



## Episode 6: Oblique strategies for creativity

This is the transcript for Episode 6 of the Smart Startup English Podcast.

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Hello and welcome to the Smart Startup English Podcast.

I want you to imagine this! We are leading a marketing project for a brand new product. And we need to make this new product stand out from the competition. When I say stand out, I mean it should be easy to notice, it should get your attention quickly.

Today, I am going to introduce to you a tool for solving problems and generating ideas called OBLIQUE STRATEGIES. In this case, oblique means to come at the problem from another angle, to look at the problem in a strange or unexpected way.

Oblique strategies are ways to approach problems when you get stuck. People working on creative projects often use this tool to help them get unstuck - that is, to find a solution to their problem.

Writers who suffer from writer's block, which is when they don't know what to write next, can use this tool to help them get some inspiration.

You can use this strategy for a lot of problems you might face, in business, personal life or anything really. It's something you can use while brainstorming during a project, or just when you encounter a problem. The goal is to generate (that is, create) a lot of ideas so that *at least one* of them will help you move forward. It will help you get UNstuck.

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So let me give you some examples of an oblique strategy. Typically they are just a phrase or idea that on its own might not make much sense. It could be something like:

“Do it backwards” or

“Elephants CAN fly” or

“Remember those quiet mornings...”

Do you get the idea?

Oblique strategies tend to be quite abstract, or weird, unusual, and almost never have anything to do with the problem. But that’s actually the point.

By trying to solve the problem in a strange or unique way, you can come up with a lot of ideas quickly - ideas that you may never have thought of any other way.

Now let’s go back to our example and I’ll demonstrate (or show you) how to use oblique strategies.

We have this new product that we need to market. And we want it to stand out and be noticed more than our competitors’.

Let’s say the product is a new fancy coffee mug. So to get started, we need to know the rules of the strategy. First, we need a long list of oblique strategies. We won’t use all of them, we just want to be able to choose some at random. There are some websites and flashcards out there with lots of these already made.

We’ll link to some in the show notes.

We start by picking one oblique strategy at random. The only rule is this: you must find a way to apply the oblique strategy, no matter how hard it seems. It’s ok if it isn’t the best solution, we just need different ideas. The more we have, the better.

So now I am going to a website that gives me a random strategy that I have never seen before, and it gives me:

“Focus on the most embarrassing details”

Ok. Focus on the embarrassing details, or the parts we usually hide because we are ashamed... Well, that is definitely oblique.

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Normally, you would never want to do this in marketing, but that's what makes this strategy oblique. It's not the normal way of trying to solve the problem.

So to try this, I would say I could take a close-up picture of the bottom of the mug handle. No one looks at that part of the mug. Then maybe, uh, I could slowly zoom out to show the handle curve.

It might be awkward, but maybe it will be interesting.

So that's **one** idea. Now, to make the most of this tool, we would do that maybe 10 more times. Just pick a random strategy, try to make it into a solution. Then write down the idea and then do another, and another. Until we have lots of ideas, and hopefully some really good ones.

Some people might feel like "oh, I'm just not creative" or "oh she's so creative, I can't come up with ideas like that".

But creativity is not some talent that you either have or don't have. Creativity is a skill that anyone can learn. The more you practice, the better you get. Just like learning a language.

Oblique strategies is a really great tool for learning to be creative. By repeating the exercise, you will find it gets easier to come up with ideas, and the ideas get better and more interesting. And don't be afraid to try weird ideas. It's better than being stuck on a problem with no ideas at all.

I hope you will try some oblique strategies this week, and be sure to have some fun with it.

With that, I leave you with one oblique strategy to apply to whatever you are working on right now. Ready?

"Do it backwards."

**Let's look at some vocabulary we've covered in this episode.**

If something **stands out**, it is easy to notice

When you're **generating** ideas, you're creating ideas, coming up with new ideas.

**Oblique** means at a different angle.

When you're **getting unstuck**, it means you're finding the solution to a problem you've had.

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If you have **writer's block**, that means you can't come up with a new idea to write about. Or using a word we've already explained, you can't **generate** new ideas.

**Demonstrate** means to show.

And finally, **embarrassing** means something that makes you feel ashamed.

**And here's your speaking practice task for today:**

What do **you** do when you're stuck on a problem and you want to get **unstuck**?

That's it for this episode of Smart Startup English. Don't forget to subscribe to our podcast. And if you want to keep in touch, go to [SmartStartupEnglish.com](https://SmartStartupEnglish.com) and sign up for our newsletter. When you sign up, you'll get free access to transcripts and worksheets based on every episode. And you'll be the first to know when we release new episodes.

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