

Songwriting Cheat Sheet

How to start a song, finding inspiration

- start with a melody (either sung or played on an instrument)
- write about an idea, emotion, or experience that's meaningful to you, keep a journal
- listen to other music and songs, study why you like it. What makes the melody catchy? What moves you from the lyrics? What are the chords? What is the structure of the song?
- start with a beat, rhythm, or groove and try ideas without judging yourself
- collaborate with someone else on ideas, musically and/or lyrically. For example, if you are having a hard time writing lyrics, find someone who is willing to let you write the music to their lyrics. If you're not as strong playing or singing, collaborate with someone who is good at writing music.
- Take a walk, do something outdoors. Sometimes ideas can come from places you least expect

Song structure

Verse: The verse tells the story and sets the emotional tone for the song. The verse lyrics contain the plot, the details, and the action. Each verse of the song usually has the same melody and new lyrics. Verses are usually 4-8 lines long.

Pre-chorus: Within a verse, there may be a pre-chorus section, usually 2-4 lines long. It usually creates a feeling of a lift or climb that moves towards the chorus. Not all songs have pre-choruses.

Chorus: The chorus is the "catchy" part of the song that repeats at least once that you sing along with. The chorus sums up the ideas and emotions of the song in a general way and hammers home the title. The chorus usually has the same melody and lyrics each time it is repeated. The chorus should be simple and easy to remember.

Hook: A hook is usually found in the chorus, and can often be the title of the song. It grabs you in a way that makes you want more and listen to the song again. Examples of "hooky" songs: "Happy," "YMCA," "Poker Face," "I Want it That Way"

Bridge: The bridge is a short section that is a release, or break from the rest of the song. Not only does it have different lyrics from the verse and chorus, but the music is a little different as well. Bridges are usually 2-4 lines of lyric, and are typically followed by another chorus.

Most common song structures:

1. Verse-Chorus-Verse-Chorus
(Examples: "Somebody That I Used to Know," "Oops, I Did it Again," "Sweet Home Alabama")
2. Verse-Chorus-Verse-Chorus-Bridge-Chorus:
(Examples: "Grenade," "Rolling in the Deep")
3. Verse-Verse-Bridge-Verse (Examples: "Hey There Delilah," "Yesterday")

Writing lyrics

- *Brainstorm ideas*, write anything that comes to mind—see “finding inspiration”
- *Have a universal theme—not too personal for others to relate to*
- *Pick a point of view*: decide which “voice” to write from.
 - First person: tells about yourself, from your point of view. Example: “I love you”
 - Second person: about the person you’re talking to. Example: “You will love me”
 - Third person: tells about someone else. Example: “She loves him.”
 - *Try to keep your point of view consistent throughout the song*
- *Start with a title*. Define what it means to you in a phrase or two, and write it on the top of your brainstorming page. For example, if your title is “I Can Love You Like That,” you might write: *I can give you the kind of love described in fairy tales and movies*
- **Blueprint/Outline the Story**: Your first verse should lead to your title/chorus, and 2nd verse should further develop the idea and give new information. The function of the chorus is usually to showcase your title—you don’t need to introduce new detailed information into the story.
- *Show, Don’t Tell*: the goal when sharing a song is for our listeners to *feel* the emotion. Bring your audience inside the world of your song by showing them a scene unfolding, instead of simply *telling* them how the singer feels. By incorporating three elements: **action, imagery, and detail** into your verse lyrics, you can write lyrics that tell a story.
- *Action*: Identify the emotion you are trying to evoke, and ask “What would a person do if they were feeling this?”
- *Imagery* refers to things that can be seen. While you cannot see “heartbroken” you can see images and actions that show a person is heartbroken.
- *Detail* is the third component that will help you show what is happening. By including adjectives & adverbs, you can describe the scene even more & it makes your lyric unique.
- *Use effective rhyming* to help hold the listener’s attention, make the lyrics easy to remember, and give the listener a sense of satisfaction.

<u>Types of rhymes:</u>	Perfect	Close	Internal
	<i>tree-free</i>	<i>love-bug</i>	<i>If you feel it’s real</i>
	<i>boat-coat</i>	<i>mind-time</i>	<i>I am not throwing away my shot</i>

Common rhyme schemes: *Rhyme lines 2 & 4, rhyme lines 1 & 2 and 3 & 4*
If you have 6 lines: *Rhyme lines 1 & 2, lines 4 & 5, and lines 3 & 6*

- *Other tips*: Keep a hook book, record your ideas, keep your lyrics conversational—think “Wal-mart” not “hallmark,” avoid cliches, rewrite your lyrics to make them as strong as possible

Resource: masterwriter.com rhyming dictionary (login: lanaiacademy@gmail.com, password: lapa2020)

Writing music

- *K.I.S.S.: Keep it simple and singable*
- *Use hymns and children's songs for inspiration. Children's songs are easy to sing because:*
 - *the phrases are short and catchy*
 - *They have a lot of repetition in the melody and/or rhythm*
 - *The melodic intervals (space between notes) are close, therefore easy to remember*
 - *They're not too wordy*
 - *The melodies contain sequences and patterns*
- ***The melody and lyrics fit together (prosody):*** The melody should sound as if it is happily married to the lyric. A melody that makes the listener feel happy should have a lyric that has a positive message, and vice versa for a sad melody.
- ***Rhythms and melody are different in the verses, choruses, and bridge:*** A common technique to make the chorus/title stand out is to make those notes higher or lower than the rest of the melody. A rhythm that is different from rhythms the rest of the song can also help your title/chorus stand out.
- *Not too much range for singers to sing (not too wide a gap between lowest/highest note):* Keep the range of the song singable. For example, if your lowest note in the melody is middle C on the piano, try not to go higher than an E above the next C (10 notes apart).
- *Keep your phrases short and catchy:* To make your melodies memorable, they need to be easily remembered. It's much easier to retain small amounts of information than long, complex ideas.
- *You can sing the melody without the words and it sounds good*
- *Melody is accompanied by the most effective chords*

Common chord progressions (in the key of C):

1. **C-G-A minor-F**—very commonly used chord progression in modern music
2. **C-F-G:** Very common progression used in folk, pop, and rock, as well as other genres
3. **C-A minor-D minor-G:** Most common in R&B and jazz genres
4. **C-F-G-F:** Used often in rock music
5. **C-F-C-G:** Folk, pop, children's music

Sad/minor key chord progressions

6. **A minor-F-C-G:** very common in pop and rock music
7. **A minor-G-F-G**
8. **A minor-D minor-A minor-E major**
9. **C-E minor-A minor-G**

Resource: www.autochords.com (chord progressions), 8notes.com/piano_chord_chart

- **Action:** Identify the emotion you are trying to evoke, and ask “What would a person do if they were feeling this?”
- Example: Instead of saying “I’m in love” you might write lines that *show* what a person in love does by writing lyrics such as:
 - I wrote your name and mine inside a heart
 - I keep singing your name like a favorite song
 - I read your text that “I love you” at least a hundred times

Note the “action” words in the examples “wrote” “singing” “read.”

- **Imagery** refers to things that can be seen. While you cannot see “heartbroken” you can see images and actions that show a person is heartbroken. For example:
 - He falls to his knees and lays the flowers on her grave
 - She sits in his chair and wipes her tears with a tissue
 - He kisses her photos

Including these images helps to show the character in the song is heartbroken. By having tangible items such as furniture, clothing, a car, a house, a specific place, food, and other concrete nouns, you allow the audience to enter your song.

- **Detail** is the third component that will help you show what is happening. By including adjectives and adverbs, you can describe the scene even more and it helps to your lyric more unique. Here’s what adding detail to the examples above looks like:
 - He falls to his knees and lays the flowers on her grave - or - *“He falls to his knees on the cold, muddy ground and lays white lilies from her garden on her grave*
 - She sits in her chair and wipes her tears with a tissue - or - *“She sits in his old rocking chair and wipes bitter tears with a wet, crumpled Kleenex”*