

Songfarmer

Writing More and Better Songs

Owen Temple
AND Gordy Quist



Austin, Texas

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Cover painting by Latané Temple

Illustrations in text and photo on back cover by Owen Temple

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ISBN 0-990-42020-5

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Preface

The principles in this text were developed and outlined by both of us, Owen and Gordy, over the course of many conversations over many years. In 2014, in the intensity of preparation for a weekend songwriter's workshop we were hosting for established and developing songwriters, we sketched, described, and mapped out our individual writing processes, compared them, and noticed the similarities and differences. We each adopted a few practices from the other, debated best practices, and then formulated a process we call Songfarmer. The weekend workshop we hosted was a success, and a few participants asked for our notes and diagrams to help them continue to refine their processes after the workshop was done.

Over a several weeks in 2015, Owen wrote and revised a draft of the text that appears in the pages and chapters that follow. Gordy edited, provided clarifications, and wrote revisions that sharpened the ideas. In the rest of this text, to simplify the communication of the principles, we will drop the pronoun "we" as we describe the process and adopt the voice coming from an "I" that you can imagine to be Owen or Gordy. Either way, please realize this text, like so many of our songs, is a co-write.

Onward.

Acknowledgments

Owen Temple

Without the many long conversations on songwriting I had over the years with Gordy Quist, this book would not exist. I learned much from seeking more and better songs with Gordy and from all my songwriting partners, including Adam Carroll, Walt Wilkins, Hal Ketchum, Kelley Mickwee, Jamie Wilson, Jaida Dreyer, Brian Keane, Jason Eady, Cory Morrow, Scott Nolan, Paul Cauthen, David Beck, Paul Lee, Len Lewis, George Ensle, and Clay McClinton. Also, big thanks to Tom Russell and Butch Hancock for solid advice they shared very early in my songwriting journey.

Thanks to Brian T. Atkinson for editing the manuscript and helping me move steadily toward its publication. Thanks also to my recording collaborators Lloyd Maines, Gabriel Rhodes, Phil Madeira, and Gordy Quist for bringing sonic landscapes to lyric and melody. Thanks to Jenni Finlay for trading notes on “stuff that works” for moving forward on projects. Thanks to all the past participants of the Songfarmer workshop for testing and validating the processes in these pages.

I have much gratitude to Paul Zollo for his book *Songwriters on Songwriting*. The quotes that precede chapters in this text are from the transcripts of his interviews with the world’s best songwriters. Thanks also to Tom Russell and Sylvia Tyson for editing a fascinating collection of observations by songwriters in their book *And Then I Wrote: The Songwriter Speaks*. These books unlocked a door for me, and I hope they do for many others.

Thanks to my grandfather Latané Temple for living an inspiring example of an artist at work and at play and for the encouragement to make something.

Much love to Mary Miles Temple and to Bond, Pace, Latané, and John Miles.

Acknowledgments

Gordy Quist

Many thanks to Owen Temple for being the driving force and for doing the work getting our coffee-induced philosophising onto paper in a coherent form. Without his vision, time, and organization, our collective thoughts would probably still just be amorphous guardrails that we subconsciously bounce back and forth between while we sit down to write. Owen's friendship, guidance, creative drive, and humor make my life richer and for that I'm grateful.

While the challenge of writing really great songs remains difficult enough to remain interesting and retain mystique, it is a great comfort to have trusted friends to collaborate and navigate the road with. Many thanks to Ed Jurdi, my creative brother-in-song in The Band of Heathens, as well as the many other writers I've been fortunate enough to collaborate with... Owen Temple, Adam Carroll, Jeff Whitehead, Graham Weber, Chris Brecht, Scott Davis, Bob Ritchie, Bob Seger, Colin Brooks, Jesse Wilson, Matt Largent, Lauren Hunt, Reed Foehl, Caroline Hale, Matt Tedder, Jesse Ebaugh, K Phillips, Stewart Mann, Courtney Patton, Jason Eady, Adam Hood, and many others I'm unable to place at the moment.

I would be remiss not to mention my eternal gratitude for songwriters like Hank Williams, Bob Dylan, Paul McCartney, John Lennon, George Harrison, Neil Young, Carole King, Paul Simon, Jackson Browne, Tom Waits, Tom Petty, and Gillian Welch for putting in the work and laying out the blueprint for how it's done.

To my parents, Greg and Lory, and my sister, Virginia, thank you for shaping my musical taste and for encouraging me to find my way wandering down this path chasing songs.

Finally and most importantly, all my love and gratitude forever to Amber, Fiona and Nellie. You are my inspiration and you mean everything to me. Our life together is my favorite song.

DAYS

A place to start and a place to go
A mind, a heart, and an open road
It all can go a million ways
Highs and lows — days

A fire at home and work to do
Some hard seasons to get through
Some fly like arrows, some feel like a maze
A path wide and narrow — days

Sunrise, sunset
What's behind and what's not yet
The chance to ride the light before it fades
They're all gifts — days

You turn around, you grow and change
Everything around you will do the same
Life moves in circles, it moves in waves
Blessedly simple — you get days

Sunrise, sunset
What's behind and what's not yet
A chance to ride the light before it fades
They're all gifts — days
A chance to ride the light before it fades
They're all gifts — days
They're all gifts — days

(Owen Temple and Walt Wilkins, ©2014)

Chapter One: Overview

Songfarmer is a process-oriented approach to growing more and better songs. It is a set of habits, principles, and techniques you can use to move forward in songwriting so that you are constantly learning and creating. Songfarmer is about taking the long view on writing songs - a sustainable and fulfilling way to develop at the ongoing routines of songwriting so that you get songs today, tomorrow, and on into the future.

A farmer of the land doesn't walk outside one day and simply expect crops to burst forth from the ground without daily preparation and steady application of habits. Similarly, songwriters should collect "seeds" for songs, revisit them, handle them, and work them gently until they grow.

The farmer and the songwriter both have tools that come in handy, and they both need patience to overcome frustrations as they stubbornly persist in doing the work to grow things.

What is Songfarmer?

Songfarmer is a systematic view of the processes involved in songwriting. Songfarmer is a map of the songwriting process that can be used to improve and troubleshoot work, session by session, day by day, and even minute to minute. Songfarmer is a look at the process through the lens of human psychology, and Songfarmer is a battle for forward progress despite obstacles.

The intention of Songfarmer is to write more and better songs through:

- the daily use of a few songwriting habits to collect “seeds” for songs, and
- an alternating, intentional move between two different modes of writing that we’ll call FLOW and EDIT.

As a Songfarmer, you collect seeds (ideas for songs) and you improve the soil (the skills, knowledge, and memories in your brain) through your habits of writing, listening, performing, and reading. Then, later, you grow songs from those seeds in composing sessions in which you “water” the seeds with a stream-of-consciousness writing mode called FLOW. Then, after a good flow session, you weed and prune the plants with an evaluative, critical, and structural mode of writing called EDIT.

Our goals:

- to gather SEEDS for songs with our habits
- to improve the SOIL with our habits
- to grow songs and compose in sessions using the two modes of writing
- to use the FLOW mode to water and grow our seeds
- to use the EDIT mode to weed, shape, and prune them

The FLOW mode of writing is a stream-of-consciousness style of writing with no judgments, punctuation, spelling, or critique. The object of FLOW mode is to get many connected, associated ideas and possibilities out of your head and down on paper or into an audio recorder. The nature

of the EDIT mode is an evaluative, critical look at the current work that can lead to restructuring and changes in words and phrasing, all done with the intent to refine and polish.

The two modes of writing are a FLOW mode and an EDIT mode and they should be done separately. When writers try to FLOW and EDIT at the same time, the result is often “getting stuck” or “writer’s block.” You can’t feel free to create or make unexpected connections (FLOW) when the judging, critical side of our consciousness (EDIT) is watching with scrutiny, so one of the skills this program will encourage is a conscious and strict separation of the two modes of writing.

Unlike other books you may have come across on songwriting, this book will not cover song structure, rhyme scheme, scales, or the music theory of melody. It is a book on the self-guided *process* of improving at the skill of songwriting. There is a wealth of books on those other specific topics of songwriting, so we’ll stick to the habits and processes of writers who improve and work diligently at their craft. On an ongoing basis, we’ll trust you to use the music you love to identify what specific skills and knowledge you need to acquire on your journey, and we’ll help you to build processes and the habits to acquire them.

Why we write songs

We write songs to remember people and places that we want to carry with us through the rest of our lives. We write songs to solve problems, to remember the solutions, and also to ask questions for which we may never know the answers. We write songs to try to record and capture a version of the truth of what it is to be alive. We are songwriters because we write songs, and we write songs because we are songwriters. Our minds are always on the hunt for song ideas, and we are on the hunt for song ideas because it is an activity we have done so frequently that it has become a

habit.

This program will help you to strengthen the habits that lead to more and better songs.

Some of the habits that are helpful for songwriters include:

- Sitting down with a notebook to journal or list phrases
- Listening to music
- Playing your instrument
- Learning about your instrument
- Learning songs you love
- Singing
- Reading great prose or poetry
- Listening closely to the way people talk
- Noting song ideas as soon as you get them on paper or voice memos

If you strengthen these habits, you will write **more** songs. The more songs you write, the **better** they'll become.

Wait, you say: does writing more songs result in writing better songs? Not necessarily, but we argue that writing more songs is *very likely* to lead to writing better songs. We argue that by showing up day after day, even in a small way, to perform the routines of your habits, you will be successful at writing songs. Ask many artists, and they will tell you that moving through the process of creation is the most gratifying and reliable pleasure of art, so that's why we say: if you faithfully show up for your songwriting habits, you will be successful growing songs. And as you follow your own tastes to study and learn about existing songs you admire, you will upgrade your own skills and abilities to grow songs that accomplish your goals.

So while we're thinking of "more and better songs," we might consider: what is a great song?

A great song is a mystery

What is a great song? A great song is a beautiful accident of the prepared mind- a perfect storm of ideas and sounds transmitted with voice, guitar, piano, notebook, pen, or pencil. Having an idea for a song depends on where you are, who you just met, what conversation you overheard, what movie you saw, or books you read.

Knowing a process for writing songs doesn't guarantee great songs, but having a way to move forward - having a process for writing songs - can help you make the most out of the ideas that the universe throws your way.

With Songfarmer, our hope is to give you a process, a structured way of “showing up”, to take the actions that will move you forward in your writing. The objectives are straightforward: to make more and better songs. From this book, you will get a firm idea of how to continue in your songwriting journey, and you'll have some reliable methods to get more and better songs in the future.

Chapter Two: Set a Goal

Our brains are problem solving machines and they need purpose and direction, so let's come up with a purpose and a direction for them by breaking down the idea of *more and better* songs with two questions. Now, grab a notebook to write down your answers to these questions in this section. Plan to keep this same notebook handy whenever you are reading Songfarmer to answer questions, capture song ideas, and make plans.

The first question: how many songs do you want to write? We are assuming you want at least one more song, but beyond that it is up to you to be specific. Do you want enough for a performance, enough for an album, or just one? Do you want to have a lot of extra songs to choose from for your purposes, or do you just want a certain number - no more, no less? Do you have a frequency goal, such as "I want to write one song a month," "I want to write ten songs a year," or "I want to write a song a week?" Or do you have a target goal date, such as "I want to have two new songs by August 1"?

Simply set a goal for how many songs you want to write and specify a time period for when you want to have them completed. Don't proceed until you have written down your quantity goal.

Better songs

“Better” means something different to everyone. But for our purposes, “better” means that over some interval of time, your songs become more effective at doing what you - the songwriter - hoped the songs would do.

Ask yourself: What do you want to do with your song?

Some common purposes of writing a song are:

- Enjoy the physical and intellectual activities of making music and writing lyrics
- Discover your own thoughts and feelings through the act of writing
- Communicate concepts to a reader or listener
- Connect and make a listener feel similar emotions and empathize with the characters in a song

As the creator of a song, you will need to determine why you want to create them. What do you want the songs to do? Do you want them to help you have fun, discover, communicate, and connect? Though these are common uses of a song, this list does not cover all the purposes of writing a song. You may have a few additional goals, including to make money with songs (and that's certainly a valid - and common - goal). Or your goal may be to change others' behavior, or to elicit positive feedback from people you admire or respect. However, we would argue that, even to accomplish goals like these, your songs need to do a good job of helping you to discover, communicate, and connect.

To the extent your songs allow you to discover, communicate, or connect (or make money, change other's behavior, or raise your influence or profile in a community), your songs will be “better” as get you closer to accomplishing the goals you hope to accomplish with them. “Better” will be determined by the song creator's assessment of progress, or lack of

progress, towards his or her goals for the songs. Answer as best you can:

How do you want your songs to improve?

Quality through quantity (or, more can lead to better)

We firmly believe that the problem solving, practice, and skills you acquire through writing more songs (quantity) will increase the likelihood you will write better or more effective songs (quality). We also believe that the more songs you plan to write, the odds are:

You will spend more time on a weekly basis practicing your songwriting skills.

You will regularly run into problems, and then come up with solutions for those problems, while writing songs.

You will finish songs that communicate, connect, and move people the way you hoped, and you will develop a sense for “what works” and what features made that connection more likely to happen.

You will finish songs that do not communicate, connect, and move people the way you hoped, and the more this happens, the more you will figure out what doesn’t get the reaction you hoped for.

Consider someone who decides to train for a marathon. The more runs the person completes, the more he or she will learn to solve the problems that come up while running. Through each completed run, she finds out what works and what feels good and what doesn’t.

A fast, satisfying experience at a marathon doesn’t *necessarily* follow because someone completed a quantity of completed runs, but all those completed runs make a competitive, effective long run *more probable* because of all the learning and strength in muscle that the frequent exercise made possible. If you complete the training runs in an effective way, using the feedback and learning throughout the process, your odds of completing your goal of running a marathon go up. In the same way, the more

songs you complete, the more your skills and “songwriting muscle” will strengthen to make you ready to write “better” songs or songs that allow you to accomplish your goals.

Quantity and quality

Quantity: How many songs do you want to write?

Quality: How do you want your songs to improve? What goals do you want to be able to better accomplish with the songs you write? (Such as to discover, communicate, connect, and/or to do what else?) This is tricky, but you might also decide how you will measure or track the extent to which your songs accomplish the goals you set for them. That is, how will you know if your songs get better through the work you do in this program? Be as specific as you can be, though we know it is hard to quantify. Do your best to come up with a way to measure your progress at song quality with respect to your goals.

So again, before you move on, write down your answers to the questions: How many songs do you want to make? What is your target date or how often do you want to write them? (Create a tracking chart or use a wall calendar so that you can see your quantity goal and you can make a mark for each created song.) In what ways do you want your songs to get better or more effective? What goals do you want them to accomplish?

Activating the Songwriter Consciousness

Deciding to write songs is an act of courage. You are deciding to a devote a portion of your time, attention, and problem-solving power to a recurring process of creation. You are deciding not to only consume but to produce. You are deciding to tell the stories and the perspectives that only you can tell, because no one else in the world shares your history and no one else in the world has lived the set of experiences, places, and people that you have.

Your life has never been lived before. You are an original. Only you

can write and sing the songs that emerge from your hours, days, weeks, and years as an aware and sensitive individual in your family, your town, your job, and your time on this planet. You have decided to try to grow things - to record and organize the truth of your experience in a way that is recognizable and relatable for your fellow man and woman. You seek to communicate and connect with your inner self and others, despite all the differences, distractions, and hassles. And that is an act of optimism and hope and the opposite of chaos and disorder. The act of commitment to write a song will engage your brain, and immediately after you set your goal, a songwriter consciousness is born, and it will be there as long as you have a goal to write a song.

Set a goal to write songs, decide to be a songwriter, and the songwriter consciousness will emerge and be a part of you. And almost immediately, the songwriter consciousness will be on the hunt, sifting through your past and present experience for material that it can use. Did you set your quantity goal to write a song by a specific date or to write a song at a particular frequency? Did you write the goal down somewhere you will see it and be reminded of your commitment? If you answered yes, then you are a songwriter looking to grow more and better songs.

Chapter Three: Create Songwriting Habits

“Don’t be ‘a writer.’ Be writing.”

- William Faulkner

“Be there. On a daily basis. And you’ll get better.”

- Burt Bacharach

In many ways, we are what we do, so when we talk about doing more of something, what we are really saying is that we want to create or strengthen a habit. We are saying we want to do something more often or longer or more consistently. This means we are in the habit creation business. You are what you do, and many of the things you do are habits. You get up and brush your teeth, you take a shower, you drive to work, you check your email, you meet with customers or clients, and when you do these things, you are in a groove. You don’t have to think about many of these activities because they are actions that have been repeated so often that they are habits.

What if - with daily repetition - you elevated songwriting to the status of a habit, that is, something that you do because you just somehow find yourself thinking about it and then doing it? What if you could strengthen your songwriting habits enough that it was actually harder *not* to write than it is to write? What if day after day, you woke up knowing that day you would complete a few of the basic actions of songwriting?

As a Songfarmer, it is possible to move forward at a relentless, steady pace to grow more and better songs. We are going to work together to strengthen your songwriting habits so that you are making the most of ideas that come your way, so that you are not getting blocked or procrastinating or putting off your songwriting, and you are acquiring skills and learning from the songs you love.

Think about your own thinking

A good metaphor for thinking about your own thinking is an image of a rider on an elephant. New York University social psychologist Jonathan Haidt explains much of our behavior using this metaphor in his book *The Righteous Mind*, and it's a very useful, visual way to think about songwriting (and many other beneficial activities) that we want to get ourselves to do.

Imagine a rider on an elephant. Imagine that the rider is the controlling, planning, coordinating part of your brain that is trying to get the bigger, lumbering, sluggish, and more elephant-like automatic part of your brain to take certain unfamiliar but beneficial actions. The rider must coax, cajole, motivate, and encourage the elephant to do the unfamiliar actions that it would usually try to avoid, procrastinate, or postpone. Over time, the rider can train the elephant to do these behaviors (and it turns out that elephants learn new things best by doing them by repetition, if possible, every day) until the well-worn, usual path that the elephant travels is the very path that the rider desired and steered it toward.

So how does this rider on an elephant image apply to you and your own

songwriting behavior? We want the rider and the elephant in agreement about what to do in your ongoing work to write songs. We are going to relentlessly create and strengthen a set of habits that you visit and complete regularly, so that you actually do perform the songwriting work you need to do. This is the work - repeated over days, weeks, and months - that will earn you more and better songs.

Key habits

We have already mentioned a few of the components of a songwriting habit, but let's take these general activities of "songwriting" and classify them into narrower categories of habits. Specifically, we think that ongoing songwriting can be viewed as the repetition and cycling between four key habits:

- I. Writing
- II. Listening
- III. Performing
- IV. Reading

You will collect seeds (ideas for songs) and you will fertilize and enrich your soil (improve skills and learn from work you admire) by doing each habit. In some ways, listening and reading can be viewed as "inputs" and writing and performing can be considered "outputs."

Let's look at each habit in the next section.

I. Writing

Let's consider the writing habit itself as being made up of several different activities, including:

- Noting ideas as they come to you in places where they can be reviewed later (whether the notes are taken on a smartphone app, in a notebook, or on a cocktail napkin)
- Journaling and freewriting
- Singing voice memos of words or melodies
- Reviewing previously noted ideas
- Composing, or drafting lyrics and developing melodies

If you were to adopt only one activity on the list, and ignore almost every other habit, please consider adopting the first one: writing down your ideas at the moment they come to you. We will have more to say about this activity later when we discuss “seeds for songs,” but its importance for a songwriter cannot be overstated.

II. Listening

When you are listening with attention to a new song or a familiar song, either as a recording or a live performance, you are working on songwriting, and let's call this your listening habit. Every song you ever heard came through your ears and some portion of it was stored in your memory. The way to continually add to that musical literacy and knowledge is by actively listening to songs.

III. Performing

When you sit down with your instrument and play chords or melodies or rhythms, or when you sing, you are working on songwriting, and this is your performing habit. This habit is also what's happening when you take a lesson, learn a new chord or a new tuning, or play something you know.

IV. Reading

Hearing and reading language must be key habits in songwriting. When you read fiction, poetry, theater, screenplays, or spiritual texts, when you see great (or even mediocre) films, and when you listen closely to the way people around you talk, you are working on your reading or story habit. As a songwriter, in many ways, you are a storyteller, so *stories going in* can help when it's time to *move stories out* with your pen, keyboard, or instrument.

Always have fiction or poetry on hand for those thousand moments a day when you must hurry up and wait. Download the Kindle app or carry a small paperback, so that when you are waiting - for the meal, for the bus, for the file to download - you can absorb language you admire and that inspires you.

The power of daily

Now that we've briefly discussed goals and habits, we propose:

Your quantity or frequency GOAL (that you noted in your notebook earlier) plus these four HABITS (writing, listening, performing, and reading) will equal: you getting song SEEDS (or ideas for songs) and you generally enriching the SOIL of your ongoing musical and lyrical thoughts. From your goal and your habits, you will either get a specific idea for a song - a SEED - or you will get a general improvement in your knowledge and skills - the SOIL.

When you are trying to build a new habit, you will find that inertia, procrastination, and already established routines work against your plans and can prevent you from performing the tasks you want to do. The only way to confront these forces of inertia and the way to do what you want to do with your life is by creating new habits. When it comes to forming habits, there is a very special power in *daily*. Anything you do daily, will become established habit faster than anything done every other day, or

weekly, or monthly.

In his book *Mini Habits*, productivity writer Stephen Guise argues that one way of holding to a daily habit is by setting “stupid small,” tiny daily goals. He argues that having one to four mini habits that you complete every day is a reliable and effective way to build up habits we want in our lives. We have taken his advice and applied it to the four songwriting habits to create four mini habits for ourselves that we complete, almost without fail, every day - at varying times - before going to sleep.

They are:

1. Free write 50 words in journal
2. Listen to 1 song
3. Play 1 chord on instrument
4. Read 2 pages of fiction or poetry

You might say, “that’s not enough words, songs, chords, pages etc. to make you a songwriter.” Maybe you’d be right. The only way to know for sure is to try it for yourself, but remember that these four components of the songwriting process happen every day, 365 days a year, and remember that the Grand Canyon was formed by many small drops of water over time.

JUNE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
MINI HABITS																														
Write 50 words	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Listen to 1 song	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Play 1 chord	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Read 2 pages	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
COMPOSE SESSION				✓			✓			✓		✓	✓																	✓

Log of completed daily habits, plus tracking of occasional compose session

We must also point out that on many days we do more than just our mini habit requirements. Some days, we write 500 words that might later become lyrics, listen to 13 new songs, play 50 chords, and read 100 pages of fiction.

Most importantly, we hope you recognize that by completing small daily actions, you can acquire a set of daily habits that require you to confront your avoidance, anxieties, and fears of failure - every 24 hours - in a way that you will always end up feeling victorious and energized. Mini habits can create an upward spiral where confidence leads to more confidence and ideas trigger more ideas. The practice of mini habits works very well for us, as these small actions are important enough to do every day, and we believe these actions and these habits help us to continually develop as songwriters.

The Rule of Nine

“The Rule of Nine” is a principle of writing described in *The Comic Toolbox* by John Vorhaus. The idea is: that for every ten ideas you produce, one will be very good. Every ten times you take a risk, one time will really pay off. Your ratio of hits to misses may be slightly different, but we challenge you to accept the Rule of Nine because:

1. it will help you to lower your expectations while you are writing, and
2. it will get you producing more of your work.

Lower expectations mean that the EDIT mode of your mind - or your internal critic - cuts you some slack and allows for development. Internalize the Rule of Nine and as you start writing, the critic will say: “Wait! This developing song doesn’t look like a number one hit! Oh, ok, no problem, yeah, we’ve got to write nine songs to get the one great one. Proceed, do your thing, FLOW, and I will take a backseat.”

If you believe that you get gold about one out of ten times that you make something, the Rule of Nine tells you not to be disappointed if what

you just made is not amazing. The Rule of Nine tells you to keep going, keep making things, because it turns out you have to make songs and ideas regularly and relentlessly to get the good stuff. One of our favorite mantras comes from legendary University of Texas college baseball coach Augie Garrido. He regularly tells his ballplayers to “do your best, fail, and do your best again.”¹

Overcoming distraction

We have found that using the mini habits framework has helped us create periods of focused attention to perform the routines of our songwriting habits. The “stupid small” size of the mini habits goals makes us less likely to procrastinate performing our routines, because we do feel that we can accomplish them. The small mini habit gets you to BEGIN doing your routine, and then once you are doing something, it is easy to keep going.

The Pomodoro Technique

Another idea we have found helpful for getting more focused sessions is *The Pomodoro Technique*, described in a book by the same name, developed and written by Francesco Cirillo. The idea is that you break your work into “pomodoros,” or 25 minute sessions of focus on one task, and that you do not allow distractions or interruptions during that 25 minute session. Pomodoro means tomato in Italian, and Carlos recommends using a windup kitchen timer. (Carlos’s timer was in the shape of a tomato, hence the name for the technique.) During a “pomodoro,” you don’t check Facebook, you don’t take phone calls, and you don’t check your email. After 25 minutes, you take a mandatory 5 minute break, and then determine whether you would like to do another pomodoro session.

Being a successful writer is 5% talent, and 95% not being distracted

¹ *Inning by Inning*, directed by Richard Linklater (2009; New York: Virgil Films and Entertainment), DVD.

by the Internet, so consider turning off the Wi-Fi connection on your computer and turning off your phone when you are focused on your habits. You can use computer applications like Freedom and Self-Control, and they will actually disable your Internet connection for a set period of time that you specify at the beginning of a session.

Now let's discuss what you will find while completing the actions of your habits: ideas for songs or... seeds.

Chapter Four:

Recognizing Song Seeds

“The concept, if there is a concept, or the hook, is all you’re concerned with. Because you know you can go back and fill in the pieces.”

- Harry Nilsson

“I’ve had a lot of songs that kind of intruded on whatever is going on. They usually come in the form of one line, which you might remember and go get alone later.”

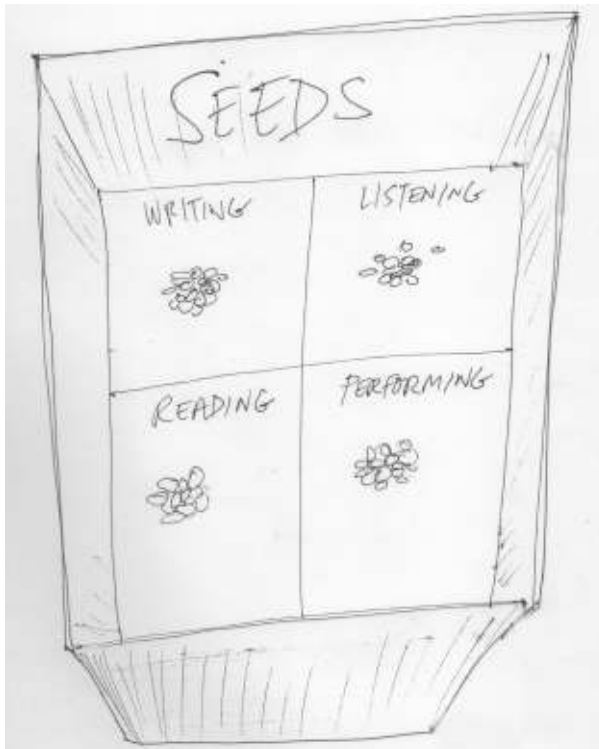
- Townes Van Zandt

Your goal to write a set quantity of songs by a particular time will activate your songwriter consciousness and a part of your mind will always be looking for material to work with. You will find that while you are practicing your writing, listening, reading, and performing habits, and in the day-to-day of your normal life, you are screening your experience for song seeds.

Song seeds can be:

- short phrases that strike your ear in a pleasing way
- truths or insights about life
- grooves
- chord progressions
- pieces of melody
- symbols or metaphors that reflect truth of life
- interesting situations
- characters, real or imagined
- strong emotions you have experienced
- a setting or location where a song could be set
- a single word to put in a song

What qualifies as a seed? One definition: If it gets you writing, it was a seed.



A seed is an idea to start responding to, expanding upon, and seeking meaning around, and anything can be a seed. The importance of a seed is that it is a beginning. When a seed is placed in the soil and watered, it starts growing. Tiny buds and then leaves appear and those leaves can become branches. As it grows, a farmer can prune the plant and weed around it.

If you water your song seed, then words and melodies, like leaves, will emerge from it. Certain words will become phrases, and phrases will become lines, and lines will pair up and become verses and choruses. As a songwriter, you will remove words that don't help the song, and you will reorder lines to help the song grow in directions that you find interesting or beautiful. Growing a song from a seed is a process that is marked by trial and error, expansion and contraction, and the slow emergence of interconnected ideas.

In the next section, let's use the word "composing" to mean the creation and structuring of melody and lyrics or "growing a song from a seed."

Chapter Five:

Composing

“I kind of try to play until I go into a semi-conscious space. And then things start arriving... You can’t question what you’re doing, because that could really get in the way of what’s trying to come up.”

- Tom Petty

“Sometimes you just put anything down... Don’t let the critic become bigger than the creator. Don’t let it strangle you... Let it go. Put a string of stuff together. Go ahead. And then futz with it.”

- Randy Newman

Flow and Edit

When you move through your songwriting habits, you will occasionally get ideas for songs, and they might come as situations, grooves, melodies, lines, feels, or stories. Let’s call all these ideas “seeds.” When you find a seed, write it down, record it, do whatever it takes to note the idea, so that you can develop it (possibly into a full grown song) at a later date. In

many ways, all our songwriting habits are aimed toward finding seeds, setting these aside, and later, growing them into songs. Take good care of your seeds, so that any place that you store them (a notebook, an app, a program, a folder, a list, a cardboard box) should be a place where you can revisit and review them often.

Now, let's talk about what to do with these seeds once you have them collected. It's time for the continued use of your writing habit, but this time, we'll be doing a specific kind of writing called "composing." And we'll further subdivide "composing" into two modes - FLOW and EDIT - that we can use to first grow, and then to shape, your budding songs.

We're at a checkpoint in Songfarmer, where we have discussed habit creation and we've encouraged you to be sure that songwriting habits are built into your daily life, and through those habits you collect seeds. Once your farming habits have resulted in a collection of seeds, now you will water them (with the composing mode called FLOW) and then you will weed the fields and prune the plants (with the composing mode called EDIT.)

The most fundamental Songfarmer concept is, again, that there are two modes of composing: FLOW and EDIT. One is a stream-of-consciousness mode (FLOW) and the other is a critical, structural, revising and evaluative mode (EDIT). The key: Don't try to do the two modes of composing, FLOW and EDIT, at the same time.

Can you really do two things at once? If you are like most people, you think you can, but in reality, you can't. Many people try to do two things at once while they are composing, and they get stuck because they *evaluate* what they are creating too early in the process before giving their ideas a fair shot.

1. FLOW. The earliest, initial mode of composing is a freeform, no constraints, stream of consciousness, keep-the-pen-moving, keep-the-keyboard-clicking, dumping of thoughts, feelings, and images onto the page.

2. EDIT. The follow-up mode of composing (that should be used in later phases after a sufficient FLOW session) is structured and evaluative. It is focused on rhyming, order, and making the most of the raw materials (words and sounds) you produced during the FLOW mode.

The two functions cannot be performed at the same time, and a very strict separation of the use of them will help you produce more songs. There is a time for FLOW, and there is a time for EDIT. You will go back and forth between these two functions throughout the process of composing a song, but you cannot do them both at the same time, and if you try to, you will get frustrated and shut down the creative drive. Imagine an iterative, repeating, back and forth switching between these two modes as you compose: FLOW and EDIT, FLOW and EDIT. Repeat as necessary until you determine that the song is finished.

If you are working on a particular section of a song, a line, or even trying to find a particular word, the back and forth use of FLOW and EDIT will serve you well.

Here are some typical characteristics and features of both modes:

FLOW

open
intuitive
subconscious
subjective
dreamlike
open channel
relaxed
play
internal
accepting
free
listening
pouring
liquid
go
raw

EDIT

closed
intellectual
self-conscious
objective
wide awake
dams and gates
reserved
work
external
critical
constrained
reacting
structuring
solid
pause
filtered

FLOW

Think about writing lyrics in the FLOW mode as an emptying of thoughts and just write down words and connections as they appear without evaluation, hesitation, or critique. (This FLOW process applies to composing melodies as well, and FLOW with music ideas is discussed specifically later in this chapter.) Just as water will find a way around barriers, so you should allow your thoughts to move to the page when you are in this mode. Try using the FLOW mode to free write for either a set period of time or for a set number of pages and:

- don't worry about rhymes
- keep the pen moving, don't evaluate, just generate
- don't use backspace if you are using a computer
- create a "junkyard" or "wild zone" of material to pick through later
- don't focus on punctuation, capitalization, or correct spelling
- put down whatever words or images cross your mind, even if they are expressions of doubt or uncertainty, keep writing words down!

Trivia: Bob Dylan wrote "Watching the River Flow" on a notepad in the studio, on the day they recorded the song, in ten minutes.¹ Leon Russell, the producer of the session, reported that he saw Bob was writing in an automatic, flow mode that initially resulted in a few lines expressing doubt about being able to write. Bob nevertheless wrote his doubts down with no editing, and the flow of words kept coming until they became the narrative that is the song's lyrics. But the first two lines of "Watching the River Flow" are:

What's the matter with me
I don't have much to say...

The moral: Write down whatever comes to mind during the FLOW mode and keep writing.

¹ Andy Gill and Kevin Odegard, *A Simple Twist of Fate: Bob Dylan and the Making of Blood on the Tracks* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2005), 30-31.

Flow Exercise 1:

Create a Junkyard or Wild Zone of Words

Is there any subject you would like to write a song about? What are some words that might be in a song about _____? List them and keep going until you fill one, two, or three pages. This list of words and phrases will be what we call your “junkyard” or a “wild zone” that we will pick through during later EDIT phases.

Flow Exercise 2:

Listing of Thoughts

Without using paragraphs or punctuation, just start listing words, phrases and sentences that cross your mind and don't stop until you get to the bottom of two pages.

EDIT

Use the EDIT mode to refine, polish, structure, and ask questions that will help you make decisions about your song lyrics.

In EDIT mode, search for key phrases:

Do any of the words or lines you have produced look like an intriguing first line?

Do any of the words or lines you have produced look or sound like the title of the song?

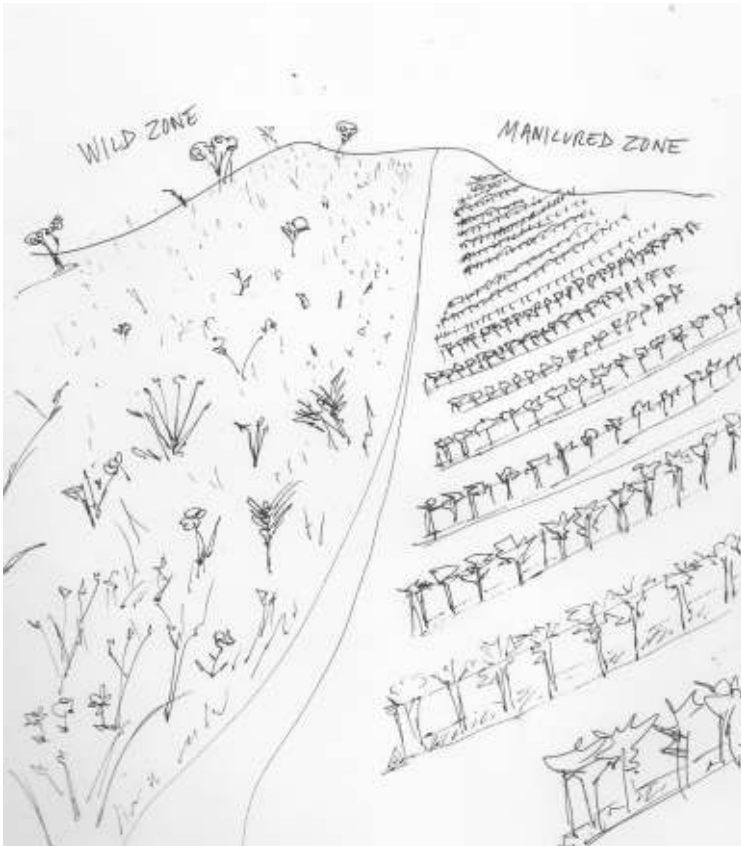
Can you think of some words that rhyme with these key phrases? (Go back to FLOW mode to produce other rhymes.)

Wild Zones and Manicured Zones

Think about the FLOW mode to be like watering your fields to see what grows and to see what springs up from the soil of your experience. When you are flowing, you are pouring out a stream of words, thoughts, and sounds without regard to anything beyond **just keeping it going**.

Think about the EDIT mode as the pruning, the weeding, and the careful moving of the tiny plants that the fields produce after plenty of watering.

Let's also propose that most of us use two different zones of farmland (or at least two different fields): one is a wilder zone and the other is a more manicured and regulated zone. We FLOW (or water) to produce growth in the wilder zone, in the more natural field. Once we begin the EDIT mode (pruning, weeding, selecting), we are moving our upstart plants to a



more manicured garden zone. Of course, we can still water or FLOW once something has moved to the manicured zone, and we will have to FLOW to keep it growing, but in a more focused way.

What does this mean practically? It probably means that you have pages or a notebook or a recorder for your stream-of-consciousness FLOW output of words and sounds, and then when you switch to EDIT and decide you like something, you write it down on another page or in another notebook or put it into another recording. In other words, your ideas are slowly graduating from a jumble of sounds and scribbled ideas to initial melodies and structured lyrics as they pass through your editor's judgment and your various filters.

Composing with a Song Seed

A routine that should be in the mix of your songwriting habits is, of course, the act of composing, or the assembling and creating of lyrics and music. You might begin a composing session with a seed for a song, collected in the course of your normal songwriting habits of writing, listening, performing, or reading - or you might have a blank page.

Here is an example with a series of steps to take and questions to ask during a composing session that you begin with a song seed.

1. Review your collection of song seeds
2. Select an interesting song seed
3. Using the FLOW mode, fill up two pages with words and phrases related to your song seed
4. Using the EDIT mode, look through the wild growth pasture of words and phrases created during the FLOW session, looking for:
 - First lines of a verse
 - A song title
 - First, middle, or last lines of a chorus
 - Last lines of a verse
 - Anything that strikes your ear or eye as pleasing

5. Run a second focused FLOW mode session to fill a page with words related to any of the pieces you identified in Step 4
6. Using the EDIT writing mode, on a clean sheet of paper, select and write down the most interesting lines or phrases from your FLOW session
 - Keep wild growth pages on one side of your writing area and keep clean, edited garden pages on another side of your writing area, and slowly upgrade phrases and lines from the wild growth pages to the clean, edited garden pages
 - You are moving words through stages of testing, almost like transplanting untamed, wild growth into a cleaner, more ordered garden zone of interesting phrases and lines
7. Using a new blank page, now use the FLOW mode again to respond to the items on your edited pages and seek to:
 - Rhyme with interesting phrases
 - Set up (write what might precede) any interesting phrases
 - Complete (write what might follow) any interesting phrases
8. FLOW and EDIT, FLOW and EDIT
 - Move words and phrases from the WILD ZONE you create with the FLOW mode into the more MANICURED ZONE you create by using the EDIT mode, by selecting your favorite lines and phrases
 - Rhyme, reorder and restructure the phrases in the manicured zones
 - Create more wild growth using focused FLOW mode to possibly fill in the gaps you find in the manicured zones
9. Repeat step 8 as necessary, with breaks of minutes or hours or days in between each repetition between FLOW and EDIT, until you feel the song is done.

Composing with no song seed

Though your habits should provide you with seeds, let's consider composing without a seed. All the steps above apply, but with one difference, before Step 1, you try to find a song seed in a hurry. The best way to do that is have an impromptu morning pages or FLOW session, where you keep the pen moving or the keyboard clicking until you have filled three pages with words, phrases, and lines, or until you have filled three minutes of a voice memo with grooves or chords or melodies. Next, use the EDIT mode to look through what you produced, looking for seeds, or ideas that could be explored further in the composing steps.

If you don't find anything, proceed with another FLOW session and fill three more pages (or three minutes on your voice recorder) with thoughts, lines, ideas, stream-of-consciousness rambling, anything. Again, once the pages are filled, switch to the EDIT mode, and look for a song seed. If you find one, begin Step 1 above. If you don't find anything, you might have to postpone your composing session, and instead complete one of your routines of writing, performing, listening, or reading until you find a song seed.

All the same steps apply to composing with a lyric seed, a melody seed, or a groove seed. The primary difference is that with melody and groove seeds you'll use a voice recorder more than paper or a text document. Let's talk a bit more about starting from a musical seed in the next section.

Composing a melody

When you are seeking melody and grooves, we can defer to a certain wonderful, mysterious, and comforting fact about the brain, and that is: bits and pieces of melodies you have heard over your whole life - fragments from your entire of life of exposure to music - are available to you as a composer. And, obviously, the more you practice the habits of listening to songs and performing your instrument, the more bits and pieces of melody

and rhythm you will have at your disposal.

You will find these “bits and pieces of melody” by opening up the gates and having a FLOW session with your instrument and/or by singing ideas. Maybe you have actual words or nonsense words attached to the melodies or maybe it’s just la, la, la or blah, blah, blah. The bottom line in FLOW mode is to get the ideas down, so don’t judge them, evaluate them, or shut them down with your EDIT mode.

With musical ideas, unless you can write in musical notation, many times you will be using a voice recorder instead of paper to get down your FLOW session and for your wild zones, so, obviously, you will be singing or performing your melodies for playback later instead of writing down words. When you play back your recordings made during a melody or groove FLOW session, you will switch to your EDIT mode to listen for interesting or satisfying melodies or rhythms. While still in your EDIT mode, reproduce the interesting or satisfying melody or rhythms by performing them again into a second recording that will serve as your manicured zone.

Once you have moved some ideas to a manicured zone, you have mapped some or all of the musical structures of a song. These musical phrases will show you the number of syllables or words you need to fill those spots. For example, you might sing a piece of the melody and note how many “blanks” you need to fill in with lyrics.

Whether you start with musical or lyrical song seeds, use the FLOW composing mode to expand, experiment, and create, then use EDIT composing mode to evaluate, select, structure, and decide what to keep. See your first early pages, documents, and voice recordings as wild zones, and then, as you make commitments to certain lyrics and melodies, create manicured zones on new pages, documents, and voice recordings.

The iterative move between FLOW then EDIT, FLOW then EDIT, always applies as you write words, sing, and play, until you get the sense that, “yes, this is the way these words should be sung,” or “no, I need to keep FLOWing ideas until I find the notes to fit these words (or the words to fit these notes).”

A song is a marriage of lyric and music, and composing with the FLOW and EDIT modes will help you to find a good match, regardless of whether you start with a lyric seed or a music seed. The most common question asked of songwriters is: “which comes first the words or the music?” By now you recognize that it doesn’t matter what you begin with - the main thing is *to begin*. Then go back and forth between creating options, making choices, creating options, and making choices.

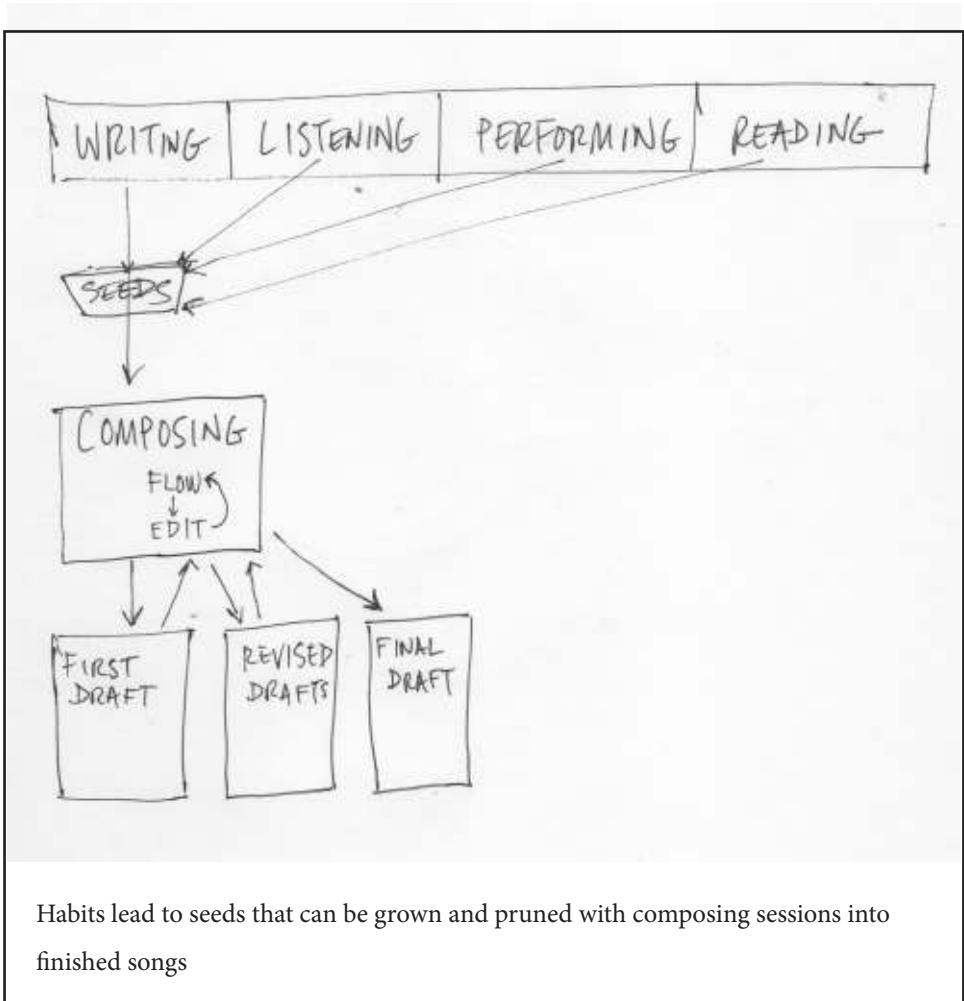
Brian Wilson says that he writes melody² by:

- Choosing a key
- Playing chords in that key until he finds a progression of chords and a rhythm for them he likes
- Then he starts either singing nonsense words or lyrics as he moves through the progression until he likes a melodic line

Some songwriters find that composing melodies by singing, without playing an instrument, can lead to more inventive melodies. Some other songwriters use their instrument to create a progression of chords and rhythms that suggest a feeling or mood, and then they begin composing words that match that feeling or mood (or that contrast with that feeling or mood). Create options, make choices, create options, make choices, is another way of saying FLOW, EDIT, FLOW, EDIT.

2 Paul Zollo, *Songwriters On Songwriting* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), 127.

When you create options, you will be attracted to some directions more than others, and you will choose them. Then those choices will be connected to other options, some of which you will favor more than others, and then those choices will suggest further options, and the process goes on and on, until the song is finished. The underlying criteria for the choices you make are *your subjective tastes informed by all your life experiences and by your habitual study of music and language*. You will choose what interests you, what delights you, and what you find beautiful or compelling.



Chapter Six:

Improving FLOW

“I’m interested in discovering where my mind wants to go, or what object it wants to pick up... It always picks up on something true... as a lyricist my job is to find out what it is that I’m thinking. Even if it’s something that I don’t want to be thinking.”

- Paul Simon

“Great ideas occur to you and the last thing you want to do is sit down, at that moment, and shape it. You just want to ride. So I usually just record it and then listen back.”

- Jackson Browne

In a strange way, you were born knowing how to FLOW, and you really just need to adjust the timing of your EDIT mode habits to get more FLOW into your life and songs. Your brain stores *connected information*. Each sound, picture, or feeling is *connected* to every other sound, picture, and feeling through thousands of circuitous routes and neural pathways.

FLOW is really just allowing the connections that are already present in your brain to be revealed to your conscious mind. Think of FLOW as the act of gently picking up a thread (of any idea) and following it, picking it up and following it, as it goes on through other linked and connected ideas. When Pete Seeger wanted to FLOW, he said to himself: “Brain, ramble on. Let me see what happens.”³

EDIT mode happens when you evaluate, select, and structure the connections that are revealed during the FLOW mode. The key is to do this EDIT mode later, *after* the FLOW session has produced material, not *during* the FLOW session!

Your mind is always working on problems in the subconscious, just outside of your awareness. If you have the goal of getting ideas, your subconscious will occasionally present some of these ideas to your conscious mind, and you should always write them down. You can evaluate them from the EDIT mode later - just write the ideas down when you get them in order to keep them coming! Your ideas are like customers: If you treat them with respect and honor them, they will come back to you, time and time again. If you ignore them, or disrespect them by not at least acknowledging them by writing them down, they will not come back to you until proper attention and respect is shown to them.

The FLOW mode is about *discovery* - your goal in this mode is to discover the contents of your thoughts and their connections. You want to get the editor/critic out of the way so that the ideas can come forth and be captured on the page or on the voice recorder. There are a few techniques and concepts that relate to improving your ability and awareness of FLOW, and we'll discuss a few of those methods here.

To anyone who says, “oh, I could never come up with an imaginative story” or anyone who says “I’m just not creative,” ask them about the last dream they had, and get ready to hear an interesting, entertaining, and creative story from someone who just said they can’t come up with ideas.

3 Paul Zollo, *Songwriters On Songwriting* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), 11.

If you want proof that your brain already has all the creativity you need, just think about the vivid dreams you've had in your life. Some examples of what the FLOW mode is like: it's what's happening when you are dreaming, mowing the grass, and driving long highways.

Dreaming

You can get seeds for songs from dreams if you keep a notebook by your bed. Set a goal to remember your dreams before you go to sleep, and then note or record the ideas you get while falling asleep and the ideas you have right away when you wake up in the morning. (Warning: this technique can make for less restful sleep, so don't have this goal when you're really needing to recharge.)

It's really that simple. Have a pen and a notebook (or a smartphone note app or voice memo recorder) by the bed, and commit to recording any song seeds, rewrite ideas, or as much as you can remember of dreams. Some songwriters think about a lyric they are trying to edit - or a lyric they are seeking a melody for - right before bed, with the intention of using brain activity during sleep to solve the problem. We use this technique regularly, and we know other songwriters who have woken up after this exercise with a revised lyric phrase, ready to write down, or a musical idea that works for the lyric.

Morning Pages

In *The Artist's Way*, the author Julia Cameron discusses "morning pages" which are 1, 2, or 3 pages written first thing in the morning in the open FLOW state with no structure or editor looking over your shoulder. It is a valuable routine for clearing out and recording fragments that can keep ideas coming while you are still close to that dreaming state.

Improvisation

In Keith Johnstone's book *Impro*, the famed Canadian theater instructor shows how the techniques of improvisation in the theater are very similar to writing in the FLOW mode. Johnstone refers to the EDIT mode as the "gatekeeper" who judges the acceptability of ideas that are produced spontaneously. Much of the art of improvisation involves learning to turn off the gatekeeper and allowing ideas and performances to emerge in an uninhibited way. Learn as much as you can about the techniques of improvisation to do better at FLOW.

Strange words

Sometimes strange words, arcane bits of slang, technical vocabulary from another field, or rarely combined words can create an intriguing idea to explore with a song. Take a look at lists of slang online or listen closely at the next family reunion to see if any colorful phrases spark music or lyrics for you.

Writing as fast as you can

Another technique for entering the FLOW mode is to write or type faster than your EDIT mode can keep up. By writing as fast as you can, until you fill up a set number of pages or until you get to a target number of words or for a set period of time, you can practice writing closer to the speed of thought.

Bob Dylan spoke of something like FLOW saying "put yourself in an environment where you can accept all the unconscious stuff that comes to you from the inner working of your mind... take it all down. You have to be able to get the thoughts out of your mind."⁴

4 Paul Zollo, *Songwriters On Songwriting* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), 72.

Shitty first drafts

Opening up, dropping perfectionistic tendencies, and giving yourself permission to write a “shitty first draft” are skills that have to be learned and practiced. Anne Lamont, in her book *Bird by Bird*, advocates this “shitty first draft” technique, and most of us will admit that it does make intuitive sense to write and produce a text this way. Write without editing because once you get the ideas down you can always go back and polish, reorder, cut, and add to them as needed. If your internal critic (or the EDIT mode) jumps all over you in this exercise, just say, “easy tiger, this is just the first draft, you’ll get to polish and rework it after I’m done.”

Different positions, different tunings

If the chords or the progressions you are playing don’t move you or they don’t seem to suggest possibilities, it may be time to learn some new chords or play the chords you already know in a different way. Try capoing the guitar up a few (or many) frets. Look up an open tuning and tune your individual strings to Open D, Open G, or Open C to see if the sounds of the chords strike your ear or your mind in a different way and shake some ideas loose. Or use a tuning like Drop D. Or use a capo at the second fret, but leave the low E (the biggest string) open so that the capo is only clipped on the bottom five strings. Play a D chord (which, with the capo on at fret 2 will actually be an E chord) and see if the sound leads to musical ideas for you.

If you use piano, instead of using C major chord, try using chords on the black keys, like C#, F#, and G#. Subtly different frequencies may sound fresh to your ears. In general, if you find yourself mildly bored by the chords you are playing, it’s time to learn some new chords or some new voices of chords. Learn to play a diminished chord, or change the order of the notes in the chords you play (called inverted chords).

Repetitive, meditative states

As mentioned earlier, if the pure FLOW mode is like dreaming, then many people can get to a FLOW type state in the early morning after just waking up. The Beach Boys lead songwriter Brian Wilson warns against too much coffee when writing⁵ because he suggests you may become *too awake* in some ways to take advantage of the FLOW mode.

Some songwriters go for a drive, a walk, a run, or a hike to engage a FLOW mode, and then they pause the activity to take notes on the ideas or have a compose session when the FLOW state seems accessible. Some have spoken of mowing the grass or exercising to “get the channel open.”

Find some quiet and be disciplined. Turn off the radio or the TV, and be with the quiet, so that your mind can be tempted to create and fill the empty space with ideas. Being in nature is a great way to get the quiet, and being close to the natural world leads to wide perspective and truth - two qualities that are valued in great songs.

Experiment to see what works best for you to get the editor and the critic out of the way. The bottom line, best measure of the FLOW mode is *getting something down* - words on the page, a chord progression, or a recording of a melody.

And finally, to use FLOW mode, remember to connect with a spirit of play and enjoyment of music and writing. The most reliable reward of creative work happens in the present, when you can enjoy the process and focus on loving writing for it's own sake - not for its results.

FLOW experiment

Here are a few ideas regarding getting better at writing in the FLOW mode. Think of the FLOW mode as a kind of free-associating, improvising, riffing writing style, a style that's very different than most of the other work you do.

5 Ibid., 127.

Your dreams at night are pure FLOW mode, so keep that in mind as the ideal when you are in a FLOW session. While you are dreaming, your mind is just following connected ideas, so a FLOW session in many ways is a kind of waking sleep or a trance or a childlike trusting of your own mind to present the ideas, while your conscious, analytical mind completely withholds judgment or evaluation.

Following your connected ideas is another way of thinking about the FLOW mode. Come up with some cues that signal to yourself that you are going to do this very special kind of work. Design cues in your environment to help you go into the FLOW mode - cues that can remind you to put aside the analytical, critical thinking of the EDIT mode.

For a FLOW strengthening experiment, Owen sometimes goes into the dining room in his house (a room where he rarely does any critical thinking or planning) with a notebook or the laptop, and does a 10 minute session of free writing in the FLOW mode. He has experimented with putting on a certain hat that he only wears during FLOW mode, and he has found it to be a useful cue. He has experimented with taking off his shoes to signal FLOW mode, and he has found that helpful too.

So if you see Owen wearing a hat, with his shoes off in the dining room, you know he's FLOWing so don't interrupt him, okay?

Why do we bother trying to adjust the cues to this extent? Why bother going into another room or sitting at a different spot at the table or wearing a different hat or no shoes when you do this free-associative kind of work? Because switching to FLOW mode is a skill, it requires practice, and *anything* that might make the skill easier to practice is welcome. It might work for you too, so the next session of FLOW mode that you do (during a creativity appointment, morning pages, journaling or composing) try adopting a cue (or several cues) that could help you get into your FLOW routine.

Important: Take the hat off, or put your shoes on, or move back to your more usual workspot before you do anything remotely related to the EDIT mode, right? Right. Keep the cues related to FLOW mode, and ditch them when you go back to your normal work or EDIT mode work.

Chapter Seven: Improving EDIT

“The cutting of the gem has to be finished before you can see whether it shines.”

- Leonard Cohen

“I take the tired verses and throw them out.”

- Loudon Wainright III

“Then something better shows up in that ninth or tenth verse than what you had before. And you go, ‘Oh.’”

- Tom Petty

Beat the Line and Overwriting

Once you have gathered a few lines into your manicured zone, you can start playing an EDIT game called “Beat the Line.” How to play: Take a lyric or line from the wild zone to the manicured zone. In other words, you select a line and put it in the structure of your song. For example, you might use it as the first line of a verse, or as the first line of a chorus, or

anywhere your taste and judgment says it might fit. Then assume that's the line you will use in the song, unless a better one comes along. Next, try to imagine a new or tweaked hypothetical line that would be better than the line you have in that spot now.

Yes, you will have to FLOW to come up with ideas to beat it, and your EDIT mode will decide whether it is stronger or not. If what you find in the recent FLOW is not stronger, the original line stands, and you did not beat the line. It remains king of that spot.

If, on the other hand, you did come up with something stronger than the original, then that becomes the new line, and you move the defeated line back to the wild zone or to somewhere else in the song.

To take the idea further, instead of just focusing on beating single lines, try overwriting, or writing more whole verses than you will need for a particular song to be sure you have found the best words, phrases, and lines for your lyric. So if you imagine a song needs three verses, compose five, seven, or even ten verses to see whether lines emerge that you like better than what you have.

The following are topics and questions to pose when in the EDIT mode. When reviewing your draft of lyrics, consider:

Development - Does something happen or change from the beginning to the end of the song?

Pronouns - Is it clear who is speaking or which perspective the song is from? Is it from first person (I, me), second person (you), or third person (he, she, they). Or does it blend these perspectives in a logical way?

Phrasing - Can you eliminate excessive or redundant words? Do the words fit the melody comfortably?

Clarity - Is it clear or apparent what is happening in the song? When you ask your buddies about it, do they “get” the actions of the song?

Believability - Do people behave like this? Would your characters really do or say these things?

Images - Can you put more vivid pictures, sounds, smells, dialogue into the lyric? Can you create a lyric so rich with images that it seems like listeners just traveled somewhere and interacted with your characters?

Contrasts - Can you set up opposites or polarities to make the ideas pop?

Mystery - Can you leave out some facts so that listener has to solve a mystery or play detective at some point in the song?

Repetition - Can you repeat something often enough that it is singable or a welcome resting place or a break from new information?

Metaphor - When you introduce a metaphor to compare one thing to another, is it consistent and logical?

Originality - There's no such thing. Borrow small pieces from many, because there's nothing new under the sun, but there can be fresh combinations. You can learn a lot from writing your own lyrics to an existing song. (That's what Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan did many times.) Then, after you've got a newly composed lyric, you can just come up with another melody for them!

Ending - Does the end of the song feel like a return to home, a transformed reflection of the beginning, or a loop closed?

Associated words

When composing the first draft of your song, you may have produced a list of words related to your song seed. Now that you are in an EDIT mode, take second look at your seed, and switching back to the FLOW mode, produce one more list of words related to either that initial seed or to the central phrase in the lyric. The object of this exercise is to see if you have fully explored the ideas in your song and to see if obvious (or less obvious) associated words can be used to improve individual lines in the song.

Vary sounds

Use a variety of sounds in your song to keep the lines sounding fresh to the ears of your listeners. While you are composing, use the EDIT mode to determine what sounds your lines end with. Consider vowel sounds in particular, because vowels sing well. Specifically, think of the long vowel sounds (A, E, I, O, U) and see if you have an: “ay” rhyme, “ee” rhyme, “eye” rhyme, “oh” rhyme, or an “oo” rhyme.

If you don't have one of these long vowel sounds, use your FLOW mode to produce a few words that end in this sound that might make sense in your song. Then continue to use FLOW mode to come up with the words in the line that precede your rhyme. For example, if you don't have an “ay” rhyme, you might use FLOW mode to produce day, stay, and way. Then you'd use FLOW mode to come up with the words that set up one of these end of line sounds: “When you walked by today.” Then come up with the line that follows this one, “I hoped you'd look my way.”

To take this idea of sounds further, you might think of word families to vary the sounds in your song. Word families are words that have a common feature or pattern; they have some of the same combinations of letters in them and a similar sound. The most common 37 word families in English⁶ are: ack, ain, ake, ale, all, ame, an, ank, ap, ash, at, ate, aw, ay, eat,

6 Wylie, R. & Durrell, D. 1970. Teaching vowels through phonograms. *Elementary English*, 47, 787-791.

ell, est, ice, ick, ide, ight, ill, in, ine, ing, ink, ip, it, ock, oke, op, ore, ot, uck, ug, ump, unk. Try ending some lines with these sounds. That is, use FLOW mode to produce a word list and then produce the lines that end with these words.

Rhymes

Rhymes provide patterns, and patterns help the brain organize information. When you use rhymes in songs, you establish patterns that make the information in your song easier to remember. Because rhymed lines are more memorable than unrhymed lines, most songwriters are looking to rhyme words that fall at the ends of lines. One additional way to enhance the memorability of your lyrics is to try to create internal rhymes (when it suits the song.)

An internal rhyme is:

- two sounds that rhyme within a single line (before the last word of the line), or
- a rhyme that happens between two sounds in two different lines but not located at the ends of those lines

If used correctly, internal rhymes add rhythms and a kind of pleasing snap to lyrics.

Hard rhymes

As an experiment, throughout the course of a song you are composing, try using only hard rhymes, that is, perfect rhymes at the ends of your lines. For example, with word “stone” you could use “alone” but not “home.” You will end up saying things with your lyrics that you might not have anticipated by sticking to hard rhymes as you compose lyrics.

Feminine rhymes

Feminine rhymes are two syllable rhymes, like drinking and thinking, or father and bother. They can sometimes have a more memorable quality in a lyric because there's twice as much rhyming happening at the end of lines and the two syllable words are encountered slightly less frequently than single syllable words.

Repetition

It seems obvious, but then, maybe that's why we need to remind ourselves that building in repetition makes songs more memorable. Repetition builds familiarity into a lyric that allows the brain to rest and enjoy before tackling new information in the rest of the song. The tradition of choruses that come around a few times in a song is based on the enjoyment of repetition, but even for songs without Verse-Chorus-Verse structures or songs without refrains, repetition can be employed. If you are writing a song without a chorus or without a refrain, you can still find spots to repeat phrases or words to provide pattern and familiarity for the listener.

Cliché

To make your lyric more memorable, do your best to avoid clichés or overused expressions. Go for a fresh comparison or statement in your lyric - add a new twist or an unexpected perspective and pass up the most obvious or frequently used ideas. The best cure for cliché is knowing a lot about your subject, or writing about what you know, because your experience will direct you to the more nuanced features of your subject and not just the surface, superficial ideas.

Hear your song a different way

While you are composing melody or finding a way to sing lyric

fragments, move to a different key from the key you were playing in initially to compose the song. Try some of the melody in the new key to see how it strikes you from that new position on the guitar or piano. Or play the song in the same key you were writing in, but use a capo on the guitar. Sometimes the different voicings of different chords can influence melodic choices or overall feeling, and can send you off down fruitful paths.

Once you have some words and melody coming together, try singing and playing your song directly to the wall and listen to your song bouncing back at you. We are used to hearing the sound of our singing in our heads, but the wall will reflect the sounds back to your ear with a delay of milliseconds. Using that bounce of the sound waves against the wall in the EDIT mode can give you a slight distance and enable you to evaluate and “listen” to your song more objectively.

Finally, as a way to hear and evaluate the current state of your song, record it on a voice memo and play it back. Listen to it as if you didn’t write the song. Try to put yourself in the perspective of someone hearing the song for the first time and take notes on what you like and what could be better.

Chords

Interesting chords can sometimes produce unique melodies or create a feeling you can explore with lyrics, so ask your musician friends if there are any new chords they know that they can show you. If there is a new chord you have learned, try it out while you are composing and see if it suggests any promising possibilities for the lyric and melody you are composing. Try a diminished chord, a minor chord, or inverted chord with the usual order of notes switched around to see if it adds to or detracts from the movement of the melody. For a performing habit, keep a copy of a chord reference book like *Mel Bay’s Guitar Chords* (or the Chord Garden section in the back of this book) around and in easy reach, and try to learn one new chord a week.

Development

Listeners expect development in a song. What do we mean by “development?” In many ways, a song is a story, and listeners expect that songs and stories have a beginning, middle, and end, and that by the end, something has changed. Components that can change:

- The character can change his belief, attitude, or behavior
- The perspective can shift from a close up focus to a wide focus, or vice versa
- The questions posed in the song are answered

In general, strive for *something to be different* from the beginning to the end of the song.

Bridge

The right time to think about adding a bridge is usually after the verses and choruses of the song are mostly finished. A bridge section usually brings musical and/or lyrical contrast, new twists, or some form of development. Thinking about a bridge is a good time to ask: what haven't I said about this subject or situation that might be relevant? Not every song needs a bridge, but it's usually a good exercise to consider a bridge, even if you just rule it out.

Truth, resonance, and timelessness

People have varying opinions on many subjects, but there remains significant overlap in our various views, and that overlap we can call truth. When we encounter these rare observations or statements, the essence of the idea feels valid for many people across many of different various experiences. A song with truth is one that you can sing over and over

again. When you have found lyrics with truth, you can look people in the eyes as you perform it, because it is something you can stand behind with confidence.

Truth can emerge from the EDIT mode when a rough idea is polished and refined to a state of clear meaning, and truth can also emerge from the FLOW mode when a line pops out with all the necessary equipment in place to communicate and connect. “Resonance” might be the presence of a near universal truth in a song, and most of us hope we can find songs that have this quality in the finished versions. To highlight truth in a lyric while revising, in EDIT mode, ask yourself: what is true about this song? If it’s not already in the song, stated in an economical way, try to compress those lines. Use EDIT and FLOW to rewrite anything that you do not feel is true or credible.

To test whether you believe a lyric: sing it. If it is hard to sing with conviction, most audiences will detect this subtle backing off, and the song will probably be held back by this lyric. It should be rewritten.

Another way to think about lines that you can sing year after year is the quality of timelessness. Timelessness means that it deals with the truth of the human condition and some universal concerns in the lyrics. Sometimes saying something that you feel but have never said out loud before can be a way to find truth, resonance, and timelessness.

Don’t explain everything

Listeners and audiences like to play along, and you can allow them room to play along by not filling in every single gap in your lyrics. The Rolling Stones used to go through their song lyrics, crossing out lines at random, to make sure that the exact meanings were open and intriguing enough to be memorable. (For example, “Jumping Jack Flash” was initially about a gardener walking in wet rain boots during a storm, and Mick Jagger and Keith Richards took out the lines in the song that made that too clear.)

Phrasing and singability

The best way to refine, polish, and test your draft of a song is to perform it. Each time you perform a new song, in your room against the wall or face to face with your fellow humans, you will get closer to the true path and true shape of the song. You will find comfortable and uncomfortable spots and you might get ideas for helpful revisions. Sometimes, while performing, you will unintentionally sing a better word or a better phrasing of the lyric. Sometimes the energy of performing will show you a better key for the song or a way to vary the melody or rhythm.

However, while you are performing in public, focus entirely on communicating and connecting, and put the EDIT mode completely away, out of your mind. Afterward, you can revisit your memory of performing the songs to identify spots that might need some tweaking or ideas that didn't come across. Some songwriters maintain a rule that "the song doesn't exist unless you can perform it," and every time you play a song, you will learn something about it.

Imitation is the best form of flattery

If you get stuck with a song, sometime it helps to imagine your songwriting or musical heroes. What would your favorite singer do with this idea or lyric? Imitate them to discover possible answers for your own songs. Once you get moving forward with an idea again, you can drop the imitation, or keep it going if it's working. An extreme version of this idea: you could write new lyrics to an existing song. Then once the lyric is finished, you could compose a new melody for the lyric you wrote. A less extreme version of this idea: cover that songs you love. Learn the lyric, chords, melody until you can perform it without notes or lyric sheets. You will unconsciously and consciously learn techniques, structures, tricks, and phrasing that may eventually help you to compose songs.

Folders

By now, you know that we recommend keeping a file or a folder that holds seeds, but you should also have a folder for finished songs. (These can be physical or digital folders, whatever you prefer.) Additionally, you should have another “middle” folder for songs that are in draft form but not “finished.” Keep these three folders together, side by side, so that you are motivated to move ideas from a seed folder to a drafts folder, and then to move drafts to final folders of songs. Having a trusted system or a set of folders where ideas grow up, stage to stage, folder to folder, will assure the songwriter consciousness inside you that the ideas you generate will be stored, evaluated, and used, and that nothing will slip through the cracks.

Feeling stuck

When you feel stuck on an idea that has passed the SEED stage but not yet a finished song, there are two things to do. Either:

1. FLOW in a focused way to find material that might fit in and fill in the gaps, or
2. Take a break from composing for a while and switch to another activity, like driving, another one of your habits, mowing the yard, folding the laundry, or sleeping. Your subconscious mind will be churning on the problem, and odds are, it will present a solution to you suddenly or the next time you sit down to compose.

The main thing is to remain calm and believe that solutions will appear, even in a period of uncertainty about the future shape of the song. Your patience over time, the good taste and skills you’ve developed with your habits, and the problem-solving work of your unconscious and conscious mind will find a lyric and melody that feel right.

Finishing what you start

Many songwriters will tell you they have a principle that helps keep them moving forward and it is “finish everything.” What this means: once you begin growing a song from a seed, you stick with it and move it along from the seed stage to a first draft stage. This principle doesn’t mean every seed has to be developed, it means that once you begin expanding a seed that you usually see it through to a finished first draft.

Most songwriters further revise beyond the first draft through multiple drafts of songs, but the point is to get to the first draft in order to assure yourself and your songwriting consciousness that:

- You will not judge the song’s worth in the middle of growing it
- You will learn something from every song you complete
- You will be employing the Rule of Nine (see Chapter 3)
- Writing up everything to a completed stage will close open loops in your mind

One more way to think about finishing things: try thinking of every song as a table that you are making. Some tables are big, ornate formal dining room tables and some are crooked little kids’ tables, but for it to be a table, it needs four legs and a flat surface. So go ahead and get all the seeds you begin composing to a playable song form.

One alternative to finishing an idea to first draft form, is consciously putting it into a folder or a file that you can access later that is labeled “On Hold” or “Fragments.” That action of putting the idea “on hold” will free your mind from thinking about the idea because your mind can’t stand ambiguity and now you have made that “on hold” status of that idea clear. Therefore, the idea doesn’t need to be on the active list of commitments that your mind automatically monitors every day.

Unicorns

Like reports of unicorns, there are tales of songwriters who, in a fury of FLOW, write down pages of lyrics and the song is basically finished. These cases are extremely rare. But every now and then you may catch one, so just hold on and enjoy the ride.

By far, the more common writing style is getting down the basic structure and a few key ideas about the song in an early draft, and then using EDIT mode to improve it.

Chapter Eight: Strengthening Habits

“If you wait around for inspiration to happen and are not conducting a creative life where you’re involved with your music and your instruments, then that inspiration will happen and you’ll have a couple good ideas and it will be gone before you can respond to it. ”

- Jackson Browne

“Whatever I hear becomes part of my vocabulary... Whatever you listen to, it becomes part of what you do.”

- David Byrne

Your GOAL and your four key songwriting HABITS (writing, listening, performing, reading) will help you collect SEEDS. Then you can take a seed and begin to compose with FLOW and EDIT, moving budding words, phrases, lines and melodies from WILD ZONES to MANICURED ZONES, until they are finished SONGS. Using the habits and FLOW and EDIT will get you *more* songs, but one more exciting proposition is that the

habits will get you *better* songs too.

The four habits will make you the director of your own learning, and, through their use, you will lead the study and design that allows you to develop your skills and knowledge. Your habits will direct daily attention to works and concepts that you find inspiring and useful.

Your writing habit will keep you noting the ideas that cross your mind, and it will help you create rich junkyards or wild zones of FLOW free writing. It will keep you collecting seeds where you might have neglected them in years and months past. Your performing habit will help you learn new chords, gain confidence using your voice, and upgrade your motor skills at playing the piano, guitar, or whatever instrument you use.

Your listening habit will continually present intriguing and inspiring songs to you, and your close attention will help you see how other artists solved problems and made the most of their ideas. Your reading habit will direct your attention to language and storytelling that can teach you how to use beautiful language and principles of good storytelling in your own songs.

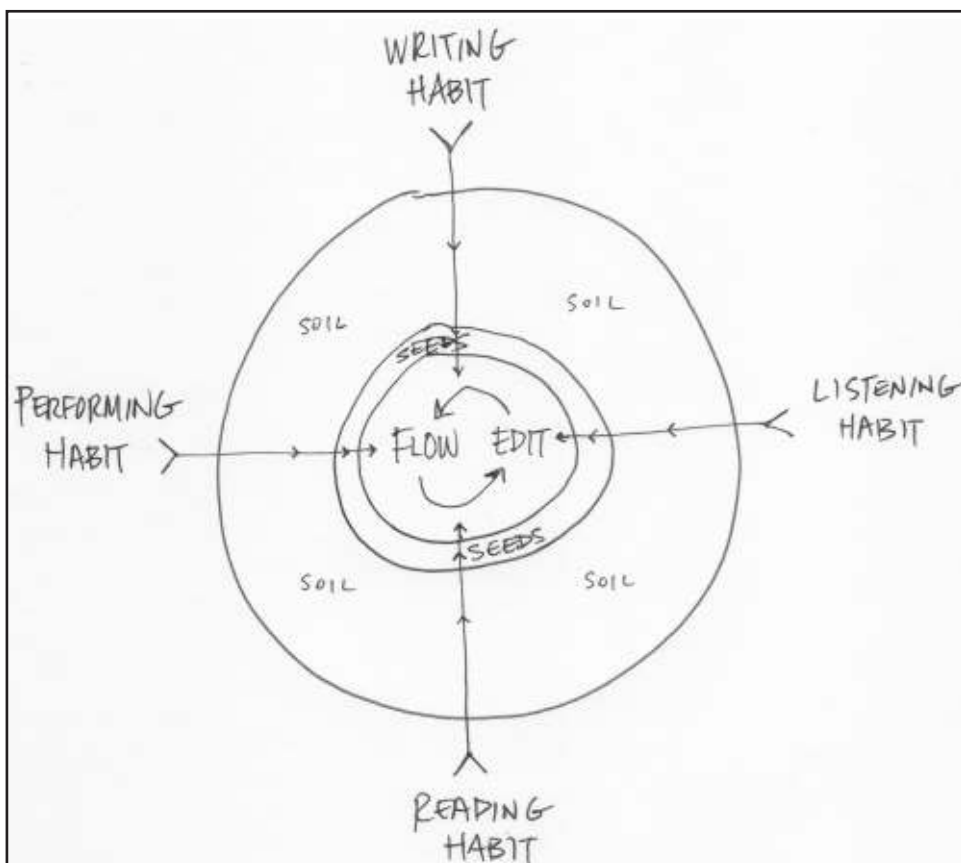
In summary, the writing and performing habit will get you accustomed to producing words and melodies, and the listening and reading habits will help you acquire knowledge and skills by enriching the soil of your mind. In many ways, writing is the interaction of your senses and memory, requiring you to combine ideas from both your current and past experience. Reading and listening provide a steady incoming stream of images, sounds, and words, and they are good ways to load new stimulating experiences into your memory where they can intermingle with the experiences of all your previous days on the planet.

In summary, to attempt to say the thoughts above in the fewest possible words:

GOAL + HABITS = SEEDS

FLOW & EDIT grows SEEDS into more SONGS

GOAL + HABITS = improved SOIL and better SONGS



Another visual model to show how songwriting habits will result in seeds you can use to compose songs. Note also that the inputs of each habit, whether they result in a seed or not, will enrich the surrounding knowledge and experience, the soil, of the songwriter.

In this section, we will dig into the habits a little deeper and we'll show you how to use them in a more advanced way. By understanding the three part structure of habits - cue, routine, and reward - you may be able to cue your habits more, execute the routines more, and reward yourself for completing them.

Cues

We are trying to strengthen our habits, and any habit is made of three components: a cue, a routine, and a reward. Here's an example of the three components in action, in Owen's coffee habit:

“When I wake up in the morning, I walk in the kitchen and see the coffee maker. Seeing the coffee maker is the cue for my coffee habit. The routine I perform in response to the cues is: filling the machine with water, putting a filter in, measuring coffee into the filter, and flipping the switch to brew. The reward is the aroma and taste of coffee (which I love) as well as the stimulation I get from the caffeine. I have a habit of drinking coffee, I perform the routine when I see the cues, and then I get the reward.”

Let's look closely at the sequence of cues, routines, and rewards to decide how to strengthen the four habits of songwriting.

Examples of songwriting cues can be:

- a guitar sitting out on a stand (not hidden in a closet)
- a piano
- a blank notebook
- listening to a song or an artist you admire
- a book on songwriting
- a written goal to write a song posted in a place where you see it regularly
- a friend who asks to hear a new song
- language you admire in a book or a poem
- a strong feeling about something going on your life
- a memorable phrase or piece of conversation

To strengthen the habits of songwriting, keep songwriting cues present and visible in your environment. If you don't have cues to write songs in your environment, try to find a way to get those cues into your daily life. A written goal in a place you will see it is a powerful cue. A notebook and a pen (nearby at all times) are very helpful cues for a writer.

More from Owen on a notebook cue he uses:

“In my own life, when I keep a notebook by my bed, it’s a very visible cue in my environment and a constant reminder of my goal to write songs. I know I am serious about finding seeds for songs when a notebook is one of the last things I see at night and when that same notebook is one of the first things I see in the morning.” Bottom line: decide what cues might work for you and build them into your daily world.

Routines

To use the language of habits, songwriting routines are the sequence of actions you perform after you hear or see a cue. Some routines that we have already discussed so far include: free writing in a journal, singing or playing a chord, listening to a song closely, or reading pages of fiction. All these routines can be used to help you collect seeds and improve your skills and knowledge. Once you have seeds, you can use the seeds themselves as a cue to perform a composing routine.

One tip: do your most difficult routine first thing in the morning as it is the one most likely to get procrastinated. Maybe that means a writing mini habit (50 words of free writing) is one of the very first things you do in the morning, before even looking at email. In your routine, use the same tools and materials day after day to smooth your workflow. Select tools that inspire you, with designs that fit your needs, because they will make completing your routines more enjoyable.

Is there a particular style of pen or notebook that feels right and is aesthetically pleasing to you? Buy a few extra to keep on hand. However, do try to use just one notebook at a time rather than keeping notes spread among the first five pages of five different notebooks. Write down phrases and lines from movies, books, and conversations in your notebook. Take notes several times a day in it, and also take notes on your smartphone.

Regarding tools, here are a few choices we have heard friends talk about that you might consider for your own songwriting toolbox:

- Notebooks with unlined pages (sometimes better for freeform FLOW mode)
- Notebooks with lined paper (better for EDIT mode)
- Graph paper (yep, also sometimes better for EDIT mode)
- Particular pens or pencils
- Computer program where final versions of song lyrics can be composed or stored (MasterWriter, Scrivener, or just text documents in a folder)
- Voice recorder or voice memo app on smartphone
- A folder on your computer to keep rough acoustic demos of songs
- Rhyming dictionary book or online (we like RhymeZone.com best)

Rewards

The reward you get for completing a routine will usually be a feeling of satisfaction at getting it done or the songs that eventually result from the work, but feel free to add other rewards to the system. For example, you might write a newly completed song onto an ongoing list of your compositions that you keep. Anything else you enjoy and could use to celebrate completing a routine might be a good prospect for a reward too.

There is a plethora of apps and websites for tracking completion of routines (www.chains.cc, Momentum, and beeminder.com, for example), but for us, the best tool for getting a sense of reward and completion, is checking off the days on a wall calendar or a single summary of the month's tasks. In our opinion, there is still something more intrinsically rewarding about marking a routine or a mini habit as "completed" with paper and ink. You might find it gratifying to see a hard copy record of the days you completed the commitments you made to yourself. It is rewarding to see tangible evidence that you are moving forward with your habits and building skills.

Owen describes the way he post his progress:

"I use year-at-a-glance wall calendars and put a check mark on days

when I completed all my mini habits. I also make a monthly record using graph paper. On the graph paper I write the month name at the top and then list 1 through 30 or 31 for the days in the month on one row. Then, on the left side of the page, I write each habit on a different row, so that I can put a check on the row for that habit for each particular day of the month.”

The point is, don't assume digital records and digital to-do lists are more rewarding or motivating than paper-and-ink lists. Thousands of years of evolution have made the act of making a physical mark on a surface more rewarding than any digital check marks. Go with whatever works for you and gives you a sense of satisfaction after completing the routines to strengthen your habits.

Belief

The final essential component to an ongoing habit is belief. To keep a routine going, you must *believe* that is worthwhile and that more and better writing is possible if the habit is maintained. Belief is best cultivated in interactions with other people, so plan on seeking out one or two or more people with whom you can share your habit creation successes and challenges. Find a community of songwriters you can join to refresh, rebuild, and sustain belief, so that you can create and maintain your habit of songwriting.

Belief can also be reinforced by books by other people who have done the work you are doing. You can strengthen belief with interviews and advice straight from some of the world's best songwriters in the books *Songwriters on Songwriting* by Paul Zollo or *And Then I Wrote* by Tom Russell and Sylvia Tyson.

Be assured: your habits will fill and refill your collection of seeds and your habits will enrich the soil of your mind. Keep in the groove with your habits by performing your instrument, listening to songs, reading words, and writing notes/journals/morning pages, and the seeds and skills for more and better songs will inevitably come along.

Lists

Keeping a few lists on hand is good way to keep your habits supplied with incoming fresh material. Think about lists as cues for routines you want to perform. For your listening habit, keep lists of songs or artists you have heard recommended by friends or other trusted sources, so that when you have a crosstown drive you can cue up the song or a new album to listen to.

For your reading habit, keep a list of movies and books to read. Because folks who tell stories well are a good source for song ideas, you might even keep lists of people to make a point to talk to regularly and listen to them closely for song ideas. Fiction, spiritual texts, history, and poetry are all good genres for songwriters to read. For your performing habit, keep lists of chords to learn and songs you want to cover. Remember that, in addition to piano or guitar, your singing voice is also an instrument, and the more you use it the stronger it becomes. For your writing habit, in addition to actually working on song lyrics and music, you should keep lists of writing techniques and routines like journaling, writing-all-the-time, morning pages, and creativity appointments to use in this habit.

Writing Routines

Journaling

You can create rich soil for songs and find and collect seeds with a journaling routine. Any topic is fair game - anything on your mind can go into the journal entry. Some of what you write down will be feelings, things you need to do, reports of recent activities, things you're looking forward to, or things you are worried about. Use the opportunity to write down beautiful, remarkable, or surprising things you noticed in the events of your day. Think of journaling as exercise for your noticing, reflecting, feeling mind.

Note-taking

Regular journaling is an important writing routine, but another kind of writing routine can potentially be happening all the time. “Writing-all-the-time” is a mindset, a practice, and a discipline. All it requires is a notebook, a cocktail napkin, a note-taking app on your smartphone, or the back of a receipt.

“Writing-all-the-time” is a decision, a commitment you make to yourself, a promise to take notes when ideas cross your mind, whenever and wherever you are. The discipline of “writing-all-the-time” requires you to write down the ideas you have when you have them, and not to say “oh, I’ll write that down later,” because, of course, you won’t write it down later. You will forget the idea you had. Also: “Writing-all-the-time” requires you to not judge or evaluate your idea - only to record it in a place you know you will see it later.

Many professional musicians do not compose drafts of songs while touring or on the road, but say they do *take notes* while on the road. Then later, back home or off the road, these pro songwriters will expand these collected notes into drafts of songs.

Creativity appointments

Actually performing songwriting routines on a daily basis is the best way to strengthen the songwriting habit. We know how hard it is to do anything on a daily basis, but it’s not impossible. Most people brush their teeth every day. Some people wait to be inspired to write, but in our experience, we are more likely to be inspired *while* writing rather than waiting to be inspired to write. “Showing up” - setting aside the time to write - is the most basic and necessary requirement for a song, but additional sessions can be scheduled beyond your daily mini habits, so consider making a creativity appointment with yourself and committing 5 to 25 minutes to focus on one of your songwriting habits. Shut the

door, turn off the phone, close down the internet browser, and open the notebook.

Procrastination

Procrastination sometimes comes along in the form of over-preparing and waiting for ideal times and conditions. You find ways to delay composing a song because, “I need to collect more seeds” or “I need a stronger idea to start with” or “I need my usual notebook to write” or “I need a longer block of time to get anything done on the song.” When you see these kinds of statements in black in white, you probably realize that they are just the different masks and disguises of stalling and fear of failure. They are excuses that prevent you from getting to work. So remember, in course of your habits, your quantity goal of finished first drafts of songs should keep you completing and finishing songs, not just planning and preparing for songs.

Revisit your writing

Regardless of what songwriting routines you perform, whether journaling, writing-all-the-time, or creativity appointments, plan on revisiting all this writing at regular intervals to look for song ideas.

Owen talks about his writing routine:

“My own writing routines include a daily mini habit of writing 50 words of morning pages and then throughout the day, I write down every seed idea I have. Then once or twice a week, I set make a creativity appointment with myself to review seeds and compose from a seed (FLOW then EDIT). I usually structure composing into three 25-minute blocks with two 5 minute breaks built in, so that’s 25 focused, 5 break, 25 focused, 5 break, 25 focused for a total of about 85 minutes. During this time, I review seeds, then FLOW, EDIT, FLOW, and EDIT to see if I can get a song growing.”

Performing routine

Getting better at your instrument will make you better at playing and writing songs. No matter what instrument you play, chords are your friends when you are writing a song, so always be looking for a chance to learn a new chord. Take on the viewpoint of a chord collector, and you'll always be interested in getting a new one added to your collection.

Learning some music theory - the principles of harmony and melody - can also provide you with seeds, enrich the soil of your mind, and serve as a subject you can tackle in small pieces your whole life. Reading a book on guitar or picking up a new instrument to play, like harmonica or piano, can also influence your songs for years to come. Regularly learn how to play and sing songs you've always admired. By deconstructing the lyrics and chords, you'll see up close how the songwriter built it, and then you can emulate it in your own songs.

Listening routine

The melodies, harmonies, and rhythms you have heard throughout your life are stored in your brain, and the music you expose yourself to will inform your future songwriting. Each of us synthesizes the sounds we have heard throughout the course of our lives to get melodies, harmonies, and rhythms for the lyrics we write.

Explore the great music you haven't heard. Get a list of highly esteemed music from a source you trust (a friend, blog, or book) and regularly listen to the artists or songs that are on that list. Always have an artist, album, or song list that you are working through, and closely listen to the works on that list as part of your listening routine.

Reading routine

In many ways, the reading routine can also be considered a story routine. Getting lost in the stories you watch, read, or listen to is a great

feeling. However, when you are “working” on your reading or story routine, one idea that can help you develop as a storyteller is to be mindful and analytical as you read, watch, or listen to stories. When possible, try to track the structure of the story and notice how your attention is carried on through, scene by scene, to see how the characters are changed by their experiences. Two books - Robert McKee’s *Story* and Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* - are helpful for understanding the form of stories that move through a classical arc from conflict to resolution.

Reading poetry exposes you to compressed, condensed imagery, and religious texts and scientific publications can bring you stories from a wide perspective. Fiction and biography will often drill down into a narrower perspective inside the life of one individual and their feelings and social interactions. Exposure to all this language will help you make effective songs.

In addition to reading books and seeing films, the reading and story routines can also be employed in listening closely to the stories told by the people around you. The most common advice to writers is “write what you know.” Listening closely to stories, words, and sayings of many different kinds of people expands what you know about, and the more you know about, the more you can write about.

And don’t forget to read your own work. You can and should revisit and reread old notebooks. Sometimes an idea from years ago will be sitting there, waiting for your present-day self to see it and understand it in a new way. (Because you will reread and revisit old notebooks, this is a good reason to write in one at a time and fill up all the blank pages to the end of the notebook, because this will result in fewer old notebooks you have to store somewhere!)

Now that we have discussed ways to strengthen habits, let’s consider a framework for designing memorable songs.

Chapter Nine:

Stickiness

Write down your answers to the following questions: What do you want a song to make people feel or understand? What do you want them to do? Do you want them to stand up and sing along, do you want them to cry, or do you want them to play it at their wedding? By writing a few goals for the song you write before beginning a FLOW process, you can sometimes wind up with a song that meets your goals. “Better songs” can mean songs that accomplish the goals you set for the songs. Some songwriters want their next song to be the one that:

- People play at full blast at the summer keg party and sing along to
- People dance to at a country bar
- Inspires their songwriter heroes to send them a message to say “well done”
- Gets played on the local radio station
- Is popular among college students
- Will get you booked at a folk festival

The bottom line is that “better songs” can only make sense in regard to your goals for your songwriting, and your songs get better to the extent

that they accomplish the goals you set for them.

One idea we believe we can all agree on: more memorable songs are generally better. We want the people that hear our songs to pay attention long enough for the song to make an impression in their consciousness and memory. Let's use the word "stickiness" to describe how memorable a song is for a listener.

Elements of a memorable idea

In his 2000 book *The Tipping Point*, Malcom Gladwell proposes that some ideas are "stickier" than others. That is, they are more memorable. In a further exploration of this idea, Chip and Dan Heath, in their 2011 book *Made to Stick*, surveyed research on ad campaigns, urban myths, and other often repeated social phenomena in order to describe five factors that contribute to an idea's "stickiness" or the quality of being memorable.

They created an acronym from the first letter of each of the five factors and they spell SUCCEsS:

Simple

Unexpected

Concrete

Credible

Emotional

Stories

(The last "s" in SUCCEsS is silent and doesn't represent any sixth factor.)

Use the acronym SUCCEsS to remember a few features you can possibly build into your own work to make it more memorable.

Simple: a core idea comes through and a central idea is clear. By trying to pack too many simultaneous messages into a song, we end up losing the main idea. Simple means we should try to make at least one central idea of a song apparent to a listener. The test? A listener can state what the song is

about after the song is through.

Unexpected: A surprise that can hook and keep attention. Any element that defies or disturbs expectations will grab attention and, thus, have a shot at being memorable.

Concrete: details and talk of people, places, and things will be more memorable than abstract concepts. Vivid images are your best friend when striving for the concrete.

Credible: you believe the voice of the songwriter or you believe the characters in the song would truly behave as described. Specific details can also lend credibility (as well as concreteness).

Emotional: the work elicits an emotional response as events in the song reveal how characters move closer or further from their goals. News networks and horror movie directors know how to use emotion in their stories. Strong emotion is memorable.

Stories: we store information provided in a narrative structure better than in other forms. One way to think about a story is “an interruption of a routine that is eventually resolved.” How was someone’s usual routine interrupted and how do they attempt to get the new challenge resolved? The account of an interruption and its resolution is a story, and the information embedded in the series of events is more memorable.

Details

The SUCCEsS framework from the book *Made to Stick* is a good framework to keep in mind when you are looking for seeds and also when you are in the EDIT mode and you are looking closely at your early drafts of songs. Sometimes you will spot ways you can make your song more sticky and memorable when you are editing them.

Most lyrics will have components of more than one of the SUCCEsS dimensions of stickiness. For example, very personal song lyrics are often more memorable, often because they are credible, emotional, and reveal a story.

If you get overwhelmed trying to judge all the SUCCEsS dimensions to create stickiness, just keep in mind one rule of thumb: *it's very difficult to go wrong by adding details.*

Details - images, proper names, place names, colors, and numbers - are reliable choices for creating more memorable lyrics. For example, consider the power of details like:

Proper names

Mary Jane's Last Dance, Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds, Jack and Diane, Roxanne, Visions of Johanna, Layla, Eleanor Rigby, Billie Jean

Colors

Purple Rain, Purple Haze, Tangled Up in Blue, Green Green Grass of Home, Brown Sugar, Back in Black, Yellow Submarine, Red Red Wine

Numbers

1999, Thirty Days, 867-5309, One Love, 9 to 5, Summer of '69, Highway 61 Revisited

Place names

City of New Orleans, Viva Las Vegas, Georgia, New York, New York, L.A. Woman, Folsom Prison Blues, Please Come to Boston, Atlantic City

Why try to design for stickiness?

As we discussed in the "Why we write songs" section of Chapter 1, a song can be a tool for human connection. If, by this view, songs are tools, then the purpose of a song is to create a communication and connection between at least two human minds. Catching another's attention and helping that other to remember features of the song seems like the minimum requirements for communication and connection. So when we

are setting out to improve a song's hooks we ask: "How can I make this more sticky?"

Simple to unexpected moves

As you consider the rhythm, chord progression, and melody of your song, remember that moves from simple to unexpected throughout the song will maintain interest and be more memorable. Use common melodic patterns plus occasional sonic surprises to get both familiarity and novelty into an ideal mix.

To tap into the unexpected component of stickiness of lyrics, try to use surprising turns of phrase or unexpected information at the very beginning of your song, so that you raise questions for the listener to get attention and draw them in. The first few lines of a song are prime real estate for snagging a listener's interest, so make the most of it. And keep the surprises coming throughout the song whenever possible.

Ask questions

As listeners, a question requires just a touch more processing power from our brains than a statement requires. Because our brain is a problem-solving machine, it will try to answer the question. Extra processing means more memorability, so we remember when Bob Dylan asks: "How does it feel... to be on your own?" or "How many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man?"

Go personal

Only you have lived your own particular life, so the details from your experiences that you know and include will make your songs credible. And as a bonus, the events from your own life that you use are likely to have stickiness components of story and emotion.

Show, don't tell

Our brains handle images better than abstract ideas, so when possible, convey the feelings in your song using pictures and sounds. If you give us pictures we will “see” the story or song for ourselves in our mind’s eye, rather than just take your word for it. For example, rather than saying a character “felt sad,” describe him as “looking down” or “with tears in his eyes.” Give the listener pictures and allow him or her to produce the feelings themselves. In fact, whenever possible, convey the ideas in the song as images because one way to think about a good story or song is as a waking dream. When composing, try to *see* what’s happening and use words to reproduce the images on the page or in the mind of the listener. Very often the difference between a good song and a great song is the presence of rich, vivid images, so use them whenever it suits your song.

Metaphors

The use of metaphor can also embed memorable images in your songs, especially if the metaphors are used consistently. We humans can break the overwhelming, abstract complexity of the world into more familiar, concrete symbols. The Oxford Dictionary defines a metaphor as “a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else, especially something abstract.” Songwriters use metaphors in songs, and one way to make songs better is by paying attention to consistency in the use of metaphors. Metaphors can make for “aha” moments where you show the listener how seemingly unlike things are, in fact, similar in some ways. If you are inconsistent with comparisons, the attempt can lead to confusion and frustration for the listener.

For example, if in a song you say: “our love is like a river and it flows over deserts and through the plains,” then you are saying the force, power, and persistence of flowing water is similar to a strong relationship through

hardships and different settings. Now that you have made this comparison, it would be inconsistent to say: “But now our love is broken.” Why? Because you said your love was a river. How does a river break?

You get it. Once you make a comparison by using a metaphor, use it consistently, until you set up the next comparison or metaphor. Don't mix metaphors because when you lead listeners astray they can lose patience, and a bunch of small errors can be the icing on the camel's back.

Hooks

The bottom line: a hook is anything that gets and keeps attention. Ask yourself: What would be the first line of an interesting song? What line would get you leaning forward, turning up the volume to hear what comes next? Whatever line fits that description is a hook. If something interests you or if some idea or sound or rhythm appears in your thoughts, that's a clue that you should explore it. Creativity and fresh ideas come from people exploring what they love and what amuses/interests/delights them. Do consider the listener's perspective, but, at first, you will have to use your own experience and aesthetic tastes. The good news is that we are not so unique and there are other people in the world amused/interested/delighted by the same things we are. So go ahead and make something for yourself and for them.

Chapter Ten: Collaboration

Co-Writing

Co-writing is what happens when two or more people have a goal-oriented, creative conversation and slowly discover (and take note of) lyrics and melody for a new song. Perhaps some songs can only be written by one person - all alone - who must go and interrogate himself or herself until the words and music express a singular, artistic vision. But many satisfying songs have been crafted when two people contribute their own distinct feelings, perspectives, and styles into the same new composition.

What makes a good candidate for a co-writer? Because much of co-writing is conversation and trading back and forth of ideas, a co-writer should, at the very least, be someone you would enjoy having a conversation with. As a rule of thumb, two hour blocks of time are the minimum that most pairs of songwriters need to put a song together. Four and five hours might be the upper limit for a productive, focused meeting on creating a song.

Step 1: Brainstorming (FLOW)

The first goal of a co-writing meeting is settling on a topic or phrase or melody to focus on for the next 2 hours. The first effort together is characterized by the FLOW style. The co-writing meeting can start with an existing idea for a song (or even a partially written song lyric or melody idea) that the two of you flesh out into a full song, or it can start from candid and personal conversation of “what’s been going on?” Any distinct feelings or issues that either one of you have been thinking about or dealing with lately might hold the seeds of a song you can create together.

Listen closely in your conversation with a co-writer for any feelings or phrases that catch your ear. Recent travels, family members, or personal experiences/difficulties/successes are usually productive areas for co-writing. As you bounce ideas back and forth, write down the words that come up in conversation in a notebook. No need to note structure - just list the interesting words or ideas that come up in your conversation. The first part of your meeting is about FLOW of ideas, with no judgments, just listing, sharing, free-associating, and connecting. Devote 20-40 minutes on just creating a “wild zone” or “junkyard” of ideas that you both can pick through later.

Maybe another good question for this phase is: what kind of “feel” for a song do you feel like writing? (uptempo, bluesy, bluegrass, rocking, ballady, country?) When brainstorming - and during co-writing in general - keep the sharing channels between you wide open.

Remember: Write down **all** proposed ideas, whether or not you think they will appear in the final version of the song. The word “no” is not helpful in co-writing. Instead, use the phrase, “Yes, and...” over and over. If you use “no” or “that’s not good,” you will shut down your partner’s creativity and sharing (and thus, you’ll shut down your own as well). When you are tempted to say “no” to an idea, try instead saying “Yes, got it down, and what else?” The key is to keep generating raw material at this phase. You need all the material you can get for later phases of the co-writing.

Step 2: Focus (EDIT)

After brainstorming and having a freeform conversation about possible song topics, and listing words, issues, phrases, and feelings, it is time to enter an EDIT phase of the session. Together, take a look at the “junkyard” or “wild zone” of words and ideas you have produced together, and circle the ones that seem rich for further digging, unearthing, and discovering together. Use the evaluative function of the EDIT mode to seek a phrase or a melody that you both would enjoy contributing ideas toward for the next couple of hours. Did you find an idea that could serve as a jumping off point, a central idea that you both can continue to explore together with the goal of creating a song? If so, proceed to step 3. If not, go back to step 1, Brainstorming, and repeat the process until you do have something to proceed to Step 3 with.

Step 3: Expand your wild zone

Once you have a topic or central phrase or central melody or some concept that your song is about, now it's time to resume the FLOW phase. Together, ask yourselves: What words or phrases might be in a song about _____? List them with no judgment, just write, talk, and free associate. What chords might be in a song about _____? Revisit the idea of question of what kind of “feel” might the song have (uptempo, bluesy, bluegrass, rocking, ballady, country)?

Sometimes drawing bubble maps or mind maps helps, and sometimes it helps to list different aspects of the topic on multiple pages of a notebook. Produce lines that rhyme, lines that don't, lists of words, and favorite phrases that might connect to this central idea.

Step 4: Pick a line to start reacting to

From what you produced in Step 3, use EDIT to find a line that sounds like the beginning of something - a line that could be the beginning of a verse or the beginning of the chorus. Or maybe it's the last line of a verse, or the last line of the chorus, or the last line of the song. Either way, take it and write it on a new sheet of paper.

Step 5: Find out what comes after that line or before it

React to that line with FLOW: try to figure out what comes right after it, or maybe what comes before it, what rhymes with it, what contrasts with it, or what goes along with it. Grab any words from Steps 1, 2, or 3 and expand them into phrases that can precede or follow up the line you have written down.

Steps 6, 7, 8, 9...

Whenever you feel moved to, try singing some of the lines in a musical FLOW mode or play some chords or a groove that might fit the lines. FLOW and EDIT, FLOW and EDIT, FLOW and EDIT, until you're both happy with the song. But, by now, you're not reading these steps anymore, you're off and running, co-writing a song, because you got it started by listening and writing down everything that was said without judgment. You said "yes, and" and "what else?" and you got the song growing from a seed. You created options, you made choices, you used FLOW, then EDIT, then FLOW, then EDIT. You and your co-writer created a draft of a song that would never have existed if either of you were writing alone. Your minds and ideas interacted to create an artifact of your conversation and experiences. Each of you will probably revise it by singing it and playing it on your own, then you'll meet up again to show each other what you have learned. FLOW and EDIT until you both agree that the song is done.

Prompts

Feel free to use one of the following prompts to start a compose session:

- Talk to somebody that isn't there
- Go on a trip to a new place and pay attention to the things you see, hear, and feel
- Stay in a familiar place and pay attention to the things you see, hear, and feel
- Try to create a specific mood with a song
- Read a poem and imitate the style and feeling of it in a lyric
- Use a common saying as a title for a song (or use an uncommon saying)
- Write a first line with a lot of options and paths that you can take from it
- Write a line that is true for you and then exaggerate it
- Start a song with lines that sound like the beginning of a joke
- Write a song about a character with supernatural abilities
- Write a song with a mix of conversational language and more poetic language

- Write a song based on a historical person
- Write a new song to a beat or a groove you like
- Write a song based on a character from a movie
- Use a book title as the title of a song
- Pick a setting and write a song where the action of the song happens in that setting
- Use the Songfarmer App at <http://app.songfarmer.com> to generate a Setting prompt
- Learn a new chord and put together a progression of chords that it fits in. Imagine that each chord is like a pearl on a string and string them together, one after the other, and then produce lyrics and melody after the chord progression is basically set
- Write a song with just one or two chords
- Write down all the things that have caught your attention recently and put them together and see what happens
- Embody another character different from yourself and write a song from the first person perspective that the character would sing
- Write a chorus that would be encouraging for you to hear and believe
- Write about your feelings without using the word for the feeling. Try to produce the same feeling in a listener and convey that feeling using lyrics that show pictures and vivid images

Conclusion

In summary, we believe that cultivating songwriting habits, collecting seeds, and moving back and forth from a FLOW mode to an EDIT mode while composing is how songs are written.

We believe that you will write **more songs** as you:

- Strengthen songwriting habits and increase the number of song ideas you get from songwriting routines
- Separate FLOW mode composing from EDIT mode composing to prevent writer's block and getting stuck
- Gain skill to FLOW more freely

We believe that you will write **better songs** as you:

- Design songs to meet your goals
- Study what makes for “sticky” or memorable songs
- Gain skill to EDIT and improve early drafts of lyrics
- Gain musical skill with your instrument
- Learn from listening and performing how to use melodies and grooves effectively

We believe we can make something with our days. So go ahead and...

MAKE SOMETHING

Tighten up that string, stomp your foot on the floor
Find some words to sing, open up your door
Grow the tree, carve the wood, polish till it shines,
Find the better way, something that saves time
Go on light the way that no one's ever seen
Bridge the gap, draw the map of the places in between

Make something, make your own
There's a statue waiting inside a block of stone
Twist the knob on that amp 'til you find the right tone
Make something, make your own

That picture in your head, put it on the wall
Paint it on a cave, hang it in the hall
Change the oil, change the tire, get it rolling true
Do your best on the test, that's all that we can do
If it's beautiful but useless, don't be ashamed
Show it to your people, don't forget to sign your name

Make something, make your own
There's a statue waiting inside a block of stone
Take a hammer and a nail, build someone a home
Make something, make your own
Make something, shake something with both hands
Leave your mark, throw a spark so the world will understand

That restlessness to see what's over the next hill
Keeps you up at night, probably always will
So keep the fire burning, on into the dark
But if it keeps on raining, go on and build an ark
Fall in love, raise a child, teach her right from wrong
Build her up, raise her tough, so she can write a song

Make something, make your own
There's a garden rising up from seeds that were sown
Tell the story that the world has never known
Makes something, make your own

Make something, shake something, up and go
Believe me when I say, the clock ain't moving slow
Make something, while you can
If you want to live forever, better make something man
While you can, make something man

(Owen Temple, © 2013)

The Chord Garden

“It never hurts to learn as many chords as you can. All kinds. Sometimes it will change the inflection of a whole song, a straight chord or, say, an augmented seventh chord.”

- Bob Dylan

On each page that follows is a group of chords that often appear next to each other in many songs. That is, each page contains a set of chords that are in the same key. The chord names are written under the fingering diagram, and the number of the chord in the scale is written above the diagram. While doing reps for your performing habit, you can play a few of these chords and hear how they sound together. While composing, you might create progressions of different chords within a particular key until you find a sound you like.

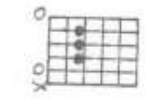
KEY OF

A

OR

F#m

1



A

A7

VARIATIONS

2m



Bm

Bm7

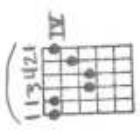
2



B OR B7

MORE
COLORFUL
SUBSTITUTIONS
&
VARIATIONS

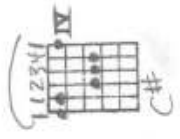
3m



C#m

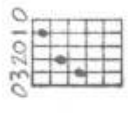
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3



C#

b3



C

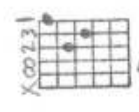
4



D

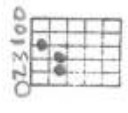
D7

4m



Dm

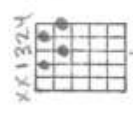
5



E

E7

b5dim



D#dim

4/5



D/E

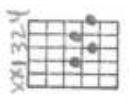
6m



F#m

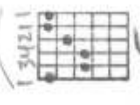
F#m7

b6dim



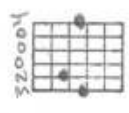
Fdim

b6



F

b7

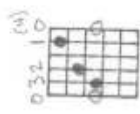


G

KEY OF

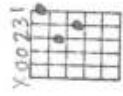
C
OR
Am

1



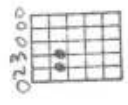
C C7

2m



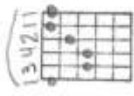
Dm Dm7

3m



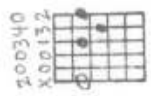
Em Em7

4



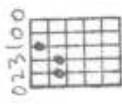
F F7 Fadd9 Fmaj7

2



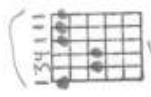
D Dadd9/F#

3



E or E7

4m



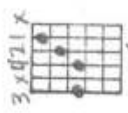
Fm

b5dim



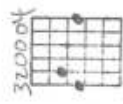
F#dim

4/5



F/G

5



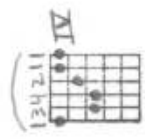
G G7

b6dim



G#dim

b6



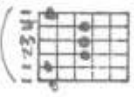
G#

6m



Am Am7

b7



Bb

MORE
COLORFUL
SUBSTITUTIONS
&
VARIATIONS

VARIATIONS

KEY OF

D
OR
Bm

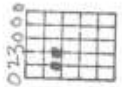
1



D

D7

2m



Em

Em7

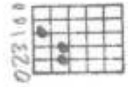
3m



F#m

F#m7

2



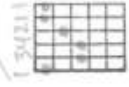
E

3



F#

b3



F

4



G

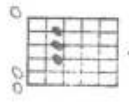
G7, Gmaj7

4m



Gm

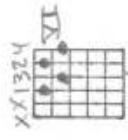
5



A

A7

b5dim



G#dim

4/5



G/A

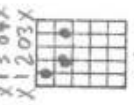
6m



Bm

Bm7

b6dim



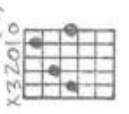
Bbdim

b6



Bb

b7



C

Cadd9

MORE
CAREFUL
SUBSTITUTIONS
&
VARIATIONS

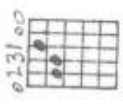
KEY OF

E

OR

C#m

1



E

E7

2m



F#m

F#m7

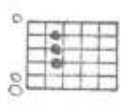
3m



G#m

G#m7

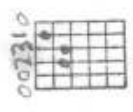
4



A

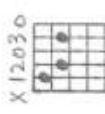
A7, Add9, Aug7

4m



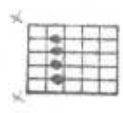
Am

b5dim



A#dim

4/5



A/B

5



B

B7

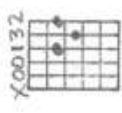
6m



C#m

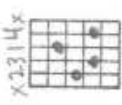
C#m7

b7

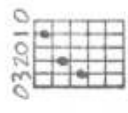


D

b6dim



b6



C

VARIATIONS

MORE COLORFUL SUBSTITUTIONS

VARIATIONS

KEY OF

G

OR

Em

1

320004



G

G⁷

VARIATIONS

MORE COLORFUL SUBSTITUTIONS

VARIATIONS

2m

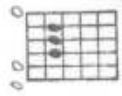
002310



Am

Am⁷

2



A OR A⁷

3m

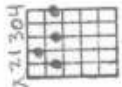
113421



Bm

Bm⁷

3



B⁷ OR B

b3



Bb

4

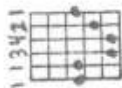
32010



C

C⁷

4m



Cm

5

X00132



D

D⁷

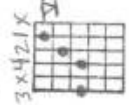
b5dim

X2314X



D^bdim

4/5



D⁷

6m

023000



Em

Em⁷

b6dim

XX1324



E^bdim

b6

X32014



E^b

b7

124211



F

Fadd9

About the Authors

Owen Temple has recorded and released 12 albums of original songs, under his own name and pseudonyms, and the songs he has co-written with friends appear on the recordings of more than 12 artists. Other habits besides songwriting include spending time with his family, reading history, hiking, and cooking. He lives in Austin, Texas.

Gordy Quist is a founding member of the roots rock n roll band, The Band of Heathens, and co-owner and operator of The Finishing School, a private recording studio in Austin, TX. When he is not writing, recording or on tour with The Band of Heathens, he is usually engineering and/or producing records for other artists, or hanging out with his wife Amber and two kids, Fiona and Nellie.