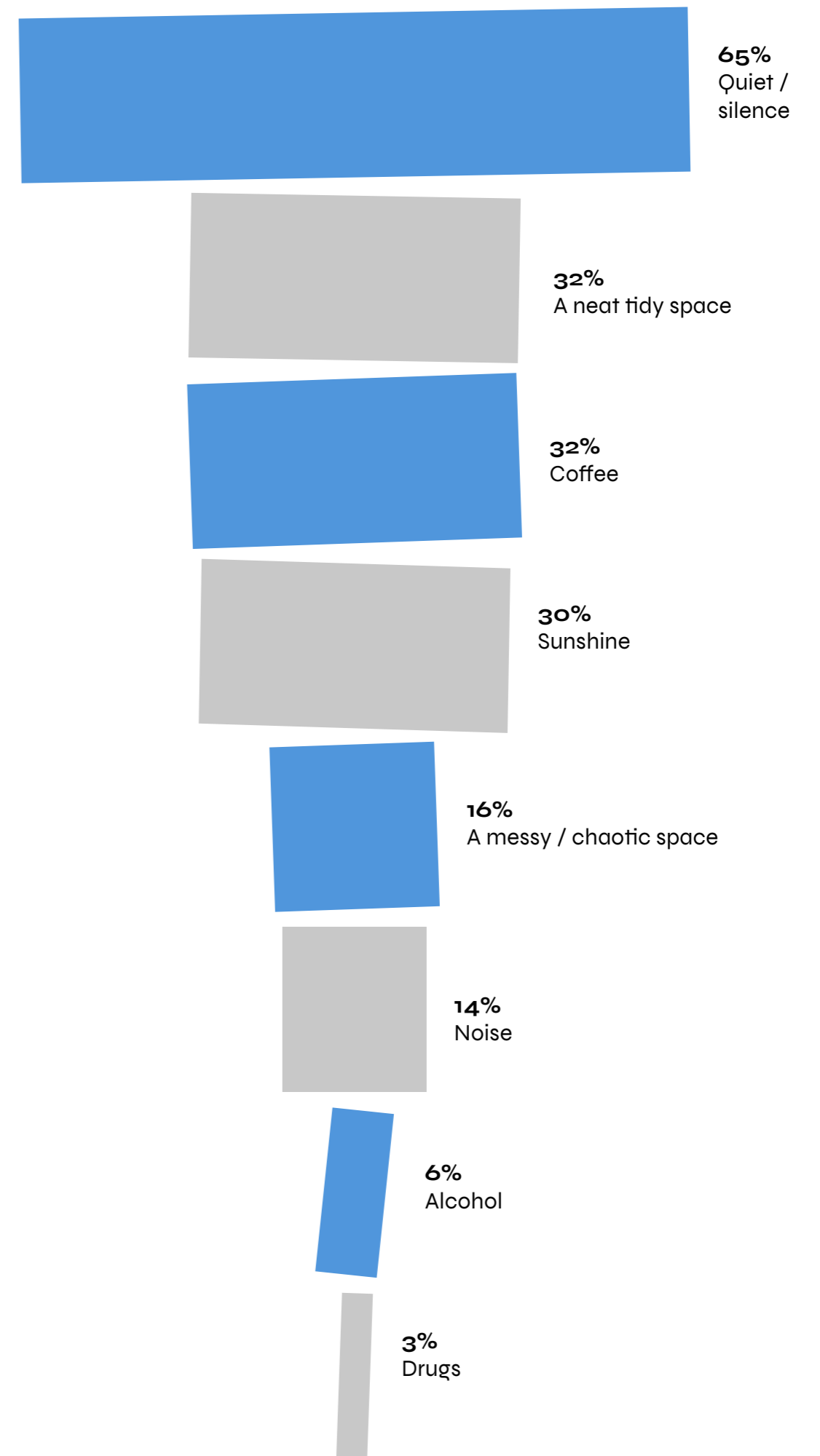
What inspires your best ideas?



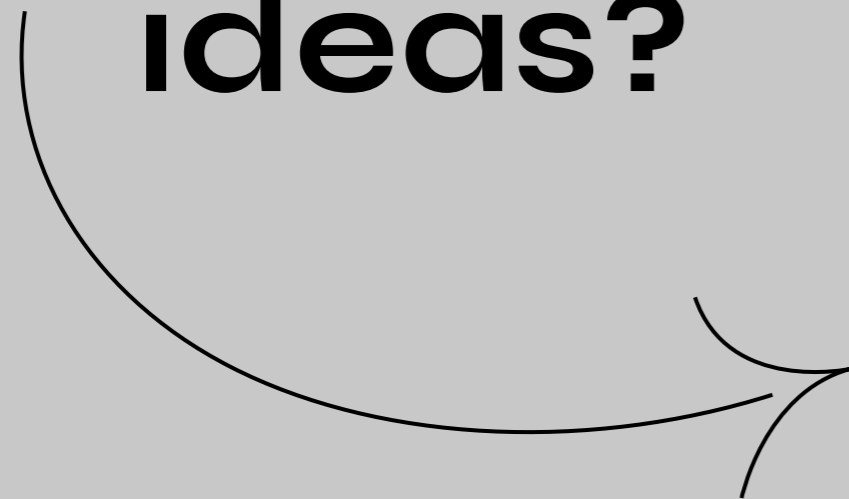
# To be really creative I need...



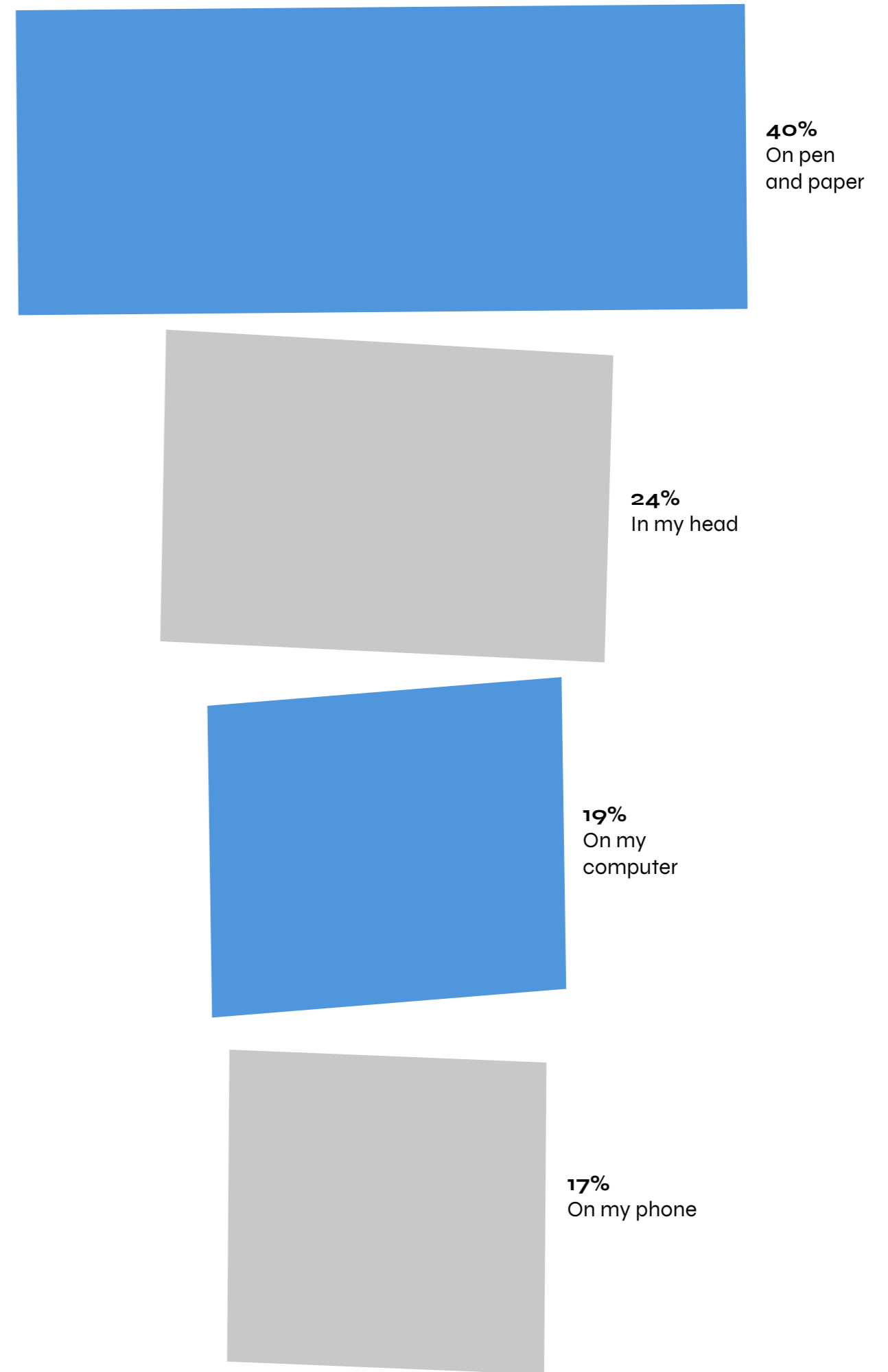
## To be really creative I need...



# How do you usually record your ideas?



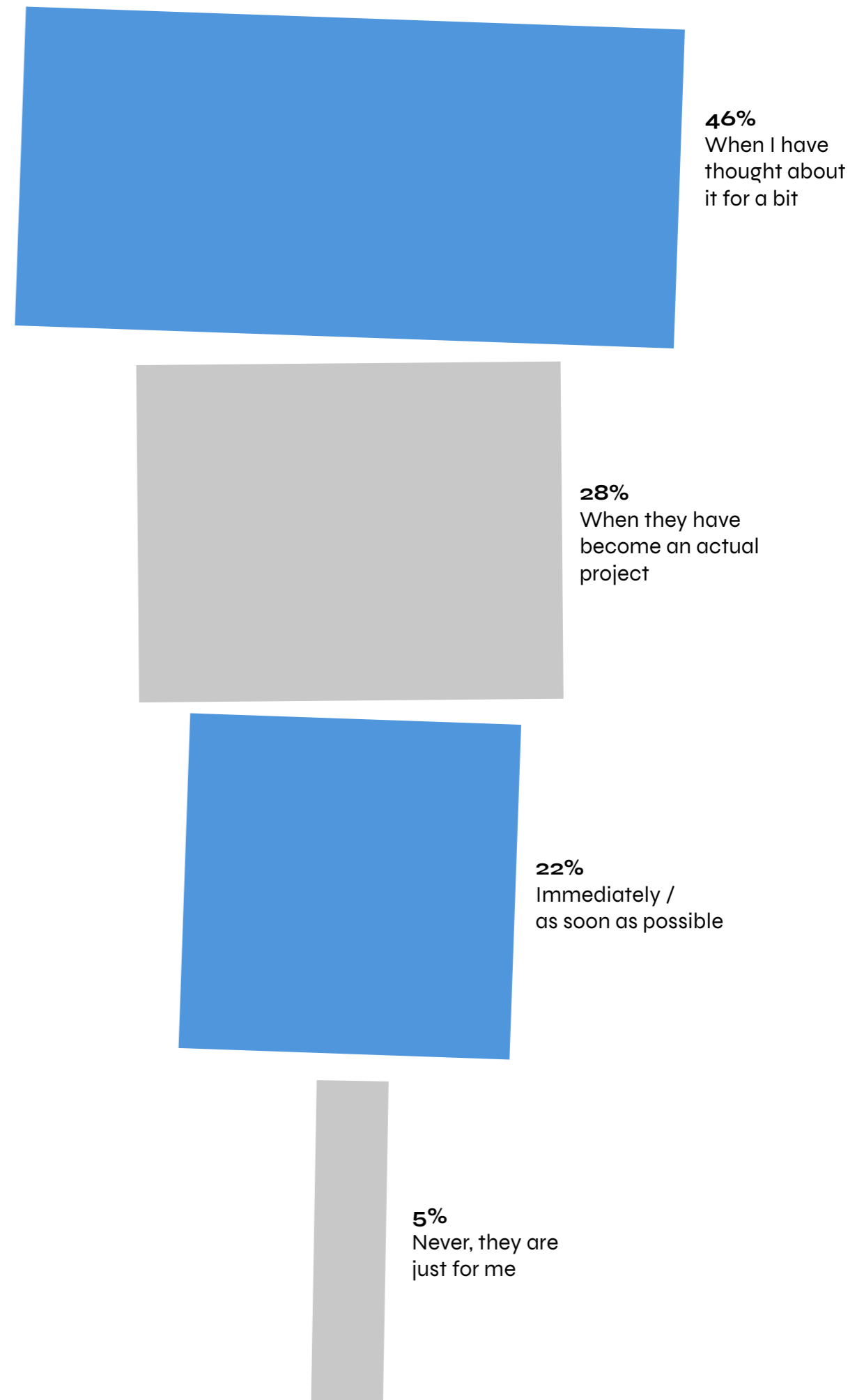
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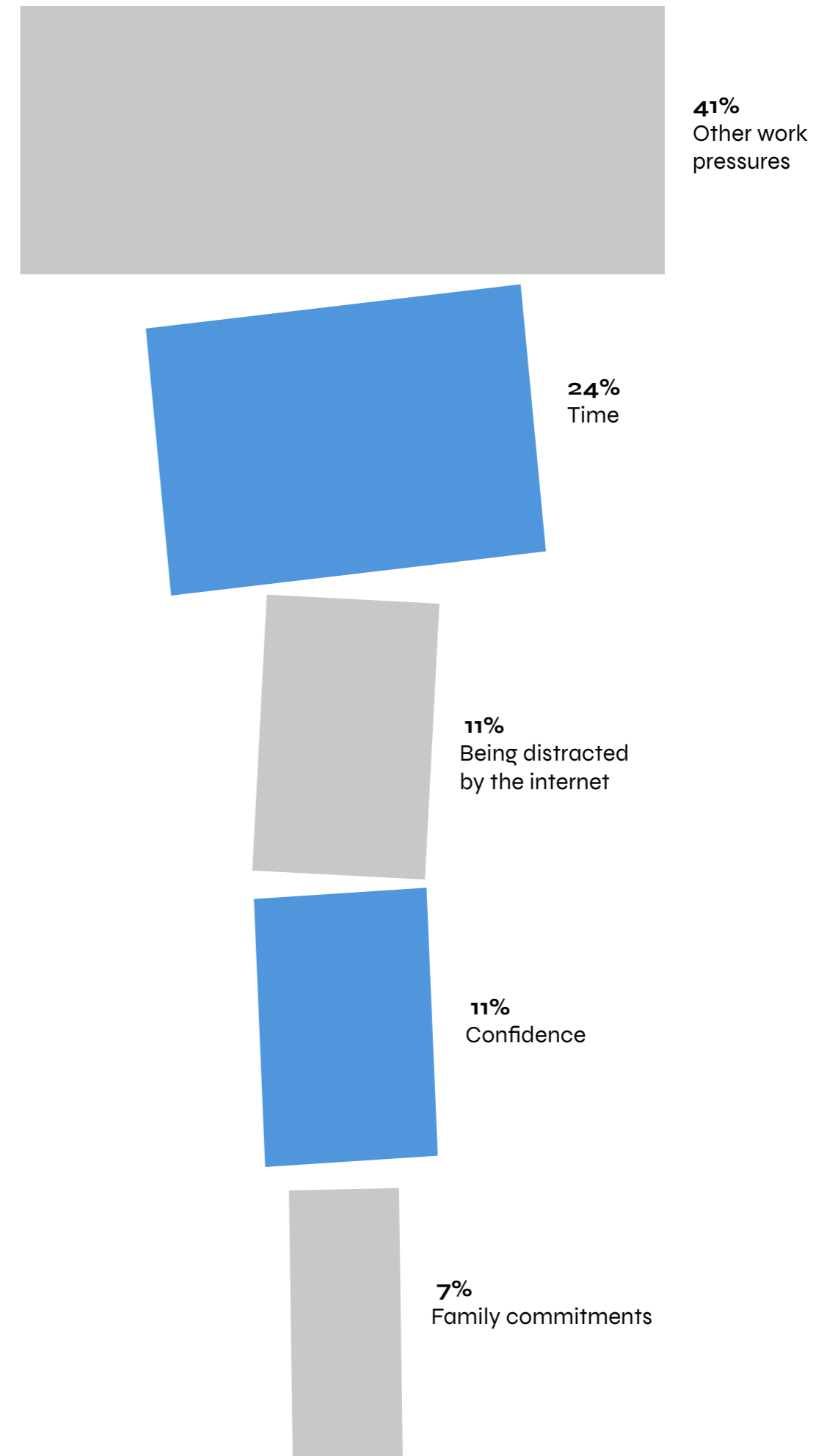




# When do you usually like to share your ideas?

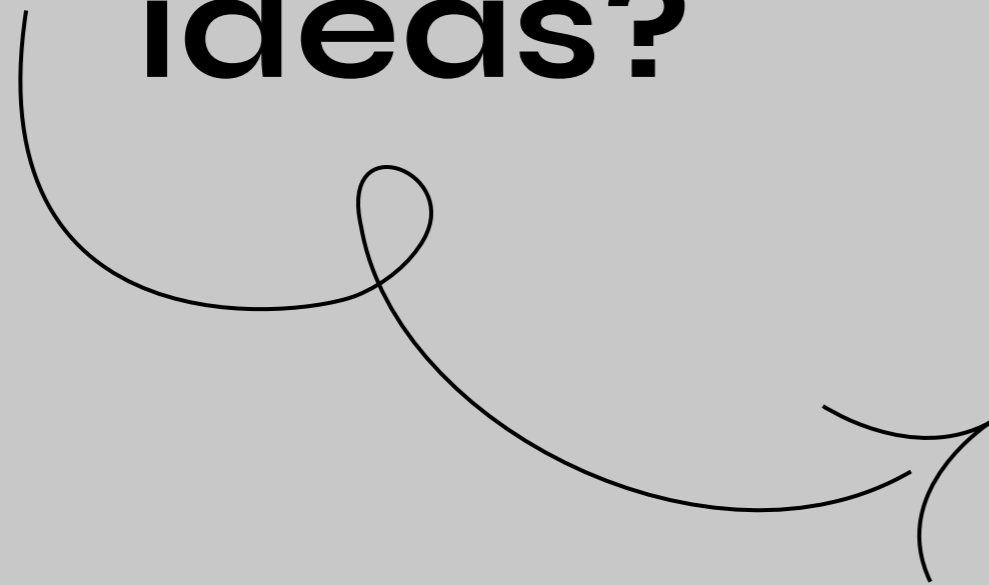
When do you usually like to share your ideas?



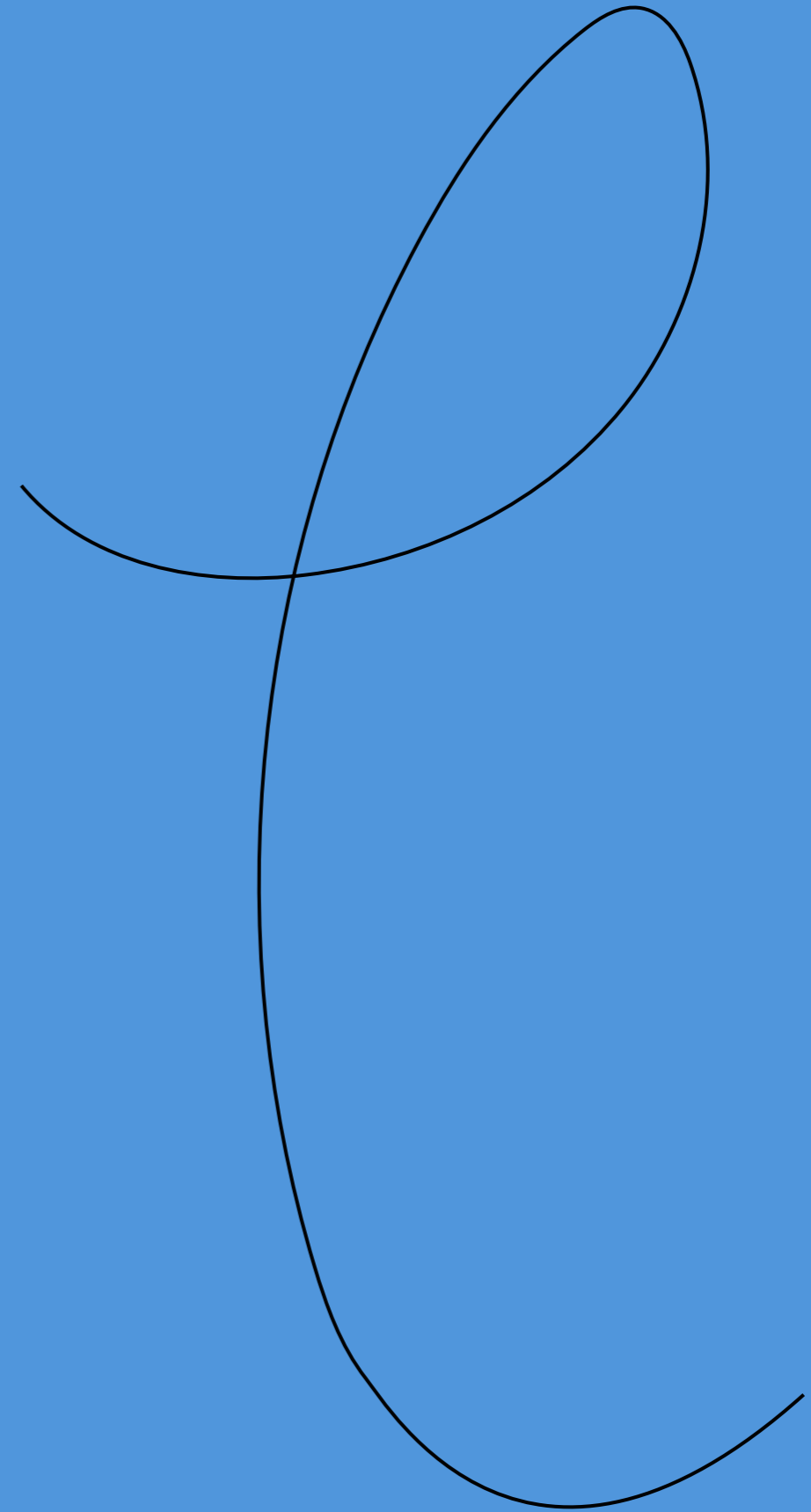


What gets in the way of having good ideas?

# What gets in the way of having good ideas?



# Experts



## INSIGHT 1

# Switch off to switch on your ideas

Overwhelmingly creatives said they were more likely to get ideas from *real-life* experiences like *talking with friends, travel, nature, books, magazines* and going to *galleries*. Creative blogs and social media (especially Twitter and Facebook) scored less well, suggesting we need to build better online spaces for idea generation.



EXPERT

*To get inspired, get off the internet*



**Maryanne Wolf**

A highly-acclaimed neuroscientist at Tufts University and a specialist in the ways the brain processes information through language and reading.

When you think about what goes into cognition, there are multiple sensory pathways in. To give you a tiny example, if a stroke patient can't retrieve a word like 'orange,' and then they smell an orange, it will enhance their ability to retrieve the word. In other words, we have multiple contributors to how we think. The recipe is the same for reading and real-life experiences. The multiplicity of multi-sensory information that you can get [offline] helps you with a better understanding and a better perception too.

The problem that we have with the digital screen is that it has neither kinaesthetic [to do with learning through physical activity] nor spatial information in the same way that print does. There is a fair amount of work that shows when you have this tactile dimension, you are actually delving deeper into what is being read.

The second factor is that the digital screen enhances the speed of processing more voluminous material. The reading brain has a circuit. It's a plastic circuit, so when you read on a digital medium you are quickly skimming multiple sources of information; you're multitasking. You are giving less attention to the apper-

ception of detail and the deep reading process. What often goes missing in skimming, browsing and word-spotting is the time the brain circuit usually allocates to deep reading, empathy and critical analysis.

After empathy and critical analysis comes insight. That takes time. I'm not saying it's impossible to gain insight digitally. It's just that you're more able to gain insight when you allocate more time to these deeper processes. They lead more naturally to insights and to creativity.

## INSIGHT 2

**The  
'random  
idea  
moment'  
may be  
a myth**

The most productive 'eureka!' spot was surprisingly *everyday*. The most popular answer, at 47%, was that the best ideas come when people are at their *desk*, in *their studio*, or at *work*. *Commuting* came second, followed by in *bed*, the *bathroom* (nice) and *exercise*.

## EXPERT

*Why your desk is a creativity center***Lu Chen**

Professor of Neurosurgery, and of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University who specializes in how the brain's synapses fire during different mental processes.

When people—including artists—say the way creativity works is when they're sitting at their desk or in the studio, I agree with them. You need to engage your mind at a high intensity to have meaningful thoughts; previously non-existing thoughts. It doesn't happen when you are totally relaxed that something just pops up.

Those incidents when you're walking down the street, or you're in the shower, and you have ideas—that's because you were already thinking about it. The mind needs to be sufficiently, intensely engaged in the thinking process. It's a process of working, generating results—and sometimes results that don't make sense. It's through trying to make sense out of them, that's when creative ideas occur.

The other element highlighted by people who say, "I had this idea in the shower," is if your mind is too intensely engaged you can get kind of locked up, putting you in a state where you've cornered yourself in your thoughts. That's when you tend not to be creative. My personal experience is you need a good level of stress. None of us can be creative when we're too stressed out, but if you're completely relaxed you can't be creative either. What works really

well is, say I'm writing a paper or writing a grant, or I'm thinking at my desk and I get a block in my thoughts, that's when I pick up my running shoes. I go running through the beautiful campus here. Usually after 10, 20, or 30 minutes running, I find a way to get over that block. I wouldn't say I always come back with creative ideas, but people often see me running into the lab really sweaty saying, "I have an idea!" This is because your mind is already engaged in intensive thinking. If you get too intense, your mind gets inflexible. But when you change your routine, and in this case engage in physical activity, that is mindless. Running is meditative for me, when I go running some things actually jump out.

## INSIGHT 3

**The pen is  
mightier  
than the  
phone**

Despite the digital revolution, *pen* and *paper* remain the king and queen of note-taking. 40% of people said this is how they prefer to record their ideas, more than double the number who said they take notes on a *computer* (19%) and, to our surprise, on their *phone* (17%). But many embrace the power of *the mind*—24% of people said they keep their ideas in their *heads*.

EXPERT

*Why pen and paper still reigns supreme*



**Pam Mueller**

Social psychologist and policy researcher at the Rand Corporation who co-authored the research paper *The Pen is Mightier Than the Keyboard*.

What we found in our work is that when people write things down by hand, using pen and paper, they process the material more deeply, and when they're typing, they're just doing a mindless transcription of what someone might be saying to them. So if creatives are writing by hand, it's probably giving them more of a chance to process what they're putting down on the paper.

The processing still applies whether it's your own ideas or an outside idea coming in. If you have an idea, chances are it's not fully formed as it comes to mind. But as you write it down longhand, your mind is elaborating more than it would be if you just typed it out because you wouldn't have to think as much about the typing as you do about the writing. And I think people do take more care with their handwriting. People are just thinking about it more—and more thinking is better.

The multitasking capability of computers is going to have a huge additional impact. There has been work before ours, showing that computers were bad for that reason, because of distraction. But we took that off the table. The computers didn't have the internet, so you could really only use them as typewriters.

After we ran one study showing that people who took notes on computer wrote more but understood less, we ran a follow-up saying this is really bad for you, you shouldn't be trying to transcribe notes, try to write things down in your own words. But when we gave people a computer they weren't able to do that, they weren't able to hold themselves back and process the material. They're just too used to using it as a transcription machine.

## INSIGHT 4

# Musicians move to a different beat

Musicians do things differently. They were the only group for whom the *night* was the most fertile time for ideas, and they overwhelmingly get inspiration from *other music* (rather than the broad range of sources we saw for other creatives). When we asked what gets in the way of being creative, 13% of musicians said *family commitments*, more than double the rate of non-musicians.

## EXPERT

*How to exercise your creative muscles*

**Dr Catherine Loveday**  
Principal Lecturer in Cognitive Neuroscience  
at the University of Westminster.

Music stimulates a lot of different areas of the brain, and whenever you are using it, you are nurturing connections and shaping the structure. That happens when you go for a walk or read a paper—you stimulate your brain. But one of the things that makes music special is that it is very rewarding and people emotionally connect with it. And we know that when there are higher levels of engagement and reward, the brain is more malleable.

There are a number of studies that have looked at musicians who engage in improvisation, people who are having to be creative on the spot. It's been discovered that, over time, improvisation becomes more automatic. People become more able to be more creative on the spot the more they practice it. And it's also been found that people who improvise more and for longer have greater connectivity in their brain's creative networks.

If you put people in a scanner while they're improvising, you can see a unique pattern of activity in the prefrontal cortex. The authors of that study suggest that there is more activity in brain regions that promote self-expression and exploration, while the regulating, controlling areas of the brain

seem to sit back a little bit. There are various times in everyday life when that controlling part of the brain might be naturally less active: when you're tired, or particularly relaxed, when you've been meditating, or when you've had a glass of wine.

There is evidence that musical improvisation may nurture the brain's creative circuits, and it is possible that this might transfer to other domains, allowing other creative states to be reached more easily. This is a complex thing to prove scientifically, but it's a fair speculation.

## INSIGHT 5

# A free spirit stirs in Brazil

Brazil's *cultural diversity*, *youthful population* and *innovative heritage* make it a *creative powerhouse*. When it came to *inspiration*, *publications* and *films* scored very highly, reflecting strong *local traditions* in both. As a very connected country, it's not surprising Brazilians said being *distracted by the internet* got in the way of good ideas more than anyone else. But when it came to getting ideas *flowing*, 8% of their creatives told us *drugs* helped (against a 3% average) suggesting a *free-spirited* creative scene.



*Brazilian creatives to watch*



**Malfeitona**  
Tattoo Artist.

**Ana Elisa Egreja**  
Visual Artist

Ana Elisa paints in an ultra-realistic style while sneaking in flights of imagination into her meticulously constructed worlds. She is nominated for the prestigious 2018 Pipa contemporary art prize.

 [find out more](#)

**Renée Nader Messor**  
Film Director

The Dead and the Others won the Prix de Jury at Cannes this year for São Paulo-born cinematographer Renée Nader Messor and her co-director João Salaviza (Cannes' 2009 Palme d'Or short winner). The film fictionalizes the pair's experiences during a year living in northern Brazil among the indigenous Krahô people.

 [find out more](#)

**Pedro Bernardes**  
Musician

Pedro is a composer and musician who created the alter ego Wladimir Gasper. Wladimir creates electronica using a bizarre collection of home-built musical devices and blinding improvisation.

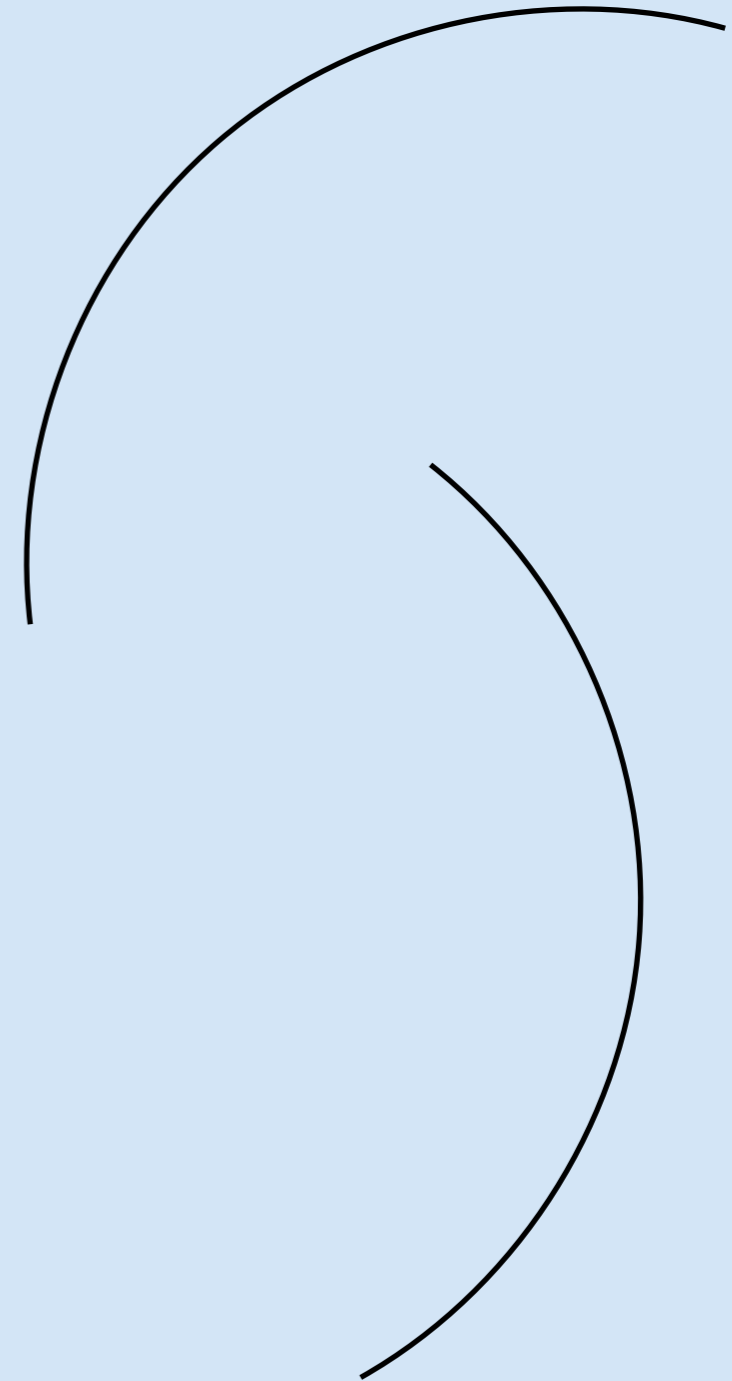
 [find out more](#)

**Malfeitona**  
Tattoo artist

Helena Fernandes, aka Malfeitona, is a self-taught tattoo artist whose naive and whimsical designs became an internet sensation. She designed the tattoo infographics for the Brazil focus of the WeTransfer Ideas Report 2018.

 [find out more](#)

# Tell me more



## The international angle

*South Americans* start early. This was the only region where the morning scored higher than “it’s never the same” when we asked when creatives get their best ideas.

# South America

**India**  
**Brazil**  
**UK**

It was interesting to see how creative blogs and websites were valued in different countries. In *India*, *Brazil* and the *UK* they scored highly, but in *France* they ranked well below the average.

Booze was not a big thing for sparking creative ideas. Except in *Japan*, where the % who found alcohol creatively useful was three times higher than the international average.

# France

# Japan

There is a lot of buzz about the rise of podcasts, but for ideas, not so much. Only in the *US* did they register a significant score as a source of inspiration.

# US

# Nigeria

Nigerians think best in bed. More than one third of *Nigerian* creatives told us they have their best ideas in bed—*India* and *South Africa* also scored well above the average.

# India

# South Africa

When we asked what people need to be creative, it was noticeable that quiet/silence scored very highly in *Asia*. Coffee came in very high in *Mexico* and *Turkey*, while *Sweden* was almost the only place where sunshine was not prized as important.

# Asia

# Turkey

When we asked what got in the way of creative ideas, most people said other work pressures (41%). But in *Mexico*, confidence came out as one of the biggest obstacles.

# Mexico

# Sweden

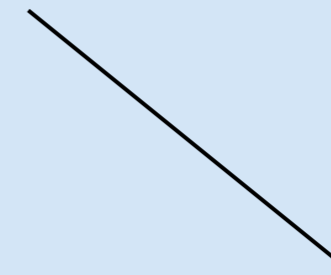
## A generation thing?

# 18

The only group for whom “mess and chaos” as a creative force scored as highly as “a neat and tidy space” was the *under-18s*. A whopping 45% of them also said they had their best ideas in bed.

Is print dying? For the *over-45s*, books and magazines came out as the number one source of new ideas. That dropped to second in the *25-45* age group, and third in the *18-25* category. It then plunged to eighth for the *under-18s*.

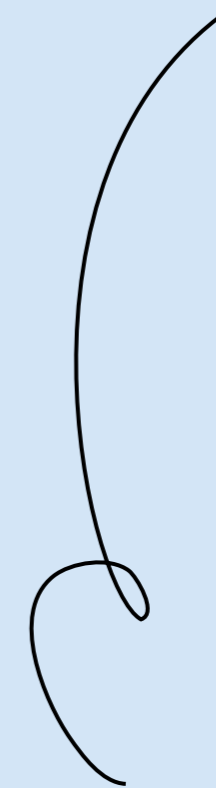
# 45



Only 5% of creatives said they never share their creative ideas. But this number was almost three times higher when it came to the *under-18s*, suggesting the confidence of youth might be a myth.

# 25

The *18-25* group was the only category where drugs scored higher than booze when it came to getting ideas flowing.

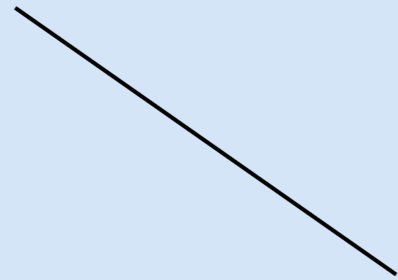


For those *under 25*, the 8pm to midnight slot was a very productive time for having new ideas. That score dropped off significantly for the *over-25s*, who find the mornings much more inspirational.

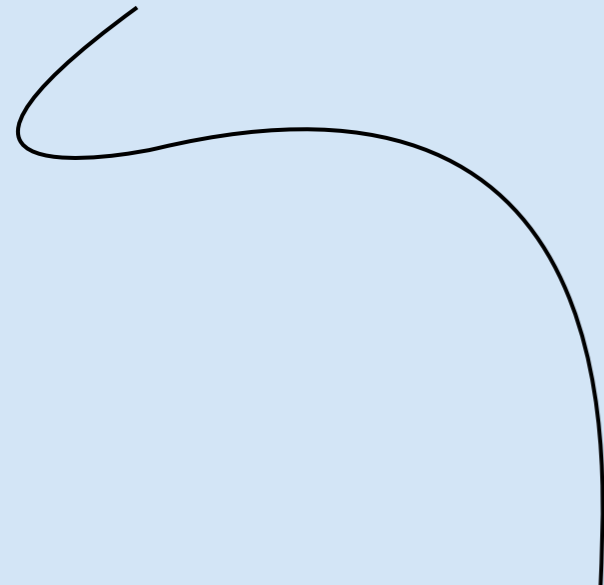
How different disciplines do it

# Creatives

The one group in which online idea-sources held their own against offline ones was for *designers*. Creative blogs scored very highly here, as did Pinterest.



# Designers



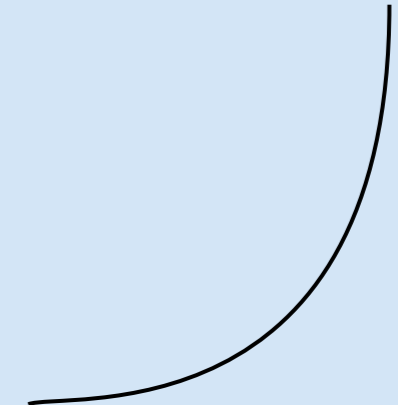
The only groups who find booze boosts their ideas were *musicians* (perhaps not surprisingly) and *illustrators* (more surprisingly).

# Musicians

When we asked about people having great ideas in the bathroom, *creatives* working in marketing and advertising came out well above the average. *Illustrators* too told us the bathroom was a good breeding ground for great ideas.

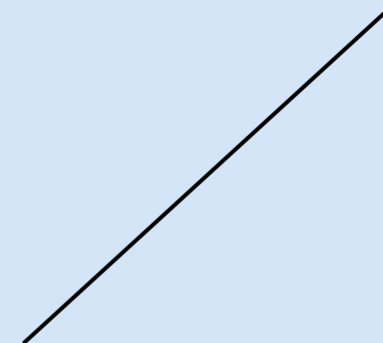
# Dance

Perhaps predictably, those involved in *dance* and *theater* are not shy with their ideas. More than one in four said they like to share their ideas as soon as possible. *Musicians* were much more cautious; nearly half said they only like to share when their ideas are in a nearly-final form.



# Theater

For *illustrators* and *photographers*, confidence can cause a crisis in their ideas, much more than other creative categories.



# Photographers

# Colofon

## Editor-in-Chief

Rob Alderson

## Project Lead

Danielle Boelling

## Creative Development

The Church of London

## Creative Director

Laszlito Kovacs

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Devin Beliveau

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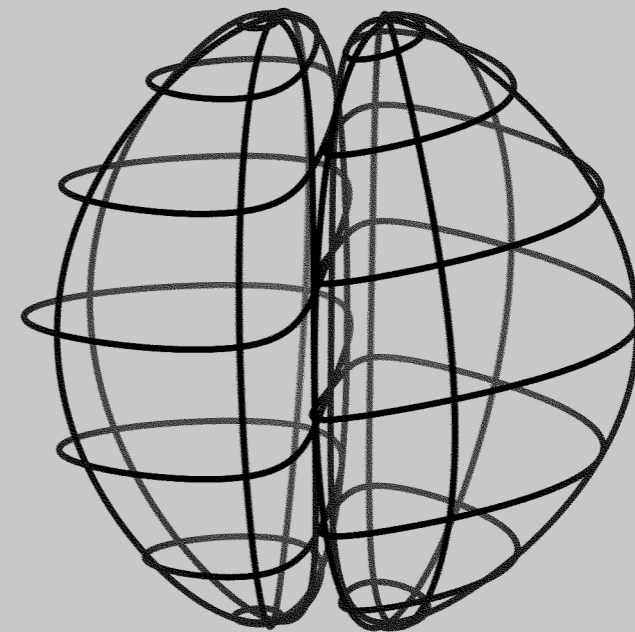
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*Syne* by Bonjour Monde

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Ethiopia  
Fiji**

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**Oman  
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