

# SCAMPER

SCAMPER is a technique you can use to spark your creativity and help you overcome any challenge you may be facing. In essence, SCAMPER is a general-purpose checklist with idea-spurring questions – which is both easy to use and surprisingly powerful. It was created by Bob Eberle in the early 70s, and it definitely stood the test of time.

Since it can often be difficult to come up with new ideas when you're trying to develop or improve a product or service, creative brainstorming techniques like SCAMPER can help. This tool helps you generate ideas for new solutions, products, or services by encouraging you to think about how you could improve existing ones.

**SCAMPER** is a mnemonic that stands for:

- **S**ubstitute.
- **C**ombine.
- **A**dapt.
- **M**odify.
- **P**ut to another use.
- **E**liminate.
- **R**everse.

To use the SCAMPER technique, first state the problem you'd like to solve or the idea you'd like to develop. It can be anything: a challenge in your personal life or business; or maybe a product, service or process you want to improve. After pinpointing the challenge, it's then a matter of asking questions about it using the SCAMPER checklist to guide you.

Consider, for instance, the problem "How can I improve my study habits?"

Following the SCAMPER recipe, here are a few questions you could ask:

- **S (Substitute):** "What can I substitute in my study habits?"
- **C (Combine):** "How can I combine studying with other activities?"
- **A (Adapt):** "What can I adapt or copy from someone else's study habits?"
- **M (Magnify):** "What can I magnify or put more emphasis on when studying?"
- **P (Put to Other Uses):** "How can I put my studying to other uses?"
- **E (Eliminate):** "What can I eliminate or simplify in my study habits?"
- **R (Rearrange):** "How can I change, reorder or reverse the way I study?"

These questions force you to think differently about your problem and eventually come up with innovative solutions.

**EXAMPLE QUESTIONS:**

Let's look at some of the questions you could ask for each letter of the SCAMPER mnemonic:

**Substitute**

- What materials or resources can you substitute or swap to improve the product?
- What other product or process could you use?
- What rules could you substitute?
- Can you use this product somewhere else, or as a substitute for something else?
- What will happen if you change your feelings or attitude toward this product?

**Combine**

- What would happen if you combined this product with another, to create something new?
- What if you combined purposes or objectives?
- What could you combine to maximize the uses of this product?
- How could you combine talent and resources to create a new approach to this product?

**Adapt**

- How could you adapt or readjust this product to serve another purpose or use?
- What else is the product like?
- Who or what could you emulate to adapt this product?
- What else is like your product?
- What other context could you put your product into?
- What other products or ideas could you use for inspiration?

**Modify**

- How could you change the shape, look, or feel of your product?
- What could you add to modify this product?
- What could you emphasize or highlight to create more value?
- What element of this product could you strengthen to create something new?

**Put to Another Use**

- Can you use this product somewhere else, perhaps in another industry?
- Who else could use this product?
- How would this product behave differently in another setting?
- Could you recycle the waste from this product to make something new?

**Eliminate**

- How could you streamline or simplify this product?
- What features, parts, or rules could you eliminate?
- What could you understate or tone down?
- How could you make it smaller, faster, lighter, or more fun?
- What would happen if you took away part of this product? What would you have in its place?

**Reverse**

- What would happen if you reversed this process or sequenced things differently?
- What if you try to do the exact opposite of what you're trying to do now?
- What components could you substitute to change the order of this product?
- What roles could you reverse or swap?
- How could you reorganize this product?

## SCAMPER - seven tools to being creative

"Companies are increasingly falling into two categories - those that are innovative and those who go out of business" Dan Branda

CEO HP Canada

A company should never be satisfied with its products and services. You must always be innovating. Hewlett Packard began with \$500 in cash and recently hit the \$25 B sales mark. To be more creative use the SCAMPER tool.

**Substitute:** Substitute one of the components for some other material. Automotive manufacturers substituted plastic for metal to reduce weight to improve mileage. They are now substituting with lighter stronger steel. Look at the construction industry where materials have been substituted for cement, metal, wood and plastic. E.g. metal studs, plastic pipes, wood foundations...

**Combine:** Combine two or more concepts that do not normally go together. The Earl of Sandwich slapped a piece of meat on a slice of bread centuries ago and created the sandwich. Guttenburg changed the world when he combined a wine press with a coin stamp creating the first printing press which spawned the first information age. Walk down the soup aisle at the grocery store to see some unusual combinations.

**Adapt:** Zenon Environmental adapted nature's principle of osmosis to create a water purification system which is sold around the world. A Swiss inventor discovered the principle of hooks and loops by observing how burs clung to clothing, then adapted that to create Velcro. Individuals who are downsized learn to adapt their skills as entrepreneurs.

**Modify - Minimize/ Maximize:** Chrysler launched the successful mini-van by making vans a little smaller. Retail was revitalized by making stores bigger with the big box store. Radio maximizes news content to become a 24 hr news station. The blossoming investment market is the result of people attempting to maximize their retirement wealth. Health and beauty services and products promise to minimize the effects of aging.

**Put to another use:** After SPAR Aerospace sold NASA all the Canadarms that were needed, they looked around for another market. They put their arm to another use by selling it as a backhoe for use by the US military in cleaning up old missile silo sites. I remember watching the TV show McIver to see what new use he would create for duct tape.

**Erase - eliminate:** Take out the parts that don't add value. Food companies do this with Caffeine-free, no-salt, and sugarless. Eliminate excess packing to reduce costs and environmental waste. Remove steps in the process that annoys customers. A buyer for a medium sized institution told me they achieved a better price than a much larger buyer because they eliminated unnecessary paperwork in the transaction.

**Reverse - rearrange:** Which came first - the microscope or the telescope? One is just the reverse of the other. Try reversing perceptions. If people hate going to the dentist - then reverse the perception by making it an enjoyable experience. My dentist introduced himself by his first name and showed me the underwater photos he took scuba diving.