Inspiration 1 & Preparation

For every artist, the most important step in the creative process is the first one: inspiration. Inspiration is what electrifies and excites us enough to spend days, weeks, months, and even years creating.

Inspiration for LEGO builders can come in an infinite number of forms. Perhaps it's the climactic scene in the year's most action-packed blockbuster or the lyrics of a great new song from your favorite musician. Or maybe it's a trinket at a local antique store that leads you to imagine a scenario that you feel compelled to construct.

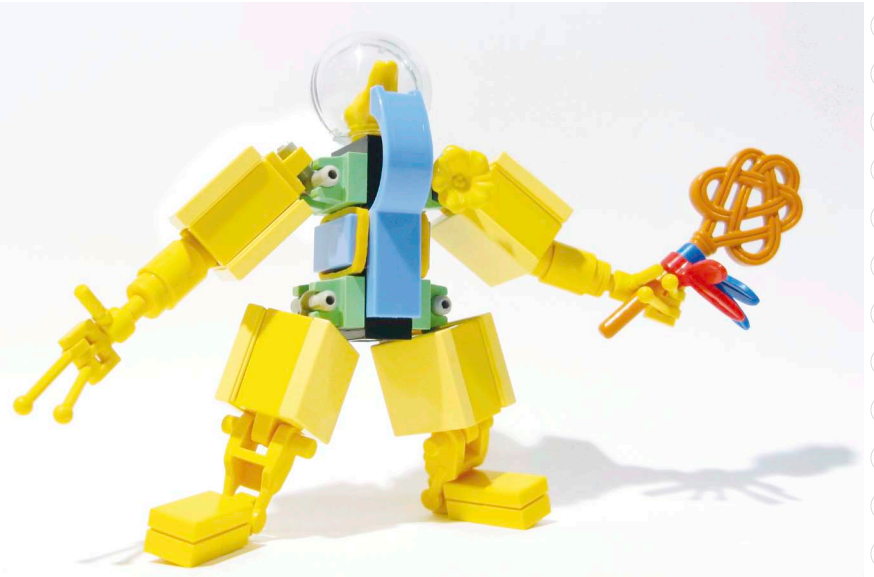
No matter what inspires you, certain processes can help you get the most from your inspiration so that you can build the best model possible. I'll describe how to look at the world and visualize your final model, help you set up your work environment, show you some basic building tools, and discuss the most useful LEGO elements to gather before you build.

The Plastic Perspective

The first step in the LEGO creative process is one that develops over time: learning to look at everything with "LEGO eyes"—that is, looking at the world with LEGO elements and colors in mind and visualizing how a certain subject might look if it were built from LEGO elements. After a while, the real world begins to look blockier. I call this the *plastic perspective*. Developing and perfecting your plastic perspective is fundamental to the model-building process. Once you've reached the stage where you can look at something and know which elements you would use to build it, you know you've got the plastic perspective.

When sculpting with clay or metal or building models from wood or foam, you have the option to strive for accuracy and verisimilitude. This isn't the case when modeling with LEGO pieces—to some degree, your builds will always have a slightly blocky aesthetic. By developing your LEGO eyes and seeing with the plastic perspective, you learn to predict the extent of that blocky aesthetic.

Say you decide to construct a chrome gold spaceship you saw in an old science fiction comic book. Let your imagination run wild. How would the ship fly? What powers it? Who's inside? Ultimately, you can build anything out of LEGO elements, but not always at every scale, in every color combination, or with the best techniques. One major challenge of model building is that you have to be practical; your tools and resources are limited. When building the chrome gold spaceship, the most obvious limiting factor is the lack of chrome gold elements. You won't even find enough in the aftermarket. Unless you're willing to wait decades to compile the best chrome gold brick collection in the world, you'll have to forget the color that originally inspired you. But you can still focus on building that spaceship in a way that evokes the original. You'll need to make the same sort of compromises with other components as you consider the size, shape, and scale of your model. By determining which colors, shapes, and scales will work with your subject before you snap the first pieces together, you'll have a strong foundation on which to proceed.



This small mech, piloted by a LEGO frog, is affectionately named ***Buttered Toads***. This odd little model boasts an equally odd color scheme, made up of yellow, light yellow, medium green, and medium blue. The unusual color combination of several rare shades makes this model bright and visually striking.

Colors

Pay close attention to the colors of your subject. Search for LEGO elements by color with online databases such as Peeron (*http://www.peeron.com/*) or BrickLink (*http://www.bricklink.com/*) . If you find the ones you have visualized in the correct colors, you should be in good shape to move forward.

As you work on your projects, you'll learn more about LEGO elements and the colors they come in. In general, the more basic the color, the more elements available in that color. A light yellow model will be more difficult to construct compared with a standard yellow one, because fewer light yellow parts are available. But that doesn't mean it can't be done. If you do choose to build in a scarce shade, your model will be more impressive.

If you can't find the right elements, don't resort to painting bricks to get the color you need. In the LEGO community, painting elements is like cheating because it eliminates a major building challenge—collecting the right pieces. But more important, by painting pieces you diminish the artistic impact of models that use unusual or rare shades of bricks. If people become accustomed to seeing painted elements, when they see a truly impressive use of a rare color, they won't care or simply won't believe it.

Shapes

When considering a subject for your build, look at its angles, lines, and curves to identify which LEGO elements could be used to replicate them accurately. Try to visualize your subject as if it were made out of giant LEGO elements (maybe even imagine yourself as a minifigure at its scale). Can you identify slopes, wedges, or other elements in your subject? You can match LEGO elements to your subject in two ways. First, you can look for elements that match its shapes exactly. For example, when choosing a windshield for an automobile, just choose the best-matching prefabricated one. Second, you can find simple assemblies that match sections of your model: If one wedge won't create the correct shape, maybe two connected in a certain way will.

Size and Scale

The larger your planned model, the easier it will be to shape; the smaller it is, the trickier and more puzzle-like the building process will be. Try to imagine the size of your model when translated to your chosen scale. Sometimes, you'll find that you can't build a subject at one scale but you can build it at another. If your first choice of scale seems unrealistic, try a different one.

There are a few main scales to consider when building. The most common is *minifigure scale*, where a minifigure represents the height of an average human (for the sake of convenience, usually about 6ft).

Two other scales to consider are *Miniland scale*, which is used in the Miniland displays at the LEGOLAND theme parks, and *microscale*, shown on the opposite page. Miniland scale uses figures around 10 bricks high, 3 bricks wide, and 2 bricks deep as the scaling standard. Microscale, on the other hand, describes anything smaller than minifigure scale.

Don't be limited by these standard scales. If none of them suits your needs, make up your own!

Five Stud Kingdom **by Sean and Steph Mayo takes microscale to a whole new level. Notice that they use a LEGO Technic spacer as a turret, brushes for trees, and flowers for clouds! Even builders with small or limited collections can build amazing, grand models at microscale.**