

What I've Learned From Nashville

Passion:

Write what you know.

Love what you write. But don't get too attached.

Listen to your heart, but know your heart can be deceitful.

The Hook:

Everything points back to the hook.

Set it up well.

Find unique treatments for universal themes – fresh ideas to say what's already been said.

The title matters.

Don't water-down the hook.

The first line is prime real estate.

Melody is King. Lyrics are Queen. A catchy song is the royal offspring.

Content:

It's Walmart, not Hallmark.

Short and simple. Say as only what needs to be said.

Don't bore us, get to the chorus.

Conversational language: If you wouldn't say it, don't sing it.

Show, don't tell.

Write with the video in mind.

Stories rule. (Even if it's not a story song, conversational songs are part of a bigger story.)

Structure, Form and Mechanics

Our ears have been trained to expect certain forms and structure.

As soon as people think about *how* you said something versus *what* you said, you lose.

If the line doesn't read well, it won't sing well.

People describe commercial songs as "cookie-cutter." But if you're gonna make a cookie for other people, shouldn't it look, taste and smell like a cookie?

Songwriting is an art *and* a craft. Learn the craft.



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The Writing Process

Write all the time.

Don't wait for inspiration (or the muse). He/it/she honors those who are already at work.
Songwriting is like building birdhouses – Birdhouse #1 is going to suck. #38 will be solid. #480 might get you noticed. (If you take time to improve on each one)

The Writing Process: Do it Over.

Rewrite. Rewrite. Rewrite.

Make every word count.

If the line's not fun (or moving) to sing, rewrite it until it is.

Stop rewriting after feedback starts coming back with only preferences.

Stop rewriting when it's clear the song doesn't have a future. Ask, "Is this song worth more time and energy?"

"Second verse hell" is usually due to poor planning and not writing to the hook.

The Writing Process: Do it in Front of People

Co-write.

"Suck out loud." (quoted from Brian White)

Seek feedback: "Be humble, learn. Be humble, learn. Be humble, learn."

Play out.

Making it in Nashville

It's about who you know (*and* having great songs to show them).

Co-write. Co-write. Co-write.

Write with the artist.

Learn Nashville writing as a means to an end: to be a better writer.

Don't chase the radio.

Don't hang your happiness on making Nashville happy.

You have to be present to win.

Co-write up. But you have to be invited.

Don't hang your happiness on making Nashville happy.

Write five up-tempo tunes for every one ballad or mid-tempo.

The artist doesn't want to look bad or self-righteous.

An "artist-writer" can get away with more than "just the songwriter."

Nashville knows the difference between what "sounds *like* a hit" and what "*sounds like a hit.*"

Nashville wants fresh and original. Even though the radio doesn't sound like it.

Don't hang your happiness on making Nashville happy. (Did I mention that one already)

There are 1,000 more rules to making it Nashville.

And 10,000 exceptions to every one of those rules.

