

# ***The Starter Guide to Being Selfmade***



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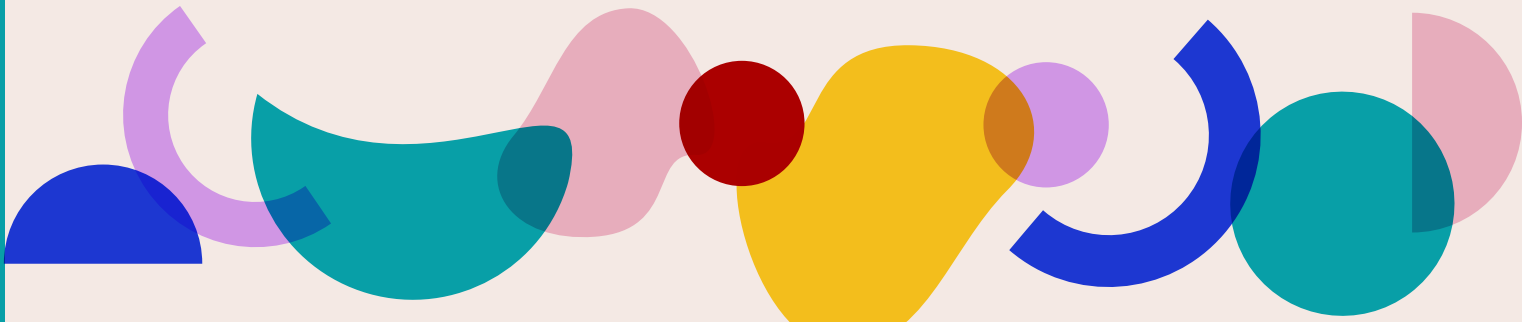
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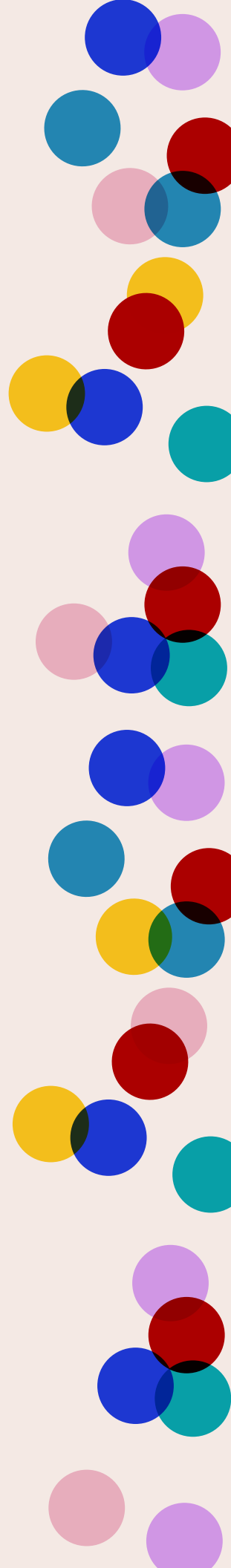


**Brit Morin here from Brit + Co** — and I'm thrilled to join Office Depot in going all-in on seeing you succeed. We've curated this custom guide packed with lessons, templates, and solutions to help you find success and accomplish more for your business. From branding, marketing, fundraising, and beyond, this guide is filled with the tools you'll need to conquer the many phases of your entrepreneurial journey. We're beyond proud of you for making it this far — for committing to doing something you've always dreamed of and for betting on yourself.

Taking risks is scary, but you're already one step ahead of everyone else on the path to changing your life. And we're honored to be part of that, even in this micro way.

**Now let's get this business party started!**

-XO- Brit

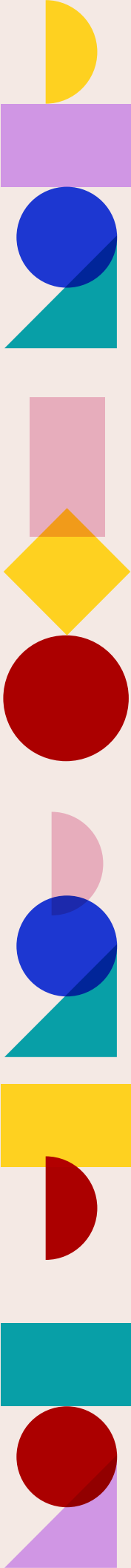


# ***Chapter 1: Mindset***

Before forging ahead on any journey, be it a professional, entrepreneurial, or personal one, you've got to be in the right headspace. In other words, you have to believe you can accomplish what you're setting out to do, and that all starts with your mindset. When I think of the entrepreneurs I know who have that X factor, so much of it comes down to this belief that they can achieve anything, and that nothing will get in their way.

**Your mindset is the foundation for everything you'll be building.**

So you're likely wondering, what does a healthy, success-oriented mindset even look like?



## ***The Ingredients of a Success-Oriented Mindset:***



***1. Confidence***



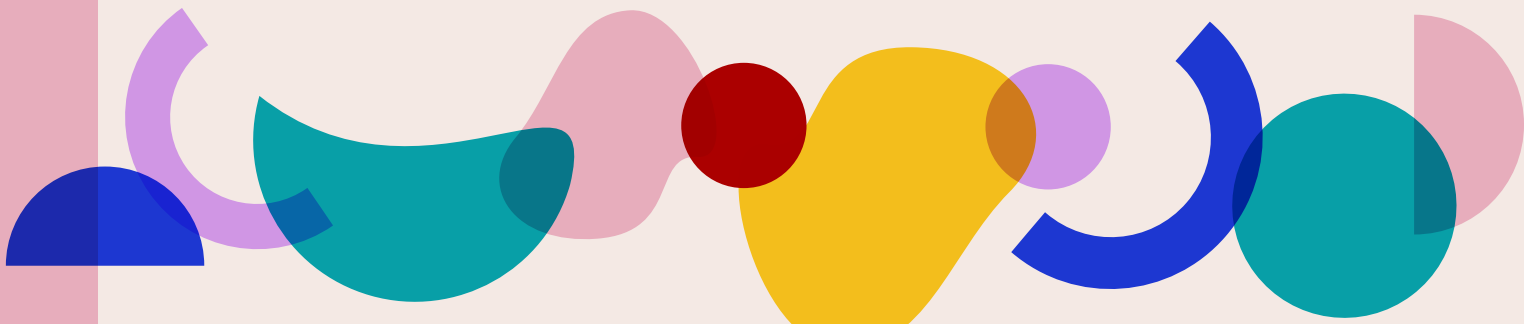
***2. Nimbleness and Agility***



***3. Decisiveness***



***4. Resilience***



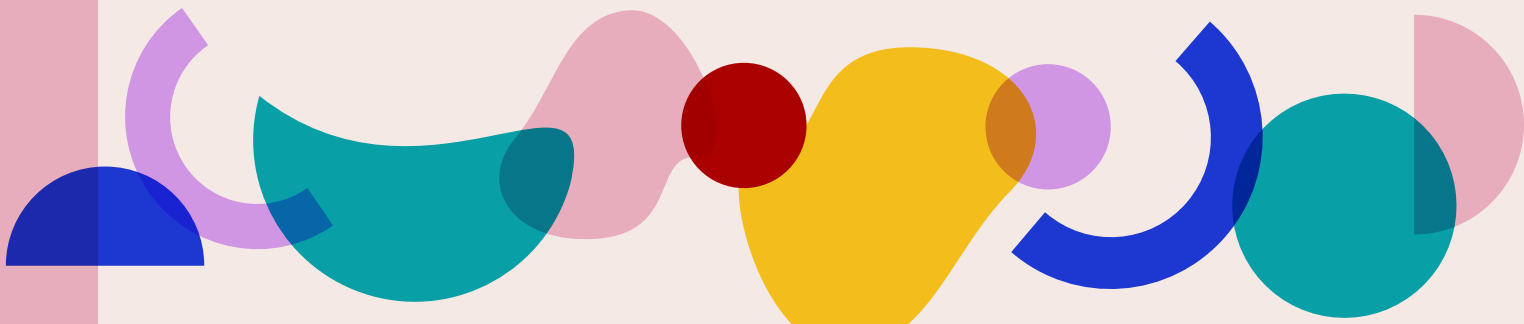
# ***The Ingredients of a Success-Oriented Mindset:***

## ***1. Confidence***

We have to confront self-doubt and challenge our inner critic to find confidence in ourselves. **Confidence is also about dismantling our fear of failure.** I encourage you to reframe your fears so you see ups and downs as an opportunity for growth and learning versus equating them to failure. Ultimately, confidence is a feeling of self-assurance arising from one's appreciation of his or her own abilities or qualities. It's all about self love, and that starts with **investing in yourself.**

**Mantra Break:** I will figure this out, even if I don't know how to do it today.

**Put It To Practice:** Try something totally new, even if it has nothing to do with your business, because that's the best way to break out of your comfort zone. You learn so much about yourself when you test your boundaries — it's really powerful.

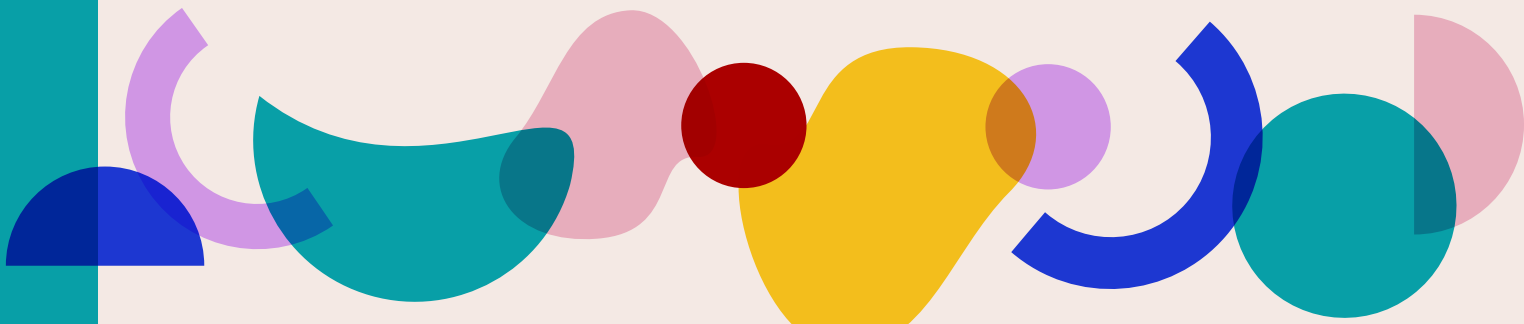


# ***The Ingredients of a Success-Oriented Mindset:***

## ***2. Nimbleness and Agility***

How quickly can you move and respond to market feedback? This strength is all about the power of iteration. In thinking about your business, **you want to consider your product-market fit**. That's a fancy, Silicon Valley way of saying do you have a product that people love, and is it being marketed to the right people (who also love it)? If you're messaging the wrong consumer, how can you pivot your targeted messaging to the right consumer? And if you have any weaknesses within your product, how can you improve upon it in real time? You want both of these elements to be in harmony so you have the best possible chance for **growth and scale**. Once you find something people love, pay attention to the data and keep at it.

**Real world case study:** Anyone remember when Netflix was a DVD rental service? They stayed nimble and saw a big opportunity when internet speeds increased and were able to monopolize the streaming video category by moving quickly from a mail-based service to an online streaming one.



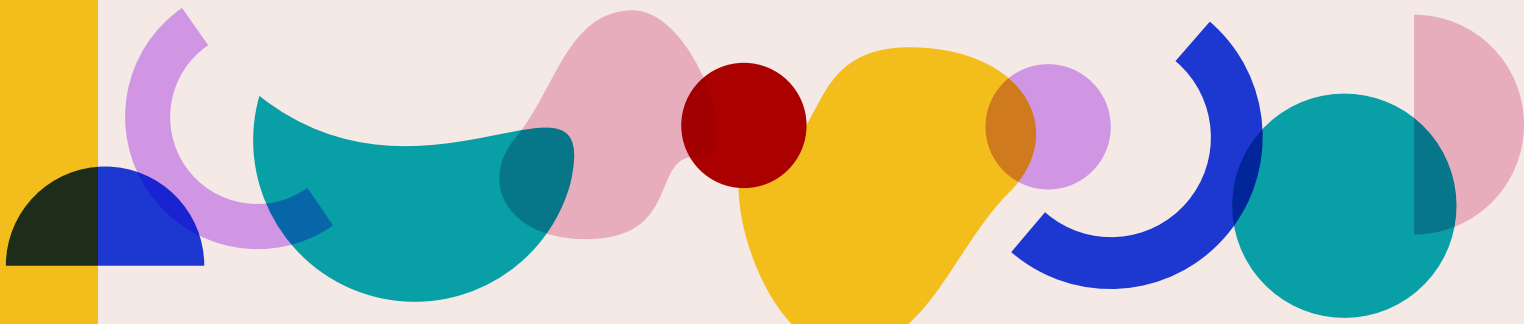
# ***The Ingredients of a Success-Oriented Mindset:***

## **3. Decisiveness**

Being a fast decision maker is an important skill for entrepreneurs and it can be practiced and strengthened in your day-to-day life.

**The faster you move, the faster you learn;** and the faster you iterate and change, the faster you are more likely to succeed (and cha-ching — make more money!).

**Put It To Practice:** Identify what kind of decision-maker you are — do you need to do a lot of research, sleep on it or journal through the pros and cons? Or do you need to run it past five other people first? What tools do you need to make decisions quickly? Spend some time practicing speedy decision making throughout your day (even if it's just what you're making for lunch or what outfit you'll wear). More often than not, when you trust your gut you'll realize that the answer or decision you need to make is within you, **you just need to give yourself a moment to find it.**



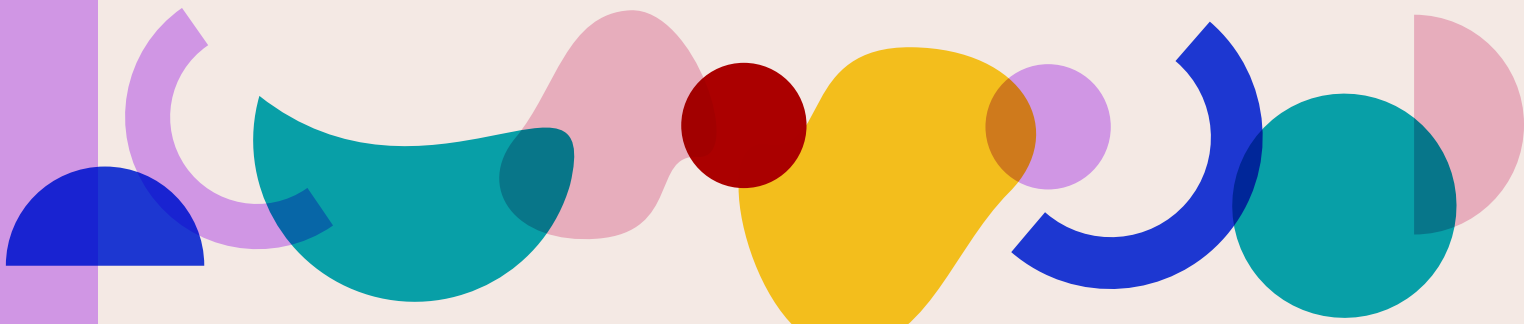


# ***The Ingredients of a Success-Oriented Mindset:***

## **4. Resilience**

This is the capacity to **recover quickly** from difficulties and tough situations over and over again (often many times during the course of one day). This is especially true in the era of the internet troll when anyone anywhere can say something negative about you or your product or service and blast it to hundreds of people across social media and beyond. You can't stew on these remarks. Instead, let them be a learning opportunity (if, in this case, the criticism was valid). Resilience comes through when you can **face each setback with humility**, accept that you messed up or did something wrong, and then strive to do better next time and move on. You must keep moving forward. And know that each time you get back up again, you're creating a stronger version of you.

**You must keep moving forward.**

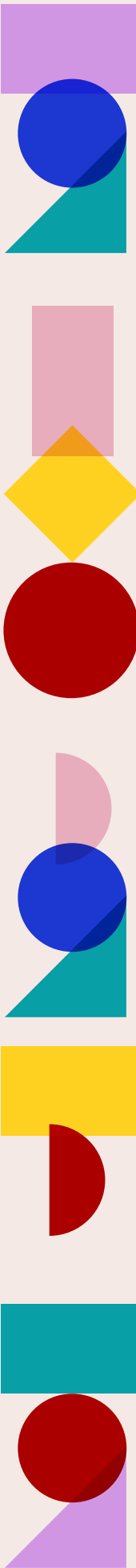


# ***Homework:***

Now that you've learned the four traits that all entrepreneurs should hone in on, spend some time taking your learnings and applying them to your brand and business.

## **Today's Exercise:**

Create a manifestation and vision board of who you want to be. Think about the **words or phrases, images, affirmations, colors, and textures** that come to mind when you think of your most powerful version of yourself. This is less about the aesthetic of your business and more about you and your mindset. If you don't believe you can do what you include on your vision board, you risk manifesting failure. So focus on **positive emotion, positive intention, and the goals** you actually want to achieve. To get started, focus on where you want to be in the next six to 12 months. And share it with a friend or family member for accountability and to literally put it out into the universe.





## ***More resources***

When you're just starting out, we know there are a lot of 'hats' you need to wear, but did you know **Office Depot® OfficeMax®** offers a full suite of [business services](#) & solutions to help you succeed?

From [print & copy services](#) to help build your brand, [24/7 remote tech support](#), to products to help you [work from anywhere](#).

Office Depot OfficeMax is all about helping you accomplish more so you can focus on more important things, like starting & growing the business of your dreams.

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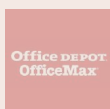




**YOUR GUT INSTINCT**  
IS YOUR  
**GREATEST ASSET**



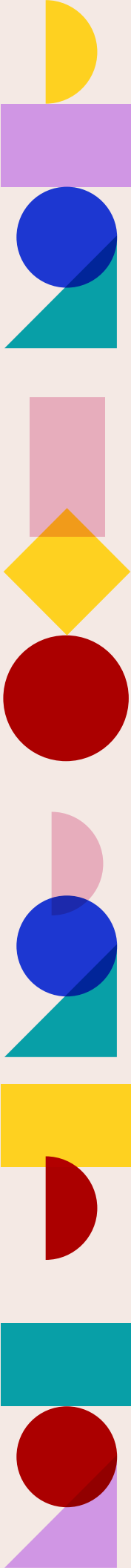
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# ***Chapter 2: The Big Idea***

Whether you've been workshopping your genius business idea for years, or feel as though you're bouncing between 100 idea seedlings and aren't sure what to lean into, this chapter is all about **helping you refine your idea so your business concept can be set up for success from day one**. If you don't have the right idea, it's going to be twice as hard to make your business work. No pressure — right?

Good business ideas generally rely on two things: They tap into something you're passionate about while also solving a problem. The intersection where those two meet is going to be the sweet spot for **finalizing your business concept**.



HERE ARE A FEW QUESTIONS TO HELP GUIDE YOU  
AS YOU THINK THROUGH YOUR IDEA:

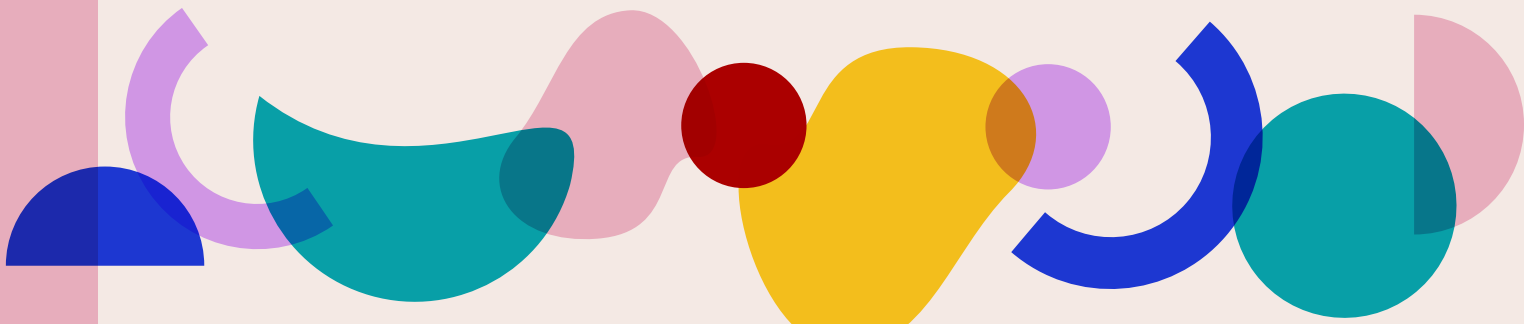
## **1. What problem does your customer *\*need\** solved?**

If you're not sure, go ask them!

## **2. Is your business a “vitamin” or a “painkiller”?**

Vitamins are the nice-to-have businesses that make your life a little better. Painkillers solve a problem that can't be solved anywhere else. Both of these are valid, but it's good to be clear upfront on **which category your business falls into.**

**Real world case study:** A Kate Spade purse is a great example of a vitamin — buying a new bag likely won't change your life, but it might boost your mood and improve an existing solution (like having a chic carryall for your personal belongings). The Kate Spade brand is also proof that vitamins can turn big profits, as the business sold for \$135 million. Tesla is an example of a painkiller business, offering the first commercially successful electric car, with self-driving features, that's helping to lower carbon emissions and change the world.



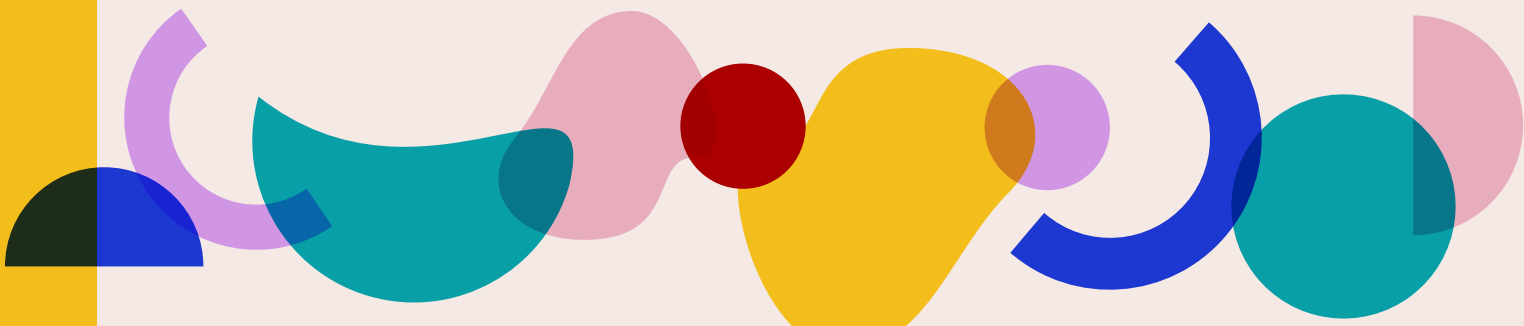
HERE ARE A FEW QUESTIONS TO HELP GUIDE YOU  
AS YOU THINK THROUGH YOUR IDEA:

### ***3. What is the ONE solution you want to achieve?***

Get specific here. This will help you zero in on what you're offering.

### ***4. Who is the target buyer of your product or service? And how big is the audience?***

We'll dive more into marketing in later chapters, but having a general idea of who you're targeting is going to help inform so many of your decisions — how much you'll charge, how and where you'll market your offering, how expensive it'll be to attract your audience, and more.



HERE ARE A FEW QUESTIONS TO HELP GUIDE YOU AS YOU THINK THROUGH YOUR IDEA:



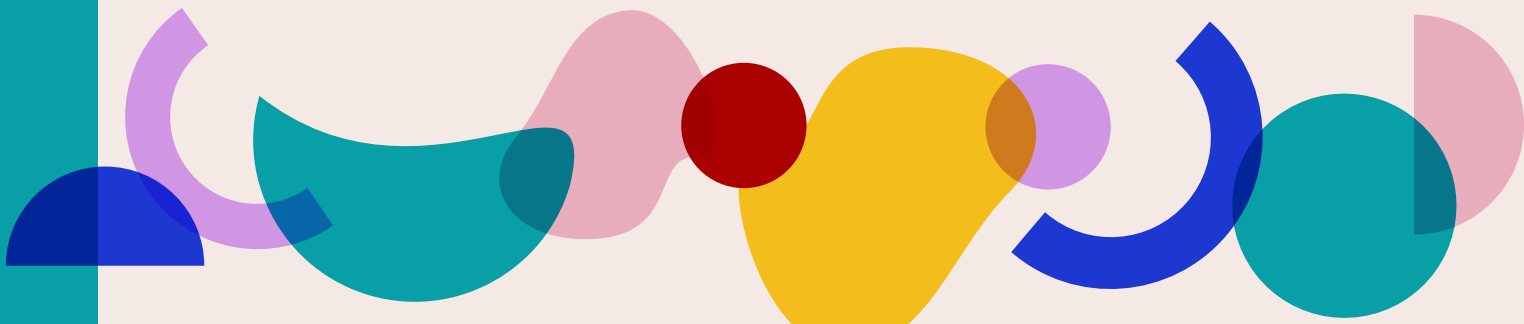
## **5. *Who else offers this solution? And how are YOU going to be different?***

Do your research. If there are similar products and services that already exist, take a look at what they offer, what they charge, and how they're reaching consumers. This will help you to find differentiation within your own product. Why is someone going to open their wallet or want to join your community — **what everyday pain is your business solving for?**



## **6. *Is this truly a passion of yours?***

**How does your idea make you feel?** Why do you love it? Is this something you could dedicate the next 10 years of your life to? These answers will help guide you to your mission statement and reveal why you are uniquely suited to solve this challenge.





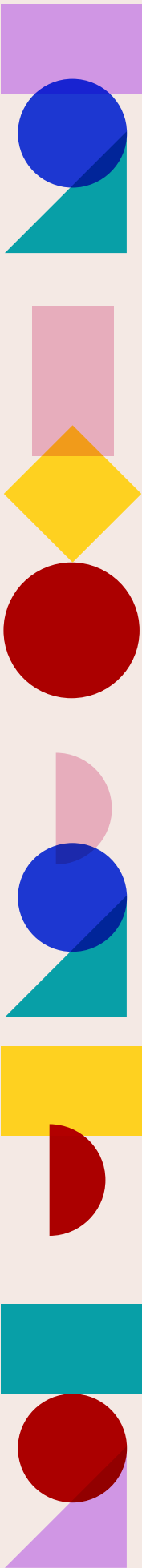
# ***Homework:***

Consider each of the questions above, jot down ideas that come up for each, and share your findings with a trusted friend. Once you feel good about the direction of your business, you can jump into today's exercise, the elevator pitch!

## **Today's Exercise:**

Practice and perfect your 30-second elevator pitch.

In a few sentences, how can you make your business idea easy for people to understand in the most concise, clear, and compelling way possible? Also, remember that it's okay to change your elevator pitch based on who you're talking to, be it a potential consumer, a client, or an investor.





## ***More resources***

Committing to an idea is hard, and SO exciting.

Once you've figured out your direction, **Office Depot®** **OfficeMax®** can help turn your idea into a reality with a full suite of [business services](#) & solutions to help you & your business succeed. From [print & copy services](#) to help build your brand to products to help you [work from anywhere](#), learn about all the ways they can help [businesses](#) like yours, accomplish more.

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# Successful business ideas

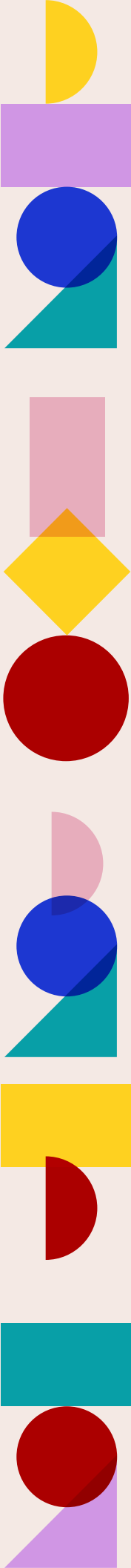
tap into something  
you're passionate about  
and help solve a problem.



# ***Chapter 3: Business Models***

## **Let's talk numbers!**

If business models and profit and loss statements feel a little intimidating, not to worry, because by the end of this chapter you'll have it all down pat. And even if your business is already fully operational, this refresher will help you analyze the foundation of your business and its stability. Onward!



## ***Common Business Models To Know:***

### ***1. Commerce***

This is one we're all likely familiar with, when a business offers something a consumer can buy — be it in a physical retail space or online. Virtual goods are also an example of this, i.e. if you have a game on your phone and want to buy more tokens to keep playing.

### ***2. Subscription/Membership***

A subscription model is when commerce repeats itself, a la Netflix and Spotify who bill for recurring charges each month.

### ***3. Commerce + Subscription***

To understand this blend model, look at Peloton. The fitness brand offers equipment like treadmills and bikes for the commerce portion, but they also offer the subscription element via fitness classes you can subscribe to and take each month.

## ***Common Business Models To Know:***

### ***4. Advertising***

This model entails creating content people want to read, watch, or listen to, and then embedding advertising within or around that content. It's tough in that you have to satisfy your audience and the advertisers you're beholden to.

### ***5. SaaS***

The software-as-a-service model works when a business pays a monthly fee to access the SaaS product, which is hosted in the cloud. SaaS businesses earn their money mainly through recurring membership revenue. Successful examples include Zendesk, which is a customer service ticketing system and Salesforce, a customer relationship management tool.

### ***6. Licensing***

This is when a creator uses a patent, copyright, or trademark to create intellectual property. The inventor can then license the technology or creation to another party to earn royalties. For example, Disney could license out the use of Mickey Mouse for a clothing manufacturer to use.

## ***Common Business Models To Know:***

### **7. Affiliate**

In lieu of banner ads on webpages or mid-roll advertisements in the middle of a YouTube video, affiliate relies on embedded links within your content. For example, if you have a fashion blog and have an affiliate partnership with a clothing brand, the brand will pay you a small commission for every customer referral you drive to their business.

It's fairly common for companies to use a combination of these models. But in the early stages of your business, we highly encourage you to stick with one. A helpful way to decide what model is right for you is to ask yourself, are you marketing to businesses or to consumers? **Who is your most important customer?** If your business could be valuable to a company rather than a consumer, you might be able to unlock the oh-so-coveted repeatable revenue.

**Fun fact:** Businesses that take off fast usually have other businesses as their clients vs. consumers because the revenue opportunity is greater. If Google is your client, for example, you'll immediately add 100,000 people to your customer base instead of going after them one-by-one. If you make a product you want to sell, the most popular route in recent years has been selling directly to consumers. Think Casper or Glossier, who have gone on to become billion-dollar companies selling a single type of product. They grow rapidly because they don't have to factor in retailers and any middlemen.

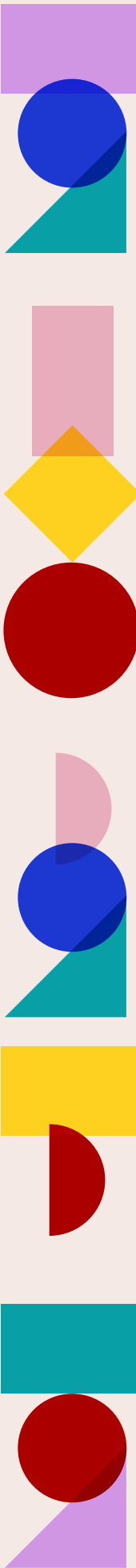
Also, it's important to remember that **product innovation comes first**. If you're having trouble figuring out what business model to adopt, it's possible your product isn't quite there yet.

## ***Homework:***

Now that you're well-versed in some of the most common business models, you'll start to recognize how some of your favorite brands operate. As you get in the habit of identifying these frameworks, it'll help you get closer to the right one for your business.

### **Today's Exercise:**

In addition to creating your own P&L, let's get your business in motion. What is your **Minimum Viable Product**. Figure out what you can put out in the world to test and learn.







## ***More resources***

Keeping track of your ever-changing business model is a full-time job — from managing incoming and outgoing funds to accounting for unexpected twists and turns (both good and bad!), CFO is one of the many hats you'll be wearing as you set out on your journey. No matter what challenge you may face on your business journey, **Office Depot® OfficeMax®** offers a full suite of [business services](#) & solutions to help you succeed. With [print & copy services](#) to help build your brand to products to help you [work from anywhere](#) & [organize & save time](#), accomplish more with Office Depot OfficeMax by your side.

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## ***A Quick Word On Pricing***

**Do not compromise on the quality, and your customers will not negotiate on the price.**

A common mistake made by startups is that they undervalue their product or charge too little. You should be aware of what's comparable to you in the market and what they're charging. A good place to start if you're unsure what to charge for your product or services is with a cost-based model. Double your hard cost and that's your price.

One of our Selfmade coaches astutely put it: **Price and worth are two different things.** You are priceless, but your services have a minimum and a maximum price based on current market values and your resources. Start high with your pricing, and remember you can always lower it.

### **Profit and Loss Statements**

A profit and loss statement is critical for your business because it allows you to monitor the funds coming in and going out the door. It shows you plainly what revenue is coming in versus what costs you have each month. Unexpected business costs can pile up, so that's why being organized on this front is so important. If you're an e-commerce business, you'll have refunds and processing fees to consider. But also think about your COGS, or cost of goods sold and anything under the hood you need to operate the business, such as website costs, salaries, etc. As you play around with your own P&L statement, you'll have a better sense of how much money you'll need to get started if you haven't launched yet. Maybe you need to bootstrap a reserve of six months runway before starting, or fundraise from investors, bank loans, or family and that's totally ok. We'll get to all things fundraising in a future chapter.

**YOU DON'T  
NEED VALIDATION,  
JUST GO FOR IT.**



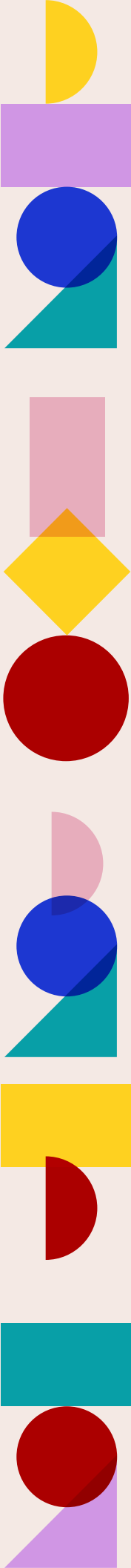
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# ***Chapter 4: All Things Branding***

Now that we've laid the foundation for your business, it's time to **build your brand**. This is where you get to take the why that we've been so focused on and translate it into how your brand comes across to your consumer.

This is another checkpoint in ensuring you're telling a clear brand story.





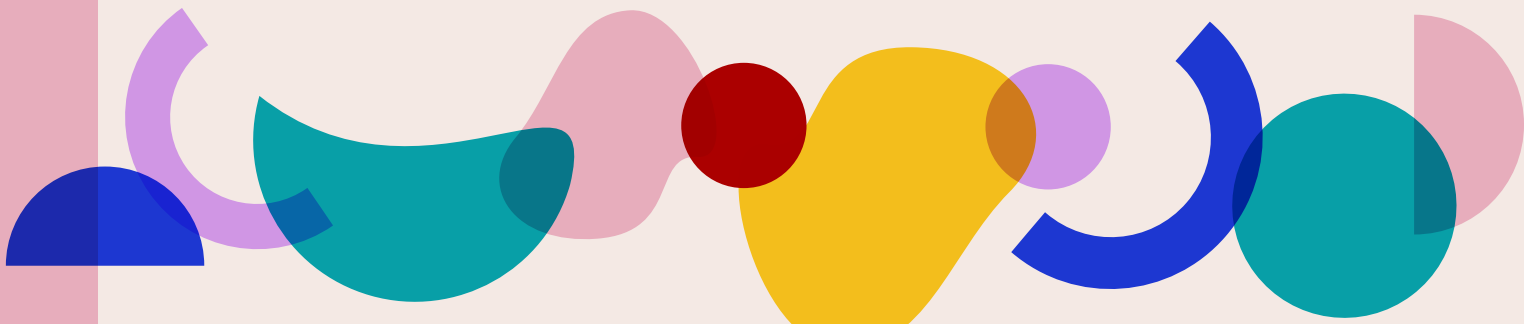
## ***Building Your Brand House***

There are three pillars that support your brand house:

**The Why:** Your brand purpose. This isn't a mission statement, but rather a living, breathing, fire-in-your-belly company mission. Why do you exist? Why are you doing this work?

**The How:** Your brand essence. The one or two words that sum up how your brand connects emotionally with its users.

**The What:** Your brand position. This defines what your brand is, who it's for, and what it does.





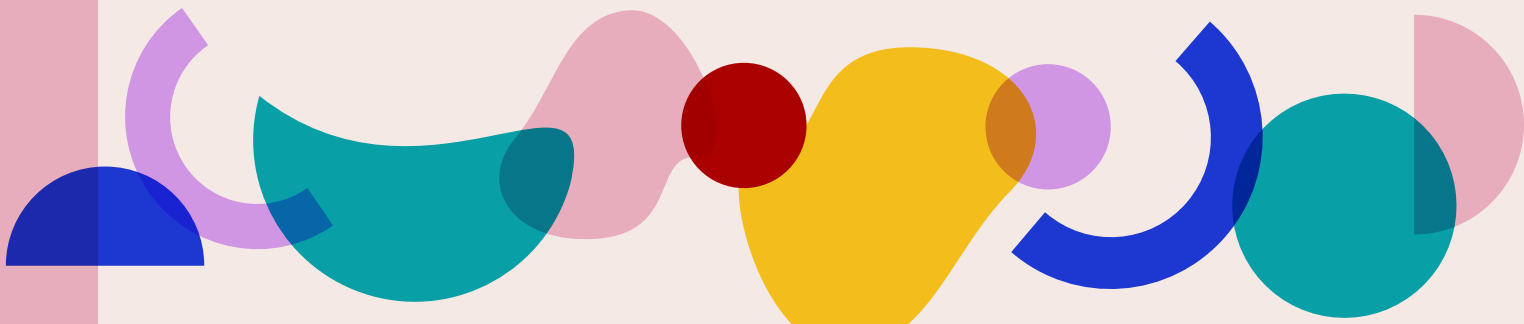
## ***Building Your Brand House***

As the mindset chapter was all about conquering your own emotions and feelings of self-doubt, and the business model chapter got more tactical with the operational specifics, now we're layering back into the emotions and your storytelling — and that's your brand house.

The top of your house is how your business looks to internal stakeholders and any clients you work with and is composed of the three above pillars. The bottom half of your house is for your users and consumers and speaks to how your brand shows up everyday. It relies more on your brand values, its character and personality and the audience you're speaking to. As you think of what your brand stands for, you could easily come up with a very long list. The challenge is in making it concise and digestible. **Brand values serve as a checklist to keep yourself accountable.**

**Put It Into Practice:** Brainstorm five words that could be your brand essence and take each word through the funnel to see what aligns with your brand.

Another exercise to help you land on your essence is to think about what your brand isn't about, and what it's not doing. It might be specific actions or words, but that will also help you realize you don't have to be everything to everybody.





## ***Crafting A Brand Positioning Statement***

A positioning statement is a succinct description of who you are for the core audience for which your brand exists. It should encapsulate:

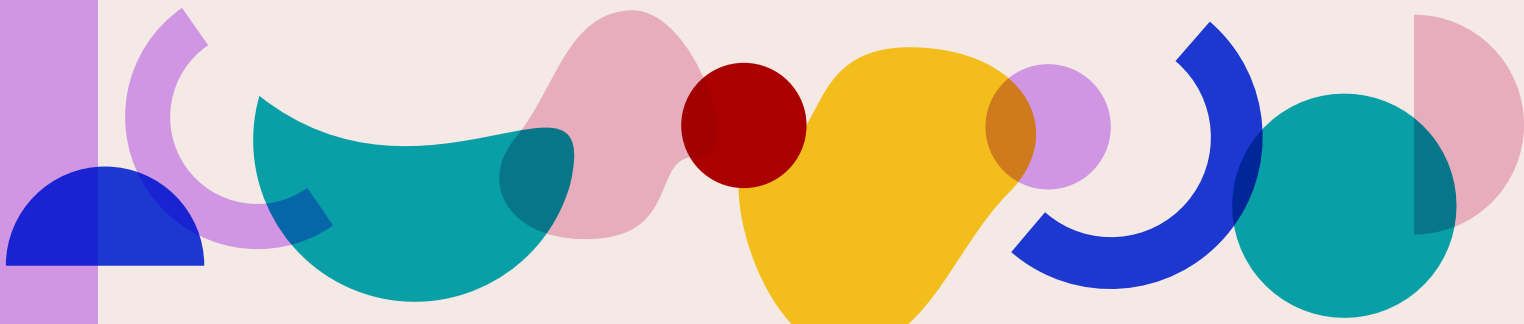
**1) Target Audience:** The group of customers that most closely represents the brand's most fervent user.

**2) Frame Of Reference:** The category in which the brand competes and the context that gives the brand relevance to the customer.

**3) Point Of Difference:** The most compelling and motivating benefit that the brand can own in the hearts and minds of its target audience.

**4) Reason To Believe:** The most convincing proof that the brand delivers what it promises.

Most of this will come directly from you, but once you have testimonials, case studies, and user and product reviews, you can get firsthand proof of your brand delivering on its promise. Even if your product hasn't quite launched yet, you can have people from your inner circle or network try out your product and seek out their testimonials to weave in to your communication strategy ahead of launch.





## ***A Quick Note On Personal Branding Vs. Business Branding***

Unless you are the product, your personal brand is simply another tool for you to use. You can **show how your personal experiences have led you to this business**, but it's certainly not a requirement. It's just another tool in your wheelhouse that can help you.

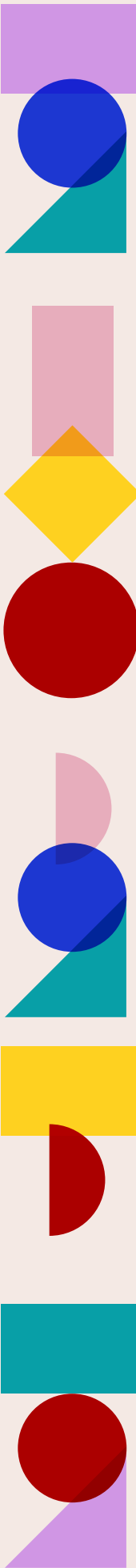
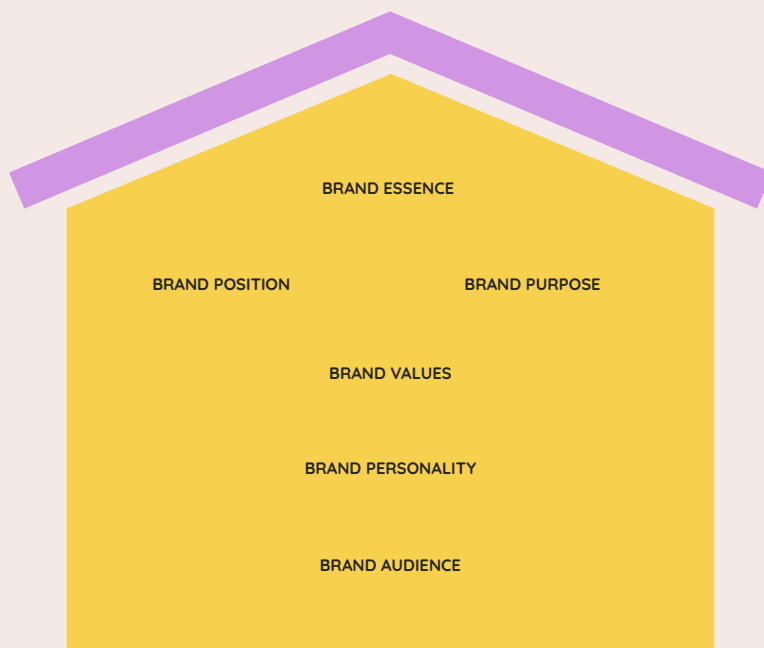


# Homework:

Go back to your idea and to your mindset and use that information to help build your own brand house.

## Pro Tip:

If you're feeling stuck throughout the branding exercise, consider how you would describe your best friend's personality. Your best friend is your brand. How does she show up? What do you love about her? These are all questions that you can come back to and continuously refine the answers to over time.





## ***More resources***

You've got your idea, you've got your business model, now it's all about building a brand and **Office Depot® OfficeMax®** is all about helping your business shine. From [signs, posters & banners](#) to get your business noticed, to [marketing materials](#) to keep your customers informed, **Office Depot® OfficeMax®** offers a full suite of [business services](#) & solutions to help you bring your brand vision to life.

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***Be unstoppable.***

NOT BECAUSE YOU DON'T  
HAVE FAILURES OR DOUBTS,  
BUT BECAUSE

***you continue on  
despite them.***



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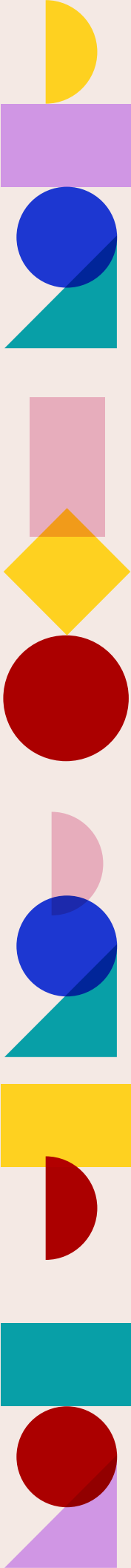



# ***Chapter 5: Funding***

Fundraising can mean so many different things depending on your business, but one thing is universal: Everyone needs to **find the funds** to bring their brilliant idea to life.

In this chapter, we'll talk through all the different options for fundraising, from bootstrapping to applying for grants and loans, crowdfunding, raising funds from your friends and family, angel investors, and venture capital. Let's get to it.

Fundraising has become mainstream thanks to shows like Shark Tank that glamourize the pitch process. But those who raise money from investors are actually in the minority. Most small businesses raise money on their own terms and don't have to give away part of their company to anyone else. Before we get into the different ways you can fundraise for your business, let's start with the jargon.





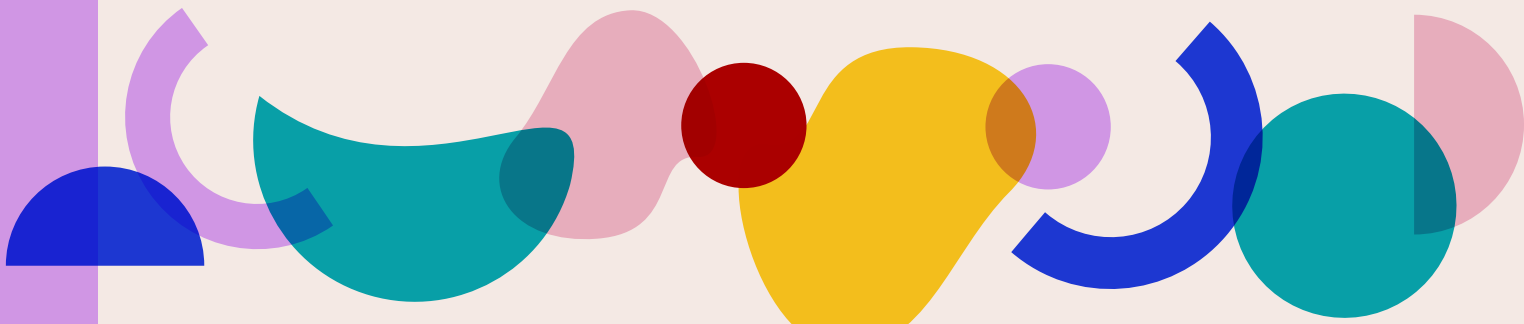
## ***Key Fundraising Terms To Know***

**Equity:** Equity is how much ownership you have in the company. Oftentimes when you're giving away equity, you're giving away ownership.

**Due Diligence:** This is when someone does their data homework on you. Before anyone commits to being an investor, they're likely to ask you for all sorts of documents, like files, spreadsheets, a history of your P&L statements, and more. It's a really clear way to evaluate the health of your business and review your business model.

**Angel Investor:** Someone who is willing to write a smaller check as an individual investor.

**Cap Table:** This is a fancy way of saying a spreadsheet that shows who owns what percentage of your company. If you offer equity or sell parts of your company to advisors or employees, you'll have a cap table detailing what every person owns.



## ***Key Fundraising Terms To Know***

**Preferred Stock:** This is what investors typically ask for. By taking a preferred classification of their ownership, the investor would get paid back first if you were to ever sell your company, and then the rest gets split amongst everyone else. This is particularly important if your company gets bought for less than you expected. For example, if you thought your company was valued at a million dollars and were forced to sell it for \$500,000 one day, and had \$500,000 of investor money in the company, investors would get the \$500,000 sale amount and you'd get nothing. Before you sign any financial agreements, check to make sure that preferred stock isn't in there and that you fully understand what you're signing.

**Burn:** This is how much money you're losing. You likely won't have a profitable company from the start, so it's important to understand what you're burning every month so you'll know your runway.

**Reminder:** Profitability isn't always the goal. If you're trying to scale and dominate a specific market, you want to get market share quickly. So you generally have to burn more money than you're making to capture that market (Uber is a solid example of this). But if you have a smaller business and are self-funding, you likely want to get profitable and mitigate the burn.

## ***Funding Sources***

**Bootstrapping:** This is when an entrepreneur builds a company with their personal savings or the operating revenues of the new company. If you pursue this route, you can bring on hires by offering equity in the company if you can't immediately pay a salary. You'll also want to start seeking out advisors in the beginning — specifically people with different skill sets than yours. Two to three advisors is a solid place to start in your first couple of years.

**Popular Bootstrapped Brands:** Patagonia, Spanx, GoPro

**Grants:** This is money you don't have to pay back that helps fund your business. Popular examples include iFundWomen, The Red Backpack Fund, FB Small Biz, Eileen Fisher, Tory Burch, FedEx, and more here.

**Loans:** This is money you eventually have to pay back, usually with an additional interest payment. The longer you're in business, and the more profitable balance sheets you have to show, the lower your interest rate will be for a small business loan. Shop around for several quotes so you can ensure you're getting the best interest rate if you go this route. One type of loan to know is a cash advance, which a bank gives you up front to pay out your vendors, etc., and that you'll pay back over time, plus interest.

## ***Funding Sources***

**Crowdfunding:** If you've ever been on Kickstarter or Patreon, then you probably have a good understanding of how crowdfunding works — by raising small amounts of money from a large number of people.

**Popular Crowdfunded Brands:** Brooklinen, Allbirds, PopSocket

**Angel Investments & Venture Capital:** With both of these funding options, you'll have to agree to give the investors a certain amount of equity in the company. AngelList is a great resource if you're considering raising money from angel investors. To pitch venture capital firms, you need a referral and an incredibly tight pitch deck. This is for businesses with a clear path to a billion dollars in revenue. Once your biz is in with VC, your only "exit" strategy is to get acquired or go public.

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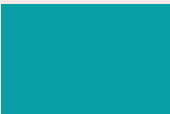
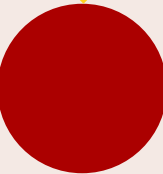


## ***Homework:***

Now that you have a better understanding of the different paths to funding, it's time to make your very own pitch deck!

### **Today's Exercise:**

Follow our simple outline to create your business pitch deck.



***Cover Page: Startup Name***

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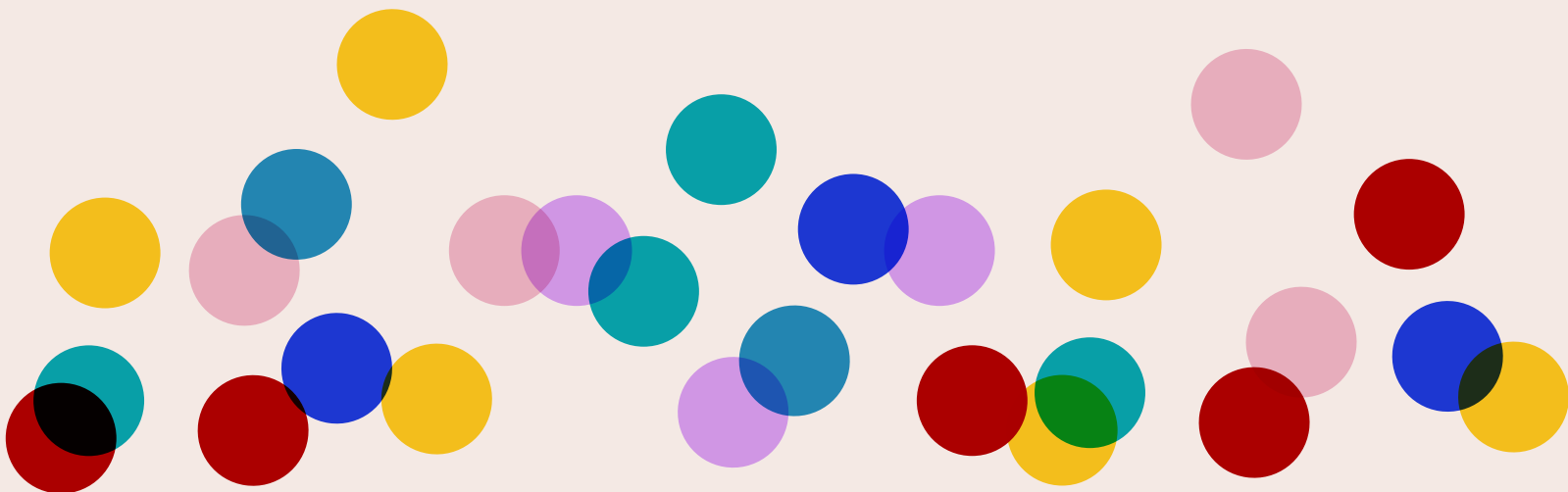
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## ***Section 1: The Problem***

Write your problem statement in two to three sentences. The shorter the better! Use graphics to illustrate your point if you have them.

## ***Section 2: The Solution***

Be short and to the point. Descriptive details can come later.

## ***Section 3: Market Fit***

Can you validate the problem exists with data? How big is the addressable market? Share estimates of the number of people and potential \$ they are spending.

## ***Section 4: The Product***

This is where you can more eloquently describe your solution with visuals (but again, keep it simple).

## ***Section 5: Business Model***

Explain what you'll charge and how you'll make money.

## ***Section 6: Traction***

Use data to detail how successful you've been to date: how many sales/members, growth of audience or following over time, press, etc.

This is your place to brag, brag, brag! Show charts that are going up and to the right, testimonials of happy users, and screenshots of your PR stories.



## ***Section 7: Competitive Landscape***

Who else is doing this and how are you different?

## ***Section 8: Your Team***

If it's just you, tell YOUR story. This is where you can show off the WHY YOU part of your pitch. Brag about your background and why you're the best to do this job. If you have a team, mention them here along with any early investors, advisors, etc.

## ***Section 9: The Financials***

Show a snapshot of your P&L (ideally one year, but better to project your growth across 3 years).

## ***Section 10: Investment Opportunity***

How much money are you raising? How will you use these funds? How long will they last you? What major milestone will they help you hit?



## ***More resources***

Still not sure where to start? Sometimes jotting it all down and making a plan can make it feel more real. **Office Depot® OfficeMax®** can help you [organize & save time](#) with a suite of [business services](#) & solutions to help you accomplish more. Make a good first impression with [business cards](#) & build the business pitch of your dreams with [custom presentations](#). With **Office Depot® OfficeMax®** it's never been easier for your name and ideas to appear in print.

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It's ok to grow **slower**  
so you can grow  
the *right way.*



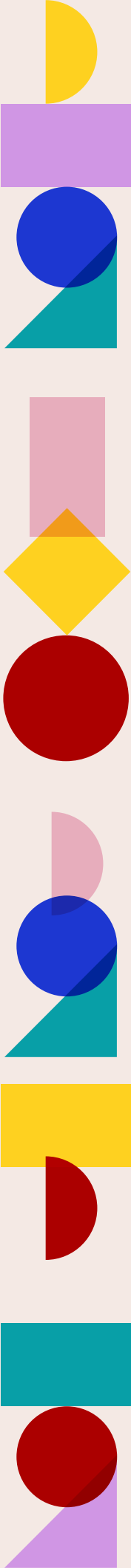
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# ***Chapter 6: Marketing***

How can you communicate your brand to the world and really bring it to life? In these next few pages we're tackling all things marketing! From what it looks like today (and beyond), to how to put together a shining marketing strategy, we'll cover it all.

The modern consumer doesn't just want a product shoved in their face. **They want stories.** They want lessons they can learn. They want to feel better about themselves. And they want to feel inspired. So how exactly can you do that?



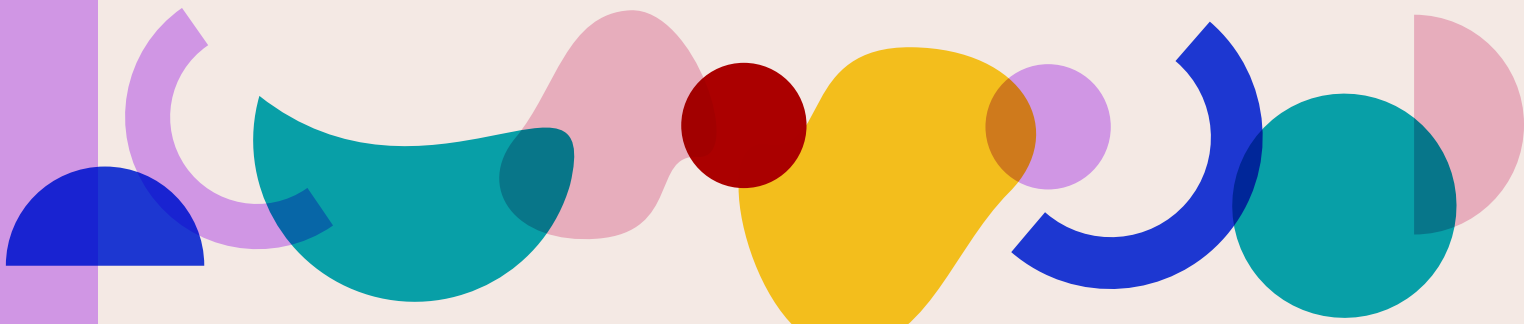


## ***Dive Into The 4 Cs***

Marketing today is unique because there are so many different places you can reach an audience. Half the world is online right now. So how can you reach them? Tap into the four Cs, aka the foundation of every strong marketing strategy. That's content, community, CTA (or call to action), and consistency.

**Content** is king. An audience doesn't always care about who you are, but they certainly care about how you're able to help them. So what are you going to talk about? When you start creating content, use your brand house as inspiration and be sure your content ladders up to your brand essence. You'll also want to select your key platform — where are you going to be sharing your message? It can be overwhelming to create content on every platform, so pick the one platform you want to focus on growing. You might choose Instagram, or if you're a B2B, you might opt for LinkedIn. Email is great in that it doesn't contend with any algorithm; you get to control who sees your content. Once you've released a few weeks or months worth of content, you can measure what's working and tweak your posting strategy in the future.

**Consistency** is about continuously showing up to build your audience. Once they discover you, they'll expect a cadence of communication from you so it feels like an authentic relationship. Once you have an idea of the content you want to share, you can build a calendar and posting schedule to keep on top of it all (and be consistent)!



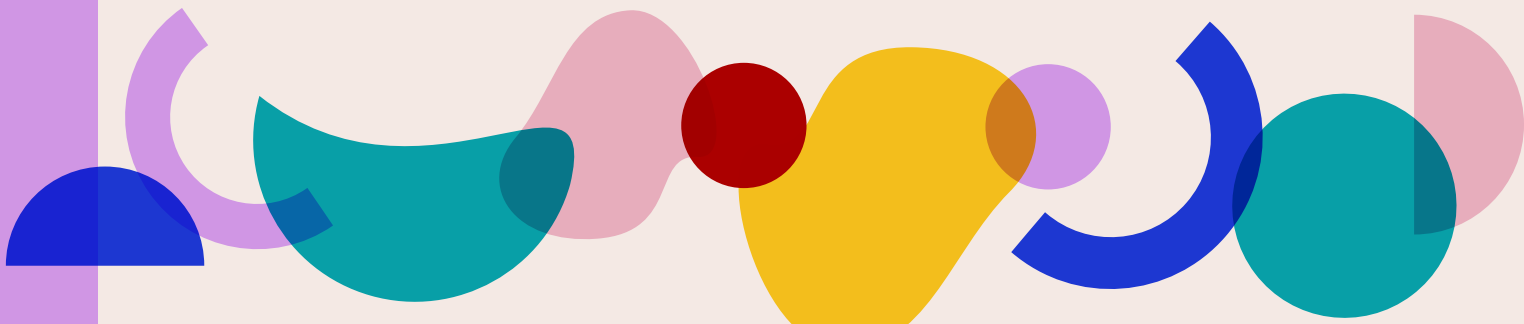




## ***Dive Into The 4 Cs***

Your **community** is the people you're reaching and where you're finding them. Is it on Instagram, TikTok or LinkedIn? How are you bringing them together? What common interest will all of your followers share? Once you have a following, it's important to keep them engaged to foster loyalty and reciprocal engagement within your community. Are you responding to their DMs and questions and comments? Are you following the \$1.80 rule and leaving your two cents on the top nine trending Instagram posts for 10 different hashtags or brands that are relevant to your business every single day? You should engage in the social ecosystem where you're building your brand and create visibility for your business. Sharing positive energy across social networks with like-minded accounts and people can earn you good social karma. With any luck, the goodwill will come back to you and your business.

A **call to action** is what you want your audience to do. It's the driving message to get your audience to consume or buy your product. If you're posting on Instagram, make sure you're explicit in your caption about what you want your audience to do. Do you want them to check out your sale inventory at the link in bio? Tell them! Do you want them to respond to your question in the comments? Prompt them by asking them to.

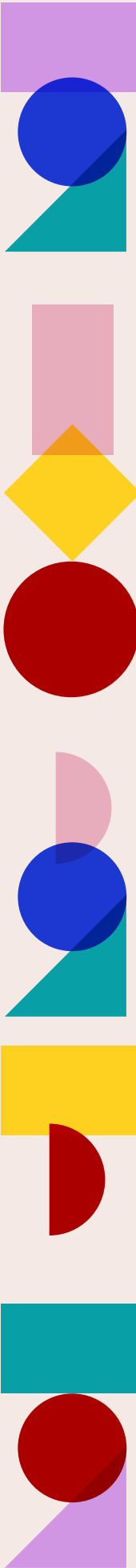


# ***Homework:***

You're primed and ready to start getting your brand's voice heard! It's time to create a social account and get posting.

## **Today's Exercise:**

To better understand what converts an audience or new follow, think about what converts you as a consumer. **Pick five accounts you love and write down why they “converted” you and what actions they inspired you to take.** Then jump into you spankin' new social account and update your bio with something short, snappy, and reflective of your brand's personality.





## ***More resources***

No matter what business you're in, marketing is critical in helping you find and keep your customers. From [signs, posters & banners](#) to get your business noticed, to [marketing materials](#) to keep your customers informed, Office Depot® OfficeMax® offers a full suite of [business services](#) & solutions to help you & your business.

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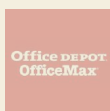
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IT'S NOT ABOUT  
WHAT YOU MAKE,  
IT'S ABOUT THE  
STORIES YOU TELL.



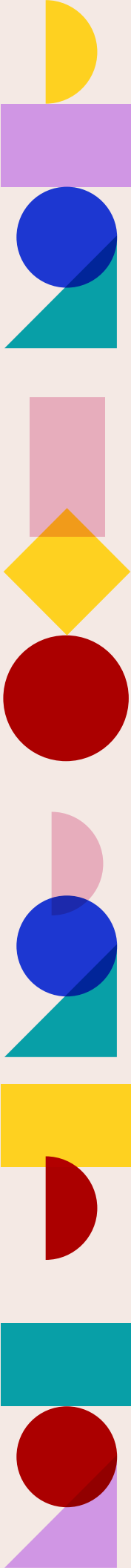
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# ***Chapter 7: Social***

Now that you know why content marketing is so crucial for unlocking your audience, let's go deeper and help find your social voice. In this chapter, we'll help you start thinking about your brand as a living, breathing entity, define your voice, show you how to create content creatively and efficiently, and make a content plan. We'll also talk through how creating your "on-brand" and "off-brand" guidelines will help inform your storytelling strategy.

We'll lay out the framework for putting together your content calendar and strategy in a way that can scale. We'll also talk through your target audience (the customer and social engaged are not always the same person), and figure out what images, stories, and quotes will **bring your vision to life.**





## ***Finding Your Social Voice***

Social media is an amazing free marketing tool that didn't exist 15 years ago. Particularly with Instagram, you can use a few images and words to tell followers who you are in an instant. A great exercise to try before digging into your brand's DNA is to think about the six images you would share with someone to tell them who YOU are. Then you can extend this to your brand.

Once you start to think about your brand as a living, breathing entity influenced by its surrounding environment, personal histories, cultural happenings, and more, your brand's voice will come more into focus. And just like a person, the way you express your brand's voice will change depending on the audience, the objective, the time of year, and your subject matter. Your brand isn't simply you, or your co-founder, your manager, or your customer, it's a dynamic combo of all of these things, with the brand's mission at the forefront of her mind and voice. You'll also want to be mindful of your visual voice and how that echoes your voice across copy and written and spoken extensions of your brand. A moodboard exercise is a great way to figure out your visual voice.

**Put It To Practice:** Create a moodboard, be it digital or physical (Pinterest is great for this!), to explore and define your voice. You can print stuff out, gather postcards, magazine cuttings, construction paper in colors you like, and anything else that you might be drawn to. Using words, images, colors, and patterns are all fair game. Once you've assembled everything, you can pick out trends to discover what's on-brand and what's clearly off-brand. For instance, your imagery might be positive, empowering, authentic, informative, playful, inclusive, etc. and you'll notice your brand isn't snarky, cheesy, exclusive, and more.

## ***How to Build a Content Strategy***

Now that you have an eye for your brand ID, we can move on to building your content strategy. Creating content is all about testing and learning. Start with the mission and voice behind your brand, then consider your target audience and figure out what images, stories, and quotes can bring that vision to life.

**Content Types:** With so many different types of businesses you can pursue, not every content type will be relevant to your brand. Here are some common types to explore:

- Editorial and Real-life Photos
- Stylized Product Shots
- Promotional Messaging + Launches
- Behind The Scenes Footage
- Seasonal and Topical Inspiration
- Community Highlights
- Profiles and Human Interest
- Gatherings and Events

Also, if you're just starting out and don't have the resources to create your own content from scratch, curate a mix of existing content you can regram (with permission and credit, of course). For most brands, a good ratio to aim for is sharing 50% original content and 50% curated reposts. This will help you grow your community as you find like-minded creators and boost their work. If you're a paper goods brand, graphic designer, or something that translates immediately to social, you'll want your original content ratio to be higher. As you start posting content, you'll be able to notice trends in performance. Then, with a few months of content under your belt, you can begin to practice the 80/20 rule — meaning you should be able to predict the performance of 80% of your content and 20% should be a wildcard. Really what this means is notice what your high-performing content looks like and innovate with new styles and formats about 20% of the time.



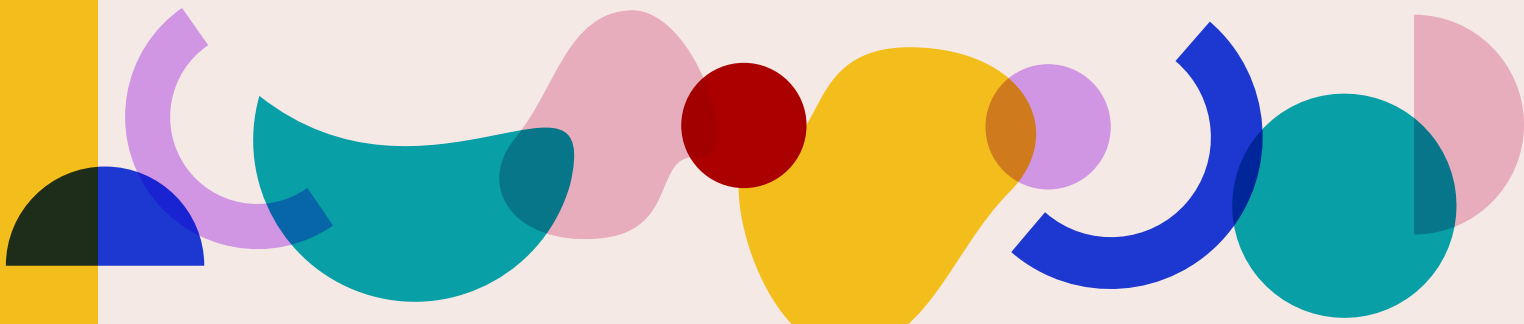
## ***Keeping Up With Your Competitors***

It's a good rule of thumb to keep tabs on what your competitors are doing. It'll help you determine how to differentiate your brand from the rest. What can you learn from their content mix, color choices, design aesthetic, caption style, and more?



## ***The Art of Content Creation***

Your followers want to feel like they're in the world your brand has created. Your social platform's job is to portray your brand's POV and story.



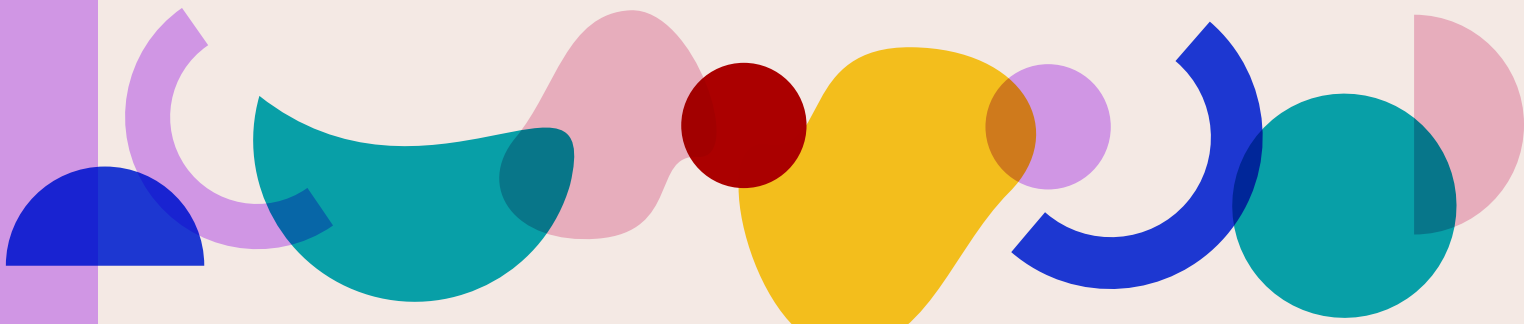


## ***Content Best Practices***

**Photo:** Traditional portraits can feel stiff and inauthentic, so it's best to capture candid moments with movement, especially if your photography is subject-based. Fill the frame but leave room to breathe. Negative space is a key part of any composition. Adjust the cropping until you get the perfect frame. And remember that light and bright is always best. Sunlight is the best flash you could ever hope for, so set up flatlays outside on the sidewalk or over a piece of fabric to take advantage of natural light. Also be mindful of the color palette you've chosen for your brand so that there's consistency across your posts.

**Captions:** Speak to your followers like you're texting with a close friend. This will help humanize your brand and remind your audience there's a human behind each post. Liven up your copy by choosing 10-20 emojis you plan to use regularly and stick with those.

**Regrams and Takeovers:** One of the best ways to double your content is by regramming customers, fans, local businesses, and so on. You can also do takeovers with influencers on the feed and in stories. Fold these into your content calendar so you don't rely too heavily on them and make sure they contribute to cultivating your community — not just bring you the likes.

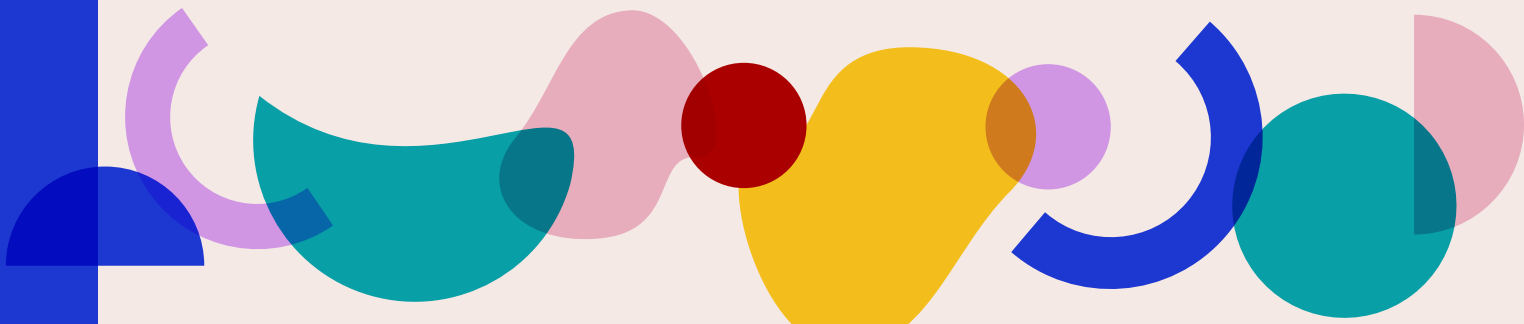


## ***The Learning Process***

**Make a plan, put it into action, and learn from it.** Give yourself goals and objectives so you can evaluate performance based on those. If one thing doesn't work, figure out three ways to do it differently.

So how do you create content when it's not your full-time job? A sample weekly schedule could look like this: On Mondays, set aside one hour for planning — mapping out your calendar, determining your themes, etc.). Then spend 30 minutes a day curating or creating content. Once every two weeks, hold time for a photoshoot as needed for product shots and more.

Lastly, if you're pre-launch you might be asking yourself — well, how can I start making content now? Just do it! Show behind the scenes of what you're building, or talk about your process and what you're creating because **people love to see the raw, messy work-in-progress moments too.**

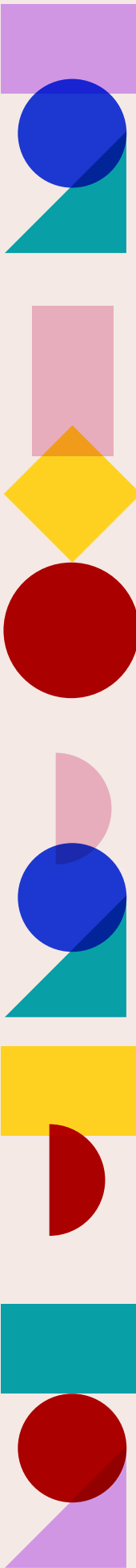


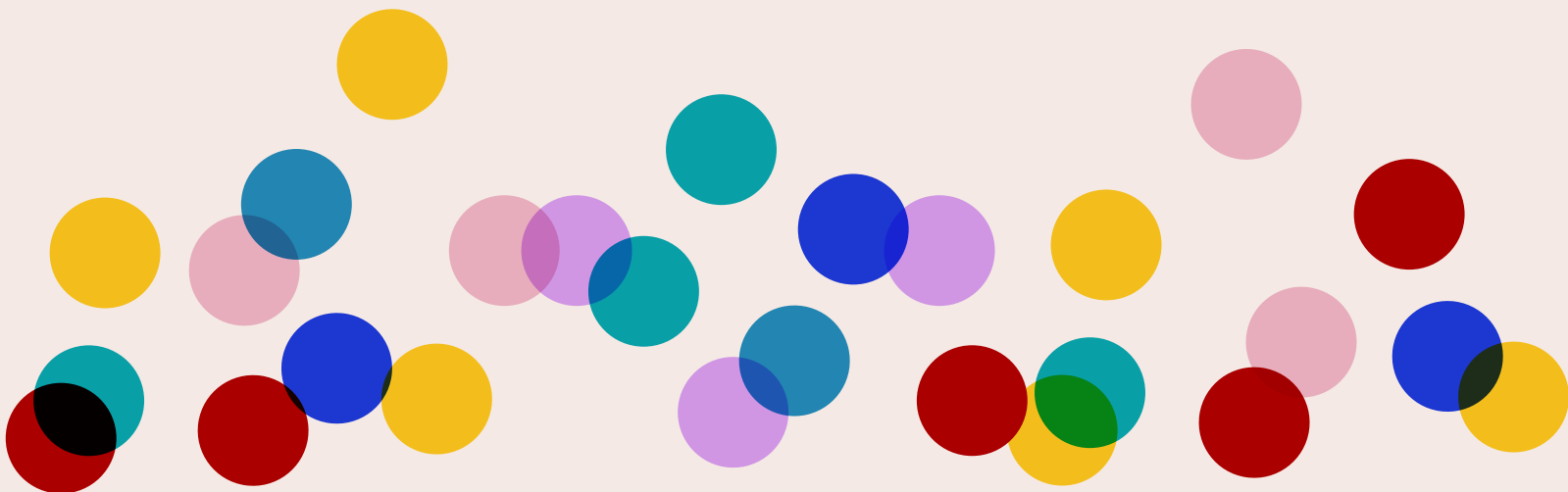
# ***Homework:***

Now that you're up to speed on all things content, it's time to put your skills to work!

## **Today's Exercise:**

Run a competitive analysis. **Choose three competitive brands and analyze their social channels to help identify likes, dislikes, commonalities, and points of differentiation.** Then, create your content calendar! Plan your posts for the next four weeks so you can test your new social strategy. Note: This doesn't mean you have to post every day! Start with what feels manageable and ramp up if you have the bandwidth to add more posts.







## ***More resources***

Color palettes, copywriting, and content calendars — this week definitely covered A LOT. But don't fret, **Office Depot® OfficeMax®** is all about helping you [organize & save time](#) with a suite of [business services](#) to help you accomplish more - from [signs, posters & banners](#) to get your business noticed to [marketing materials](#) to help your brand vision to life. With **Office Depot® OfficeMax®** by your side, we know you can tackle it all.

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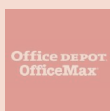
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**Like you and me,**  
your brand is a  
**living, breathing entity**  
with a unique  
**personality and VOICE.**



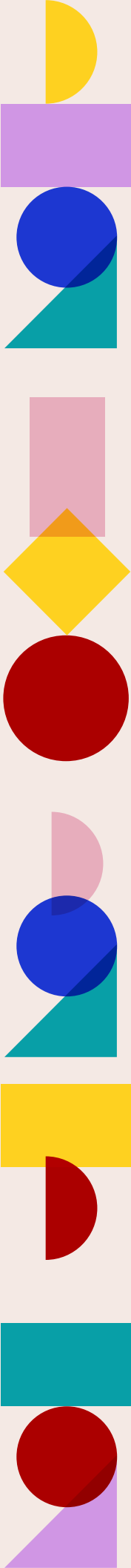
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# ***Chapter 8: Presentation Skills***

Public speaking is scary!

And so is presenting, pitching, and all the things you need to do to put your business out there. In the next few pages we'll demystify the art of the presentation, with tools and tricks that will serve you for years to come. We'll also share our go-to "triangle" strategy for all presentations and meetings. (It seriously works every time!) **Let's get into it.**



**Presentations are all about the audience.** Aristotle said if you want people to listen to you, to feel inspired, and to be motivated to action, there are three things you must do:

### ***1. Seek understanding***

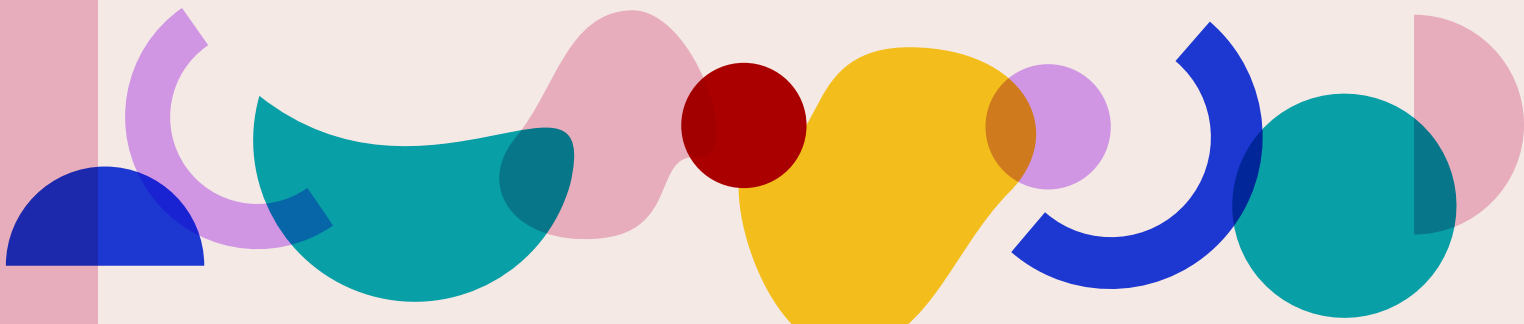
First think of yourself, why do you care about this, and what are you trying to achieve? And secondly, understand where your audience is coming from so you can better relate to them and communicate effectively.

### ***2. Make your content clear***

Of course it'll make sense to you because it's your brand that you've been steeped in, but it must make sense to the audience.

### ***3. Have a memorable delivery***

How can you seem enthusiastic about what you're talking about and convey that you care so it'll stick with the audience after your presentation is over.





In our **current remote landscape**, your next presentation might be virtual. Here are some basics for strong communication through your screen:

**Have your camera at eye level.** Eyes should be across from the green light, and you never want to look down at your audience.

**Mimic eye contact** by looking at the camera.

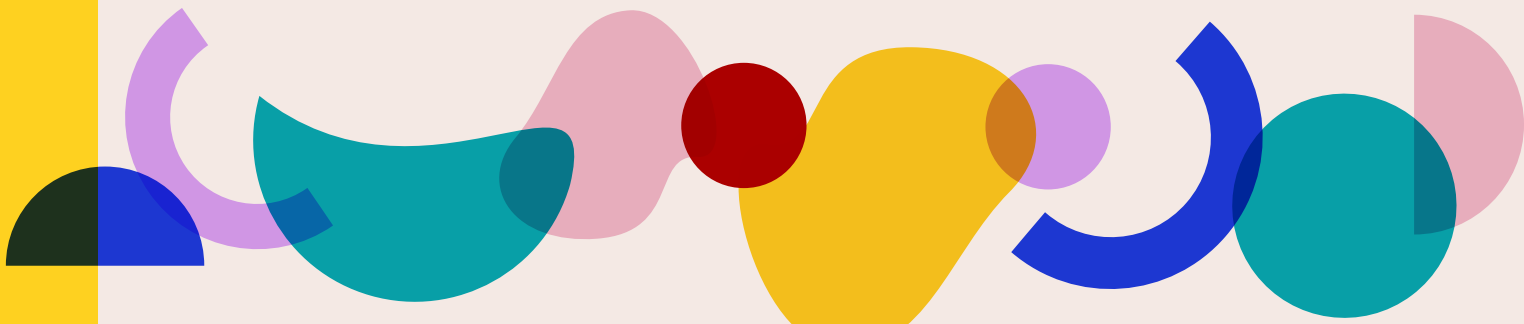
Try to **be two to three feet away from the camera** with framing just below the shoulders and just above the head.

Face a window, check your lighting, and **consider your background.**

**Turn off all notifications** across your devices.

Keep your feet on the floor to **straighten your posture.**

When a visual or slide goes up, the audience will automatically try to digest the slide and might miss what you're saying, so be sure to **tell people what they're about to see** in a concise sentence before you flip to the slide, and then break it down in more detail once it's on screen.



## ***The Triangle***

So how do you put your content together? The Triangle is a helpful formula for prepping your next presentation or pitch. A triangle helps you bucket your thoughts into three parts.

To try it on your own, draw a triangle and then think about the topic of your next presentation. Give it a name and drop it in the middle of your triangle. Then think about your audience, specifically who they are and what they care about, and drop that in the middle of the triangle as well. Next you'll want to think of the three main buckets of information you want to get across. What are the three most important values you want to get across? These go on each side of your triangle and should tap into the content of your presentation. Then, come up with a thesis sentence for each section (hint: imagine you only have 90 seconds to get each point across). This is a logical way to gather your thoughts and drive home clarity for your audience.

**Aristotle's recipe for presenting:** Tell people what you're going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them. The hope is that after sharing your message three distinct times, it'll stick with the audience.

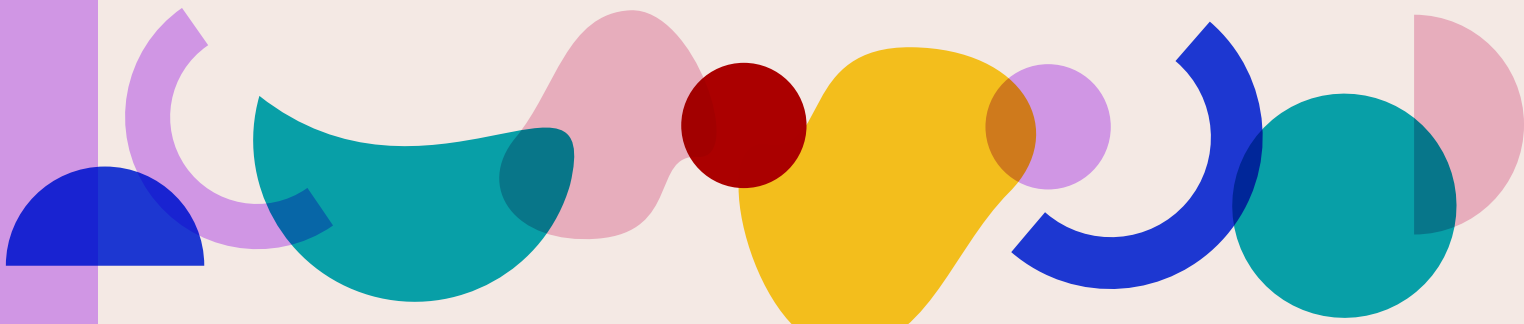


## ***Virtual Q&A Best Practices***

It's possible you might encounter some hostile or uncomfortable questions during your pitch or presentation. But don't let that keep you from inviting your audience to dig deeper or ask clarifying questions.

Say you get a heated question like, "Who are you to be telling me about x, y, z?" To start, be sure you're able to listen to the question without getting into the negative emotion of the other person. Then rephrase their question in your response. You might say, "What are my credentials?" And then bottomline the answer. Give a short answer and don't give a speech.

**If you don't have the answer to a question, it's okay to tell them you don't**, and that you'll get back to them when you do. Say, "I will find that out and get back to you." Then follow through!



## ***The Founder Mindsets***

Getting in the right headspace for a presentation or pitch is never easy, but remind yourself of these common founder strengths for an extra vote of confidence before kicking off your next talk.

**Founders** are forever students, they never lose the curiosity to keep learning.

**Founders** are relentless and never give up. In times of crisis, they figure out what to do.

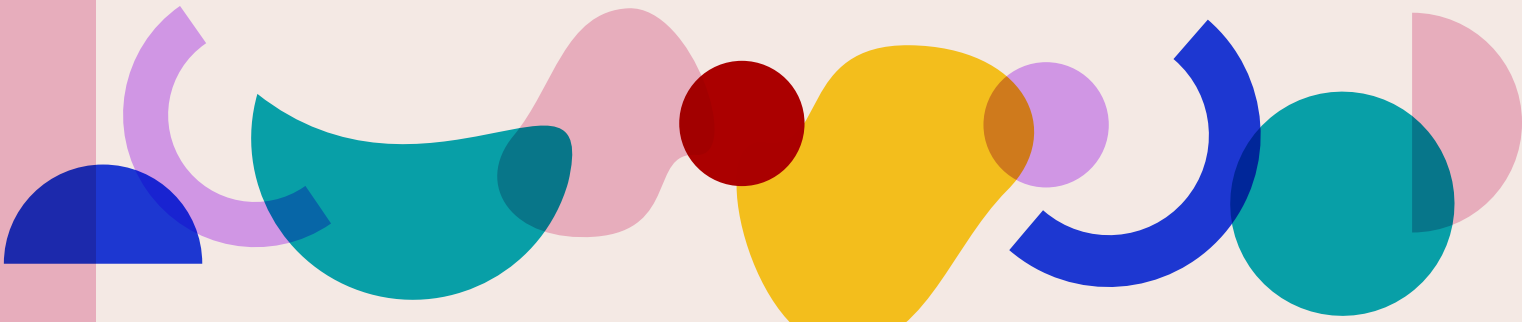
**Founders** value working with teams and know they can't do it themselves.

**Founders** lean into their purpose and are mission-focused — they're not motivated solely by money.

**Founders** are committed and have a bias toward action. It doesn't matter if there's an obstacle, they'll move around it.

**Founders** are future oriented and know what they need to do to get there.

Do these sound familiar? That's because as a founder, you possess these strengths too!

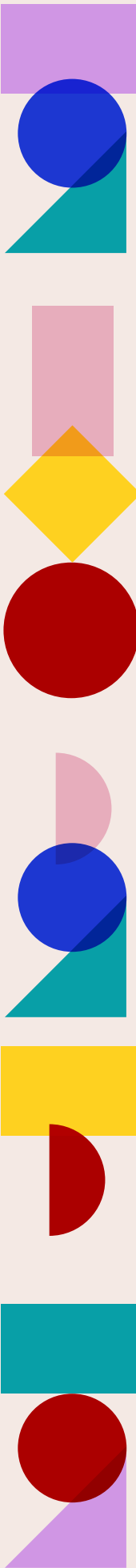


## ***Homework:***

Your presentation skills only get better with time and practice, so see how often you can tell someone new about your business pitch to refine your speech and get more confident.

### **Today's Exercise:**

Practice and perfect your **90-second “triangle” pitch** (building on the elevator pitch you practiced in Chapter 2).

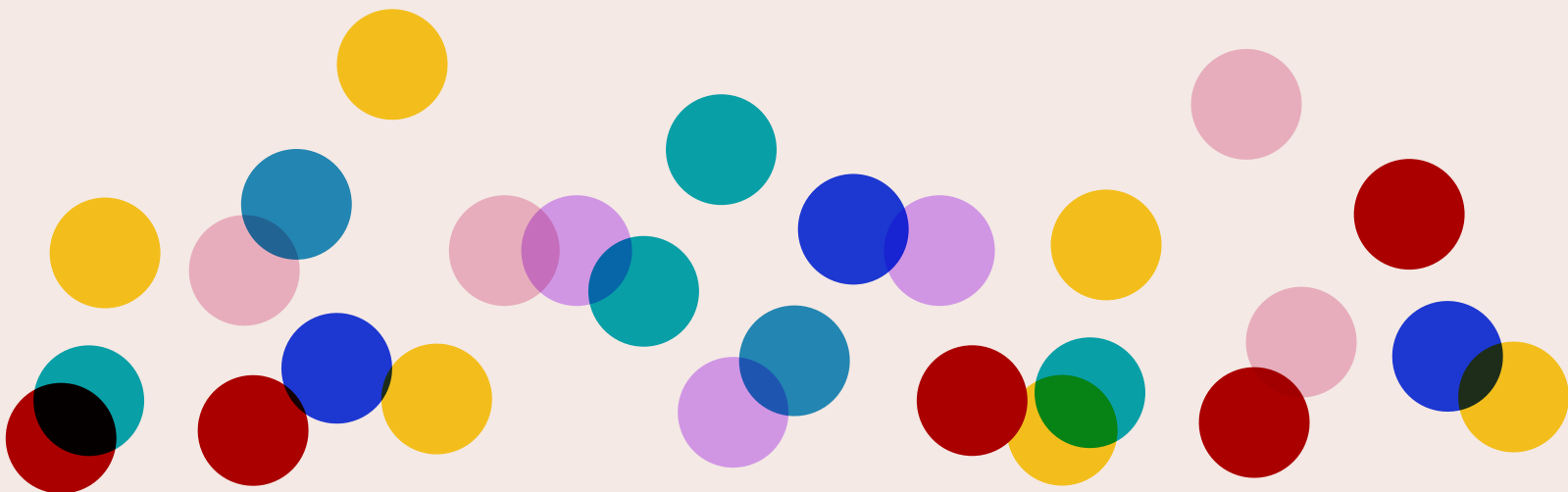


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## ***More resources***

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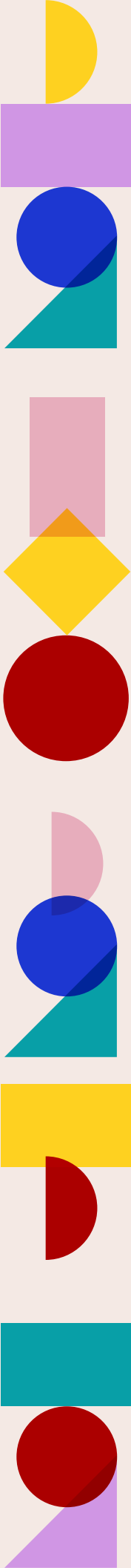


*TAKE THAT PAUSE,  
TAP INTO YOUR  
INNER VOICE,  
AND TRUST  
YOUR INTUITION.*



# ***Chapter 9: Public Relations***

Second to fundraising, PR can seem like one of the toughest and most uncomfortable aspects of building a business. But press can serve so many purposes — it gets your message out there, it gives you credibility, and it can lead to partnerships, incredible business opportunities, and even increased customers. In this chapter, we'll share our tips for figuring out a PR strategy that will help **elevate your business and brand**.



## ***A Primer on PR: How to Become Pressworthy***

Here's a secret: YOU can be your own best publicist. You don't always need external help, especially when you're first starting out. So remember that you have all the tools you need right now to unleash your message into the world and get the media attention you want.

**Step 1: Know your intentions.** Be clear on what your intentions are for getting press. Is your goal to be personally positioned as an expert? Is it to get the word out that a game-changing problem-solving product exists? Get clear on who you are and what you're about before seeking out press so your message and intent come through clearly.

**Step 2: Understand the art of storytelling.** Before you start creating your pitch, get familiar with the key elements every good story has. The founder's journey is a great starting point. If you've overcome an obstacle in the process of creating your company, tap into that to help craft your backstory. Also think about what contributes to your signature style. Are there little touches that can help make you more memorable and stand out as people get to know you from press (think Anna Wintour's signature bob)? Then layer in the message of your brand and what it can offer or teach other people or companies. Lastly, has your product or service changed lives? Drop in a testimonial or two if you have one.

**Step 3: Befriend the press.** Once you have your story down, you can focus on building relationships with the media and tailor your pitch specifically for each connection. The non-human copy-paste pitch doesn't work — it always has to feel personalized. If you're not sure how to connect with the press, some thought starters include reaching out when you've read an article they wrote that you enjoyed, inviting them to events, or giving them free services with no expectations. What could serve them? Could you give them sources or ideas that don't just benefit you? Building press relationships takes time, so have patience!



## ***PR Strategy***

Now that you're on your way to securing your first press interview, let's talk PR strategy.

**First,** ensure that your press materials are ready to go. Have a one pager with your most up-to-date bio, double check that your website or social media account is up and running smoothly, and that the photos in your press kit are high-res quality and publishable.

**Secondly,** ask yourself who in your company is the best spokesperson for your brand. If you're shy and introverted, give yourself permission to pass the mic to another team member who can effectively speak to the brand's mission and message.

When you get a press inquiry, take a look at the reporter's other work before saying yes. Written interviews are ideal, but if that's not possible, let them know you're recording the interview. During the conversation, ask them explicitly to mention your product or website and confirm in a separate email. Reporters also love stats so include metrics about your brand when relevant.

Really slow down as you're speaking and think about the coherent message you want to get across. Consider memorable quotes that would be tweet or quote worthy. Reporters are listening for the headline and the soundbite to get the most interesting story possible.

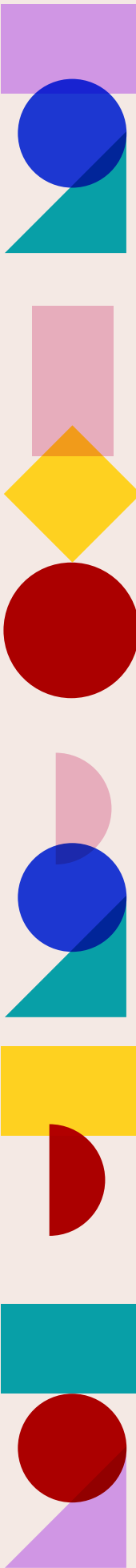
Speaking to the press isn't always the most natural feeling, so practice being interviewed by your friends and family until it feels more comfortable. And remember, the most you put yourself out there, the easier it will get.

## ***Homework:***

Ready to get people talking about your brand and business? Start consuming media with a different lens to analyze and deconstruct press you like and don't like. Then create a press vision board of the outlets you want to be featured in and the types of conversations you hope to spark.

### **Today's Exercise:**

**Write a PR outreach email:** Remember, no canned emails allowed! How can you make it personal and make the person you're reaching out to feel seen?



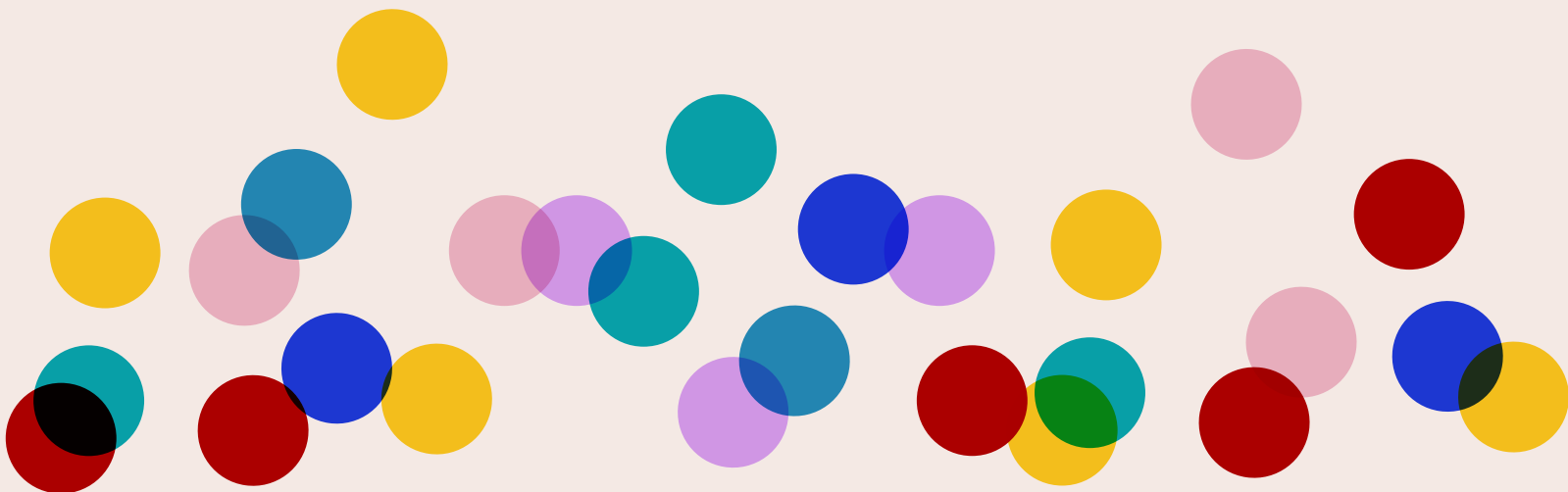
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## ***More resources***

Ready to shout your message from the rooftops?

And to start bringing in sales? **Office Depot® OfficeMax®** has got your back, with a full suite of [business solutions](#) to help you succeed, including [print & copy services](#) to make sure your message comes through loud and clear.

[www.officedepot.com/services](http://www.officedepot.com/services)



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**Getting clear on who you are,  
what you're about, and  
what your intentions are  
is critical for good press.**



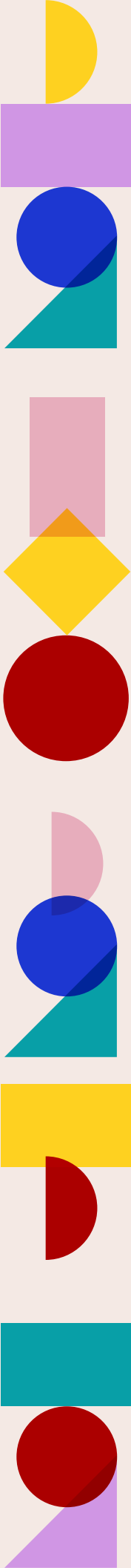
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# ***Chapter 10: Wrap-Up***

Cue all the cheesy graduation songs, because **you just made it through a marathon!** We've thrown so much at you while you've been busy building your business, so we wanted this chapter to be a space where we highlight the key takeaways of Selfmade so you'll always have it to refer to. Onto the recap!





## ***The Entrepreneurial Mindset in 4 Traits***

Confidence  
Nimbleness and Agility  
Decisiveness  
Resilience

## ***The Idea***

WHAT is the problem you wish to solve?  
WHO are you solving it for?  
HOW will you solve it?  
Why you?

Is your idea a “vitamin” or a “painkiller”? The world needs BOTH!

## ***Business Models + KPIs***

Forecast your business at least 12 months out, then work backwards.  
Don't be afraid to \*change\* your model or try a few out as you go.  
Pick one metric and make it grow. The “magic number” is key.



## ***Personal Brand vs. Business Brand:***

Not always necessary to have both, but you and your story are essential.

**Brand Strategy > Brand House:** Use your brand house to inform how you make decisions on the daily.



## ***Fundraising***

Consider the pros and cons of each:

Bootstrapping

Grants

Loans

Crowdfunding

F&F/Angel

Venture Capital



## ***Marketing and Social Tap into the 4 Cs:***

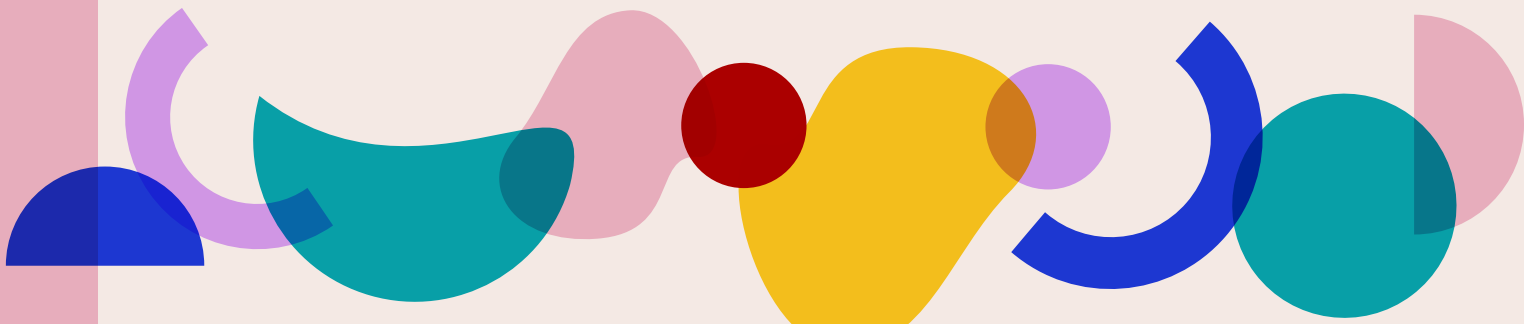
Content

Community

Call to Action

Consistency

And remember that it's about we not me. How are you creating content that's helping others?





## ***Social Voice***

Start with your mission and voice behind your brand.

Consider your target audience (both the customer and social engager).

Figure out what images, stories, and quotes will bring that vision to life.



## ***Pitching & Presenting***

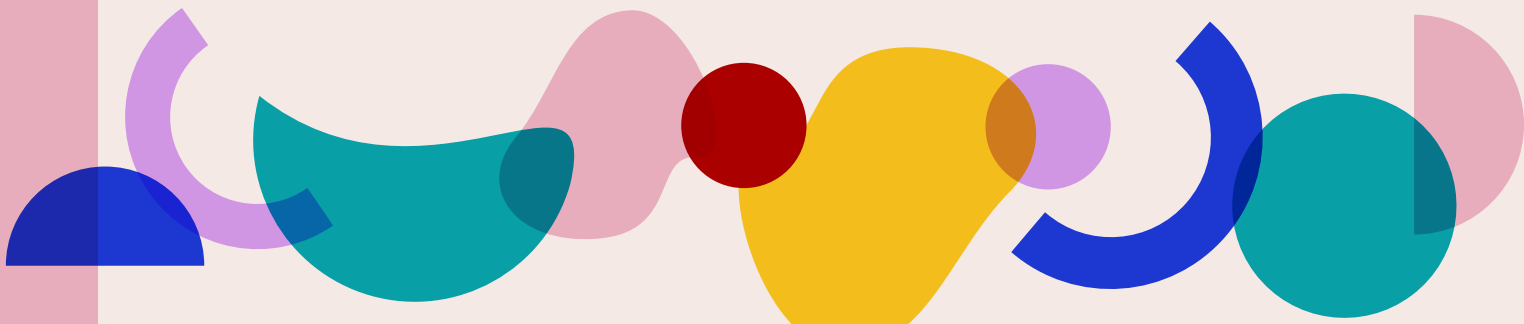
Keep your eyes on the green dot at eye level for virtual meetings.

Raise your voice. Smile! Don't fidget! **Deep breaths!**

Remember the Triangle: Intro your 3 main points, Detail each of the main points, close with a recap of the 3 points.

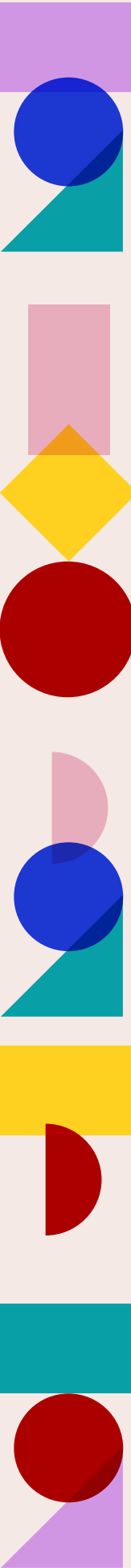
As for some parting words: Be confident that once you've stepped into this journey, you're going to get where you're supposed to be.

Keep taking the big scary leaps forward, asking the tough questions, building your community, and supporting other small businesses and entrepreneurs. We'll be rooting for you!



## ***Homework:***

**You have all the tools you need to get out there and make your business a sweeping success!** Put yourself out there and go live with your first (or next) product, offering, or service.





## ***More resources***

Ready to take your idea to the next level? Build the business of your dreams with the help of a full suite of [business services](#) from **Office Depot® OfficeMax®** to help you succeed – including [print & copy services](#), furniture & tech to help you [work from anywhere](#) PLUS the convenience of [curbside pickup!](#) Let **Office Depot® OfficeMax®** help you accomplish more so you can focus on more important things, like starting & growing the business of your dreams.

[www.officedepot.com/services](http://www.officedepot.com/services)

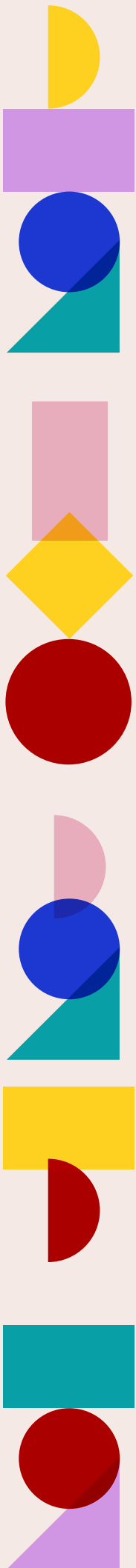


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# ***Chapter 11: Business Solutions***

We're all in on seeing you win! We're so excited to be a part of your journey to help you start or grow your business. To help you succeed, we've curated a list of custom solutions to help you focus on your passion and accomplish more in your business. **Learn how we can help you!**



# ***Business Solutions***



## ***Build demand and attract customers***

Say it in a way your customers want to hear it. Let Office Depot help you build a brand that will get the world talking.



## ***Simplify your business processes***

From basic supplies to big-picture solutions, we've got your back.



## ***Improve workforce productivity***

Create a productive workspace anywhere with our flexible work solutions.



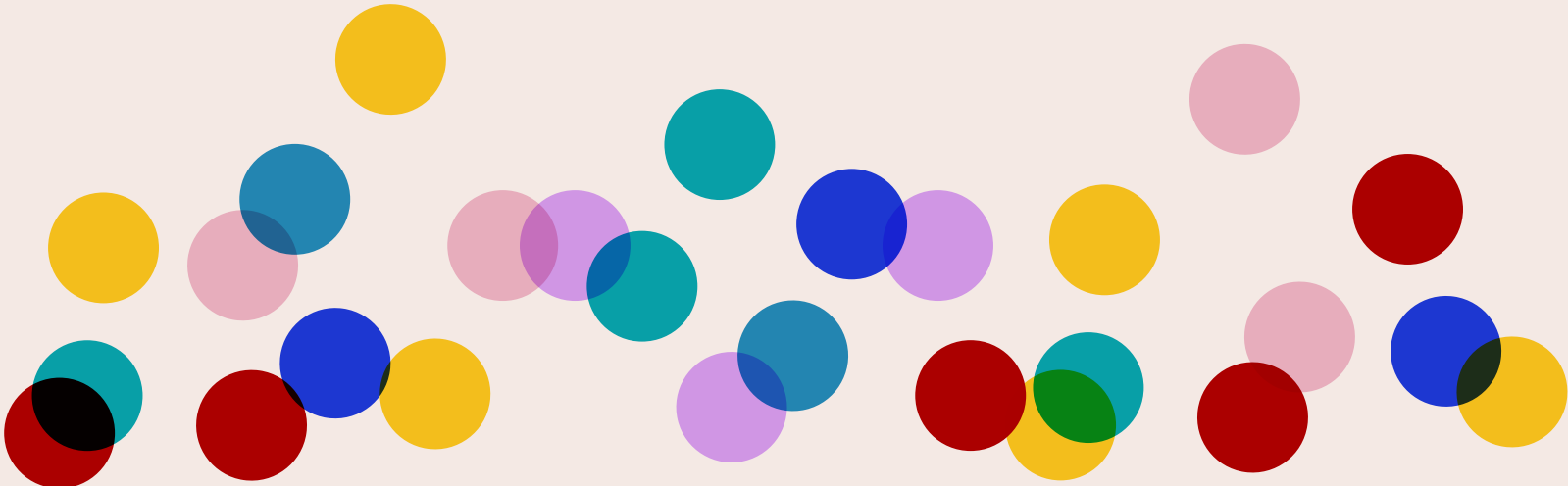
# ***Printable Work Pages***

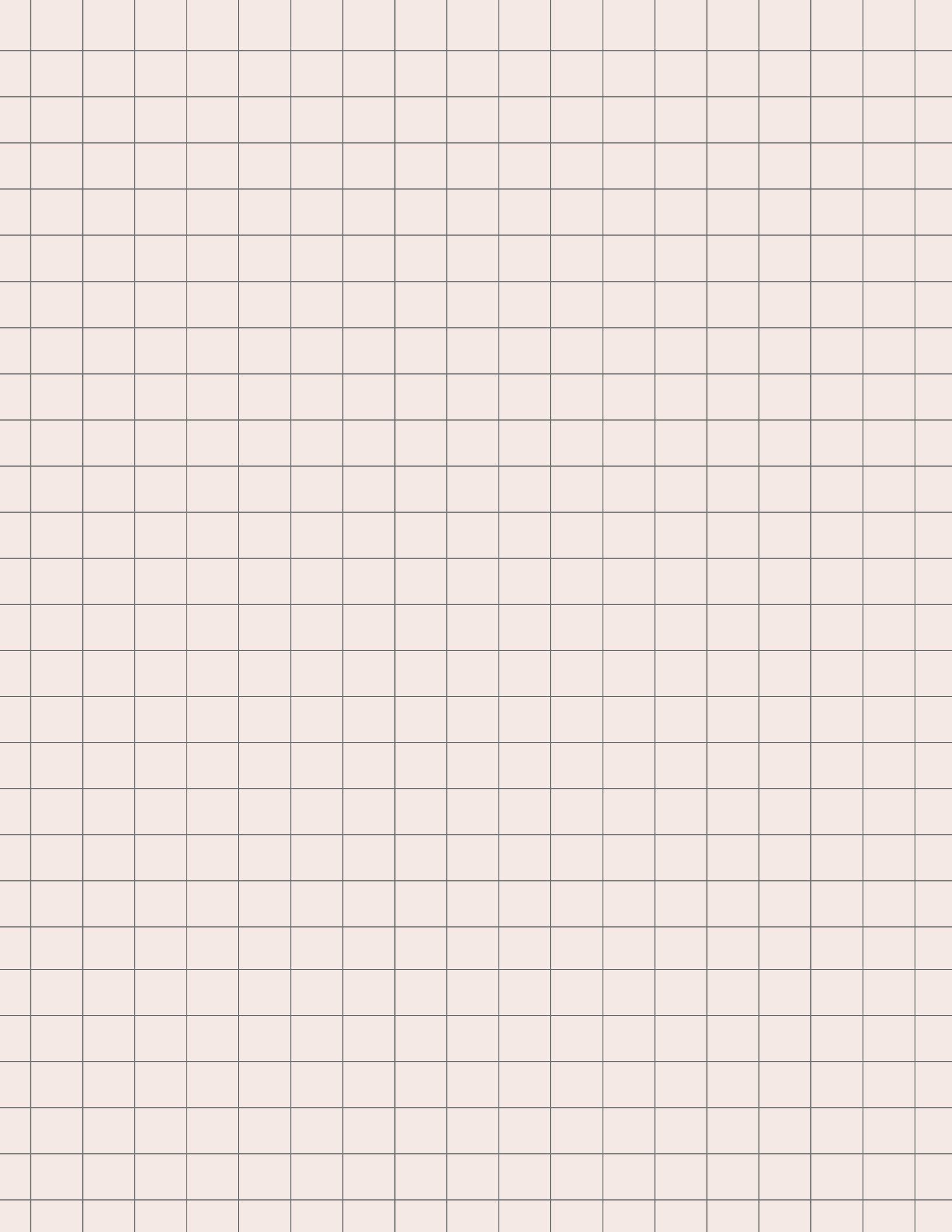


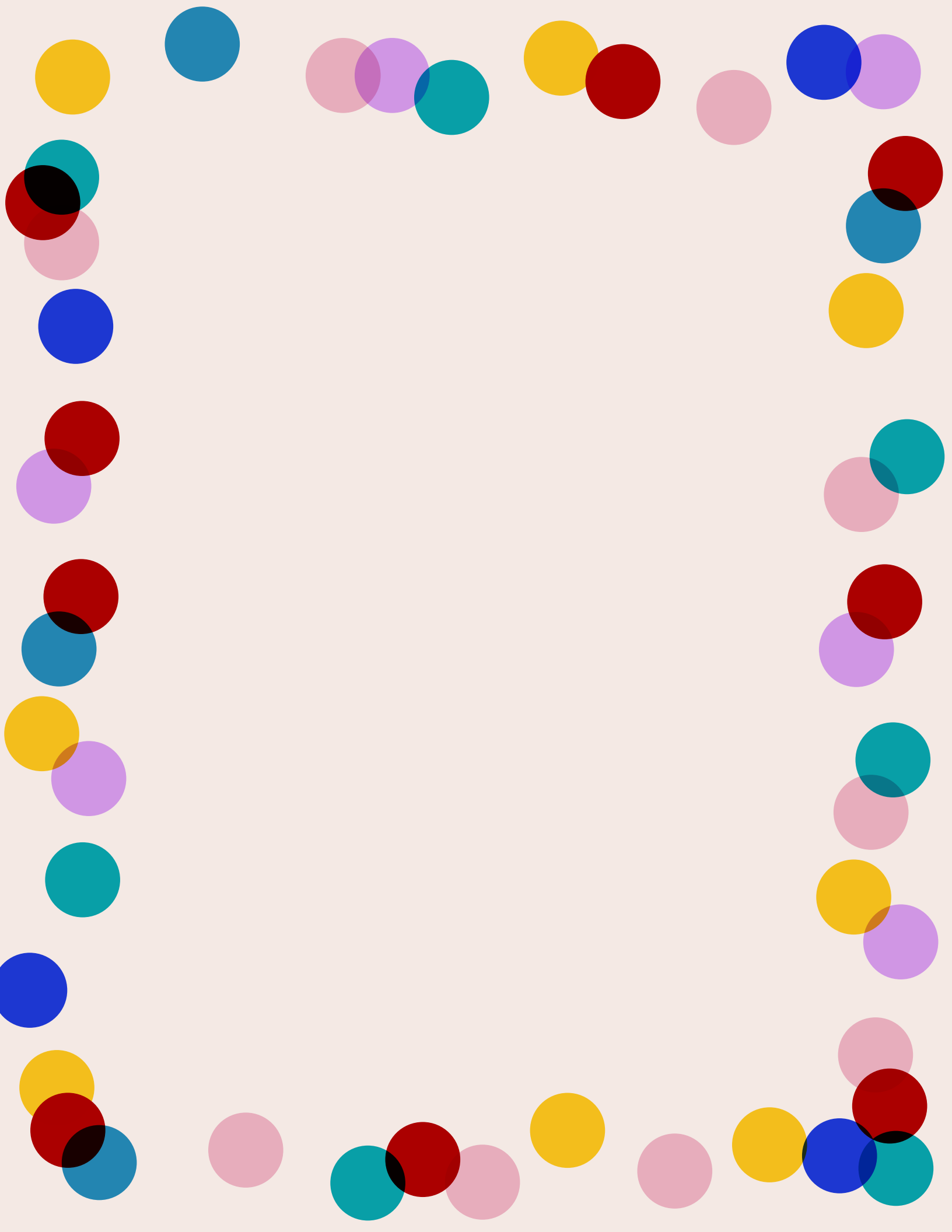
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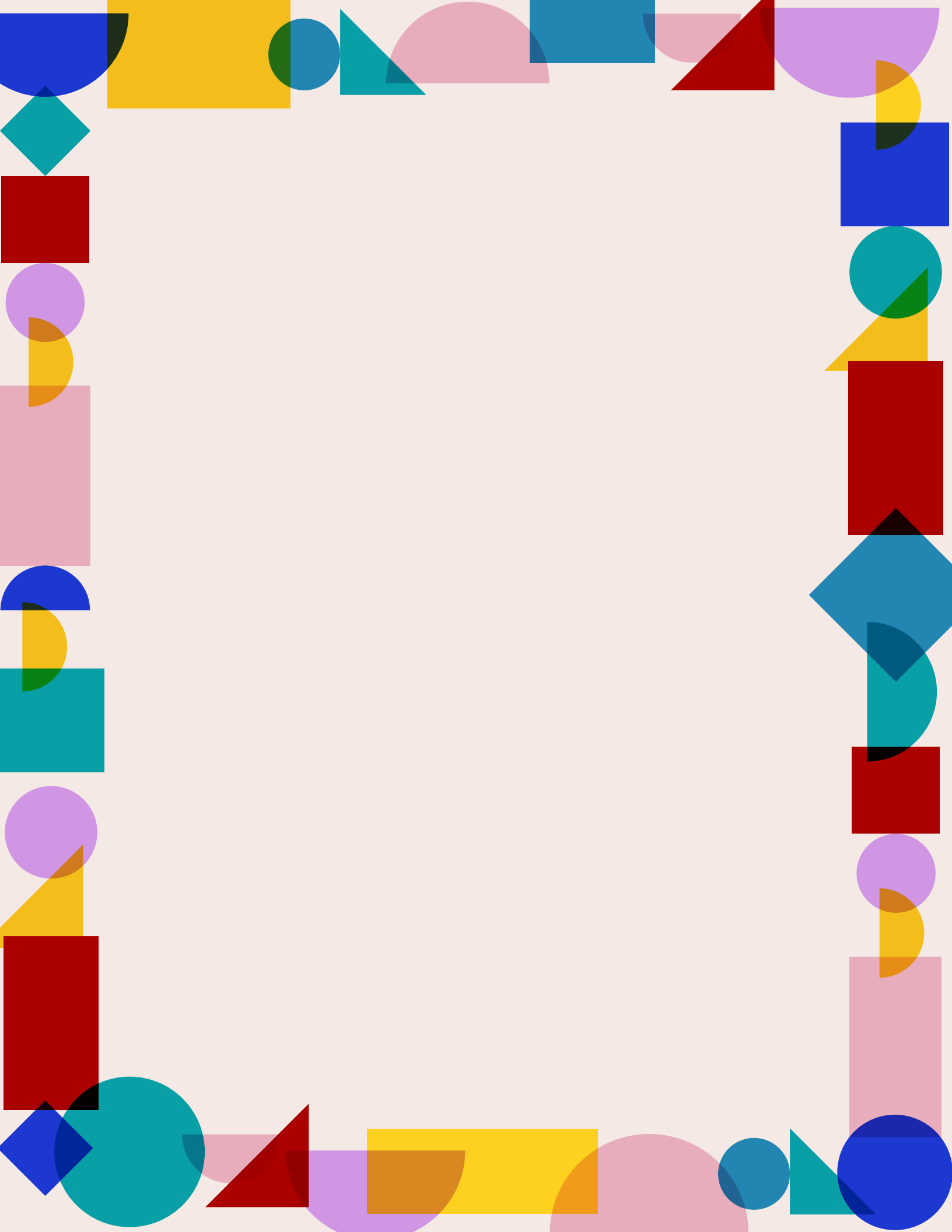


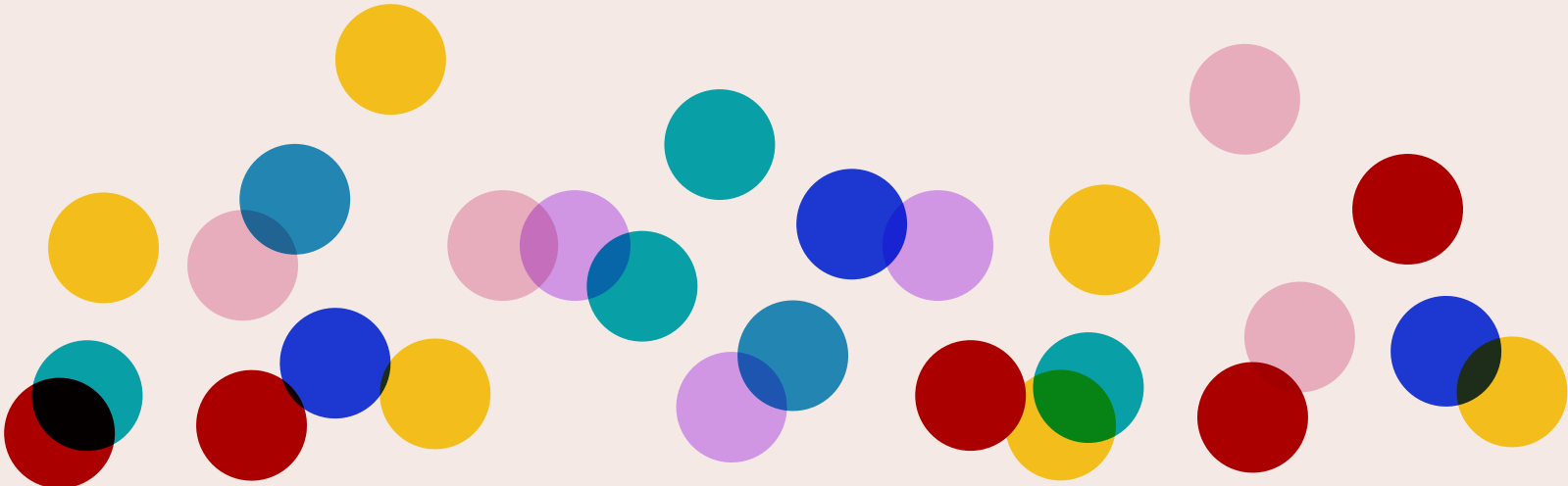


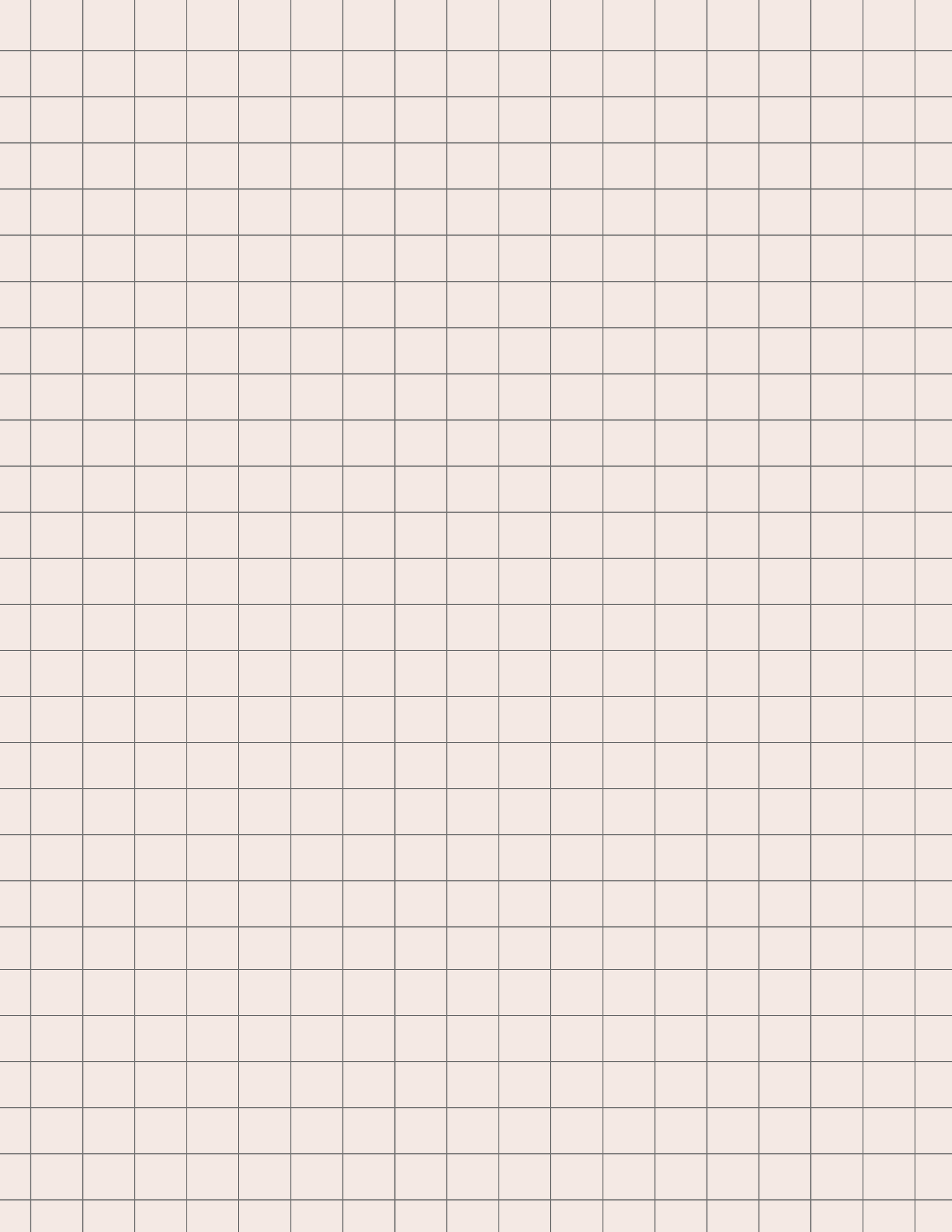


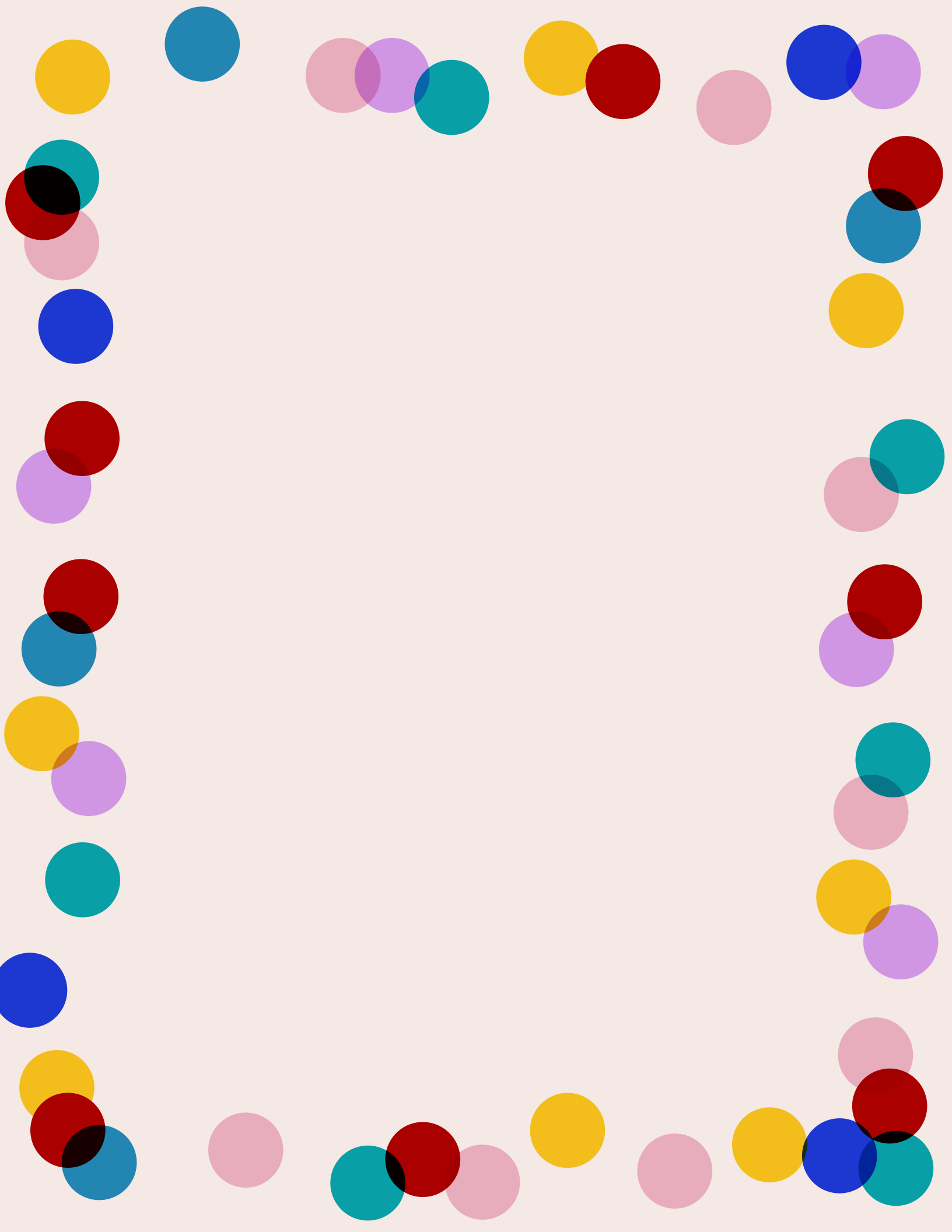


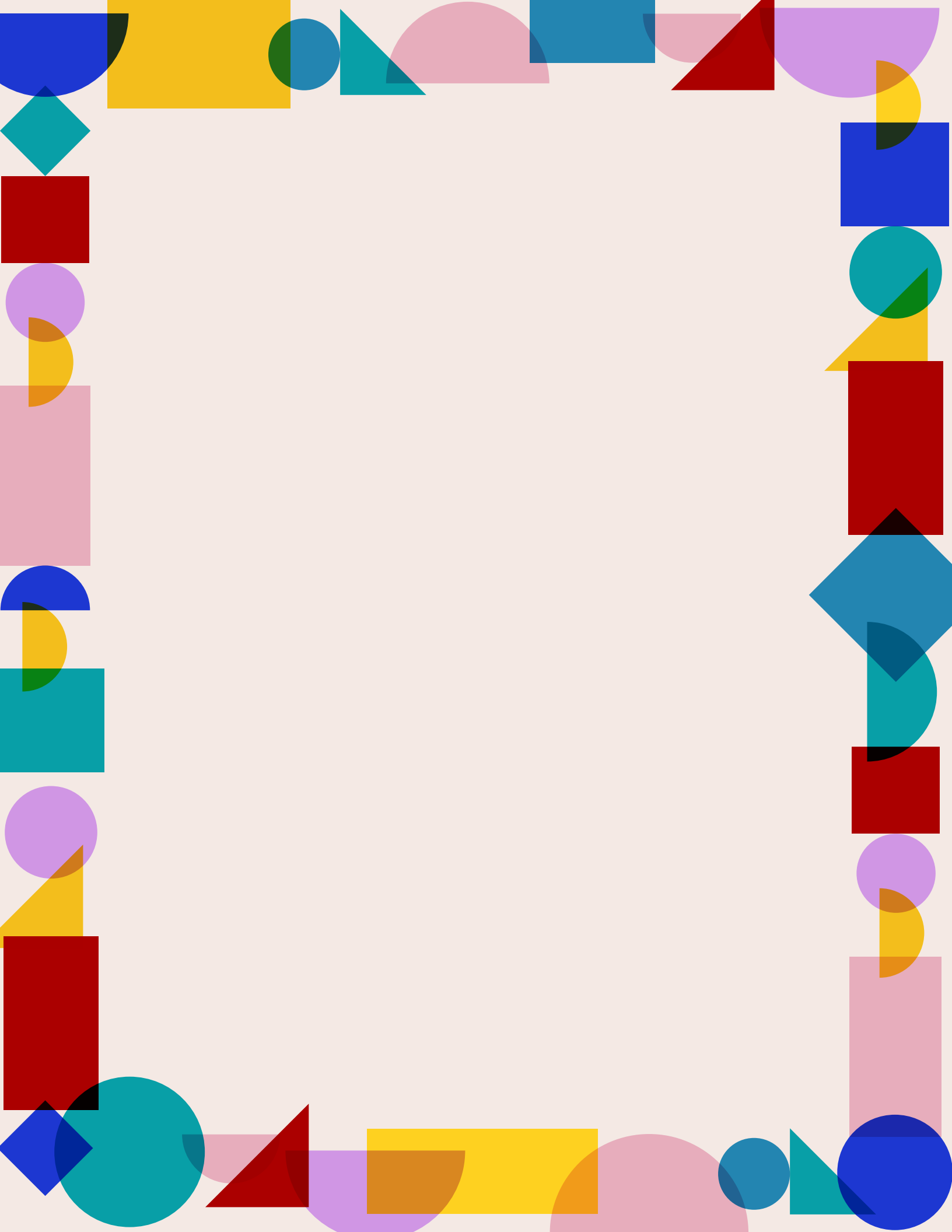




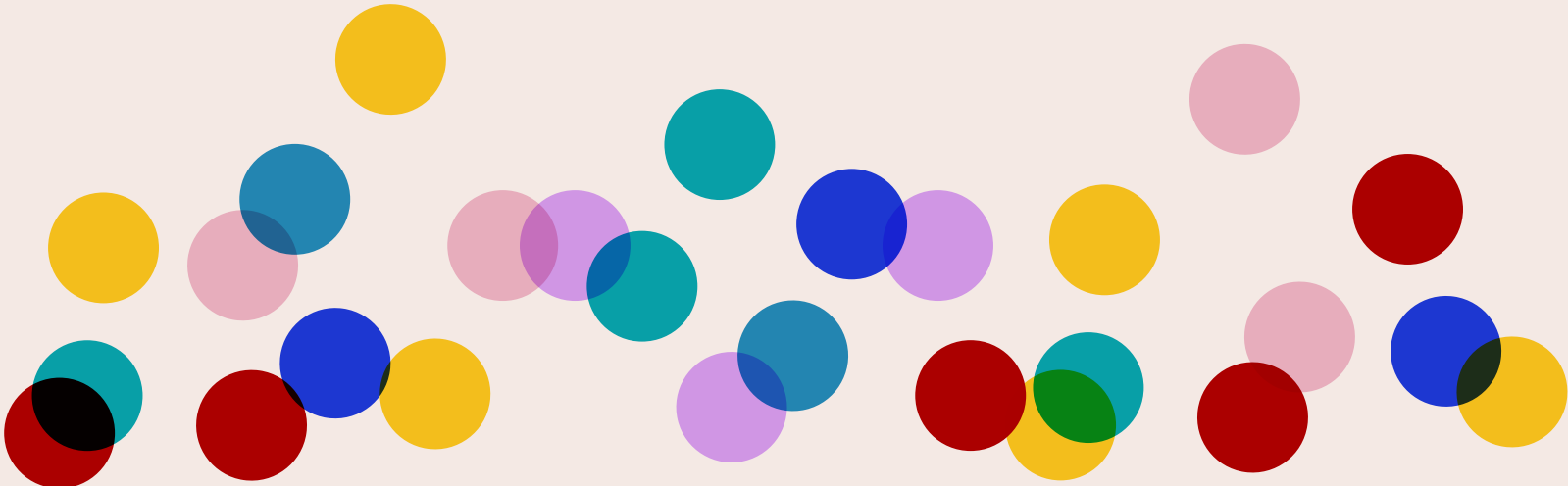


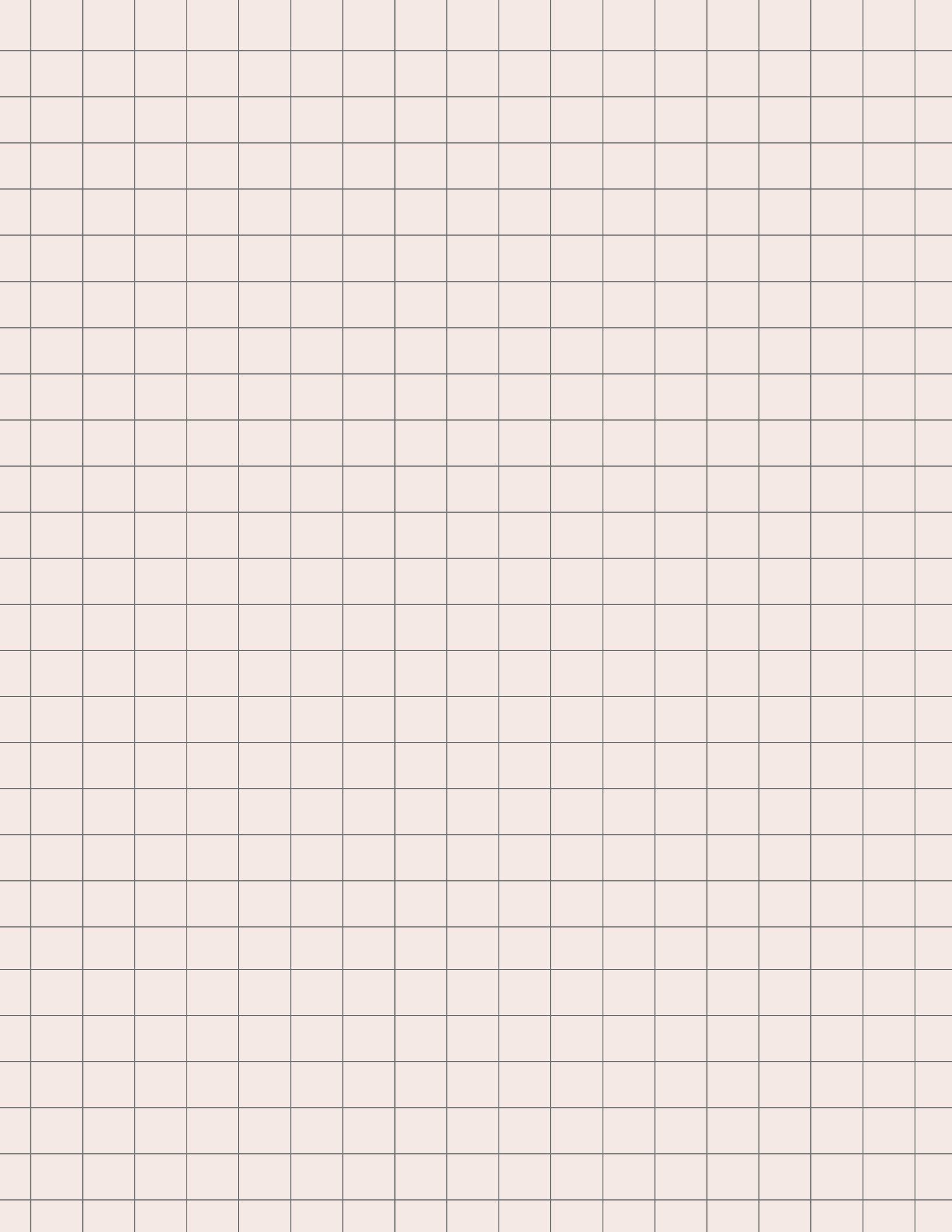


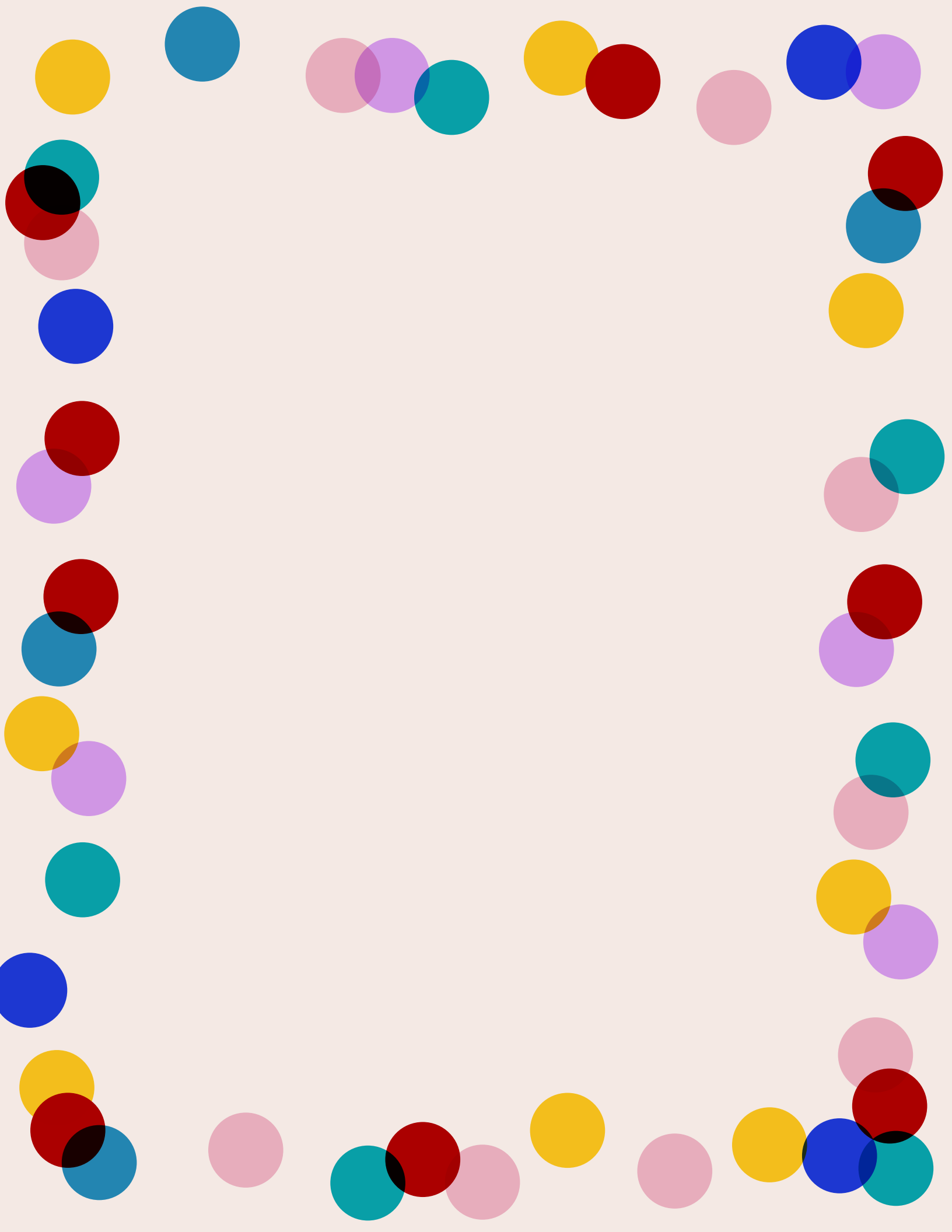


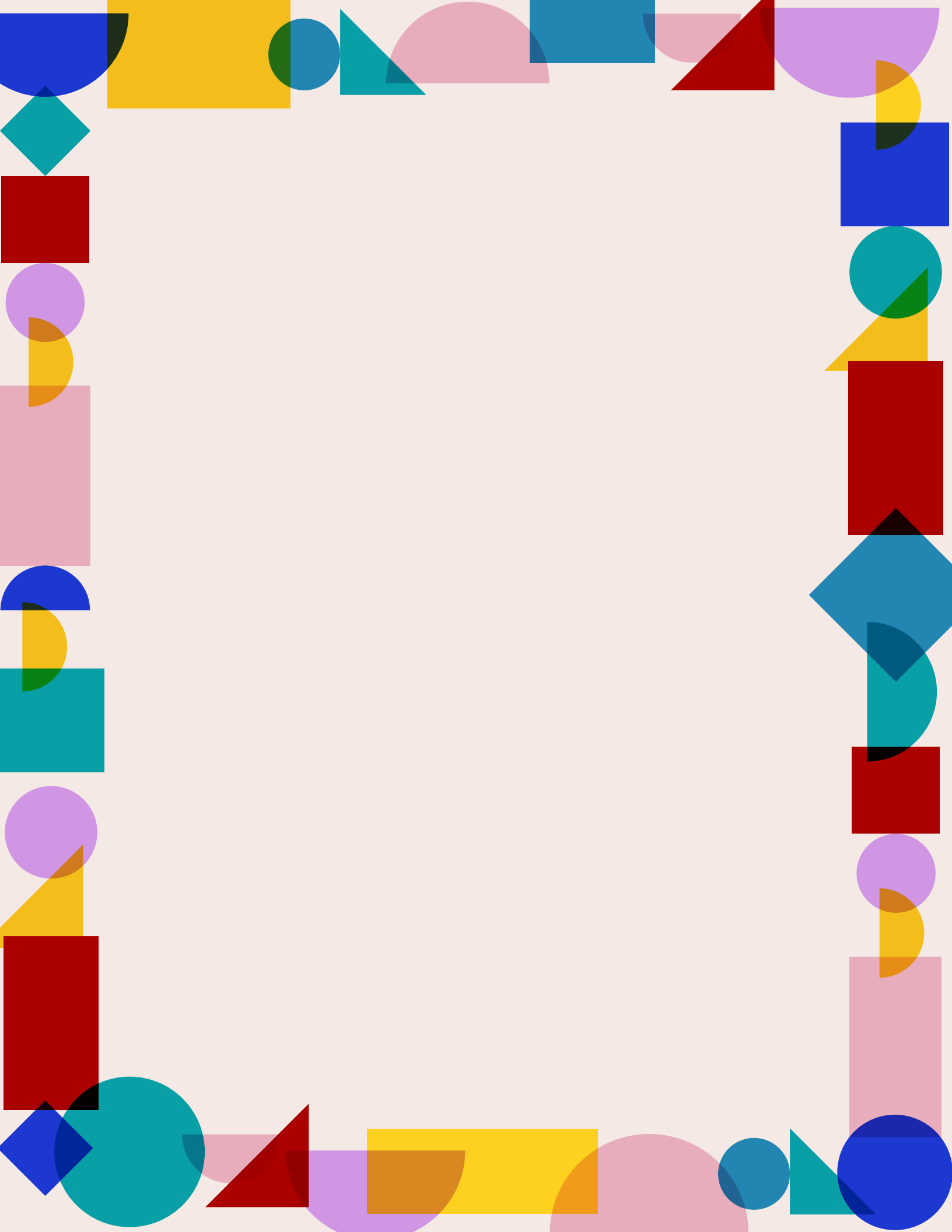














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