

# SynTAROTis

## The sceptic's Tarot

16 January 2012

### Relational algorithms: a problem-solving technique

What do you get when you combine an elephant with a bicycle?

I don't know either, but did you think of something funny? Combinations, the sillier the better, are excellent tools for sparking the imagination.

Many creativity techniques use combinations to spark ideas; one of them is "Relational Algorithms," which sounds very serious and scientific, but is actually quite fun.

*Relational Algorithms was developed by Herbert Crovitz. Creativity teacher Arthur VanGundy adapted the technique and called it "Preppy Thoughts." Now that sounds better!*

This technique works by evoking images in your mind. These will usually be absurd or really strange, which helps give the imagination a kickstart.

How it works

Relational Algorithms combines elements from the problem statement with randomly chosen words from a set.

1. The first thing you need to do is write a brief statement of your problem.

Example: "How might I entertain my mother-in-law over Christmas?"

2. Now underline the action verb and object.

"How might I entertain my mother-in-law over Christmas?"

3. Finally, insert a relational word between the two words you have underlined.

Crovitz suggested these:

about	at	for	of	round	to
across	because	from	off	still	under
after	before	if	on	so	up
against	between	in	opposite	then	when
among	but	near	or	though	where
and	by	not	out	through	while
as	down	now	over	till	with

VanGundy expanded the list to include prepositions:

above	below	except	toward
along	beneath	into	upon
amid	beside	past	within
around	beyond	since	without
behind	during	throughout	

For example:

"How might I entertain my mother-in-law over Christmas?"

- entertain/**opposite**/mother-in-law
- entertain/**past**/mother-in-law
- entertain/**where**/mother-in-law

You might come up with something like this:

- ask *your mother-in-law* to entertain one of the guests
- show her photographs from your husband's childhood albums, and ask her to tell you what she remembers about them
- play a game of "where is grandma?" with the children; the first one who finds her, gets a treat from her bag of goodies

Another example:

"How might I improve the marketing of my latest book?"

- improve/**behind**/book
- improve/**beyond**/book
- improve/**when**/book
- improve/**during**/book

Some possibilities:

- make prominent mention of my previous (best-selling) book in the campaign, so search engines will pick up both references
- include a coupon for a discount of my previous book
- offer free information from the book on my website and in my newsletter
- mention updated research and information on my blog
- offer readers discount if they review my book
- schedule my Facebook and Twitter updates to reach more time zones
- include interactive games based on my book on my website

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1. Crovitz, H.F. *Galton's walk: Methods for the analysis of thinking, intelligence and creativity*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

2. VanGundy, A. B. *101 Activities for teaching creativity and problem solving*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer, 2005.

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