

## The Memoir Writing Workbook

Memories into Memoir

# Right! Left! Left! Right! Right! Left!

## Brain Hemispheres

*We need to use and work with both the left and right sides of our brains in order to develop and perform to our optimum.*

Knowledge of right-brain and left-brain thinking has become more widespread throughout our society and is increasingly included in our educational systems.

The understanding of how our brains work is relatively new. Little was known about right-brain thinking abilities until World War II, when neuroscientists studied patients with brain damage. In 1981, Roger Sperry, at the California Institute of Technology, was awarded a Nobel Prize for his discoveries concerning the functional specialisation of the cerebral hemispheres. This work allowed greater insights into the specialisation of the two hemispheres of the brain.

While this workbook is not about neuroscience or how the brain works, it is important to understand a little about how we think so that you are aware of the workings of your own brain, and how you as an individual can develop it.

First, it is important to realise that it is not an advantage to be either right-brained or left-brained. We have two parts to our brain – the right hemisphere and the left hemisphere – and we need to utilise both of them for optimum productivity and performance, consciously working with our strengths and developing our weaknesses.

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Participants come to my workshops saying, “Oh, I am very right-brained,” meaning they are very creative, while others say apologetically, “I only seem to function with my left brain,” meaning they feel they haven’t an ounce of creativity in their soul.

Neither of these views is correct. We function, whether we are aware of it or not, with both sides of our brains. We may be more developed in one side than the other, but that is our challenge. We need to develop our skills so that we can work with both sides of our brains and ultimately be able to flip from one side to the other, and perform to our optimum.

Writing certainly requires the discipline of being able to flip from one side of the brain to the other. The left side of the brain asks the questions: What do my characters look like? How will I structure my story? What is going to happen next in my story? How will I resolve the plot? It is the right side of the brain that answers these questions creatively.

Take music as an example. Most of us just hear the melody of a song – with our right brains – but the composer uses his or her left brain to arrange the notes, make the music work and integrate the music with the words. The composer is therefore using both sides of his or her brain, and this is similar to the way writers work.

- **The left side of the body controls the right side of the brain.**
- **The right side of the body controls the left side of the brain.**

Therefore, what we do with our left hand, our left leg and left foot is sending signals to the right side of the brain, and vice versa.

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- **The left side of the brain is associated with analytical, linear, sequential thought.**

The left side of the brain is good at mathematics and logical thinking. It thinks sequentially and will solve a problem one step at a time. If the left brain sees a pattern, it will dissect it into parts, count the parts and even give the parts numbers.

- **The right side of the brain is associated with spatial, integrative, simultaneous thought.**

The right side of the brain is good at mental imagery and lateral and spatial thinking. It thinks in a simultaneous mode. It will look at the design of a pattern, the colours, and see how it all fits together as a whole. It will see symbols, not numbers. The right side of the brain does not count things. It sees patterns and colours, not words.

- **The left side of the brain governs objective, precise language.**

The left side of the brain is good at reports and information; it is accurate with language and constructs words that have a precise meaning.

- **The right side of the brain governs evocative, associative and connotative language.**

The right side of the brain stores our dreamy, evocative language; it is good at making mental connections between ideas and implying additional meanings and suggestions to that of the literal meaning. It involves emotions and sensory details.