



INVERSE BRAINSTORM

Coming up with unusual ideas by inverting the current situation.

 **Participants**
Group/ class

 **Design skill**
Think in all directions

 **Prior design experience**
None

 **Duration**
20 minutes

 **Design step**
Generating ideas

Description

When participants often struggle to move away from the existing situation when coming up with ideas to solve a problem. The reverse brainstorm enables participants to consciously think about unusual solutions.

Participants make a list of words about the normal and typical elements of an activity using questions such as 'How would you describe this activity? What is typical for this activity? Which items do you use? What does the space look like now?'



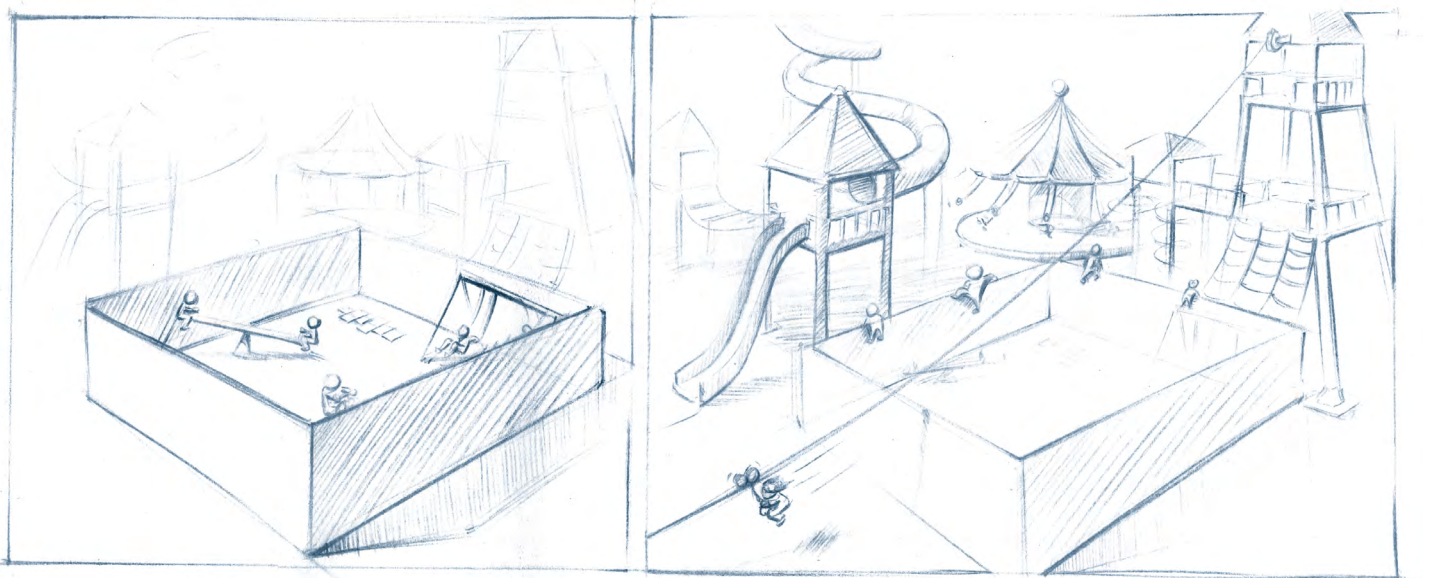
The facilitator writes the 'normal words' on the whiteboard. The participants then come up with the inverse of each normal word. Using the inverse word list, the participants think of new ideas. Because the activity focuses on the inverse, unusual and crazy words are good.

Effect

The inverse words stimulate participants to let go of the existing situation and to think outside the box. They discover that surprising solutions arise when stereotypical thinking habits are broken and that the resulting ideas can also be realistic.

Without the Inverse brainstorm

With the Inverse brainstorm



Example

Mrs. Murray's class is thinking about new playground equipment for their school playground. But they always think of existing objects: slides, climbing structures, football goals. The teacher asks the class to list what is typically associated with a playground. 'Many colours,' says Abdel, 'and you feel safe'. 'Being together,' says Sara. The ideas form a long list. 'And what is the opposite?' The teacher asks. The students answer: 'Grey, unsafe, alone.' The teacher challenges them: 'Think of something unexpected for a playground that is grey, unsafe and alone. Abdel comes up with an underground system of mole tunnels, Sara suggests a cloud of fog where you lose each other. These ideas are very different to a slide!

Step by step

- 1 Write the central question on a whiteboard or flipover, for example, 'What is the gym class?' Draw a table with the columns Typical and Inverse below.

- 2 Ask the participants what they are thinking about and write down the answers in the Typical column.
- 3 Then ask the participants what is the inverse of each word. Have them write this down for themselves and choose a random participant to give a class answer. Note that word in the second column. Ask if there are other answers.
- 4 Choose one or two words from the Inverse column and give an example of an inverse idea.
- 5 Choose another word and have each participant come up with something and write it down. Emphasize that every idea is good even if it may be strange or unrealistic. Have another participant tell their idea. If necessary, ask two more participants to share their ideas.
- 6 Pick a few words from the Typical list and have them come up with any ideas for these. Speak to each participant to guide them and enjoy the process together.
- 7 Have the participants share the best and weirdest ideas with each other. This creates a sort of benchmark: are they thinking up strange ideas or are they still copying common examples? Ask the participants how they could come up with something even crazier and give them a few more minutes to think.

Move a lot	↔	Sit still
Play together	↔	Play alone
Indoors	↔	Outdoors
Gym equipment	↔	Empty space
Dangerous	↔	Safe
Becoming flexible	↔	Stay stiff
Get strong	↔	Become weak
High ceiling	↔	Low building
Rectangle	↔	Organic shape
Lines on the ground	↔	Nothing on the ground / drawings
Sporty clothes	↔	Own clothes
Posts and nets	↔	Projections
Waiting for instructions	↔	Start right away

Quarrel	↔	Peace
Gym teacher	↔	Do it yourself
Groups	↔	Everyone for themselves
Losing and winning	↔	Cooperation
Getting tired and sweating	↔	get a lot of energy and smell good
Listen	↔	Ignore
Be the best	↔	Be the worst
Help each other	↔	Working against each other

Tips

- ▶ Fill in the inverse column and come up with the first ideas as a class if participants find it difficult to get started.
- ▶ Make it clear that it is not about the perfect opposite word, but about 'something that is completely different'.
- ▶ With participants who find it difficult to think outside the box, Try to identify the problem and practice the Inverse brainstorm with a different topic.
- ▶ When peaking about what is common, pay attention to various aspects, such as: what it looks like, how it is used, the environment, who uses it, the experience. Look for adjectives.

Materials

- ▶ Whiteboard or flipchart
- ▶ Writing and drawing material for each participant

