

Harness Your Creative Strengths

The idea that the brain's two hemispheres perform different functions and influence the expression of our abilities in different ways first came to prominence in the 80s/90s. It may now be out of date/simplistic to suggest that right brain dominant people are good at this and left brain dominant people are good at that, but it IS true that there are many different types of task or process that occurs in order to have a finished song, in two broad categories of generating and then editing. Most of us do find that one of these categories comes more easily than the other. We may end up referring to the Left/Right brain idea as a shorthand for this.

Longer term, your own creative practice is going to be best served by developing a sense of which areas you find come easier, and also committing to investing some development time into the areas we don't find so natural.

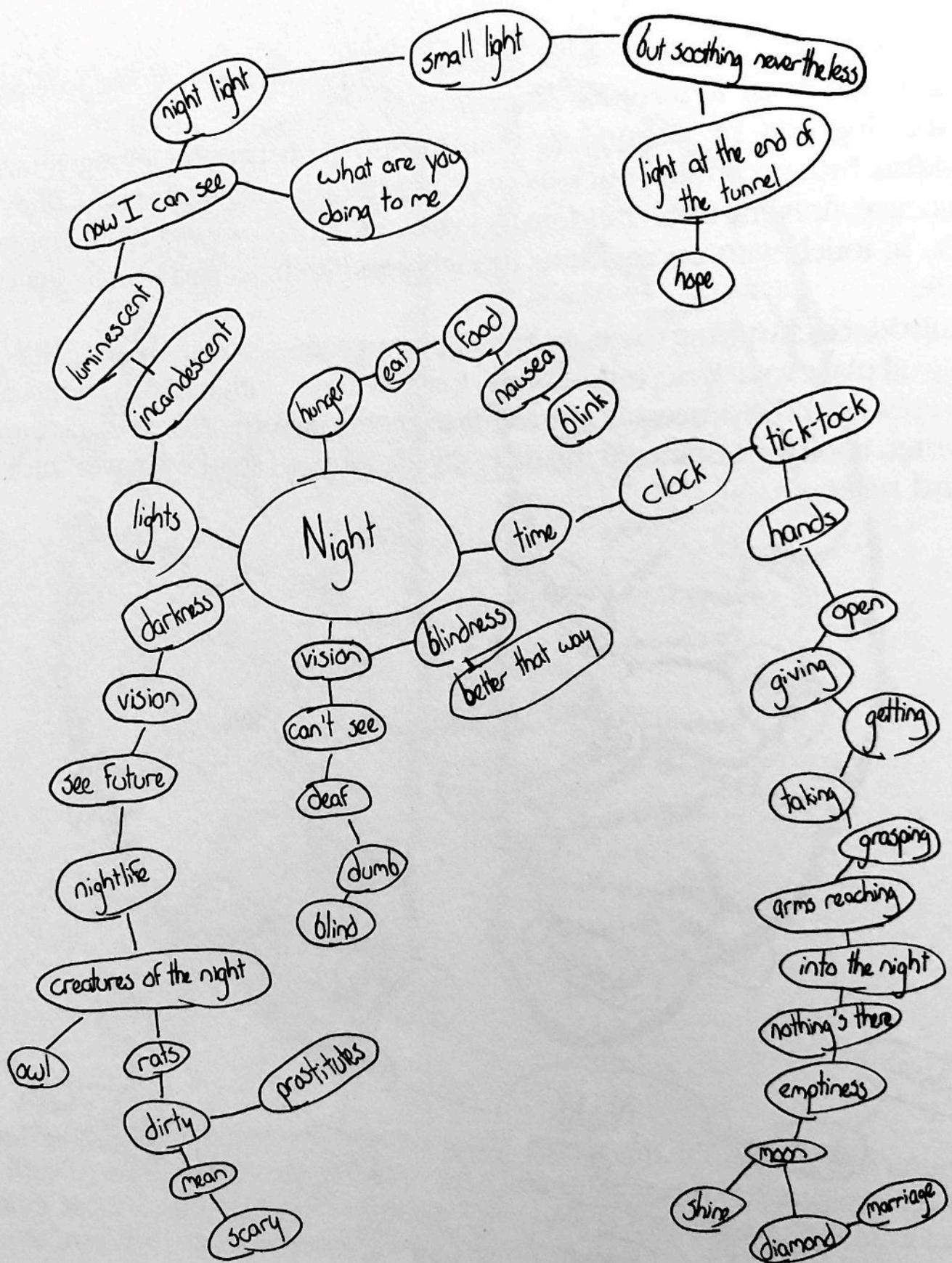
In this session, we will look at examples of techniques you can use to develop in both those areas.

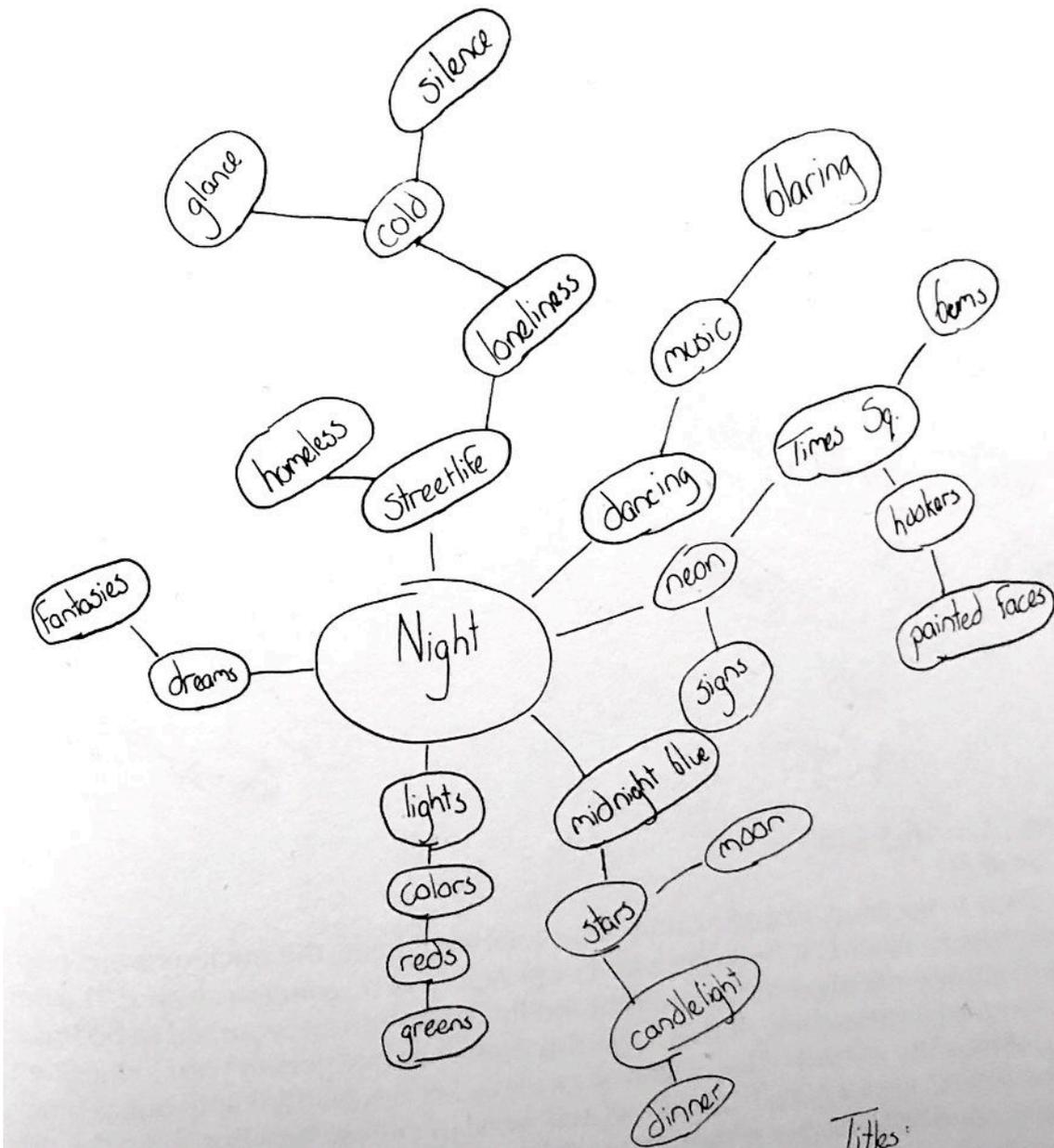
First off, a brainstorming technique called CLUSTERING.

This is a generating/free association/imagination activity.

You can mine the things that live in your field of awareness in a very open ended way. The associations and connections that you alone make from a given start point help you develop a sense of your signature themes over time.

You have a source word or phrase as stimulus and from that you draw upon random thoughts and stored experience. This can help you dredge up unconscious thoughts and feelings and patterns of idea unique to each writer.





Titles:
 Moonlight Night
 Moonless Night
 Another Lonely Night
 Only in the Night

Your turn: City wall

Don't let any critical or evaluation come into things at this point. Connect each idea to the one before or the nucleus with a line and develop it as far as it will go. Then go back to the middle and start again.

SWITCH:

Let's imagine that an idea for a title or theme has emerged. Resist the temptation to go straight into writing the lyric. Run through this list first. Now this is an editing, refining, focusing process.

Choose:

Gender

Viewpoint - I? he/she? They?

Voice - will the singer be thinking (interior monologue) or talking (dialogue)? In thinking lyrics the singer may be alone and thinking; or with someone and thinking, or addressing an absent person, place or thing; or addressing the 'collective you'. A talking lyric is a conversation with someone present. Decide the voice and stay consistent.

Time frame

Does the action occur in the present, past or yet to come? Either make sure you stick with one of those, or if it travels either from past to future or in reverse, ensure this is signalled.

Set the scene

Where is the singer doing the thinking or talking? Even if your lyric doesn't state where, you should have an idea of where. If the scene changes, show it.

Tone

What is the singer's emotional attitude toward the events - wistful, playful, grateful, rueful, sorrowful, triumphant, euphoric, reflective? Again either be consistent within that and use the lyric and music to develop and build within that mood, or if the point of the song is that the emotional trajectory develops (for example from neutral to foreboding, like Hotel California, or from sorrow to joy, or joy to disappointment) make sure that happens in a way that's clear.

Register

Is language conversational or more literary? Keep it within a register or it will be confusing.

Structure

Which song form best suits the idea and the effect you want to create?

Some of you will do this fairly naturally and some of you will feel your concentration immediately start to evaporate as you try to focus on it. Stay with it! Your first draft will be better for it.

To help you, here is a focus sheet. When you have filled it in, if you found it really arduous and this editing process is not your comfort zone, or you find it less pleasurable and natural than putting one note next to another - you should nonetheless be able to picture the scene more clearly afterwards and that will support the imagination side of your lyrics.

1. **Who is singing?** (Male, female, either, duet).
2. **What is the viewpoint** of the lyric?
 - a. First person
 - b. Second person (particular you or collective you, or absent person/place/thing?)
 - c. Third person - and if yes, omniscient comer eye view/narrator, or a singer-singee connection?
3. **What is the Voice?** (thinking or talking).
 - a. Does the voice change? yes/no. If yes, in what line is this indicated?
4. What is the time frame?
 - a. Non specific present (one moment's feeling)
 - b. Habitual present (ongoing condition)
 - c. The particular present (a one time action)
 - d. The past (first person reflective)
 - e. The past (third person narrative)
 - f. Historical present (a past event told in the present tense)
 - g. The Future
 - h. Does time move during the lyric? If yes, how/where did you make this clear to the listener?
5. Does the lyric have a setting? If yes, where?
 - a. Does the setting change?
 - b. Did you imply the setting by using the word 'here'? If so, where do you picture 'here' to be?
 - c. Is the setting conveyed in the lyric and if so how?
6. What is the tone of the lyric?
 1. Self assertive
 2. Tongue in cheek
 3. Wistful
 4. Playful
 5. Reflective
 6. Ironic
 7. Romantic
 8. Sorrowful
 9. Etc
7. What is the relationship between singer and singee?
8. In what line did you show that relationship?
9. What is the structure you will choose? Eg AAA, V/C etc.
10. Write a synopsis of the lyric in one short sentence.
11. What is the universal/relateable situation or emotion that listeners may identify with?
12. What is the song's title?

If you're wondering whether you're more 'left or right' dominant or mixed, working through the focus list should give you a clue. If you encounter resistance, you may be more strongly right inclined and find it very tiring to impose a linear structure. If you filled it out very comfortably you may be more left-brain inclined and find the sequencing of ideas pleasurable.

If you feel uncomfortable, regard that as a temporary sign of growth. Your willingness to encounter that resistance with self compassion is part of your commitment to bringing forth what is within you, in its best form.