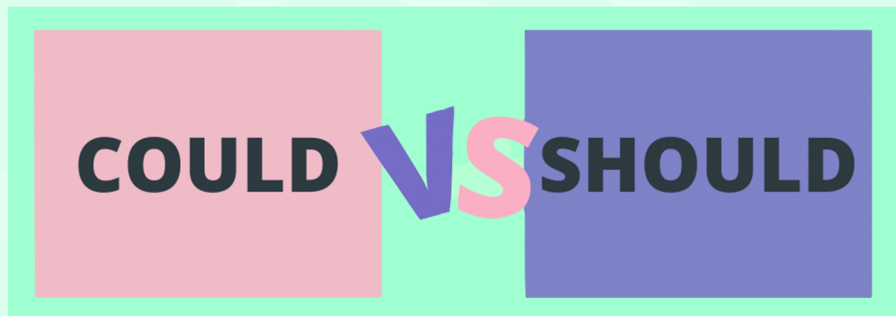


Could vs should: strategy and tactics

Could vs Should: How to think about strategy

If you were to ask a costume maker to stitch together all of the words that have ever been written about strategy, they'd probably stretch around the world. Several times. Put them in a book and they'd probably be longer all of the Harry Potter books put together.

The good news fellow creatives is that strategy is just a fancy way of describing how you are going to achieve something. In business planning terms it's simply how you plan to use the things you have – your skills, resources,



You'll probably end up working up separate strategies for different parts of your set up – strategies for winning new business or finding new partners, for finding new audiences, or even just getting the admin that we all hate done. These together will make up your overall strategy, which in turn is a good chunk of your business plan.

The principle remains the same across all of these though – looking first of all at all the things you **might do** to get to where you want to get to, and then slimming those down to the things you decide you **will do**.

Scenario planning – an exercise in ‘what if?’

You may also work up different strategies for different circumstances (eg. If we win that commission or get the funding we'll do this, if we don't we'll do this instead; if we get this many customers we'll do this, but if we get fewer we'll do that.) This last bit is what's called '**scenario planning**' in business planning circles, and is what makes you more resilient as a creative freelancer or business. If you're working up a business plan to show to a funder or bank, you may want to include strategies for a number of scenarios

Think of it as going into a dressing room!

The other way that we think it's helpful to think about strategy and scenario planning is that it's a bit like going into a changing room or a costume fitting with armfuls of possible outfits. In a changing room you'd go through a process that might involve trying different tops and trouser combinations, maybe adding different shoes in the mix too. You'd be aware that what suits you just wouldn't work for someone else. It's the same with working out a strategy too; it's a trial and error process to identify the right combination of ingredients, actions or processes that will work for you, and one that means you'll leave some things discarded on the floor just because they weren't the right fit.

And just as with clothes, what works for you and your business will be different to what works other creatives. You are you, and they are they, and the beauty of it all is that strategies should be as unique to you as your personality!

What's the difference between strategies and tactics?

If you're confused about the difference between strategies and tactics, you're not the first creative to feel that way. And it's not surprising, since both of them are about how you're planning to achieve something.

A really simple way to understand the difference between strategy and tactics is 'Think strategically, act tactically'.

Here's a quick drawing that will hopefully sum up the key differences for you...

Strategy	Tactic
Identifies the path you're going to take.	A step you'll take a long the way
More about the long term and overall understanding of what you'll do.	More concrete and specific, and about the detail of how you'll do things.
Links your vision and aims to how you'll achieve them.	Focuses much more on just the how.
Example: If you're a maker and looking to grow creative business, your strategy might be to make your prices as competitive as possible, and to make sure you never run out of stock.	Example: If this is your strategy , the chances are you'll want to tweak your making processes to minimise waste and cut costs. You might also want to shop around for cheaper materials, or take on a more junior member of staff to free you up for the more specialised tasks.

Why you need both

'There's no point in running fast, if you don't know where you're headed'. So said a cartoon that we had stuck on the wall when we started the hub. What that was basically saying was that without a clear strategy, it's likely you're going to be making some really odd decisions that may not propel you in the right direction at all. Sticking with the same metaphor, if you don't know where you're headed, when will you know when to stop running?

Don't believe us, check out what Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu wrote "The Art of War" way back.

Writing 2500 years ago, he nailed it when we said, **"Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."** Whether you're trying to win a war or making War Horse(!), it's crucial you have both a strategy and tactics in place.



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- Sun Tzu