

Who Pays Stays

How to Keep Your Creative Practice Alive in the Age of AI

Workbook — Survive It: Creativity in the Age of AI

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How to use this workbook

Each lesson follows the slides in the Genially course: the cover slide sets what you will learn, the teaching slide carries the idea, the activity slide is the work, and the quiz is a quick check. This workbook goes deeper than the slides and ends each lesson with questions that challenge you to apply the idea to your own practice.

The workbook is structured in two sections. Section 1 covers how creativity survives technological disruption: the historical evidence, and how to defend depth against the two most common arguments against it. Section 2 covers how to work with AI without losing your practice: the three levels of AI use, and the principle that keeps you on the liberating side of the line.

SECTION 1

How Creativity Survives

This section establishes the historical and conceptual foundation: channels die and their function relocates, practices transform by deepening into constraints, and the arguments used to defend surface-level AI content do not hold up when the object-versus-direction distinction is applied.

LESSON 1.1

Historical Precedents: Channels Die, Practices Survive

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- Distinguish a dying channel from a surviving practice.
- Turn a real constraint into a new creative form.

THE IDEA, IN DEPTH

The first lesson separates two patterns that look alike but behave very differently. Channels die and their function moves on. MTV gave way to YouTube, which gave way to TikTok, which will give way to the next platform. The function — distribution of music and video culture — never died. It relocated. Mourning the channel while the function moves elsewhere is a failure of attention.

Practices are different. They transform and survive by moving inward into their constraints. House music did not disappear when the clubs closed or the equipment changed. It split and deepened: Chicago house, Jersey club, UK garage, German techno, Amapiano, three-step. Each branch is centrifugal. It took a specific constraint — small apartments, township economics, an industrial city — and made a recipe out of it. The constraint became the form.

AI as channel and practice

This matters because AI is both a channel and a practice. As a channel it will rise and fall like the others. The real question is whether AI kills the practice of creativity itself — whether the availability of surface-level output at scale eliminates the need for the human practice underneath.

The answer this course gives is no, with a specific reason: creativity survives by becoming what the new technology cannot be. Against a machine that produces at volume and flattens toward the average, the surviving move is centrifugal. Go deeper into your specific constraints rather than fleeing them. The constraint is not the problem. The constraint is the form.

The exercise: name a real constraint you face — budget, time, a platform limit, a material restriction. Brainstorm three ways that constraint could force a new form. Choose the one that feels most like your own sound. A constraint turned into a form is a creative engine, not a ceiling.

WORK IT THROUGH

Turn a constraint into a form.

1. Name a real constraint you face: budget, time, a platform limit.
2. Brainstorm three ways that constraint could force a new form.
3. Choose the one that feels most like your own sound.

Outcome: You can use constraint as a creative engine, not a ceiling.

QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE YOU

- Name a channel you depend on. If it died tomorrow, where would its function move, and would you move with it?
- Pick a constraint in your practice. Sketch three different forms it could push you toward.
- Is AI a channel or a practice in your work right now? What changes if you treat it as the wrong one?
- House survived by deepening, not broadening. Where could you go deeper rather than wider?

LESSON 1.2

The Counterarguments: Defending Depth Without Sounding Elitist

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- Answer the argument that requiring depth is gatekeeping.
- Explain why audience-made meaning does not set creative direction.

THE IDEA, IN DEPTH

This lesson takes on the two arguments most commonly used to defend surface-level AI content. Knowing how to answer them matters because you will face them in pitches, in client conversations, and in public discourse about creativity and technology.

The first argument: democratisation

The democratisation argument says that requiring depth is gatekeeping. Tools that let anyone make things are good because they lower barriers to participation. Depth standards, on this view, exclude people who lack the training or resources to meet them.

But the argument mistakes the object for the direction. Requiring depth says nothing about who is allowed to make work. It says something about which way the work moved — whether it came from somewhere, whether a decision was made, whether a direction was set. Craft and respect for the form are not gatekeeping. They are the practice itself.

The second argument: Death of the Author

The Death of the Author argument says that meaning is made by the audience, so the maker's process does not matter. If the audience finds value in the work, the work has value, regardless of how it was produced. This is also partially true — audiences do make meaning — and incomplete for the same reason as the first argument.

The audience makes meaning from an object. The maker sets direction before any audience arrives. Those are two different activities at two different points in time. Collapsing them together allows process to disappear from the conversation, which is exactly what the argument needs to succeed.

The harder point from research: heavy AI use is associated with reduced formation of new skills. That is centripetal collapse happening inside the person, not just the product. The object-versus-direction distinction lets you defend depth without sounding like you are protecting a gate.

WORK IT THROUGH

Answer the gatekeeping charge.

4. Write one paragraph replying to "requiring depth is gatekeeping".
5. Use the object-versus-direction distinction.
6. End on what depth actually is: craft, respect, direction.

Outcome: You can defend depth without sounding elitist.

QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE YOU

- Write one paragraph answering someone who says requiring depth is gatekeeping. Use the object-versus-direction distinction.
- The audience makes meaning, but who sets direction? Argue your position in three sentences.
- Where might heavy AI use be quietly reducing your own skill formation? What would you change?
- Which of the two counterarguments do you find most tempting, and why is it incomplete?

SECTION 2

Working With AI Without Losing Yourself

This section covers the operational discipline that keeps AI on the liberating side of the line: the three-tier framework for classifying your workflows, and the single principle — own the decision, not just the diff — that determines whether AI is raising your ceiling or quietly lowering it.

LESSON 2.1

Ease as Liberation and Erosion: Own the Decision, Not Just the Diff

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- Classify any AI workflow as supported, led, or creative.
- Redesign a task so AI develops your thinking rather than replacing it.

THE IDEA, IN DEPTH

This lesson lays out three levels of AI use and one principle that decides between them. The three levels are not about which tool you use or how often. They are about where the decisions live.

AI-supported means you set the parameters and make the decisions. The tool helps you think more clearly, move faster, or explore more options than you could without it. This is liberation. The ceiling of what you can do rises.

AI-led means the tool sets the rules and you follow. You accept the frame the tool provides, execute within the constraints it establishes, and produce what the system suggests. This is erosion. You think less. The output may look fine, but the skill that would have developed from making the decisions is not forming.

Creative AI means the system makes everything and you consume. This is erosion completed. The gap between what you can produce with the tool and what you can produce without it widens with every use.

The line between them

The same tool sits in all three categories. The difference is not the brand or the speed. It is who makes the decisions. The principle this lesson gives you is exact: own the decision, not just the diff. The diff is the output — the text, the image, the edit, the draft. The decision is the direction, the criteria, the judgment of whether the output is correct and why. Keeping the diff while handing over the decision is how most people drift toward AI-led without noticing, because the output looks fine and the process feels faster.

The workflow audit: list the AI workflows you currently use. Label each one: supported, led, or creative. Move one task up toward supported so you keep the thinking. Used this way, AI raises your ceiling. Used the other way, it lowers it while feeling like progress.

Why this matters for your practice

Most people drift toward AI-led without noticing. The drift is gradual and the output continues to look acceptable. The signal that it has happened is not in the product — it is in the skill. When you notice that you can no longer do something as well without the tool as you could before you started using it, the tool has crossed from liberation to erosion. The audit is how you catch the drift before the gap becomes too wide to close.

WORK IT THROUGH

Label your AI workflows.

7. List the AI workflows you use now.
8. Label each one: supported, led, or creative.
9. Move one task up toward supported so you keep the thinking.

Outcome: You can keep AI on the liberating side of the line.

QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE YOU

- List your AI workflows and label each one supported, led, or creative. What is the balance?
- Pick one task that has drifted to AI-led. How would you move it back to supported without losing the speed you value?
- Where are you keeping the decision, and where are you only keeping the diff?
- If AI raised your ceiling instead of lowering it, what would you be doing differently next month?

Build your economy. Who pays stays.

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