TWYLA THARP
THE CREATIVE HABIT
LEARN IT AND USE IT FOR LIFE

—The New York Times Book Review
Floating fears from paralyzing you before you’ve begun. When I feel that sense of dread, I try to make it as specific as possible. Let me tell you my five big fears:

1. People will laugh at me.
2. Someone has done it before.
3. I have nothing to say.
4. I will upset someone I love.
5. Once executed, the idea will never be as good as it is in my mind.

These are mighty demons, but they’re hardly unique to me. You probably share some. If I let them, they’ll shut down my impulses (“No, you can’t do that!”) and perhaps turn off the spigots of creativity altogether. So I combat my fears with a staring-down ritual, like a boxer looking his opponent right in the eye before a bout.

1. People will laugh at me? Not the people I respect; they haven’t yet, and they’re not going to start now. (Some others have. London’s Evening Standard from 1966: “Three girls, one of them named Twyla Tharp, appeared at the Albert Hall last evening and threatened to do the same tonight.” So what? Thirty-seven years later I’m still here.)
Your Creative Autobiography

1. What is the first creative moment you remember?
2. Was anyone there to witness or appreciate it?
3. What is the best idea you've ever had?
4. What made it great in your mind?
5. What is the dumbest idea?
6. What made it stupid?
7. Can you connect the dots that led you to this idea?
8. What is your creative ambition?
9. What are the obstacles to this ambition?
10. What are the vital steps to achieving this ambition?
11. How do you begin your day?
12. What are your habits? What patterns do you repeat?
13. Describe your first successful creative act.
14. Describe your second successful creative act.
15. Compare them.
16. What are your attitudes toward: money, power, praise, rivals, work, play?
17. Which artists do you admire most?
18. Why are they your role models?
19. What do you and your role models have in common?
20. Does anyone in your life regularly inspire you?
21. Who is your muse?
22. Define muse.
23. When confronted with superior intelligence or talent, how do you respond?
24. When faced with stupidity, hostility, intransigence, laziness, or indifference in others, how do you respond?
25. When faced with impending success or the threat of failure, how do you respond?
26. When you work, do you love the process or the result?
27. At what moments do you feel your reach exceeds your grasp?
28. What is your ideal creative activity?
29. What is your greatest fear?
30. What is the likelihood of either of the answers to the previous two questions happening?
31. Which of your answers would you most like to change?
32. What is your idea of mastery?
33. What is your greatest dream?
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<tr>
<th>Muse</th>
<th>Genre</th>
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<td>Calliope</td>
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When I'm considering my own skills, I break them down into categories:

**Musical skill:**
an understanding of musical structure and history.

**Dramatic skill:**
a sense of what will make people care, with a dollop of daring and flair that surprises people and qualifies as showmanship.

**Painterly skill:**
the ability to conceive images in two dimensions, which is very much like creating the balances and proportions in a painting.

**Sculptural skill:**
adding depth and a sense of mass to the painterly skill.

**Psychological skill:**
knowing the strategies and techniques to get people to do what you want done.

**Design skill:**
having enough knowledge and taste to communicate collaboratively with set, lighting, and costume designers.

**Theatrical skill:**
knowing how to sustain the peaks and valleys once you get moving in the right direction.
Temporal skill:
feeling time in your gut, so you know when a scene or phrase has gone on long enough.

Motivational skill:
making people want to work with you and for you.

Entrepreneurial skill:
getting the project up in front of people.

Promotional skill:
keeping it going after the first performance.

Athletic skill:
knowing as much as possible about how the body works and moves.

Literary skill:
having a sense of beginning, middle, and end.
1. From what direction is the light coming?
2. What is the elevation?
3. What trees are native to the area?
4. Where is the nearest source of water?
5. What animals are likely to be in view?
6. What season is it?
7. What’s the weather?
8. Are you looking down, across, or up?
9. What crops are being cultivated, if any?
10. Are there towns or villages or cities in view?
11. Why are you there?
12. What is attractive about the setting?
13. Is the wind blowing?
14. How much sky can you see?
15. What’s behind you that might affect the view?
16. What color predominates in your mind’s eye?
17. How many shades of that color do you see in the region?
18. Are other people a part of the image? Who?
19. Are you imagining it today, or at some past or future time?
20. What is the frame of the image?