

What is a successful project?

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This is an exercise in:

- 1 imagining the multiplicity of ways that your next project could be successful,
- 2 recognizing which aspects of success matter to you most at this time,
- 3 identifying ways to act upon these notions of success.



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Part one

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For each of the prompts below, set a timer for 5 minutes and write for the entire time. Allow yourself to free write. This means that you do not need to worry about grammar, spelling, or “bad ideas.” Simply write. You will have time later to refine your writing. This is an exercise in getting out of your own way in order to discover what matters to you. You will not be required to share this writing with your peers. Write your responses below, in a sketchbook, on your phone, or wherever you are most comfortable.

- A** Imagine that it is six months from now, _____ date. Your project is successful because your project brought you into deep dialog with one or two people you respect, and who also respect you. You will continue this dialog for years. Who are these people?
(Free write for 5 minutes.)
- B** Imagine that it is six months from now, _____ date. Your project is successful because your project landed you a job or a sale. Who are you in touch with now?
(Free write for 5 minutes.)
- C** Imagine that it is six months from now, _____ date. Your project is successful because you learned and/or refined your craftsmanship, something that no one can ever take away from you. What skills / crafts did you learn or refine (typography, writing, woodworking, etc.)?
(Free write for 5 minutes.)

Part one, continued

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- D** Imagine that it is six months from now, _____ date. Your project is successful because your research led you to a community of researchers in a field outside of art and design, and you will continue these relationships and research for years. What field did you connect to? What ideas are you talking about together?
(Free write for 5 minutes.)
- E** Imagine that it is six months from now, _____ date. Your project is successful because you received public attention for your work in the news. Where did you gain this notoriety? (Free write for 5 minutes.)
- F** Imagine that it is six months from now, _____ date. Your project is successful because it represents deep personal growth. What aspects of your character (courage, patience, self care, humility, curiosity, humor) did you embrace and expand upon with this project?
(Free write for 5 minutes.)
- G** Imagine that it is six months from now, _____ date. Your project is successful because it is used by a community group, political project for social justice, or by a social movement. What larger project did your work contribute to?
(Free write for 5 minutes)

Refining part one

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After free writing for thirty five minutes (5 minutes x 7 options), take 20 minutes to identify and rewrite a few of the most surprising and/or important aspects of your responses to each prompt above. Write clear sentences that you can share with me. Again, you will not be required to share your responses with your peers.

- A** Mutual Respect as Success: I am in dialog with...

- B** Financial Remuneration as Success: I have a job / client / collector named...

- C** Technical Agility as Success: I am proficient in...

- D** Curiosity / Research Community as Success: I work with researchers in the field of...

- E** Professional / Public Recognition as Success: I am known by...

- F** Individual Growth as Success: I embraced my...

- G** Social Justice as Success: My work contributed to...

Part two

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Begin to think about which responses from part one above excite you most, which responses seem impossible, and which responses you would like to make a reality in six months from now. Notice that **B** (financial success) and **E** (public recognition) are outside of your immediate control, but that they often follow from the rest—**F** (individual growth), **A** (mutual respect), **C** (technical agility), **D** (curiosity), **G** (social justice). There are many forms of success!

Take 15 minutes to rank these aspects of success, based upon the ones you would like to focus on in the next four months, with #1 being your top priority and #7 being your lowest priority. Remember, these answers are for you alone. You will not be required to share these with your peers and I am no more or less interested in any of these aspects of success.

- ___ **A** Mutual Respect as Success: I am in dialog with...
- ___ **B** Financial Remuneration as Success: I have a job / client / collector named...
- ___ **C** Technical Agility as Success: I am proficient in...
- ___ **D** Curiosity / Research Community as Success: I work with researchers in the field of...
- ___ **E** Professional / Public Recognition as Success: I am known by...
- ___ **F** Individual Growth as Success: I embraced my...
- ___ **G** Social Justice as Success: My work contributed to...

Part three

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Take 15 minutes to write down 3 steps you will take to make your top priority a reality:

1

2

3

Here are a few examples of action plans for different priorities. If your #1 is:

- A** you could begin to identify people that you'd like to be in dialog with, keeping a log of their writing / research / work so that you know where your interests overlap. This way, you will be able to articulate the interests you share in an email where you invite them to tea or to do a studio visit, or to visit you, as your project develops.
- B** you could identify recent hires at companies that you want to work at on LinkedIn, find their portfolios, and notice shared sensibilities, aesthetics, or skills that you might develop or showcase. You could also interview people you know about how / if they have sold their work.
- C** you might identify practices, mentors, workshops, or tools that you need to acquire to refine the skill you have in mind.
- D** you could begin to identify conferences, events, graduate students, faculty members, and classes in this field, and attend these events or plan to meet with these people.
- E** you could begin to identify the people behind publicly visible projects, and then plan to speak to the PR firms and / or the creators of these projects who received recognition about what they did to promote, invite, and connect with people to reach this level of visibility.
- F** you could begin by identifying the practices, places, and people that allow you to be most honest and vulnerable with yourself, and make a plan to return to these weekly.
- G** you could begin by identifying the issues that matter most to you, seeking out groups that work on these issues near you, and going to meetings to listen to what contributions might be wanted by these groups.