Are you: Bored in the house, & you’re in the house bored?

How boredom can lead to your most brilliant ideas (TED Talk Transcript) Published: April 2017

**Step 1:** Use descriptive language, imagery and figurative language if you can--simile, metaphor, personification-- to describe how bored you are. Have fun with this prompt and be creative!

*Ex:* (Everything underlined is an example of descriptive language and/or figurative language)

*When I’m bored, I’m hungry. But not like a normal hungry where I could just eat some nachos, but like stomach growling like a lion hungry. Where I want the loaded nachos with beef, dripping nacho cheese overflowing the plate, soft and creamy sour cream like little clouds, the hot diced jalapeno ready to set my mouth on fire, and last but definitely not least, spicy chunky salsa. Man, I’m hungry.*

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**Step 2:** Watch/Read the TED Talk below to understand the effects of boredom. You can find the video here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c73Q8oQmwzo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c73Q8oQmwzo)

00:00 My son and the iPhone were born three weeks apart in June 2007. So while those early adopters were lined up outside, waiting to get their hands on this amazing new gadget, I was stuck at home with my hands full of something else that was sending out constant notifications -

00:25 a miserable, colicky baby who would only sleep in a moving stroller with complete silence. I literally was walking 10 to 15 miles a day, and the baby weight came off. That part was great.

00:40 But man, was I bored. Before motherhood, I had been a journalist who rushed off when the Concorde crashed. I was one of the first people into Belgrade when there was a revolution in Serbia. Now, I was exhausted. This walking went on for weeks. It was only until about three months in that something shifted, though. As I pounded the pavement, my mind started to wander, too. I began imagining what I would do when I finally did sleep again.

01:13 So the colic did fade, and I finally got an iPhone and I put all those hours of wandering into action. I created my dream job hosting a public radio show. So there was no more rushing off to war zones, but thanks to my new smartphone, I could be a mother and a journalist. I could be on the playground and on Twitter at the
same time. Yeah, well, when I thought that, when the technology came in and took over, that is when I hit a wall.

01:43 So, I want you to picture this: you host a podcast, and you have to prove that the investment of precious public radio dollars in you is worth it. My goal was to increase my audience size tenfold. So one day, I sat down to brainstorm, as you do, and I came up barren. This was different than writer's block, right? It wasn't like there was something there waiting to be unearthed. There was just nothing. And so I started to think back: When was the last time I actually had a good idea? Yeah, it was when I was pushing that damn stroller. Now all the cracks in my day were filled with phone time. I checked the headlines while I waited for my latte. I updated my calendar while I was sitting on the couch. Texting turned every spare moment into a chance to show to my coworkers and my dear husband what a responsive person I was, or at least it was a chance to find another perfect couch for my page on Pinterest. I realized that I was never bored. And anyway, don't only boring people get bored?

02:48 But then I started to wonder: What actually happens to us when we get bored? Or, more importantly: What happens to us if we never get bored? And what could happen if we got rid of this human emotion entirely? I started talking to neuroscientists and cognitive psychologists, and what they told me was fascinating. It turns out that when you get bored, you ignite a network in your brain called the "default mode." So our body, it goes on autopilot while we're folding the laundry or we're walking to work, but actually that is when our brain gets really busy. Here's boredom researcher Dr. Sandi Mann.

03:27 (Audio) Dr. Sandi Mann: Once you start daydreaming and allow your mind to really wander, you start thinking a little bit beyond the conscious, a little bit into the subconscious, which allows sort of different connections to take place. It's really awesome, actually.

03:41 Manoush Zomorodi: Totally awesome, right?

03:43 So this is my brain in an fMRI, and I learned that in the default mode is when we connect disparate ideas, we solve some of our most nagging problems, and we do something called "autobiographical planning." This is when we look back at our lives, we take note of the big moments, we create a personal narrative, and then we set goals and we figure out what steps we need to take to reach them. But now we chill out on the couch also while updating a Google Doc or replying to email. We call it "getting shit done," but here's what neuroscientist Dr. Daniel Levitin says we're actually doing.

04:19 (Audio) Dr. Daniel Levitin: Every time you shift your attention from one thing to another, the brain has to engage a neurochemical switch that uses up nutrients in the brain to accomplish that. So if you're attempting to multitask, you know, doing four or five things at once, you're not actually doing four or five things at once, because the brain doesn't work that way. Instead, you're rapidly shifting from one thing to the next, depleting neural resources as you go.

04:43 (Audio) MZ: So switch, switch, switch, you're using glucose, glucose, glucose.

04:47 (Audio) DL: Exactly right, and we have a limited supply of that stuff.
MZ: A decade ago, we shifted our attention at work every three minutes. Now we do it every 45 seconds, and we do it all day long. The average person checks email 74 times a day, and switches tasks on their computer 566 times a day. I discovered all this talking to professor of informatics, Dr. Gloria Mark.

Dr. Gloria Mark: So we find that when people are stressed, they tend to shift their attention more rapidly. We also found, strangely enough, that the shorter the amount of sleep that a person gets, the more likely they are to check Facebook. So we're in this vicious, habitual cycle.

MZ: But could this cycle be broken? What would happen if we broke this vicious cycle? Maybe my listeners could help me find out. What if we reclaimed those cracks in our day? Could it help us jump-start our creativity? We called the project "Bored and Brilliant." And I expected, you know, a couple hundred people to play along, but thousands of people started signing up. And they told me the reason they were doing it was because they were worried that their relationship with their phone had grown kind of ... "codependent," shall we say.

Man: The relationship between a baby and its teddy bear or a baby and its binky or a baby that wants its mother's cradle when it's done with being held by a stranger --

Woman: I think of my phone like a power tool: extremely useful, but dangerous if I'm not handling it properly.

Woman 2: If I don't pay close attention, I'll suddenly realize that I've lost an hour of time doing something totally mindless.

MZ: OK, but to really measure any improvement, we needed data, right? Because that's what we do these days. So we partnered with some apps that would measure how much time we were spending every day on our phone. If you're thinking it's ironic that I asked people to download another app so that they would spend less time on their phones: yeah, but you gotta meet people where they are.

So before challenge week, we were averaging two hours a day on our phones and 60 pickups, you know, like, a quick check, did I get a new email? Here's what Tina, a student at Bard College, discovered about herself.

Tina: So far, I've been spending between 150 and 200 minutes on my phone per day, and I've been picking up my phone 70 to 100 times per day. And it's really concerning, because that's so much time that I could have spent doing something more productive, more creative, more towards myself, because when I'm on my phone, I'm not doing anything important.

MZ: Like Tina, people were starting to observe their own behavior. They were getting ready for challenge week. And that Monday, they started to wake up to instructions in their inbox, an experiment to try.

Day one: "Put it in your pocket." Take that phone out of your hand. See if you can eliminate the reflex to check it all day long, just for a day. And if this sounds easy, you haven't tried it. Here's listener Amanda Itzko.
08:08 (Audio) Amanda Itzko: I am absolutely itching. I feel a little bit crazy, because I have noticed that I pick up my phone when I'm just walking from one room to another, getting on the elevator, and even -- and this is the part that I am really embarrassed to actually say out loud -- in the car.

08:31 MZ: Yikes. Yeah, well, but as Amanda learned, this itching feeling is not actually her fault. That is exactly the behavior that the technology is built to trigger.

08:47 I mean, right? Here's former Google designer, Tristan Harris.

08:52 (Audio) Tristan Harris: If I'm Facebook or I'm Netflix or I'm Snapchat, I have literally a thousand engineers whose job is to get more attention from you. I'm very good at this, and I don't want you to ever stop. And you know, the CEO of Netflix recently said, "Our biggest competitors are Facebook, YouTube and sleep." I mean, so there's a million places to spend your attention, but there's a war going on to get it.

09:14 MZ: I mean, you know the feeling: that amazing episode of "Transparent" ends, and then the next one starts playing so you're like, eh, OK fine, I'll just stay up and watch it. Or the LinkedIn progress bar says you are this close to having the perfect profile, so you add a little more personal information. As one UX designer told me, the only people who refer to their customers as "users" are drug dealers and technologists.

09:46 And users, as we know, are worth a lot of money. Here's former Facebook product manager and author, Antonio García Martínez.

09:57 (Audio) Antonio García Martínez: The saying is, if any product is free then you're the product; your attention is the product. But what is your attention worth? That's why literally every time you load a page, not just on Facebook or any app, there's an auction being held instantly, billions of times a day, for exactly how much that one ad impression cost.

10:13 MZ: By the way, the average person will spend two years of their life on Facebook. So, back to challenge week. Immediately, we saw some creativity kick in. Here's New Yorker Lisa Alpert.

10:26 (Audio) Lisa Alpert: I was bored, I guess. So I suddenly looked at the stairway that went up to the top of the station, and I thought, you know, I had just come down that stairway, but I could go back up and then come back down and get a little cardio. So I did, and then I had a little more time, so I did it again and I did it again, and I did it 10 times. And I had a complete cardio workout. I got on that R train feeling kind of exhausted, but, like, wow, that had never occurred to me. How is that possible?

10:57 MZ: So creativity, I learned, means different things to different people.

11:02 But everyone found day three's challenge the hardest. It was called "Delete that app." Take that app -- you know the one; that one that always gets you, it sucks you in -- take it off your phone, even if just for the day. I deleted the game Two Dots and nearly cried.
Yeah, Two Dots players know what I'm talking about. But my misery had good company.

(Audio) Man 2: This is Liam in Los Angeles, and I deleted Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, Snapchat and Vine from my phone in one fell swoop. And it was kind of an embarrassingly emotional experience at first. It felt weirdly lonely to look at that lock screen with no new notifications on it. But I really liked deciding for myself when to think about or access my social networks, not giving my phone the power to decide that for me. So thank you.

(Audio) Woman 3: Deleting the Twitter app was very sad, and I feel I maybe, over the last year when I've been on Twitter, have developed an addiction to it, and this "Bored and Brilliant" challenge has really made me realize it. After a brief period of really horrible withdrawal feeling, like lack-of-caffeine headache, I now feel lovely. I had a lovely dinner with my family, and I hope to continue this structured use of these powerful tools.

(Audio) Woman 4: I don't have that guilty gut feeling I have when I know I'm wasting time on my phone. Maybe I'll have to start giving myself challenges and reminders like this every morning.

MZ: I mean, yes, this was progress. I could not wait to see what the numbers said at the end of that week. But when the data came in, it turned out that we had cut down, on average, just six minutes -- from 120 minutes a day on our phones to 114. Yeah. Whoop-de-do.

So I went back to the scientists feeling kind of low, and they just laughed at me, and they said, you know, changing people's behavior in such a short time period was ridiculously ambitious, and actually what you've achieved is far beyond what we thought possible. Because more important than the numbers, were the people's stories. They felt empowered. Their phones had been transformed from taskmasters back into tools.

And actually, I found what the young people said most intriguing. Some of them told me that they didn't recognize some of the emotions that they felt during challenge week, because, if you think about it, if you have never known life without connectivity, you may never have experienced boredom. And there could be consequences. Researchers at USC have found -- they're studying teenagers who are on social media while they're talking to their friends or they're doing homework, and two years down the road, they are less creative and imaginative about their own personal futures and about solving societal problems, like violence in their neighborhoods. And we really need this next generation to be able to focus on some big problems: climate change, economic disparity, massive cultural differences. No wonder CEOs in an IBM survey identified creativity as the number one leadership competency.

OK, here's the good news, though: In the end, 20,000 people did "Bored and Brilliant" that week. Ninety percent cut down on their minutes. Seventy percent got more time to think. People told me that they slept better. They felt happier. My favorite note was from a guy who said he felt like he was waking up from a mental hibernation.

Some personal data and some neuroscience gave us permission to be offline a little bit more, and a little bit of boredom gave us some clarity and helped some of us set some goals. I mean, maybe constant connectivity won't be cool in a couple of years. But meanwhile, teaching people, especially kids, how to use technology to improve their lives and to self-regulate needs to be part of digital literacy.
So the next time you go to check your phone, remember that if you don't decide how you're going to use the technology, the platforms will decide for you. And ask yourself: What am I really looking for? Because if it's to check email, that's fine -- do it and be done. But if it's to distract yourself from doing the hard work that comes with deeper thinking, take a break, stare out the window and know that by doing nothing you are actually being your most productive and creative self. It might feel weird and uncomfortable at first, but boredom truly can lead to brilliance.

**Step 3:** Answer the following questions about the speech. Consider how and why the speech was given.

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<tr>
<th>What is the title of the TED Talk?</th>
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<th>When was this TED Talk published?</th>
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What is the main idea or purpose of this TED Talk?  
Who is the intended audience for this TED Talk?

The TED Talk opens up with an anecdote (a personal story). Why is this a good hook for the TED Talk?

What happens with our brains when we get bored? Copy specific evidence from the text to support.

Explain how and why being bored might actually be good for people.
**Step 4: Bored and Brilliant Challenge:** Put away all devices, TV, music, game systems for 5 minutes. Time yourself. After those 5 minutes choose 2 of the following options to complete a written response to.

| 1. Reflect on past decisions and choices. Do you regret doing anything? Do you regret not doing something? |
| 2. Think about different ways you can make your current situation more positive. We all know quarantine is pretty boring. What can you do to make it better? |
| 3. Envision your ideal life 10 years from now. What do you hope your life looks like at all of these milestones? How old will you be? What will you have accomplished? Where will you be living? What will you be doing? |
| 4. Set 3-5 short-term (can be accomplished immediately, or relatively soon) goals for yourself and think about how you can accomplish them. These can be school related or personal goals. Anything you want to achieve. |
| 5. Set long-term goals (something that takes awhile to accomplish. Like becoming a doctor) for yourself and think about how these goals will help you achieve your ideal life. |
| 6. Let your creativity flow! Write a poem or song. Please keep the language pg-13 |
| 8. Let your creativity flow. Create something visual. Draw a picture |
| 9. Service. Empower yourself through service. Ask someone in your home what you can do to help them at the moment. Record who you asked and what their response was. Did you actually help them? What did you do for them? How did it make you feel to do something for someone else? |

**Choice #________** Use the space below to record your response to the prompt.

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**Circle one:** CHS/Richards  WHS/Seldon  WHS/Edwards  ALC/Miller
**Choice #_____** Use the space below to record your response to the prompt.