

# STAYING CREATIVE DURING CRISIS

A GUIDE FOR ART, ARCHITECTURE, AND DESIGN STUDENTS



This guide was developed by the Teaching and Learning Committee in the School of Architecture and Design in coordination with counselors at LAU.

When your brain is under threat, it prioritizes safety over creativity. This is a neurobiological response, not a personal failure. These techniques are designed to help you gently restart your creative process when stress, fatigue, or uncertainty make it difficult to focus or begin.

## Switch from “create something good” to “create something small”

COME UP WITH 3 CONCEPT WORDS INSTEAD OF A FULL IDEA

- Pick any 3 words that feel right, even randomly
- Use them as a guide, not a rule
- Start sketching based on what those words could look like

### Use the “bad ideas first” rule

Intentionally produce 3 imperfect ideas. Bad ideas first mean letting yourself begin with 3 rough or imperfect ideas so you can get unstuck and slowly build toward a stronger one.

Your first ideas do not need to be good. They just need to exist.

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## When you feel stuck and can't start, Use small “open loops”

TRY NOT TO SOLVE THE WHOLE PROJECT AT ONCE.

Focus on one small step at a time. Starting something small creates a natural urge to continue and then, your brain shifts from feeling overwhelmed to being engaged.

### Try this:

- “I will only sketch one small part and stop”
  - “I will open the file and draw one idea”
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## When your thoughts feel scattered, Use an “external brain”

TRY NOT TO KEEP EVERYTHING IN YOUR HEAD.

### What helps:

- Write everything down immediately: ideas, tasks, feedback...
- Use paper, sticky notes, or simple lists

This frees your mind from remembering and gives you more space to focus on designing.

## When you can't get into focus mode, Create a mental trigger

YOUR BRAIN NEEDS SIGNALS TO SWITCH INTO “WORK MODE”

### Try using one specific scent only when studying:

- gum
- tea
- essential oil

This will help your brain link that scent with focus and over time, it becomes easier to enter the creative mindset.

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## When concentration keeps breaking, Work with interruptions

YOU'RE IN AN UNSTABLE ENVIRONMENT, SO DEEP FOCUS ISN'T REALISTIC.

### Try using “restart rituals”; same action every time you return:

Structured re-entry reduces cognitive switching costs

- Open the same playlist
  - Review last 3 notes
  - Keep a “next step note” before stopping: “Next, I will fix the entrance layout”
  - Work in short cycles (20–30 min)
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## When progress feels too small, Track micro-wins

SMALL STEPS STILL COUNT, ESPECIALLY IN CRISIS.

### Try writing 3 things you did each day:

- opened your project
- found inspiration
- made a small sketch

This helps make progress visible and builds motivation through consistency.

## When emotions feel too heavy, Create emotional distance safely

YOU DON'T NEED TO CREATE FROM YOUR CURRENT EMOTIONS.

### Alternative approaches:

- Design from external references instead of internal feelings: nature, geometry, historical styles...
- Use a “character lens”, ask yourself: “If I were designing for someone else, what would they need?”

This reduces emotional overload while preserving creativity.

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## When projects feel meaningless, Reconnect to purpose differently

THAT FEELING: “THIS ISN'T LIFE OR DEATH”, IS VERY REAL IN CRISIS CONTEXTS.

### Instead of forcing meaning, shift the question:

From “Why does this matter?” to “What skill am I building through this?”

### Or reframe your project as a form of resistance:

When you keep creating despite the chaos, you are refusing to let crisis take away who you are.

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## When peer feedback disappears, Recreate it intentionally

YOU LOST SPONTANEOUS STUDIO INTERACTION, SO YOU REBUILD IT ON PURPOSE.

### Practical solutions:

- Create a small peer circle (2–3 people max)
- Weekly 20-min check-ins
- Use voice notes instead of long messages

## When guilt shows up, Name it

FEELING GUILTY FOR STUDYING DURING CRISIS IS COMMON. BUT GUILT IS A SIGNAL, NOT A GUIDE.

### Reframe gently:

- Continuing your work ≠ ignoring others' suffering
- You can hold two realities at once: “People are suffering” & “I am allowed to continue my life”

### Helpful mindset:

Your education is part of your long-term contribution and stopping everything does not reduce others' pain.

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## When your body feels tense, Reset before creating

CREATIVITY WORKS BETTER WHEN YOUR BODY FEELS SAFE

### Try this:

- Hold something heavy (books, bag) on your lap
- Splash cold water on your face or hold ice briefly

This calms your physical stress response making it easier to think clearly and explore ideas.

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## If things feel too heavy, Small support matters

YOU DON'T NEED FULL THERAPY TO BENEFIT FROM SUPPORT.

You can always check in with the university counselors. Even one conversation can help regulate overwhelm.

### Remember:

You're trying to do something extremely difficult: create, imagine, and plan, in a context that constantly reminds you of uncertainty.

So, the goal is not to be as creative as before but it's to be creatively adaptive under pressure.