

From songwritingfever.com, The Place for Songwriting Collaboration.



HOW TO GET STARTED WITH SONGWRITING

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This ebook is devoted to novice songwriters who are still trying to find their way through the maze of songwriting...Well, it is not that complicated really :).
I hope that when you are through with these pages you will know how to get started with writing your song.

PART ONE.

Song components & structure.

Song Components

A song is words+music, and for a song to be successful it has to have great lyrics and great music.

A great lyric is simply a mix of easy, nice words revolving around an interesting topic. The good thing is that lyrics don't have to go by any rules; it is simply a matter of practice...May be there are some rhyming "rules" but those can be hardly called rules, we will discuss them later.

As for great music, you don't have to create a complicated masterpiece..!! Actually, great music in this context means simple, "catchy" melody and well-structured chord patterns. We will see about music later.

OK. Now we got music and lyrics but that means nothing if a catchy melody and a number of nice words were just scattered all over your song...Music and Lyrics need to be put into a concrete Song Structure...

Song Structure

A song usually have three short [melodies](#), two of which are repeated over and over again....

Chorus: The chorus is a lyric-music combination that is repeated with little or no change throughout the song. Usually, the chorus lyrics include the song title and gives the listener a general idea about the song topic. The chorus music includes the most catchy melody in the song...The chorus is generally the part that your listener will remember from your song.

Verse: The verse has the second melody of the song, this melody hardly changes throughout the song. What changes is actually the verse lyrics; as the verses usually give details about the song topic. Notice that no matter how the lyrics change they all have to fit the same melody, without having to look "artificial"...This actually is a great challenge ;).

Bridge: The third melody and the one that is -in most song structures- appearing only once. It is better if the listener gets a "tiny" surprise in the bridge; that can be a change in the chord structure accompanied by a smooth shift to another scale...etc. However, the bridge melody always ends by shifting back to the original mood and repeating the chorus all over again. As for the bridge's lyrics they usually represent a conclusion or a flash back to the whole song, this adds to the surprise. Sometimes, -especially in rock- the bridge is just a solo with no lyrics.

But how are those three parts arranged in the song? Well, you got Chorus, verse and bridge...Yes, arrange them in any way you want, but don't get too messy or your listener will get lost. To make it easier, songwriters have come up with these agreed-on song structures most of the songs follow those three structures:

verse / chorus / verse / chorus / verse...etc.

verse / chorus / verse / chorus / bridge / (verse) / chorus

verse / verse / bridge / verse

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Now, about the verse / verse / bridge / verse ... This structure takes a tricky melody for the verse; it has to be catchy, and longer than the usual verses. Moreover, you have to spice it up every time you repeat it with a new thing (like a new instrument in the background, or a back vocals line...etc.). I personally like this structure because I feel it gives a certain freedom with the lyrics, the other two structures don't give. Besides, this structure gives room for musical intros and outros, not to mention the opportunity to add some musical "breaks" (between the verses) without having to worry about making the song too long.

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PART TWO.

Lyrics topic and title.

What Are Lyrics?

First of all, lyrics isn't poetry. Poetry has lots of "word rules", it is simply a language game that has nothing to do with music. [Lyrics](#), on the other hand, has everything to do with music and it is more important for good lyrics to fit the music nicely and neatly than to have amazing metaphors or glamorous word combinations. However, it is extremely important that your lyrics be about an interesting topic...

Lyrics Topic

If you have an interesting topic, then you have done almost half the job...You now have something to write about, many of those who feel the urge to write lyrics, just don't know what to talk about..!!

Well, I like to start with brainstorming...just look around you, what do you see? A computer, a screen, desk, people...etc. Pick up one of those words, I will take "computer", What about "computer"?! Narrow it down.... There are processors, keyboards, internet, computer programmers...etc. I chose "internet", needs more narrowing down...There are websites, chat rooms...etc. OK, This is taking too long, and it should; choosing the topic is what it's all about. Just for the sake of this article, I narrowed down to "Lonely people in chat rooms".... sad lyrics topic :(, get in that mood, so you would be able to write about it..!!

By the way, write about it as if it is personal experience...instead of thinking of "lonely people", think about "I am a lonely guy in a chat room"...That establishes a sense of credibility, which in turn ends up as a great emotional link with your listener.

Lyrics Title

Now that you have a topic, you should start working on having a title for your lyrics. The title should give those who read a "little" shock; it must be something FAMILIAR but that nobody is used to hearing ALONE, or in a COMBINATION with other words. Examples are "Sympathy for The Devil" ([Rolling Stones](#)) and "The Scientist" ([Coldplay](#)); "sympathy" and "devil" are two words that everybody uses but nobody had put them together before, that's a weird combination. "Scientist" is a very common word, but nobody just came up to you and said: "The Scientist" !! You are not used to hearing it on its own.

Now back to "Lonely people in chat rooms". One can use "lonely" but that has been used billion times before, actually the whole idea of "lonely people" is over-consumed!! The new thing is "chat rooms", and the title should refer to that. I guess "lonely in a chat room" is OK. NO?!! Yeah, it sounds too silly, because I included "lonely"...the over-consumed word. " Chat with me"....better is just "Chat"..!!(only my opinion, but the shorter the better)

The Lyrics Themselves

Now you have come to the point where I can give no or little advice. Make your lyrics as simple as

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possible, no big words or Shakespearian attitude, no difficult-to-understand metaphors, not even a lot of easy-to-understand metaphors...The thing is that lyrics are only part of the song, and if you make the lyrics require work to understand, there wouldn't be much energy left with the listener to understand the [music](#)...

Most important thing is that you don't repeat yourself and -at the same time- don't go off topic...For example, don't write "Nobody to speak to, Nobody to hear me"...that's repetition. And if you want to write about "other people who are chatting with the lonely people", save it to another song; that's off topic...stay specific and at the same time interesting as much as you can.

Still, there other few general guidelines (not rules) that most of the songs follow...

- 1- Include the title in the chorus.
- 2- Make sure the chorus is a general explanation of the topic
- 3- The verses are detailed explanation of the chorus....BUT NO REPETITION
- 4- Do not repeat the same word more than two times (or three max.) in a verse or chorus(the chorus itself is repeated, but within it no repetition allowed)
- 5- If it happens that the music doesn't fit the lyrics neatly, alter the lyrics not the music.

Now, we will go on with the very few "Lyrics Rhyming Rules"...

PART THREE.

Rhyme.

Why Rhyme?

Lyrics that rhyme are the most memorable, and the easiest to fit in a [music](#) vehicle nicely. But, take care!! Rhyming too much sounds STUPID, and keep in mind that rhyme should come second to meaning...Never sacrifice the idea for the sake of a rhyming word and never put stuff together just because they rhyme...

Rhyme Scheme

The [song structure](#) thing we talked about earlier is more about the music than the lyrics. The lyrics, instead, are organized by the rhyme scheme.

The rhyme scheme is the pattern by which a certain rhyme is repeated...There are several conventional rhyme schemes:

1- A-B-A-B

The first line rhymes with the third, while the second rhymes with the fourth.

2- A-A-A-A

The same rhyming sound throughout.

3- A-A-B-B

The first line rhymes with the second, while the third rhymes with the fourth.

Of course, one can come up with an infinite number of different rhyme schemes...

Rhyme Types

I won't get into weird useless terminology. Instead, I'll name them Type1, Type2...etc. and give examples:

Type1.The end sounds and is written the same way.

*EX. I saw my cAT
It was too fAT*

Type2.The end sounds the same but is written differently

*EX. She said there is nothing more to knOw
When I asked if she was honest, The answer was nO*

Type3.The words at the end sound and are written differently. They, however, share the same vowel somewhere...

*EX. If you ever come by hOME
I'll meet you by the east park in the coffee shOP*

Type4.The ends don't sound the same. Instead, there is a certain type of "word rhythm". This is the smartest type and the hardest to write as well.

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*EX. We got Mercedes, we got Porsche
Ferrari and Rolls Royce (From [Roger Waters's "It's A Miracle"](#))*

Type 5. The end is the same, the beginning is the same. The middle is different.

EX. I will talk abOUT YOU

I will sing abOUT YOU

coz, I can't live withOUT YOU

Rhyming Your Lyrics

To write good lyrics that rhyme smartly might look easy, but take my word for it: It's not a walk in the park!!

You have to be rich in your vocabulary; so as to find words that deliver meaning and preserve rhyme. But no body is that good with language (with the exception of William Wordsworth), we all need help with synonyms and rhyming words. I have several help suggestions:

- 1- Thesaurus dictionary from any book store
- 2- Online Thesaurus dictionary (although I don't like those)
- 3- [Lyricist Software](#) (This has a lot of other features that make your writing a lot easier)

Now that I have "got you started" with a neat interesting lyric, let's move on to music...

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PART FOUR.

Music in songs.

Composing vs. Songwriting

There is a difference between [Beethoven](#) and James Hetfield. Beethoven wrote miraculous symphonies, sonatas and concertos...Hetfield wrote catchy smart (well, it's still [Metal!!](#)) songs for [Metallica](#).

I'm not saying James Hetfield is a bad musician; songwriters are as good musicians as composers but the nature of songs is different...They are much less complicated, they are heard along side with the song's lyrics and they are usually played by bands of about 5 members.

Song's Music Conventions

If you analyze a song, you will most probably discover two distinctive melodies (musical sentences) throughout: The verse and the chorus (Remember [Part One?](#)). If you analyze one of those melodies, you will find out they consist of certain phrases that are repeated with very slick minor changes.

Confused?! Listen to [U2](#)'s "Beautiful Day"; you will find the first melody(verse) which is played twice, then you will find a second melody(Chorus). The verse itself is nothing but very similar and very short phrases that are put together in a catchy way...

Don't think it's easy to write a melody that consists of short slightly different phrases...It needs practice and hard work (Download ["Ten Steps To Improve Your Songwriting Skills"](#) for more).

Music After Lyrics

This is how we did it in "How To Get Started"; we first got you started by writing the [lyrics](#) and then we moved on to music. Sometimes it's the other way around.

There is no particular plan to follow if you want to write music for lyrics. For me, I usually read the lyrics a couple of times then start "singing" the lyrics. The result is a nice but "imperfect" melody that I later have to modify and alter to be satisfied with it.

Just try...Keep reading your lyrics then try to sing them, it WILL work :).

Music Before Lyrics

May be you want to write your music first...Seek the help of your [guitar](#) or [piano](#) and start playing. [Record](#) what you play. Stop playing. Listen to what you recorded. May be ,just may be, you will find a nice "song worthy" melody.

Arrangement

Now that you have a melody, try to arrange it..!! Arrangement starts with writing chords that are played alongside your melody. To write chords you have to be familiar with music theory.

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PART FIVE.

Chords and music theory.

Chord Progressions

A chord is usually three or four notes played at the same time, so instead of hearing each note alone you hear a "Chord".

Chord Progression is a number of different chords that are played in a certain order...The idea is that different chords relate to each other somehow, and according to this "somehow" songwriters write chord progressions for their [melodies](#).

Melody vs. Chord Progression

The melody of your song determines how your chord progression is going to sound. It can be the other way around (chord progression then the melody, but that's not common). Note ,however, that chord progressions are not "copyright material"...Certain chord progressions are used in BILLION songs. The melody is of course copyrighted.

To be able to write chords for your melody, you have to have some experience with music theory and some experience with a "songwriting instrument"([Piano](#) or [Guitar](#)).

Chords In Music Theory

A very big part of music theory is about scales. The "somehow" that relates chords to each other is actually the scales.

There are two different approaches to teaching music theory for songwriters...One teaches scales first and then moves on to chords. The other teaches chords in a "Just learn, no need to understand" manner, then fills you in on all the missing gaps about the scales.

Attention!!

What did you learn in this part?!! Nothing :)

My goal was just to give you a bunch of down to earth, simple definitions to the whole thing of Music Theory, Chords and Scales; so that when you go out there to buy a book, visit a website or get a teacher you find yourself familiar with the subject.

Learning music theory and mastering chords needs a lot of hard work, patience and practice...You can spend years trying to master chords, so to save you the trouble I recommend that you visit [this website](#) and spend a week or so with it. When you are done you'll be able to write chord progressions but you'll still need the help of professional well-written chord charts or a computer software. I recommend [Lyricist](#) which comes in with a complete chord library archived very smartly and cleverly...Visit [Lyricist website](#) for more.

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PART SIX.

Writing a hit song.

Songwriter Habits

Now that you have started songwriting and actually wrote some [lyrics](#) and [music](#) (that is: a song!!), you need to know that you were just practicing...The habit of sitting down to actually think about a subject, to look up words in [rhyme dictionaries](#), to play the [piano](#) for just the right chord...etc. All this is just the habit of practicing; a songwriter develops a lot of other good habits too.

All these other habits are tools to help the songwriter collect the fruits of practicing. This means that practicing doesn't get you hit songs or hit ideas, instead it trains your brain to function better musically and to become more aware of "songwriting potential" in things occurring in your environment.

As you practice more, HIT IDEAS will suddenly come to you out of the blue!! Writing hit songs is more of an inspiration than organized thinking...You spend a lot of nights wearing your brains out writing melodies (that is practicing), and then while shopping for shoes an amazing melody starts echoing in your head: That's your hit song.

To keep these hit ideas from being forgotten and lost I developed some habits to help me keep track of every idea or thought no matter how trivial...

Habit One. Have a notebook with you at all times:

Any time a song idea hits you, a good verse, creative metaphor..etc. Write it down for review later.

Habit Two. Have a digital recorder with you at all times:

You can use any thing to record sound with...Your "hit" melodies will not be lost. (Sometimes I use the notebook to write the notes of the melody -like D B A G..etc.-, you can do that too and save yourself the trouble of having to sing in a supermarket ;).

Habit Three. Ask people what they think about your creations:

Showing them to friends is always a good idea. However, showing them to other songwriters means great advice and "professional" comments that would go beyond "Good work, where are we going to eat?" :). There are some decent songwriter communities on the internet, and I have set up [Writing Fever Yahoo! Group](#) just for that...Give it a Try!

Another Idea would be to publish your work on various websites and wait for the different comments (Writing Fever offers to host [songs](#), [lyrics](#) and [instrumental tracks](#) for free.)

Habit Four. Keep your hit ideas organized:

Now that you have kept every amazing melody and every interesting lyric that hit you on paper, It's time for you to put them together in a great song. But how are you going to keep track of every single melody, title, progression or lyric that you think of or write?!! The answer is to have them organized in a way that makes them easily searchable and accessible. I use a magnificent software that I got few months ago called [TrackNotes](#)...It functions -among other things- to organize all your recorded material in an efficient manner. It made my songwriting a lot easier. Of course you can still do your organizing the old way using paper put in folders besides the folder-subfolder organizing on your computer.

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Habit Five.Practice:

I have talked about this a lot. It's really important...You will not be musically inspired unless your brain gets used to music. Inspiration is HARD WORK!! Practice by reading for successful lyricists, by listening carefully to great songs, by struggling for days with one line to get the right word for meaning and rhyme, by experimenting with chord progressions...etc. There are lots of stuff you can do...PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!!

Junk Ideas

Not every idea that you get is an inspirational moment, you will get a lot of "junk ideas". Still, never try to judge your ideas the same moment you get them; record every thing and keep track of every thing you think of. You can later review these ideas, save the good ones and throw away the bad ones (you can better keep them in a safe place too, every thing may come in handy!).

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Good Luck,

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