



FREE

10 TIPS TO BOOST YOUR CREATIVITY

VALERIE JARDIN

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About Valérie...

Valérie Jardin is a French photographer, currently residing in the United States. She is self-taught and worked for several years as a commercial photographer. Today, Valérie is known internationally through her workshops. When she is not teaching others the art of visual story-telling, Valérie is a prolific author and speaker.

She lives and breathes in pixels.



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01

**GET OUT OF YOUR
COMFORT ZONE**

Most photographers only shoot one or two genres of photography and never experiment with other subjects. Have you ever wondered if maybe you're missing out on something? I'm not suggesting you go from photographing bugs to nudes, but then again, why not?

A good photographer should be able to adapt to all kinds of situations. And whatever you learn in one photographic genre will definitely carry over to the next one and ultimately you will grow your skills.

I'm known for my documentary photography but I also love photographing still life, and architectural abstracts and I do so almost as often. I even rise up to the challenge of photographing nature and landscapes occasionally, even if I don't share it.

A good photographer should be able to point his/her camera at many different types of subjects and deliver quality work.

The point is to experiment often and add some variety.

Maybe you only photograph in B&W.... Time to add color to your life! Maybe you've always wondered what it feels like to be in the shoes of a street photographer or a wild-life photographer. You don't need special gear to experiment, and you certainly don't need to go on a trip to Paris or an African safari. People are people and wildlife can be a squirrel in your backyard.

So... What will you challenge yourself to photograph today?



You could say that photographing nature is almost the opposite of what I usually shoot. But I can take on the challenge any day!

02

**WORK ON A PERSONAL
PROJECT**

A personal project can be a lot of different things. It can be long term or short term. Before you embark on a long project, make sure you'll be able to handle the commitment.

For example, a 365 project is a great way to grow as a photographer but it can also become a burden and be counterproductive. If you end up quitting after a few weeks, you may end up feeling worse about yourself and photography in general. If you decide to go for the 365, don't be too hard on yourself. Don't get to the point where you'll shoot just about anything to get your pic of the day. Remember that it's supposed to be FUN!

You may also consider starting something a little bit more manageable such as a 52-week project, a short term photo essay, a series of portraits of strangers or selfies, etc. You can also have several on-going projects at the same time.

I do, and I don't have an end date for some of them. Others are more seasonal or just end on their own when the novelty wears out.

Whatever you decide to do, make sure you share with the world. Post on Instagram or start a blog. It will be a lot more fun that keeping those photos on your hard drive...

Everything has been done but no one is going to do it like you!



Stories of Hands is part of a long term on-going project.



On Ice was a one season project.

03

**GIVE YOURSELF AN
ASSIGNMENT**

Have you ever dreamed of being a photo journalist? Why not pretend to be one and give yourself an assignment. You don't need a press card to get started, choose a subject or cause that you are passionate about and give it a go!

It can be a simple photo story about a local business or the coverage of an event.

You can also work on your visual story skills by pretending to work for the tourism board of your own city. How would you make a series of photographs to attract people to come and visit your town?

This is also a fun way to see your own city for the first time and practice your travel photography skills.

Think about writing too. If you were to try to get anything published, a paper or magazine will always be more interested in a full package, including quality photographs and accompanying text.



04

**SHOOT LESS, SHOOT
BETTER!**

The digital age of photography has been extremely beneficial in many ways. The learning curve is easier and faster than ever before. The photographer has immediate gratification and the advantage of correcting mistakes on the spot with a quick visualization of the LCD. It's also free, and we all know that the more we shoot, the better we become. That is especially true for beginners who need to experiment with different gear and techniques to learn the craft. As you begin to master the basic skills, there is nothing to gain from the 'spray and pray' approach.

With free unlimited shutter clicks, are we still taking the time to work the frame and compose as carefully as we did during the film days? Are we still making every frame count?

I think it's time to reverse the trend and put more intent in our photography.

Setting some simple limitations is one way to do it. The power of limitations is not a new concept. It can be applied in photography in different ways, each one guaranteeing better resulting images. Here are two steps you can take to improve your craft, even at an advanced level.

Limit yourself to one prime lens. Leave the zoom lens at home. Go out with a prime and work it! Shooting with a fixed focal length lens makes you work harder and the results will show a growth in your photography.

Ready to double the challenge? Now limit yourself to a certain number of frames during your photo walk.

Pretend you're back in the film days and all you can afford is a roll of 36 exposures. Of course, you can also choose to shoot film for the day.

What matters is that you are going to slow down and compose more carefully before you press the shutter.

Know what story you want to tell and carefully select the point of focus and the depth of field to lead the eye of the viewer. By taking your time, you will be more likely to use compositional elements such as leading lines or negative space in your first shot. You will crop in camera and make decisions to remove distracting elements from the frame to make the strongest image possible. Just try it on your next photo walk, you will be surprised at how many more keepers you have that day because you slowed down and pressed that shutter with intent.



05

**PLAY A PHOTOGRAPHY
GAME!**

Here is a simple exercise you can do anywhere that will help develop your photographic eye. Take your camera with just one lens and go for a walk (of course any camera phone will do too). While walking down the street, at the park or even in nature, make a point to stop randomly and find something to photograph within 10 or 15 feet (3 to 5 m) from where you are standing.

Better yet, if you are walking with a non-photographer, ask him or her to tell you when to stop. Look up and down, look all around you and take your time to find something interesting to photograph.

It can be a scene in the street happening just in front of you, an architectural detail, the manhole cover on which you are standing or an insect on a flower. The point is to learn to make the ordinary look extraordinary. Try different angles, a shallow depth of field, etc.

Another idea is to get children involved in this exercise. A perfect way to get them to walk and introduce them to photography at the same time. Their discoveries might surprise you. Children also love to participate in a photography treasure hunt. Give them a theme and join them in the game.

A fun activity for photographers of all ages and ability levels is to look for the alphabet in nature or in architecture. Trees that look like the letter V or the frame of a bridge that makes an elegant M.

Better yet: Invent your own photography games!



06

**PHOTOGRAPH WHAT
YOU LOVE**

Whether you work for clients or shoot for yourself, you probably realized a long time ago that you do your best work when you are passionate about the subject matter.

The best way to get the creative juices flowing again is to follow your heart and photograph what you love. Whether it's classic cars, pretty bouquets or your dog, you will always get more satisfaction photographing things you enjoy, you will go out more often and become a better photographer in the process!



07

**DEVELOP A MORE
AUTHENTIC VISION OF
THE WORLD**

This way of seeing through your lens is often referred to as contemplative photography.

The mind tries to rearrange things whereas the heart sees them for what they are. If you stop analyzing with your mind and start 'seeing' the world around you with your heart, endless photo opportunities will open up. Every light situation will reveal the beauty of mundane objects that would otherwise remain unnoticed.

By practicing this type of photography you will not only get a fresh view of the world around you, you will improve your skills as a visual artist in everything else you photograph.

Whether you're in nature, on the streets or in your home, contemplative photography will help you connect with your visual perception in terms of color, texture, pattern, light and shadows.



08

**START A PHOTO WALK
GROUP**

Photographers usually do their best work when they are on their own. But it gets lonely at times. Hanging out with like-minded people can get anyone out of a rut.

Not too fond of your local photo club? Start your own! You can keep it simple and just plan regular photo walks. Start with a handful of local friends and more will join.

As a bonus for you: Since it was *your* idea, you will have *no* excuse not to join them. You can start a photo walk account on Instagram to make your announcements and use a specific hashtag to see everyone's work.



09

**EDUCATION IS ALWAYS
BETTER THAN NEW
GEAR**

Gear should never be an excuse for your lack of vision or creativity.

The only way a new camera or lens will make you a better photographer is *IF* it takes you on more photo walks. I'm not going to dwell on the fact that the camera doesn't make the photographer. You already know that.

Although I've never met a photographer who improved thanks of a new camera, I've met hundreds who grew in their craft during a workshop. Nothing will boost your vision and passion more than learning new skills in the company of like-minded people.

Likewise, a getaway to a new location for a few days with your camera will also boost your inspiration a lot more than a shiny new lens.



10

**TRY A DIFFERENT
VISUAL ART FORM JUST
FOR FUN**

A few years ago, I decided to try pencil drawing. I never thought I could draw anything more complex than a stickman but within a few hours I was able to apply shading techniques, and even draw a face. Drawing and painting have since become a great meditative escape when I have some spare time.

I believe that all art forms complement each other at some level and trying something new is always both a humbling and rewarding experience.



CONCLUSION

We all go through creative blocks. It's not necessarily a bad thing. On the contrary, it may just be a sign that you need to push yourself, to grow in the process. I hope one of these tips will help you get motivated again.

Remember that photography is a journey. We never stop learning and growing.

You will find more inspiration in my books and workshops.

Au revoir!
Valérie Jardin



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