



Inspiration vs Perspiration

with Charlie Grant

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“Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration” Thomas Edison

Typical ideas about inspiration - bolt out of the blue, from the heavens, somehow mystical... THATS THE EASY PART! NOT RELIABLE ENOUGH

In order to have a career as a songwriter you will have to write songs, consistently, regardless of how you feel or if you are in the mood. You will probably have to write at least 50 songs that you think are absolutely the best thing you've ever done before one gets somewhere. So, you have to write A LOT OF SONGS.

I was guilty of having a “This is my ART, man, I can't just turn it on and off like a tap” attitude but I realised that it wasn't helpful or professional. What if you have a session with a big artist and need to deliver that day??

My top inspiration hacks

1. Identify your own habits and comfort zones musically, rhythmically, lyrically and ban yourself from using them. EG Brian Eno producing U2, giving Bono a list of banned words. Research [“Oblique Strategies”](#)

Ask your peers to point out the things that you overuse, or record yourself and listen back, you will hear more objectively. For example, I tend to write wordy choruses, simple chorus challenge! Less info but more impact.

2. Write first, edit later. Try to switch off the internal editor. Overcoming the fear of the blank page and generating material on a chosen theme. 15 minutes free writing, no concern for structure or rhyme. Take a short break and then sift through for ideas that stand out to you, or pass it to someone else to do the editing part and vice versa.

Do Julia Cameron's [MORNING PAGES](#). Start a Journal.

3. Repurpose a cliché or a well worn phrase. Flip the meaning. The power of familiarity and surprise.

4. Write on an unfamiliar instrument. A childlike or naive approach can be charming. “Our hands are like dogs that always go back to the same comfortable places” - Tom Waits.

Use alternate tunings on guitar, bust out of your own habits! (point 1)

5. Choose 5 universal themes and write three song sketches for each. Give yourself a time limit, 1 theme per day for 5 days e.g. song for a wedding ceremony / I'll be there to support you / how did I end up with someone as great as you?

6. Get weird with gear! Use pedals or plug ins to make your instrument an interesting sound generator, the more random the better. EMBRACE HAPPY ACCIDENTS! TREAT YOURSELF TO CHEAP AND VIBEY BITS OF GEAR, GLITCHY IS GOOD! Or do a gear swap with a musician friend. Maybe you are bored of the sound of your usual instrument.

7. Get in the zone by thinking about what kind of song you want to write and listening to great/successful/modern examples.

TRY THIS: 15 minutes listening, 30 minutes writing and then a 15 minute break. Do four hours like this and then review your work and choose the ideas that you want to develop.

8. Cut yourself some slack. Don't get down on yourself if you have days where you aren't excited about anything you come up with. Julia Michaels said "Be brave enough to risk being crap". If you have days where you look at everything you came up and think it's rubbish, that's fine and totally normal. No one hits a home run every day. What can be learned from days like that? Maybe you can identify areas for improvement in your playing or production skills.

9. Always keep a record of good titles, melodies, grooves that pop into your head while "real life" is happening. They can be your "Break glass in event of an emergency" ideas for days when you need to deliver but are feeling uncreative.

Use your phone for voice memos and notes. NO EXCUSE! Collect ambient sounds, street sounds, trains going past, people talking in a bar. Add texture and WEIRDNESS to get past the sterile silence of a blank session. "PUT SOME SMOKE ON IT". Use sounds that aren't easy to identify to add a vibe and some magic.

IMPERFECT PERFECTION. Let wonky-ness, human-ness and glitchy-ness be your friends. Sometimes there is a fine line between perfectly crafted and perfectly dull.

10. Start with a feel/tempo/groove of a song that always makes you want to dance. Start uptempo! People want to groove as much as, or more than they want to listen to a detailed lyric. The moment writers hit 30 they tend to write SLOW, sappy, deep and meaningful.

WRITE SOMETHING ENERGETIC AND EXCITING!! GET A REACTION!!

11. Get out of your “lane”. If you are a lyric person, focus on beats. And vice-versa. We neglect areas that are important because they aren't our specialist subject. FOCUS ON WHAT YOU DON'T USUALLY FOCUS ON e.g. I sometimes don't focus enough on melody when I'm writing a lyric.

12. Collaboration/co-writing. Find a great creative partner or better, a few. Chemistry and a shared objective! Harder to bail and watch TV when you've made a date to write with someone. HAVE FUN! The hilarious days and the great songs often come together.

13. Shake up your influences: Step away from your old favourites. Put yourself on a strict new music diet. GET EXCITED ABOUT NEW STUFF! We are in a fashion industry. Don't study what was great 20 years ago, study what's great NOW.

14. Routine is your friend. THE IMPORTANCE OF JUST SHOWING UP TO WORK. Your chances of writing something great are massively increased if you simply carve out the time. Get in the habit of writing. Write regularly and with some discipline and structure.

15. If you feel like you have no inspiration, spend some time learning a cover version, ideally something modern. You will most likely pick up some new tricks and have fun in the process. If you are a singer, you will be challenged and you will learn about your range.

16. Write A Cappella. Don't let your instrument take you down your usual cul-de-sacs.

17. Take breaks. Go for a walk. Try working somewhere other than your usual creative space. Go for a drive and record some voice memo ideas.

18. Try writing the missing track from a famous record. Get into the DNA of an artist and imagine you are them.

19. Try to nail something outside your core musical knowledge base e.g. a song with a key change or an odd time signature. Listen to great examples of these. **EXPAND YOUR THEORY KNOWLEDGE AND VOCABULARY.** It will help you out in the future.

20. Think visual. Write a video script first and work backwards. Imagine writing a song to match a scene from your favourite movie.

21. Take a longer break! Have a few days where you aren't allowed to write at all. Use this time to organise files, tidy studio, restring guitars, organise voice memos, etc. Clear out mental clutter - get all that guilty, distracting admin/life to do list stuff done so it isn't clogging up your mind and pulling you away from working on music.

22. Lateral is good. Try writing a "retort" or "answer" song to a famous hit. Perhaps from the perspective of the person being talked about in the original song? go from victim to perpetrator or vice versa. e.g. [Graveyard by Halsey](#)

23. Speed writing. Buddy up with another writer and chat online about what kind of song you want to write, agree to talk again in one hour and then hang up and write a song. If you agree on a tempo then you can swap what you did and try to finish the other persons ideas. GREAT FOR LOCKDOWN WRITING!

Pass the parcel writing, one person writes verse one, passes it on and then you get on a call and discuss what you've created.

24. Write a Christmas song.

25. Work on minimising ego. Many co-writing sessions fail because people can't handle having their ideas shot down in flames. Some days you lead, others you facilitate and support.

26. Look up 80's T shirt slogans, bumper stickers or titles of Netflix episodes from your favourite series and use them as song titles.

27. Use the last half hour of your writing day to write a brand new song. By freeing yourself from the headspace you've been in all day and adding in a time restraint, you might find some fresh ideas pop up when you shift your focus.

Above all, enjoy the process...it's a gift!