



Dreaming Up Thoughtful Gifts

for Valentine's Day

*with
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How to Give the Perfect Gift

Design a uniquely fitting “perfect” gift for a particular special person via a radically thoughtful creative process of exploration and reflection. Let the gift show them that you notice them -- you notice their wonderful details, you listen and pay attention, you are present with them, you see their pieces and their whole. You care for their well-being.

Give a gift that ONLY YOU could give to this recipient.

Go slow. Don't hurry to your gift idea. Take time to meander through this process. Your great idea will come to you when it's ready.

1: gift memories

Reflect upon a few remarkable gifts you have given or received during your life so far. Any thoughts on why they were so special or powerful?

2. your gift recipient

Is your gift for a dear one? A group of people? Strangers?
Is your gift for a person? A place? An animal? For yourself?
Perhaps your recipient is no longer living, or yet to be born...

Your gift recipient:

3: your gift purpose

What is the deeper reason, goal, or hope for your gift?

- celebration
- gratitude
- romantic courtship
- build trust
- offer encouragement
- increase intimacy
- show care and support
- mark a moment
- lift spirits
- share beauty
- enjoy quality time
- rest and rejuvenation
- demonstrate respect
- existential depth

Your intentions:

4a: gather creative material -- reflect

Reflect upon your gift recipient and your relationship with them. Here are some prompts to get you started. (Don't worry about the occasion or goal yet.)

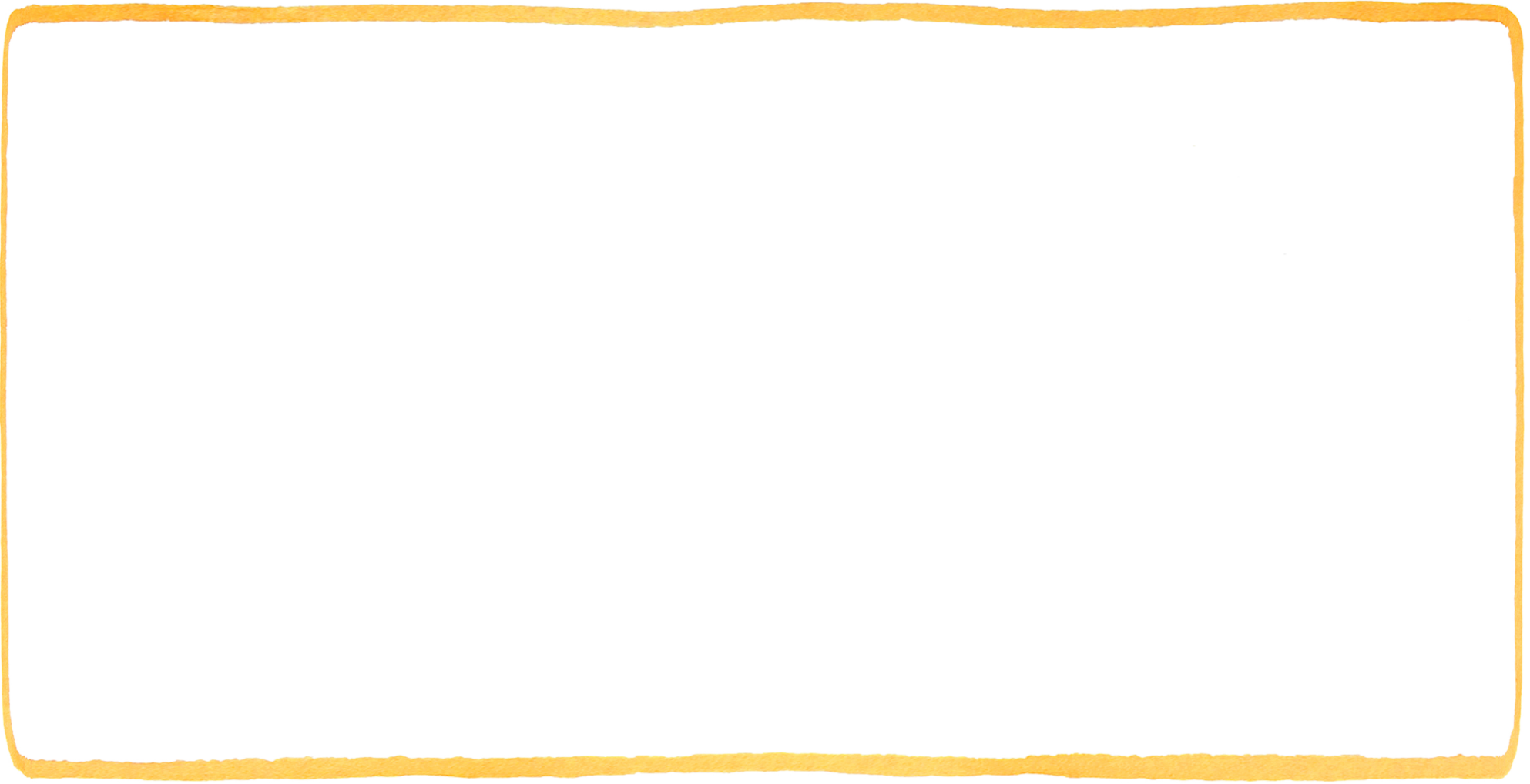
- write about shared memories, who you are together.
- map out your recipient's hypothetical dream day.
- list your recipient's key qualities, character traits, identity attributes, values, beliefs, curiosities, etc. How do they enact them through their work, hobbies, and other actions?
- draw a map of the places they hold dear.
- write about your recipient's nearest and dearest human relationships.
- "build their bookshelf:" list their favorite books, music, movies, TV shows, and other art and cultural media items.
- "curate their exhibit:" write a list or draw a collection of the significant material culture of the recipient's life. Think beyond possessions. Maybe these items wouldn't literally fit in a museum. Poetic leaps are okay! These might be favorite things, but they also might be problematic things.
- draw a graph or timeline of your recipient's recent past -- key events, moods, struggles, successes, etc.. Include what's going on for them in the present.
- think about what your recipient needs right now. What do they deserve, love, dream about, wonder about, long for? What do they want, but don't know they want it? Who are they hoping to become in the future? Do they need a celebration? A reminder? A fresh start? A gentle nudge?

workspace

Your recipient(s)

Shared

You



4b: gather creative material -- empathy experiments

Step into your recipient's "shoes" to get to know them better:

- read their favorite book
- listen to music they love, or attend a concert or show
- visit their meaningful city sites and natural landscapes
- try their favorite restaurants with them
- ask them to show you one of their hobbies or work projects

4c: gather creative material -- research

Go deeper. Follow up on themes and anecdotes:

- read articles, Wikipedia pages, books
- go to an exhibit, browse a shop, or look at online collections
- listen to podcasts
- interview experts, family members, friends, even your gift recipient themselves!

5: design -- organize, connect, develop, refine

<p><i>purpose</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • your purpose, aim, hope • how does your gift highlight their truest, best self? • what experience do they need right now? Long for? • how does your gift embody and continue your relationship? 	<p><i>purpose:</i></p>	<p><i>who:</i></p>	<p><i>who</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with you? a solo experience? with someone else or a group? • social context? • collaborators? do you need anyone's help to make it happen?
<p><i>materiality</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what is the gift made of? • color, patterns, motifs, shapes, ingredients, history, method of making, sources? • the senses! • care/use instructions • acquire items at: bought, found, free, borrowed 	<p><i>materiality:</i></p>	<p><i>activity:</i></p>	<p><i>activity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • activate! Think about the doing, the verb, the "life" of the gift experience • interactions, encounters • gesture, movement • what might the gift spark, or eventually lead to? What might it enable?
<p><i>place</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a particular place or type of place? • a place with memories • future places, dream places, places of growth • familiar place, or never-before-been place? • at a park? through the mail? underwater? where? 	<p><i>place:</i></p>	<p><i>words:</i></p>	<p><i>words</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what is the role of words in your gift? (helpful? distracting? big? small?) • written, spoken, whispered, sung, recited, memorized, spontaneous, none, silent? • gift tag or letter to go with the gift?
<p><i>time</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • duration -- how long is the gift experience? • time of day or night • one-time event? a series, spread out over time? • daily? annual? seasonal? • what's the perfect timing? 	<p><i>time:</i></p>	<p><i>presentation:</i></p>	<p><i>presentation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how is it gifted? • directly from your hand? hidden in the landscape? after solving a riddle? in the rain? • consider the "packaging" and framing, and how it can help it be received

b. your gift ideas

Jot down three gift ideas and add a few details for each. The three can be wildly different, or subtle variations on a theme. Sometimes our first idea isn't our best idea, so go for at least three before choosing a final design.

Look back at all of your workspaces, highlight strongest images, words, materials, etc. Try to connect and integrate them into one shiny gift concept. If you're stuck, return to step 4 and gather more creative material.

variation A:

variation B:

variation C:

As you identify your best ideas:

- keep your deeper purpose in mind, while also acknowledging that you cannot control it all.
- try to put yourself in your recipient's shoes. What will they love? What will make them smile or laugh or cry?
- also put yourself in your own shoes! Which idea has a lot of energy in it for you? Which one inspires you?
- consider the intensity and appropriateness of the gift.
- take timeline, labor, and budget into account.

A few qualities of great gifts:

- the receiver could never have given this to themselves.
- the receiver didn't even know they wanted this!
- ONLY YOU could give this to ONLY THEM.
- It's perfect for now and perfect again down the road.
- the gift is more about DOING and BEING than HAVING.
- the best part is hard to hold, see, or point to.
- the gift feels lively and can take on a life of its own.
- the gift is memory making material.
- the gift is surprising, and yet, also makes perfect sense.

Is your gift idea also good for you?

As you give this gift, will you also be caring for self?

7. make it happen!

If you get stuck:

Q: Lost? Revisit your purpose & highlights. Focus.

Q: Overwhelmed? Reduce scope! Sometimes less is more.

Q: Too expensive? Make it scrappy, borrow, junk shops, etc.

Q: Taking it too seriously? Do what will make them smile.

Q: Bit off more than you can chew? Ask for help! Delegate!

Q: Running late? Reduce scope! Or make an IOU coupon.

Q: Running severely late and can't let go? Save for next time!

things to do:

items to obtain:

logistics to figure out:

people to speak with:

deadlines:

other arrangements:

workspace

8. bonus -- ponder

- do you want to photo document your gift? Will it be more special if you do or if you don't? For whom?
- what are the many ways to say -- or show -- "thank you"? What is the true timeline of a thank you?
- will you have expectations of reciprocation after your act of generosity? If so, what do you think about that?