RISK-TAKING & MISTAKING
By definition, creativity involves taking risk. First and foremost for students is the risk associated with grades. They are not likely to take risk if there’s a high probability their grade will suffer because of it. Students also take risk when they share creative—meaning, not always right—ideas with their peers or instructor, fearing that they might look silly or even stupid. To mitigate concerns about risk-taking and mistaking, create a safe learning environment where all ideas are explored and evaluated without ridicule. (This is sometimes called a “yes-room.”) Give students support and constructive feedback and provide them with enough latitude to explore that off-the-wall idea.

Other effective ways to encourage risk-taking in the college classroom are to model it, applaud it, and reward it.

- **Modeling Creativity:** Instructors can model risk-taking through the things they do and try in the classroom. Simply asking students to finger paint is risky for an instructor. Imagine the impact if the instructor paints alongside her students.

- **applauding Creativity:** Instructors must publicly and privately acknowledge highly creative solutions to problems or examples of work. For example, consider publishing the most creative projects, chosen by students, to the course website; start class with a slide show of student work; allow students to share and discuss their work with each other.

- **Rewarding Creativity:** Sometimes a project or assignment demonstrates a high degree of risk-taking and/or exceptional creativity, but it is not exactly on target. Grade the project according to the rubric, but add “bonus” points for creativity, even if creativity is already a criterion of the rubric.

CONSTRAINTS & FREEDOM
In creative exercises, a constraint is some limit placed on the project parameters or the manner in which the project is completed. Rather than hinder creativity, constraints often help students develop richer and more imaginative ideas because they force students to focus their energies on the process rather than the task. It is important, however, to give students complete freedom within the constraints; otherwise, the project may feel forced to them, as if the instructor is “looking for something” specific.

Example constraints include the following:
- Limit the amount of time students have to complete the assignment. It is often beneficial to give them considerably less time than you think they need.
- Limit the number of resources students have available. For example, only give them three colors to paint with; give them pencils without erasers for drawing exercises; only give them 2-3 prompts for creative writing exercises; only allow them to use one type of media for digital projects, excluding the obvious choices.
- Force students to grapple with course content in manners far removed from their discipline. For example, ask chemistry majors to write a poem to explain the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle or ask English majors to draw their reactions to poetry.

FEEDBACK & REVISION
In learning environments which foster creativity, students constantly receive support and constructive feedback. This allows them to learn alternative ways to solve a problem, incorporate a more diverse range of ideas, and most importantly, it shows them how to think rather than what to think.

Ideally, support and feedback occurs several times throughout the project lifecycle and comes from multiple perspectives, including self-critique and peer- and instructor-feedback. Additionally, it is useful to have students get feedback from peers not in the class. The peer-students’ separation from course content tends to produce new and unique perspectives. Sharing their ideas with someone outside of the class also encourages students to articulate their projects in layman’s terms, fostering understanding of complex ideas.

Finally, students should have opportunities to revise their work, incorporating all the ideas they get and deem valuable. Asking students to make their revisions explicit
in a reflective essay (see below) can help the instructor better assess their learning.

**Reflection & Rubrics**

One of the most powerful ways to assess learning in creative projects is through student self-reflection. A reflection essay, which might be anywhere between 1-5 pages in length, should address what the student was attempting to capture in the project, in what ways the final project effectively represents the idea(s) explored, and in what ways it falls short. It might also include a discussion of the revision process, how the student incorporated feedback, and what they might have done if given more time or additional resources.

The actual project is best assessed using a rubric, or description of the criteria and standards. Instructors should make students aware of the rubric early in the creative process. Highly detailed rubrics, however, often stifle the creative process. Opt instead for a more general, holistic rubric, one that briefly describes the main criteria and the standard for excellent work. As long as students get ample feedback along the way, they will not be concerned about the lack of precision in the rubric.