

Guide to Co-Writing

Based on notes from "The Songwriter's Guide to Mastering Co-Writing" book

Benefits:

- everyone brings a different strength and specialization to the song-creation process
 - One person may be great at coming up with titles or ideas
 - Another may be good at finding a unique angle to come at the song idea
 - Some people can come up with and play really cool chords or start playing a rhythm that inspires the other songwriters in the session
 - Others are great at editing the melody, words, or song structure during and after the co-writing session
 - Some writers are strongest at just coming up with melodies, some with lyrics
 - Some people are great cheerleaders who react to and encourage great ideas
 - Another common role is a "track person," someone who creates a bed of recorded music with bass, drums, keyboards, guitar, or electronic instruments
- sparks and energy
 - When co-writing, if you're low on inspiration, you can draw on other people's energy and inspiration.
- instant feedback and editing
- faster songwriting
 - Co-writing is usually much faster than writing alone. If you get stuck, there are other people and other ideas you can try
- more universal and relatable songs
 - Co-writing can result in you writing more universal and relatable lyrics because the song includes more than one person's story and perspective
- more chances to get your songs heard, pitched and recorded
- having fun, getting free therapy, and developing life-long friendships
- most hit songs are co-written, the current average of songwriters for a top ten hit is 4.07

Where to find co-writers:

- open mic nights, songwriting events/conferences
- online communities (www.songtown.com, www.songu.com, many others)
- writing with artists/fellow musicians
- friends and family—anyone can be a songwriter, they just don't know it yet!

Finding what you do best:

- Songwriting specialties:
 - Ideas/titles/hooks
 - Chords/rhythms/instrumental ideas
 - Melodies
 - Lyrics
 - Editing
 - Song blueprinting
 - Track
 - Building the room/team of co-writers

How to Come Out of Each Co-Write with the Best Possible Song:

- take responsibility—bring your best attitude, be prepared, don't complain, blame others, storm out the door, etc. NO EXCUSES
- find your role in the co-writing team
- respect your co-writer's creative process habits and be flexible
- be willing to be stupid and suck, sometimes you have to get it wrong before you get it right
- Yes AND (from improv)—respect your co-writer's ideas. Denial may be the number one reason songs/scenes go badly. Say “That's interesting, let's explore that” or “What about this?”

Best Songwriting Collaborative Practices

- Communicate to each co-writer how you work best
- Respect your co-writer
- Don't label co-writers based on your perception of their “level” or talk down to them
- Don't dominate a session
- Don't go along with something you don't like
- Make it your goal to bring out the best in every co-writer
- Be self-aware

Co-Writing Etiquette and Co-writing No-No's:

DO's:

- decide on credit splits up front before the song gets written. Songs are usually split evenly
- **THE SONG IS KING**—the goal should be to make the best song possible, it doesn't matter who gets credit or who gets their idea used. Let go of your ego
- if time permits and you finish the song, play it a couple times and see if you want to edit/rewrite as a team
- once the song is finished, keep lines of communication open in case you want to throw ideas back and forth without necessarily having to get together in person
- be prepared and be professional
- write with many other writers. Play the field—co-writing is like dating. You may need to kiss a few frogs first
- use humor if you get stuck, throw out a funny line, take a break
- **HAVE FUN!**

DON'T:

- take back titles, ideas or melodies and use them with other writers
- insist on your way and get in the way of the flow
- worry about whether you are holding your own or contributing enough
- bring baggage in and let your attitude ruin the experience
- take all the credit for the song and say “here's a song I write” without mentioning your co-writers. Word gets around—next time you might be writing by yourself

Co-writing tools:

- notebook to keep ideas in/phone/technology, a place to store ideas, create database
- Google Docs
- Zoom, Skype, other video services
- DAWs (Digital Audio Work Stations)—Garageband, Logic, a way to record your songs at a high quality and share ideas back and forth
- Rhythm loops—phone-based apps include: iMaschine 2, Launchpad, Groovebox and Auxe
- Services for storing, sharing and pitching songs: songspace.com, Soundcloud.com,
- Online rhyming dictionaries: rhymezone.com, rhymedesk.com, masterwriter.com
- Old school tools: real instruments, pen and paper