



**Emergency Planning Society
Presents**

**A Toolkit of Creative Strategies for Personal
Debriefing**

Authors
Stuart Andrews and Patrick Duggan
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This Toolkit is a direct outcome of the research project 'Social Distancing and Reimagining City Life: Performative strategies and practices for response and recovery in and beyond lockdown' ([AH/V013734/1](#)).

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Andrews, S. and Duggan, P. (2022), *A Toolkit of Creative Strategies for Personal Debriefing*, May 2022.

Introduction

Personal debriefing is critical to emergency planning. In this Toolkit, we introduce creative strategies that offer new methods of engaging in personal debriefing, both for individuals and to support team approaches.

We start from understanding emergency planning 'as' performance (as explored at our EPS Huddle, 30th March 2022 and in publications) to introduce and investigate performance processes as creative, flexible, and dynamic strategies for personal debriefing.

Too often, creative practice is understood through finished artworks or performances, yet many of the processes that arts practitioners use in making work offer creative, individually-nuanced ways of making sense of events or situations. The Toolkit offers a range of strategies for personal debriefing that we have developed through our work with emergency and resilience planning professionals in the UK and USA.

In May 2022, we led a workshop on Creative Strategies for Personal Debriefing. This Toolkit builds on that work and we will update and revise this over time. If you find this Toolkit useful, or if you feel it could be more relevant to you and your work, please get in touch and we will build this feedback into future versions (contact details at the end of the document).

How to use the Toolkit

Through employing, revising, and reimagining the approaches below, we invite you to build an individual creative practice of debriefing. The exercises presented here are not designed to be used in any particular order. Rather, you might find certain exercises appeal in some moments or contexts, and others that you come back to at another time. We invite you to build these into your working day, to find spaces to reflect in and after work. Engage with these ways of working as you wish to: try them out, change them a bit, make them work for your particular situation. Most can be undertaken when home-working, in office environments, or in more complex working environments; others, perhaps, are more private. We present them here in order of quickest to complete, to longest running. There are 10 strategies to explore.

The Creative Strategies

While the kettle boils (3 – 5 minutes)

While the kettle boils, take your shoes and socks off and plant your feet shoulder width apart. Stand tall, with arms relaxed by your sides.

Close your eyes; don't open them until the kettle is finished. Breathe deeply (in through the nose over 10 seconds, out through the mouth over 15 seconds).

Open your eyes when the kettle finishes.
Make your drink.

Ice breaker (5 – 10 minutes)

The Covid-19 pandemic revealed the way that online meetings can be relentless, tiring and very similar in their sedentary, digital spaces. To disrupt this, start every online meeting by asking people to take a paper and a pen, and draw:

- the view through the closest window to them
- what they plan to cook for dinner
- their favourite drink
- the shoes they are wearing
- the weather where they are
- their favourite place
- a clock of the time they got up
- what they last ate...

Ask participants to hold up these images to the camera, to share them with the 'room'. There could be a discussion of these but there does not need to be.

Protective Sphere (10 – 15 minutes)

In a quiet private moment, sit comfortably with your eyes closed.

Imagine yourself enveloped by a warm protective sphere; you can see out and interact with others and they can see you as normal, only you know you are in this sphere.

Now imagine the sphere has lots of long, soft, wavy tentacles coming off it; these tentacles wave and welcome those around you who mean you no ill, who will work with you collegially and professionally. To those who mean you no harm, these tentacles are friendly.

Now imagine you are approached by someone who wants to operate more abrasively, or who does not have your best interests in mind, or who simply wants to assert their power over you or your way of working. Imagine the tentacles stiffening

as they approach, forming hard spikes on the outside of the sphere. Imagine these spikes push the negative energy and presence of the other away, giving you the power and confidence needed to deal with the encounter.

Invisibly and imaginatively, the sphere addresses situations and people as you need and as encounters change their energy. Recall this sphere when you need to prepare for or are in a complex work interaction.

Extension: Reflect on the following questions:

- What observations did you make about yourself when doing the visualisation?
- What are your practices of forming 'spikes', of preparing for complex interactions? Is it a struggle? Does this exercise help?

Screen break (10 – 15 minutes)

Walk away from your screens and find a window or door that opens to the outside and open it. Step outside or safely lean out of the window. Close your eyes, breathe slowly and deeply for a minute.

Listen attentively: what do you hear or notice?

Open your eyes.

Watch attentively for a minute: what do you see that catches your attention?

Walk back to your desk/screen/work environment and write down something from your observations that you found beautiful, relaxing, or intriguing. Put it on a piece of paper beside you, to notice and return to later.

Extension: Run this exercise a number of times in a day; how does your experience shift over the day, what observations do you note each time? Just as you finish work, look at the list of observations and reflect on what this list reveals about your day.

Thresholds (10 – 20 minutes)

From inside a room, open a window. Notice and write down what changes in the room. What do you sense? Can you feel the air? Can you hear sounds from outside? How does the open window change your sense of the room inside?

From inside, close a door. Respond to the same prompts: Notice and write down what changes in the room. What do you sense? Can you feel the air change? Can you hear sounds from outside the door? How does the closed door change your sense of the interior?

Over the course of a single day, notice the ways in which you manage thresholds. Look for opportunities to vary your practice. If you usually open a window on going into a room, leave the window closed and notice how this feels. Throughout the day, note down anything you notice during the day. At the end of the day, read through your notes and recall your experiences.

Answer the following:

- How important are open and/or closed thresholds to your experience of a space?
- Are there ways in which your knowledge, sense and practise of thresholds can help you work more effectively?
 - o If you work at home, how might you manage thresholds to separate work and life?
 - o If, at work or at home, you work in spaces that are used for multiple purposes:
 - is it useful to you to find or create thresholds (e.g. putting work materials in a cupboard or locker that can be closed)?
 - can you generate 'threshold practices' that mark the completion of 'work' and the move from and to 'home' life. (e.g. going for a walk around the block before you start work and after you finish)?

Office exploration (20 – 30 minutes)

When working in your office, go for a walk around the building.

Take something to write on and make a note of anything that stands out for you, such as:

- spaces that are interesting or might be useful...
- places to avoid because you don't like the atmosphere...
- places that you might locate yourself and/or your team to signal the centrality of the work you do to the organisation, to other colleagues, to one another...
- what one thing would you change about the building, and why?

Look for an opportunity to say hello to someone you have not met, tell them what team you work in and what you do. (If it is useful, as context, you could explain you are doing a task that involves you meeting someone new).

Re-read your observations from the first part of this exercise. Is there anything here that you might return to in the course of your work? Is there anything here that might form the basis of a wider conversation with your colleagues?

Reflect on how it felt to introduce yourself to a stranger. What did you learn in having this encounter (about yourself, the way you articulate what you do, about other people, about your ways of encountering others etc)?

Objects and stories (20 – 30 minutes)

In her recent book, *When the Dust Settles*, Lucy Easthope reflects on the importance of objects for, and in, work and life. Objects are critical in art and performance practice. In the case of a painting or sculpture, the work may be an object. In a performance, the ways people touch and use objects can reveal much about the ways in which they engage with the world.

Empty your bag (or a desk drawer) and lay all the objects out in front of you. Make sure you can see them all, individually.

Observe the objects, paying attention to what they 'tell' you:

- Are there any objects that surprise you?
- What's there that you don't really need?
- What's the most important object?
- What's missing that you need to add?

Extension:

Run the exercise again, with colleagues. Discuss how you all found doing this reflective, creative practice.

- What stories do these objects tell about you, and your work?
- What did you find interesting or challenging, did anything resonate as useful?

Three good things (25 - 30 minutes)

At the end of your working day, write down a particular challenge you are addressing at work at the moment. Then:

- Write three bullet points on how that challenge makes you feel.
- Write three bullet points of ways you will address the challenge *tomorrow*.

Fold the paper up so you can no longer see the above.

On the rest of the paper and reflecting on your day from beginning to end, note down three good things from your day. Prompts:

- What gave you joy?
- What engagement with nature did you have?
- What music did you listen to?
- When did you laugh or smile?
- Which lovely people did you meet?
- Did you have good food? Breakfast, lunch, snacks

Once you have written these three good things, re-read them. Keep these good things in mind as you end the working day.

Extension:

Later today, if you're talking to anyone about your day, tell them about the three good things first.

Once at work, start by remembering or re-reading the good things from yesterday. Then re-read the three ways of approaching your current challenge: these offer immediate ways forward at the start of your day.

Allow space for good things in this new day.

Do this every day for a week. Write a brief reflection at the end of it. What do you notice?

Reflective walking (30 – 45 minutes)

Walk for 10 minutes as fast as you can; fast enough to get your heart rate up but not so fast as you can't sustain it for the duration.

Think about how your body feels and how your breathing is; what do you notice as you walk?

Find a safe place to pause, to rest; sit and observe the world around you for 5 minutes. What do you notice – smells, sounds, atmosphere, sensations, people etc?

Write without stopping for 10 minutes. Don't worry about what you write, just put words on the page.

Walk back to where you started; what do you notice on the return journey that you missed on the way out?

When you arrive, reread your writing. What's there of note, how do you feel now, has anything changed since you started the exercise?

Write a sentence or two reflecting on the experience: what did you enjoy or find tricky, how did your emotional state shift in this time, what interesting things did you observe?

Picture your year (1 minute per day... for a 365 days)

Take a photo each day for a year of the same view/frame; this could be your desk, a point on a walk, a vista from a window, a person or pet, the shoes you wear every day... or anything else you choose.

Place these images into a viewable digital space (a PowerPoint, an online album, in a particular file with preview functionality, a social media site etc).

On the last day of the year, review all the images from beginning to end. Try to take your time; try to notice differences in the images, both big and more granular. Note down how the stories the images tell you make you feel, or what they make you remember, or what you missed that you now notice.

Make a 2-minute sequential film of all 365 images and watch it back.

Write down three things you have learnt in the year as a result, of or remembered, through this year-long activity.

Extension: Pick one from each month and place these into a sequential collage. Send the collage and the learning to a friend or colleague. Ask for nothing in return or response.

Follow-up work

If these strategies have sparked your interest and you would be interested in arranging a live online or in-person workshop, we would be delighted to hear from you. Equally, if you have questions, queries or observations you would like to share, please get in touch.

We can be contacted via:

patrick@performingcityresilience.com

stuart@performingcityresilience.com

For more information about our research, and publications from our wider project, please visit www.performingcityresilience.com.

A note on the influence of practitioners

Activities in this toolkit draw on a range of established approaches to art and performance making. Drawing on our collective pedagogic practices in Higher Education, our purpose is here to indicate ways in which art practices may be valuable in new contexts (beyond performance and beyond the academy). This is far from an exhaustive list, but in developing this toolkit we are influenced by the work of:

A Studio in the Woods; Action Hero; Ai Weiwei; Annie Wong; Bobby Baker; Dee Heddon; Ellen Dowell; Goat Island; Guillermo Gómez-Peña; Hugo Glendinning; Jamal Gerald; Janet Cardiff; Joshua Sofaer; Lee Miller and Joanne 'Bob' Whalley; Lone Twin; Manuel Vason; Marina Abramović; Mondo Bizarro; Saskia Olde Wolbers; Sophie Calle; Tehching Hsieh; Testament; Third Angel; Tim Etchells and Forced Entertainment; Wrights & Sites.

In 'Three Good Things' we are riffing off Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's creative approach to domestic cooking in his book by the same name (Bloomsbury 2012).

If the work in this Toolkit has been of interest, we invite you to explore the work of these artists and to develop your own sense of the ways in which their work might stimulate new perspectives on and practices of work and life.