Collecting Ideas Worksheet

Mechanism

An idea collection ensures that you have your ideas available when you need them and that individual ideas can accumulate to allow larger or more complex creative projects.

Especially ideas generated by the discovery engine that occur during idle time (e.g., associative drift while walking or in the shower) are often for projects that are not immediately actionable. The collection preserves these ideas.

Collection means order and structure, which is needed for growth. This is more akin to an orchard than a wild garden. While there is something to be said for the latter, you can still browse an ordered collection. But you get easily lost in a wild garden and it is frustrating to lose sight of good ideas.

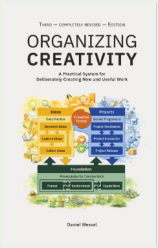
Applicability

This worksheet is useful if

- you do not yet collect your ideas externally, or
- you do collect ideas, but the friction is too high.

Skip if

- you already have a working collection, or
- the issue is execution of projects, not availability of ideas.



Chapter 9: Collecting Ideas

For a deeper look at collecting ideas and how it fits into your creative system, see Chapter 9.

Intervention Variables

The core functions of an idea collection (see Chapter 9) are:

- **Growth, Change, and Retrieval:** frictionless growth, effortless retrieval, flexible regarding content, adaptable, enable serendipity
- **Long-Term Usability:** trust, long-term ease of use, long-term availability, backups, access control

Note that a collection system is successful only if it lowers cognitive load. If it increases effort, it dies. That effort can easily be added externally by making the collection more complicated than it should be. For example, requiring meta information for entries such as categories, tags, etc.

Tools for different Types of Collections

While analog methods stay the same, the concrete *digital* ways of collecting ideas are subject to change, as new tools get developed and existing ones stop being supported.

There are lots of digital options, including specialized notes-management software (e.g., Obsidian), digital notebooks, wikis, and much more.

If pays to try out different software with a few ideas, until you have found something that works for you. Take care to check the core functions of the collection. Speed matters more than perhaps initially expected as its effects are cumulative. A handful of seconds add up quickly with intensive usage.

As of 2026, the following tools might work for you.

- **Minimalist:** Analog methods are pocket notebooks, index cards, ring binders. Digital methods are Files (e.g., text files with good editor, e.g., BBEdit, Notepad++, word processing documents) and Folders (e.g., Inbox and Sorted), or software such as Apple Notes or Obsidian.
- **Project-based:** Analog methods are dedicated project notebooks, paper folders, a stack of index cards, or a ring-bound planner to hold sketches, outlines, fragments, and working notes. The material stays physically together and the attention is on project itself. The binder or project notebook per major project can have dividers for sections like ideas, structure, fragments, problems, references, and decisions. Digital collections usually work better, e.g., by using Obsidian or (for writing) Scrivener. For individual projects, MindMap or Outliner software can be useful.
- **Network:** Analog methods are possible with index cards. This requires using Zettelkasten-style slip boxes, cross-references, tabs, and colored marks. However, it requires discipline, physical space, and a tolerance for slower retrieval. They also scale worse and search much worse than digital ones. They are usually best for people who genuinely think better through paper and do not mind maintaining the structure manually. Digital methods are usually better, e.g., using Obsidian.
- **Hybrid:** Analog methods are possible by combining forms. For example, notebooks for project work and index cards for recurring tensions. However, it does not scale well. Digital methods are much better, e.g., Obsidian.

Not surprisingly, given how frequently I have mentioned it, I can recommend **Obsidian** for a digital collection. It is available for free, stores information in markdown files (essentially text files) and folders, while offering a lot of options to structure the information in the app itself (e.g., links, tags, automated queries with dataview and much more). It works for any type of collection, minimalist, project-based, network, or hybrid. For more information, see https://www.organizingcreativity.com/2023/02/obsidian/ or https://www.organizingcreativity.com/2023/02/making-obsidian-useful/ .

Entering Information

Captured ideas have to end up in the collection and be understandable long-term. In addition to capturing the essence of the idea (see Capturing Ideas), the idea might need clearer phrasing to be understandable later.

If the collection contains too much noise, the entrance gate needs higher quality standards for what is worth keeping.

If entering ideas to the collection causes too much friction, a Collection Inbox allows for

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batch processing. Cascade sorting can be useful — first sort information in main categories (e.g., to which projects ideas belong), then sort them further. This allows you to enter ideas more quickly by having to open each respective page only once.

Structuring Entries

If entries are too confusing, structure can be added in the following ways:

Templates: For paper, just pre-print the default information on the index cards or ring-binder pages, for digital, there are usually options for creating page templates.

For example, the box on the right shows a possible template for a project in Obsidian. *r:* is for links to related ideas or projects, *c:* for contrasting ideas or projects. The information with > is a fold-in box that contains variables for dataview tables. The project starts as peripheral project and has markdown headers (#) for the default categories (Obsidian has an outline view that allows for easy navigation). If the project becomes a central or core project, additional headers can be added with templates as well.

Reducing Duplicate Items: If multiple entries refer to the same content (e.g., an image) then links are usually the better option. If you change the content, you do not need to do it in all instances, just in one place. One advantage of Obsidian is that you can embed media on pages via links. This way, the same media file (e.g., an image) can be shown on multiple pages. Not only does it not take up additional space, as it would if you insert the same image in different Microsoft Word documents, a change in the image automatically changes it on all pages.

Tags: Tags are keywords that can be very useful for organizing — or add unnecessary overhead. For example, you can tag ideas or projects with tags such as «*cars*», «*inventors*», etc. In contrast to folders or categories, tags are much more flexible. You can search for tags, using automated queries to show lists of pages with specific tags, display tag clouds, etc. Some tools allow hierarchical tags, e.g., «*creatives*» with sub-tags «*inventors*» and «*painters*». As tagging takes too much time, effort, and discipline for a «nice to have», only use them if you genuinely need them. A tag list or autocomplete is useful to avoid synonyms (e.g., using both «*authors*» and «*writers*» accidentally) and tag plurality drift, e.g., mixing «*car*» with «*cars*».

Structuring the Collection

If the collection becomes too confusing, you can try the following:

Overview pages: Overviews or hub pages are essential to make the collection easy to navigate. Even if the pages of the collection are not stored hierarchically — e.g., in folders and subfolders — you can create that hierarchy. Just the names of the pages in a hierarchical structure, e.g.:

```
Sewing Ideas
  - Trousers
    - Back Pocket Decoration
    - Cargo Pocket Extension
  - T-Shirt
    - Logo Stitching
  ...
```

In digital collections, you can use links to the pages, in analog collections add the folder name or page number. These overviews can also be alphabetical, thematic, or chronological.

Automated Overviews: Some digital collections allow for automated overviews. For example, the Dataview plugin of Obsidian can create lists or tables based on the properties of individual files or defined variables. This way, you can easily create overviews of, e.g., all central projects. Some software provides overviews of missing files (you referenced, e.g., an image, that no longer exists) and orphaned files (e.g., you created a page but there is no link to that file in the collection).

Graph Views: Some digital collections, e.g., Obsidian, allow graph views. You see how the pages connect to each other.

Backlog Files: Not every idea needs its own page. Collection pages avoid having lots of files with only a few words in them (see Figure 1). As these are peripheral ideas, they just contain a few lines of text. Using headers for the idea names, they are shown in Obsidian's outline view for easy page navigation. If an idea gets too large, the content can simply be copied in its own file.

Media Folders: Some digital collections allow you to add media (e.g., images, audio files, videos, other document formats such as PDF or Microsoft Word files) to a media folder. You can then link these files on the pages. Over time, the amount of media files can become hard to navigate. Differentiating between media formats (e.g., images, text documents, videos) and using subfolders by year can be helpful. For example:

Example: Project Template in Obsidian

```
PROJECT
====================
*r:*
*c:*

> [! project]- Status Information
> CreativeArea::
> ProjectStatus:: peripheral
> DateFinished:: open
> Image:: ![[tempimage.png]]
> Description:: add
> TargetAudience:: add
> ImpactText:: add
> ImpactScore:: 0
> FeasibilityText:: add
> FeasibilityScore:: 0
> ROIText:: add
> ROIScore:: 0

Next: add `_ central` and `_ core`

# Input



# Goal/General Idea



# Inspiration



# eof
```

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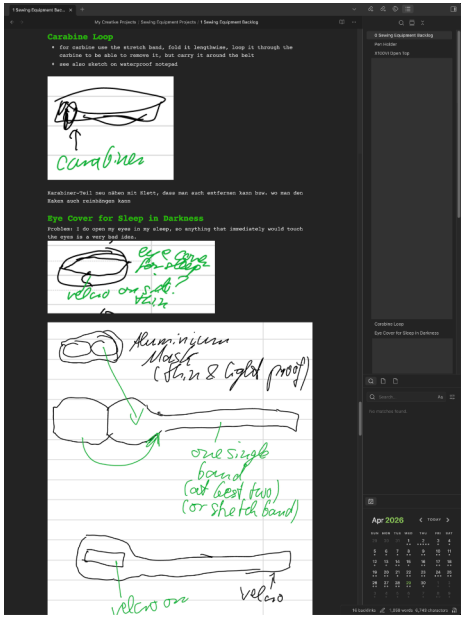

Figure 1: Example of a Backlog File in Obsidian (for Sewing Equipment Ideas)

start with one folder and one text file, or try out a software such as Obsidian. Design a trial with the Integration Worksheet. Just don't create your collection on a drawing board, start collecting and let it grow.

Be careful with tags or additional organizational overhead — they can work very well for some people, but can also become additional friction or displacement behavior. Avoid making the collection the focus, an idea dump, dead weight, or used for everything.

If you want to improve the structure of your collection, assess whether the problem occurred in the first place. Do the ideas need better phrasing? Do you need a clearer structure (e.g., overview pages) to add them in the right place? If so, improve the structure first, then try it out with the next ideas you have. That trial will show you whether it worked. Regular reminders to check the structure of the collection might be useful.

Hand-Off

A working collection is essential for larger creative projects. Look at how you collect your ideas and — if needed — improve it in a trial. If it is just available when you need your ideas and allows for projects to grow, allowing you to realize more higher quality projects you are doing it right.

Interesting Software

The following software might be useful for a digital idea collection:

Notes Management Systems (for any type of collection)

- **Obsidian:** https://obsidian.md

Text Editors (if you use minimalist text files and folders)

- **BBEdit (Mac):** https://www.barebones.com/products/bbedit
- **Notepad++ (Windows):** https://notepad-plus-plus.org

Writing Projects (if you use project-based collection for books)

- **Scrivener:** https://www.literatureandlatte.com