

# CO-WRITING TIPS

## FOR AUTHORS & SONGWRITERS



### HEY, WHAT DO I KNOW?

I'm something of a serial collaborator. Not only am I the co-author of four novels (with another series in the works), but prior to that, as a professional songwriter, I co-wrote and recorded with dozens of collaborators, including a full album written and recorded with a two-week hard deadline.

### THERE ARE NO RULES, BUT THERE ARE LESSONS...

There are no rules with co-writing, but there are definitely best-practices. I learned a lot about the process of co-writing from my days as a member of the Nashville Songwriting Association, and a lot more about my own preferences from years of co-writing and collaborating with other writers. I hope this collection of tips and insights helps you find a co-writing process that works for you!

### GENERAL TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CO-WRITE

#### GET TO KNOW YOUR CO-WRITER.

- Build trust by showing a willingness to be vulnerable.
- Can they be vulnerable? Can you share your "real shit" with them?
- Can they take feedback? Can YOU? Establish a healthy give and take.

#### LEAVE EGOS AT THE DOOR.

- You're not the better writer, and neither are they.
- Ignore accolades and past successes.
- There are no bad ideas... 'YES, And' will get you far. Shutting people down will kill the co-write.



### WHY CO-WRITE?

- Get out of your own head.
- Learn from others.
- Round-out the overall skill-set.
- Get the advantage of other writers' networks.
- Share production expenses.



### WHY NOT?

- Your idea is already fully-formed.
- Interpersonal dynamics aren't working out.
- Skillsets are redundant.
- Schedules don't align to finish the work.
- Preserve a larger % of any revenue from sale or licensing of the work.

# MORE TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CO-WRITE

## BE RELIABLE. EXPECT RELIABLE.

- Show up on time.
- Once is a free pass.  
Twice is a pattern.
- Only make commitments you plan to honor. Once you do, it's your JOB to keep them.
- Expect the same of others (but be nice about it).

## HONOR CONTRIBUTIONS.

- There is no ONE WAY.
- Everyone has their own process.
- Make other ideas better.
- Acknowledge your collaborator(s) for each contribution.
- Positivity is a feel-good drug that can endlessly fuel new ideas.

## BE A GOOD LISTENER.

- Listen with the intention of HEARING.
- Don't "listen" just to wait for your chance to get your idea heard.
- Write EVERYTHING down. Writing songs? RECORD everything.
- Don't filter during the ideas phase.

## BRING YOUR "A-GAME."

- Absolutely, keep working on your craft.
- Bring all your tools.
- Show up ready to work. That means getting enough sleep, eating the right food (so you don't sugar crash), and maintaining an exercise routine.

## CLOSING INSIGHTS AND OTHER THOUGHTS:

- It's okay to play and develop concepts, without a specific project in mind. It's okay if the co-write has no outcome.
- Once the idea becomes a "project," figure out Roles & Goals:
  - Who is the work "for?" OR: Who has the vision? Who is going to keep an eye on the "big-picture?"
  - Who knows the genre expectations for the work?
  - Who is driving the business?
- Define "Good Enough." Keep expectations in sync.
- It helps to keep a 50/50 mindset, even if your collaborator is there to improve YOUR idea. And vice-versa.
- This is a business, so even if it feels yucky, it's worth discussing "contract" stuff beforehand.
  - Decide when the right time to have a contract is: is it when the collaboration becomes a "project" or when the door closes and the pens come out?
  - Read COLLABORATIONS by Craig Martelle.
- Have FUN!!! Why are you doing this, if not to have fun?
  - Learn how to TRUST in the process, and trust others, and be aware if you're acting from a need to CONTROL the experience. If that's coming from a place of FEAR, it may pay off to invest in counseling support PRIOR to getting into co-writing.
- Don't put all the pressure on your CO-WRITE to make your career. For "Hit" songwriters and bestselling authors, having a career-making project is the exception, not the norm.