

Ideation Theory

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1. Basics of Ideation

What is Ideation?

It's the process of coming up with ideas. It can be applied to almost any field but is most recognizable in creative industries such as movies, video games, and comics/manga.

Methods of Ideation

There are many methods for generating ideas, including ones you are probably already familiar with such as brainstorming, mind mapping, random word searching, dreaming, and theme carding.

The process I will focus on here is an elaborate extension of the theme card method. After working on many independent and professional projects over the years, I have found it to be the most powerful and flexible form of ideation.

Primer on Theme Card Ideation

In short, Theme Card Ideation is where you take a few themes (such as items, characters, locations, or any other subject) and place them onto note cards, shuffle them around, select a few from the stack, and then see what pops up in your head.

This process works based on synaptic association. For instance, think of a "Floor". Just as you think about the word floor, your mind references your memory and sends you an image based on what you think and feel a floor is. Some of you will think of a carpeted floor, which might lead you to think of a drink you once spilled. Others will think of a hardwood floor that you like to slide on in your socks or perhaps a textile kitchen floor with scuff marks all over it.

This is the powerful thing about mental association. Due to our specific life experiences we can each see the same thing very differently. Theme Carding is usually effective because it takes two or more concepts and merges them together, giving you a surprising new angle on ideas that you may have considered to be dull or normal separately.

For instance, if I pick two theme cards and one has the word "Sword" on it while the other has the word "Sakura Tree" my mind comes up with something like this:



An interesting object created by the stimulation of two fairly normal and separate concepts. I might want to write a story about such an object or use it in a game or manga.

The Next Level

After working with theme cards for years I've come to find that the results are only as good as the categories and words they are inspired from. What I have dedicated a lot of my time to is honing in on what I find to be some of the most useful and most effective ways of doing theme card ideation, be it for stories, characters, locations, art, music, games...whatever. Using the Seda Ideation as a tool I would now like to share some of these principles with you.

2. Generating Ideas Using Seda

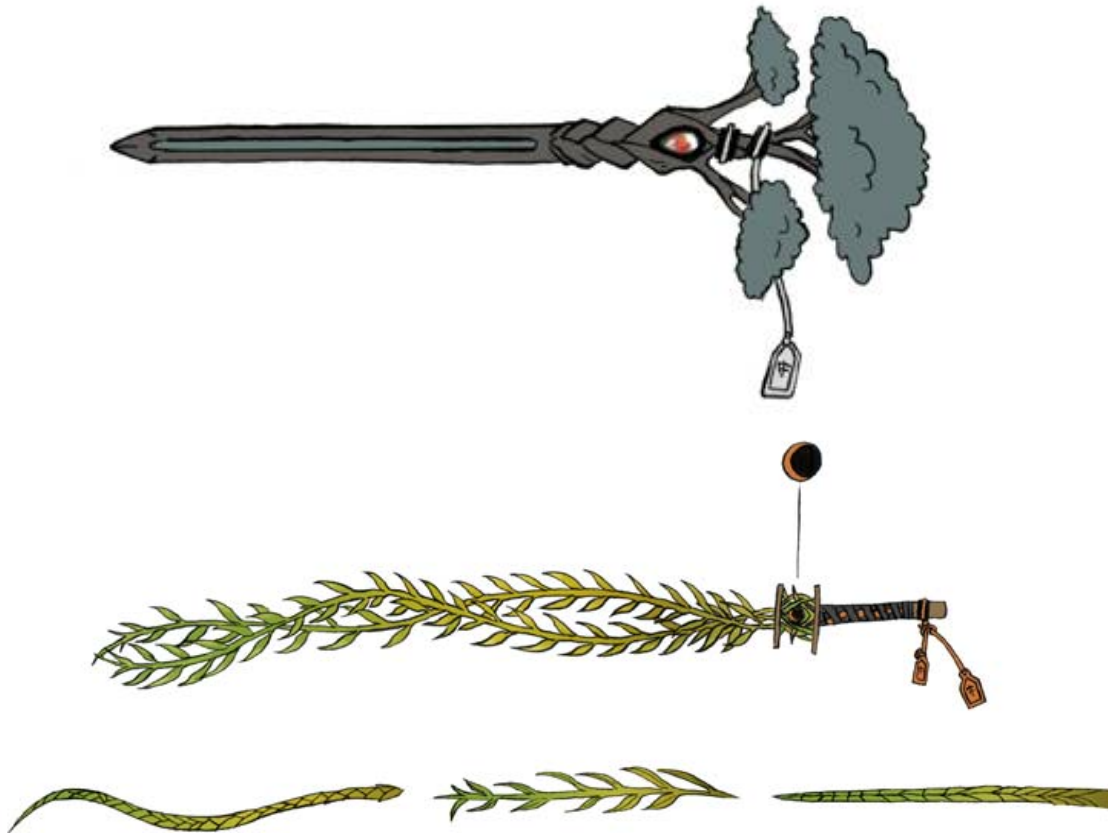
General Principles

Keep It Focused

The first thing I would stress is to focus on exactly what you need ideas for and create a set of *Theme Cards* (which I will refer to as *Categories* from this point forward) based around that idea.

For instance, when I had to come up with a set of creative combat ideas for a game I was working on, I created a category with every physical or mental offensive and defensive action I could imagine. I then took that category and another category with General Themes (that had entries such as Clouds, Bubble, Metal, etc.) and started to randomly generate content, discovering more than a few gems in a short amount of time.

You can zoom in and make your ideation even more specific to get unique variations on a single powerful idea. Recall the Sakura Sword from the last section. What might a Bonsai Tree or a Weeping Willow generate if I play it against the theme of sword?



Fewer At First

I've noticed that some of the most powerful ideas have stemmed from the least number of Items or words. Start off with a "General Themes" category and generate two to three items at most and see what interesting things you can come up with. Here's what I got from an ideation I did way back inspired by the words: *Ninja* and *Photography*.

Sort of like the Ninja Paparazzi.

There is a place for more elaborate and detailed item combinations (and I will cover a few shortly) but if you're just trying things out for the first time, keep it simple and quick. Don't get stuck on coming up with an idea for every combination that is generated by the program.

Here's an exercise: Decide on something you want to create an idea for (a character, location, weapon, story, a piece of art, a musical theme). Take a sheet of paper and using only two categories, generate 1 item from each and let them stimulate your creativity. Any ideas you have, write them down. Write down at least 10 ideas and then take a step back to see if you find anything inspiring or interesting.

If so, keep it for later or develop the idea otherwise trash it and try using two different categories.

Find Formulas That Work

Depending on what you need inspiration and ideas for, you will need to come up with categories and items that are helpful to that end. Half of this is figuring out all the variables involved with an idea and what things play well against each other. The other half is trial and error. In any case, once you find a combination of categories that work well together, document it and make it a *Formula*. You will be able to use it later when you need a similar idea.

Here's an example of a few simple formulas related to the theme Animal:

- **Interesting Animal Formula** = (Animal + General Theme). i.e. Glass Horse, Patchwork Lion, Demonic Zebra.
- **Cool Weapon Names Formula** = (Animal + Weapons). i.e. Butterfly Blade, Shark Bullet, Spider Saw.



Intermediate Principles

Formulas as Frameworks

The next step is to take the basic formulas you have and bring them together to create more complex *Ideation Frameworks*. This can be easily illustrated through using story as an example.

When creating a story you have many smaller variables to consider. There's the world. There are the characters that populate that world and their individual personalities, histories, conflicts, and motivations. Then there's the story structure itself that has to be considered.

Luckily all of these elements have a structure and a science behind them. The key is to figure out the best way of creating ideas for each element first (i.e. what's the best way to generate interesting locations? Unique characters? Surprising actions? Complex motivations?) and then create a higher-level formula that can inspire you in many of these areas at once.

Here's an example of a complex formula that I've used to create interesting character stories, back stories, and arcs:

- **Character Story Formula** = (Job + Character Values + Attitude + Attributes + Social Endowments + Personal Skills + Society Values + His Objective + Story-Conflict + Story Value + Action-Objective + Result)

Here's what I get when I generate from these categories using the Seda Ideation program:

- **Character/Job:** God Child
- **Values:** Authority
- **Attitude:** Distant, cold, aloof
- **Attributes:** Untrusting
- **Social Endowments:** Indifferent, hostile family upbringing
- **Personal Skills:** Time Management Skills
- **Society Values:** Right to Bear Arms
- **His Objective is:** To Wake
- **Story Conflict:** Man vs. Nature (including environment, animals, weather, etc.)
- **Story Value:** From giving answers to asking questions and finding them
- **Action-Objective:** To Outsmart
- **Result:** Self-Sacrifice

Using this as my fuel for inspiration, here's how this character's story might play out:

A distant and aloof child emperor with absolute and divine authority seeks to take away his counties' rights to bear arms in fear of them rising up against him. Yet when

his kingdom is attack by a fearful enemy, he awakens to the realization that his people were not aiming to rise against him, but were willing to bear arms and fight for him and their country. After discovering he was misinformed and tricked into passing such a law by a devious comrade, the young king, in a last ditch effort to save his land, sacrifices himself in order to return the weapons to the hands of his people, restoring their rights and giving them the power to fight back for their country.

And this is just with one generation. I could easily put twists on this concept with new ideas to make it better and better. The point here is to show you that you can fairly easily create fodder for inspiration at simple as well as complex levels, it just all depends on the inputs, formulas, and frameworks you devise.

3. Community

Two Heads Can Be Better

I would like to urge you to try ideation with others; your friends, colleges, or spouses. This will open your eyes up to just how many different interpretations can arise from the same stimulus. Doing this can also help improve the quality of the ideas that you walk out of ideation with, getting feedback and a different perspective from your partner.

The last thing I would suggest is to share and trade Ideation Formulas and Categories with others, as you may find that other people will have more knowledge and experience in certain areas than you and will be better capable of framing a concept for ideation. One of my friends, for instance, focuses on creating interesting formulas for Art while another uses it for Game Design and I use it for Manga and Music. Together, as a community we offer each other insights that give us all a leg up in the creative process.

A Last Word

While I have used this ideation process to great effect in my professional and non-professional career, there are many other areas of Intellectual Property Development that significantly outweigh it. Ideas are cheap and I think I've just shown you that even good ones are. In the end, it's all about implementation. How you ultimately convey that great idea. Work to master your craft, drill your skill set in both breath and depth, and understand its structure and fundamental purpose in the world. At that point your ideas will become more than just flights of fancy. They may just become masterpieces.

I hope you enjoy the program. For more information, questions, or concerns contact:
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