

Six Ways Songwriters Can Motivate Themselves To Write

Being a songwriter is a gift but, as with most gifts, some assembly (otherwise known as work) is required.

By Cliff Goldmacher

As passionate as we are about our songwriting, the reality is that sometimes it's difficult to motivate ourselves to write. Whether it's the fear of plumbing our emotional depths or just good old fatigue after a long day, there are often obstacles to overcome when it's time to write. While flashes of inspiration are great, we can't always count on the muse showing up on our schedule. Instead, we've got to make our own inspiration. I've put together a list of a few things that should help you keep your creative fires lit.

1. Set up a place at home to write. As simple as it sounds, having a place to go where you can focus and be creative can be motivating. Even if it's just a small desk and chair in a corner of your living room, the fact that you've dedicated it to your art will serve as that little push you might need to write. Keep your writing tools — rhyming dictionary, guitar, laptop, etc. — out and easily accessible. It's amazing what a difference putting your guitar on a stand versus keeping it in a case can make. Make things as easy as you can for yourself and you'll be much more likely to dig in.

2. Set up a time of day to write. Routine can be a good thing even for something as artistic and creative as songwriting. If, for example, you know that every day at 7 p.m. you're going to write for half an hour, then you're more likely to do it. They say it takes a few weeks of consciously making yourself do something before

it becomes a habit. Setting up a daily time to write will go a long way towards the healthy habit of songwriting.

3. Keep a file of unfinished songs. One of the hardest things about writing is starting with a blank page. By keeping an organized file of your unfinished lyrics and rough recordings, you won't have to climb the mountain from the bottom every time you sit down. While sometimes it feels good to start with a fresh idea, don't forget to check your unfinished ideas from time to time. It's remarkable how a few days or weeks can add the perspective you need to see a partially finished song in a new light and finish it.

4. Find a co-writer. Nothing motivates more than accountability. If someone is counting on you to show up and work, you're more likely to do it. Not only that but halving the burden can make writing a much more approachable pursuit. This is one of the many benefits of co-writing. Other advantages include having someone whose songwriting gifts complement your own in such a way that you both get a better song than you would have separately. If you haven't co-written yet, this is as good a time as any to give it a try. Even if it's not a perfect experience, we all benefit from observing firsthand someone else's writing process.

5. Give yourself an assignment. Sometimes the idea that you can write about anything offers too much freedom. Often, it's easier to write if you have some guidelines. If, for example, you tell yourself you're going to write a song with one chord you've never used or a song about a topic you've never covered, you'll find it's easier to get to work. Anything you can do to give shape and structure to what you're attempting to write will make the task that much simpler.

6. Tell yourself you'll only write for five minutes. This is one of my all time favorites. On days where you're really struggling to make yourself write, tell yourself you'll sit down for five minutes. That way, if nothing is happening after five minutes, at least

you've tried. It's astonishing how often those days are the days where the breakthroughs happen. Taking the pressure off of yourself may be all that you need to get on a roll. That being said, if it's just not coming, stop. There's no point in making yourself miserable. There's always tomorrow.

Being a songwriter is a gift but, as with most gifts, some assembly (otherwise known as work) is required. My hope is by suggesting a few ways to lessen the burden of getting started, you'll be able to write more consistently and enjoy the accompanying results.

Richhoncho's Songwriters Links

Technical songwriting blunders

(source:

<http://www.angelfire.com/music2/richhoncho/blunders.htm>)

The following is an extract from the website of www.completechords.com as part of an article called [10 technical blunders](#) where it can be read with additional information. [L T L L L]
[SEP SEP SEP]*

These studies compared two groups of songs:

1. The "Great Song" Group: A sample of the world's greatest songs by the world's greatest songwriters, including Lennon & McCartney, Cole Porter, Joni Mitchell, Jagger & Richards, Smokey Robinson, Paul Simon, Bob Dylan, Hank Williams, and others. [L T L L L]
[SEP SEP]*

2. The "Ordinary Song" Group: A sample of typical songs that songwriters and bands release independently, or send as demos to record companies, music publishers, producers, and established recording artists, in hopes of getting signed to a song publishing deal or recording contract. [L T L L L]
[SEP SEP]* Based on the preliminary findings of this research, here are just ten of the many technical blunders songwriters make, and how to avoid making them.

(The final results, to be published in 2005, may vary from these preliminary findings.) [L T L L L]
[SEP SEP]* **USING MUSICALLY UNPALATABLE**

CHORD PROGRESSIONS [L T L L L]
[SEP SEP]* Songwriters who have no knowledge of the Harmonic Scale tend to write, clunky, musically unpalatable chord progressions. Such progressions mitigate against the human brain's natural tendency to want to process intervals and harmonies that reflect simple frequency ratios.

* We found that the chord progressions of "Great Songs" tend to follow

the natural clockwise flow of the Harmonic Scale to a much higher degree than "Ordinary Songs:

INCORPORATING TOO MUCH "UNIQUE" MELODY^[SEP]* When you take the entire vocal melody of a three or four minute song and subtract out all the repetitions of the melodic parts, you have the core "unique" melody of the song. In this study, Great Songs averaged only about 20 seconds of unique melody. Ordinary Songs averaged 38 seconds-nearly twice as much unique melody:

* Human short term memory lasts only a five to seven seconds. Your short term memory (and the collective short-term memory of your audience) can only hold a few pieces of information. (That's why, for example, telephone numbers-exclusive of area code-are only seven digits long.)

* In pre-literate times, songs served the purpose of transmitting news. Any successful song really functions as an elaborate mnemonic device. It employs as many memory-helping elements as possible-rhyme, regularity of rhythm pattern, repetition of catchy melodic phrases, etc.

* Songwriters who are not aware of the importance of short term memory limitations overload their tunes with too much unique melody. They do this to try to prevent the song from becoming monotonously repetitive. Big mistake.

* You can avoid this by repeating only a few unique melodic phrases many times throughout the song.

* You can use many other ways to create variety. For example, you can modulate to other keys, use variant chords, or introduce chromatic chords.^[SEP]**EMPLOYING A MUSICALLY UNPALATABLE MELODIC RANGE**^[SEP]* We found that most Great Songs have a melodic vocal range of 12 to 17 semitones (the pitch range of the lowest lead vocal note to the highest lead vocal note, ignoring all vocal

harmony).

* By contrast, Ordinary Songs tend to have much greater variability of melodic range. Many have a melodic range of fewer than 12 semitones or more than 17 semitones. Make sure your songs are singable by just about anyone, without being too limited. Keep the melodic range to a comfortable 12 to 17 semitones.

FAILING TO FIRMLY ESTABLISH TONALITY* We found that Great Songs establish tonality quickly and maintain it throughout the song, even with modulating to other keys.

* Many Ordinary Songs often lose their way and fail to firmly establish tonality (40% of the time): You can avoid getting lost like this by understanding the meaning of tonality and its importance, and by using the tonic chord emphatically and "pointing" to it via use of the V or V7 chord.

NOT BUILDING IN ENOUGH SEQUENCE-TYPE REPETITION* A sequence is a melodic or harmonic phrase or configuration that gets repeated at a different pitch.

* For example, in the Lennon-McCartney tune, "Eleanor Rigby," think of the melody that goes with the words, "Picks up the rice in the church where a wedding has been." The three notes corresponding to the words **"rice in the"** form a sequence that gets repeated on the words **"church where a"** then on the words **"wedding has."**

* Using sequences like this enables you to repeat melody, but not exactly note for note. Sequence introduces variety while preserving necessary repetition (unity). We found much more sequence-type repetition-about three times more-in Great Songs than in Ordinary Songs:

PAYING INSUFFICIENT ATTENTION TO METRICAL

CONCORDANCE* We found that in Great Songs, the melodic line and the lyrical pattern adhere closely to the same metrical structure. We did not find this to be the case with Ordinary Songs:

* Songwriters find it easier to write lyrics that do not closely agree with the melody line. It's like writing prose. But in a musical context, it's harder for a listener to remember such lyrics because the irregular meter keeps forcing revisions to the melody.

* To avoid this problem, take the time to sweat out lyrics that adhere closely to the same metrical pattern as the melody line.

WRITING IN 4/4 METER EXCLUSIVELY^{[L][SEP]}* All of the Ordinary Songs in this study were found to be in 4/4 time. However, the Great Songs showed metrical variety. While most were in 4/4 time, nearly a quarter were in 3/4 or 6/8 time:

FAILING TO EDIT LYRICS THAT GO ON AND ON AND ON^{[L][SEP]}* We found that Ordinary Songs have less lyrical repetition and are longer than Great Songs. With Ordinary Songs, the overall effect is verbosity. The cure here is pretty obvious: focus the subject matter more tightly, edit out trivia, repeat emotionally powerful words, phrases, and lines.^{[L][SEP]}

NOT UTILIZING CONNOTATIVE LYRICAL ELEMENTS^{[L][SEP]}* We found that the lyrics of Great Songs demonstrate more and better use of the connotative elements of language. These include:^{[L][SEP]}1. Words with high emotional impact.^{[L][SEP]}2. "Personal" words- i.e., words that specifically reference people, as opposed to ideas such as political messages, or inanimate elements such as landscapes. 3. "Personal" sentences- i.e., questions, commands, interjections, fragments, dialogue, etc., as opposed to straightforward declarative sentences.^{[L][SEP]}4. Concrete words-words that appeal to the senses (especially the sense of sight), as opposed to abstract ideas and concepts.^{[L][SEP]}

SPENDING MORE TIME AND ENERGY ON RECORDING THAN SONGWRITING^{[L][SEP]}* The Ordinary Song demos and independent releases we studied tended to be slickly produced. The songwriters who made them were obviously spending way more time and energy (and money) on getting perfect recordings of ordinary songs than the other way around.

* T-Bone Burnett, ace producer of dozens of great albums (including the movie soundtrack, "O Brother, Where Art Thou"), put it this way: "These days, instead of musicians playing instruments, instruments are playing musicians."

* Bob Dylan once commented: "See, when I started to record, they just turned the microphones on and you recorded . . . Whatever you got on one side of the glass was what came in on the controls on the other side of the glass."

* The truth is, anybody can write a song in 10 or 15 minutes. Writing "a song" takes no special talent whatsoever. The same goes for painting "a picture" or writing "a poem." Anybody can create a mediocre piece of "art" in a few minutes.

* The real question is the question of quality, substance, emotional staying power. Most songs written in 15 minutes, "in a burst of inspiration," actually sound mediocre to everyone except the songwriter and his or her family members and acolytes.

* The way to overcome songwriting mediocrity is to get educated about techniques you can use to compose effective music.

* A truly great song will sound brilliant with nothing more than a guitar-and-vocal or keyboard-and-vocal presentation. Vocal skill matters little. Reverb matters less. Only the tune, the chords and the words really matter. If the song does not make it in a bare-bones rendition, it does not make it.

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TOWNES VAN ZANDT

Do you usually write your songs from the beginning to the end or do you change the order later?^[L]^[SEP] Usually. Sometimes they get real changed around. Then there's always changes to be made, even little changes, like putting an "s" on a word.

That's where my poetic background comes in. It seems a lot of people in Nashville write by phrase, or by the line. As opposed to writing by the word. A lot of my best songs are where every single word is where it's supposed to be. Whereas a lot of country songs are more like everyday conversations. It's like a paragraph that rhymes as opposed to words that fit, and come to form a big rhyme. I have a lot of songs that are written that way.

"For the Sake of the Song" was written by the word. I once sat down and wrote out the rhyme the rhyme scheme for that song, and it was amazing. Pretty complex. But it didn't seem that complex when I was writing it.

I have a song now that I wrote on the train over in Europe. I just wrote it to see if I could sustain the weird rhyme scheme.

Do you remember writing "Pancho and Lefty"?^[L]^[SEP] Yes. I was in Dallas. In a hotel room. That one kind of came from not having anything to do and sitting down with the express purpose of writing a song. I took one day and then I played what I had that night at a gig. And a songwriter told me, "Man, that's a great. But I don't think it's finished." So I went back to my hotel room the next day and wrote the last verse. The only thing I remember thinking about while I was writing it was consciously thinking that this is not about Pancho Villa.

CAROLE KING

NEW YORK, NEW YORK 1989

She is one of the most successful female songwriters of all time. Even before

her two-sided hit “It’s Too Late” and “I Feel the Earth Move” went to number one in 1971, Carole King had already written eight other number one records. They were co-written with Gerry Goffin, whom she met in 1958 at Queens College in New York. Together, Goffin and King churned out an amazing flow of hit records, inspiring the likes of the Beatles with their successes.

Born Carole Klein in Brooklyn on February 9, 1941, she took piano lessons from her mother when she was four and started writing her own music only a few years later. She met a young songwriter at Queens College named Paul Simon, and the two of them teamed up to make demos for others, with Carole covering piano, vocals and drums. She also met Gerry Goffin at Queens, and when they started dating, they found more excitement at the piano than anywhere else, “even the movies,” Carole said. So they started to write songs together—Carole generating most of the melodies and Gerry most of the words—and wrote about 150 “bad songs” (according to Gerry) before coming up with their first hit, “Will You Love Me Tomorrow?”

Was your song “You’ve Got a Friend” written for anyone in particular?

No. That song was as close to pure inspiration I’ve ever experienced. The song wrote itself. It was written by something outside of myself through me.

Is that an unusual feeling for you?

It happens from time to time in part. That song is one of the examples of that process where it was almost completely written by inspiration and very little if any perspiration.

Does that give you the feeling that these songs come from beyond you?

Absolutely.

Can you give us any advice about how to get in touch with that source?

Songwriters, both lyricists and melody writers, are often plagued with the thing most often known as writer's block. All writers are, writers of prose as well. I have found that the key to not being blocked is to not worry about it. Ever.

If you are sitting down and you feel that you want to write and nothing is coming, you get up and do something else. Then you come back again and try it again. But you do it in a relaxed manner. *Trust* that it will be there. If it ever was once and you've ever done it once, it will be back. It always comes back and the only thing that is a problem is when you get in your own way worrying about it.

I'd like to say that I almost never have worried about it. Because when it seemed to be a problem, when I seemed to be...I don't even want to say "blocked" because it seems like too strong a word. But when the channel wasn't open enough to let something through, I always went and did something else and never worried about it and it always opened up again. Whether it was an hour later, which is often the case, or a day later or a week later or sometimes a few *months* later, I just didn't worry about it.

Do you ever feel limited by the song form?

No! The song form is limitless. You can do anything you want. Given the fact that a song is generally something that takes between three and five minutes on a record. But if you feel like going seven minutes, you can go seven minutes. If you want to write a really short song, you can do that. I think it's kind of nice because you're given a task to make a statement, musical and lyrical, and you do it and you don't have two hours to do it in. That's kind of nice; but I don't think it's limiting at all. I think it's liberating.

JAMES TAYLOR: Artist in Residence

Your songs, unlike those of The Beatles or Dylan, have always been poetic but clear. On your first album, for example, you were writing “Carolina In My Mind,” not “I Am The Walrus.” Is that clarity intentional?

No, that’s the way it comes out. It’s a cliché, but that’s because it’s true to say I don’t have any real conscious control over what comes out. I just don’t direct it. I wish I could say, “Oh, that would be great to write a song about.” But what I am doing is assembling and *minimally* directing what is sort of unconsciously coming out. It’s not something I can direct or control. I just end up being the first person to hear these songs. That’s what it feels like...that I don’t feel as though I write them. Then there’s a phase where you button it up and finish it. But it all starts with a lightning strike. A melody will suggest itself in the context of whatever I’m playing, and then the cadence will suggest words. And those words don’t come from a conscious place.

You once said that the sign of a good song is that it can stand without any accompaniment, just pure melody. So you have written songs with melody first?

Yes. I did write the “Mean Old Man” melody first, but that is an exception. Usually I am playing the guitar. I will have three lines that are happening at once, usually a bass line, an internal line, a top line, and a melody line that I am thinking of at the same time. Sting writes in this way too...he and I have that in common. I’ll write a melody, and the chords will shift under it. Then

it will mean something else because of the chord underneath it. My song “4th of July” is the same melody over and over again, but the changes continue to shift, so the melody means something harmonically different-‘cause the context changes.

So when the songs come for you, it sounds quite mysterious. And it’s a different experience for each.

[Songwriting] is largely unconscious and out of my control, like language itself. When kids begin to speak, they say gibberish that takes the form of sentences and syllables and has the form that sounds like a question or a statement. The cadence is already there, and it comes out as language. I speak French and German, and constantly in the back of my brain I’m translating things into those two languages. It’s just a little game that I’m constantly playing. And songwriting is like that. It’s always making little attempts. I find that now I’m compelled to revisit topics. Loss or celebration. Or a kind of mystical statement. Trying to give consciousness the slip, and relax back into the context that we come from.

Right now I have about seven starts on tunes. They’re music and a scrap of lyric and a direction that the song is going. I have a couple of notebooks that I carry with me and in them are little pieces of lyric...lots and lots of little pieces of lyric that belong with one or the other of these musical ideas that I have. They are beginning to organize themselves into another set of songs.

HANK WILLIAMS WRITING EXERCISE

by Tim Stafford (10/21/16)

Hank was one of the greatest performers and without a doubt one of the greatest writers ever. Here's a great exercise, maybe the ultimate songwriting exercise:

Assume that *Hank Williams' Greatest Hits* (no such record was produced during his lifetime) was only one half of a double album. Write the remainder of the record, the "missing" Hank songs... They have to be as good as "I Saw the Light," "Cold, Cold Heart," "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," "Hey Good Lookin'," "Jambalaya," and "I Can't Help it if I'm Still in Love with You."

This is incredibly difficult, if not impossible. But the process might yield some great songs! And it would force you to LEARN what made Hank's songs great, and by proxy insight into a genius's viewpoint, what makes ANY song great...

Let's look at "I Can't Help it if I'm Still in Love with You." First of all, the song is often praised as a paragon of country songwriting because of its simple lyrics paired with a passionate melody. In fact, that's the key to its greatness, on several levels. First, it doesn't really have a chorus, more of a simple refrain, which hammers the idea—which rises above the level of a "hook"—even stronger.

Today I passed you on the street^{[L][SEP]} And my heart fell at your feet^{[L][SEP]} can't help it if I'm still in love with you

Somebody else stood by your side^{[L][SEP]} And he looked so satisfied^{[L][SEP]} can't help it if I'm still in love with you

Let's look at the melody Hank put with this masterpiece set of lyrics. It's plaintive, but it *matches the lyric* perfectly. And that,

in my opinion—and that of many others—is the key to any great song. But this one is exceptional.

The song is in the key of E, and the first line starts almost in a circular pattern, as if stating something that is remarkable and surprising but yet took took ol' Hank full circle himself. Starting on a low B note, stating the arpeggio through a ninth note and returning to the tonic.

Today I passed you on the street

The next line is the one that tears his heart out, the true, unfiltered truth that makes his voice moan with pain.

And my heart fell at your feet

Thus, it's the highest range of notes in the song, especially leaping from the circular first line like a cry of pain. Centered around the high B note, even though the third of the 4 chord is the C#. This moaning, steel guitar-like effect makes the C# (on the word *heart...*) even more painful, as if Hank can barely think about it. And indeed, he ends up on the B, which sets up the payoff line perfectly:

I can't help it if I'm still in love with you

The entire line except, appropriately, *you*, is delivered in the 5 chord. The resolution to the 1 on *you* brings the attention back to where the song is directed. The highest note of the song, again the C#, is on the word *can't*, as if to highlight the helplessness. Then the circular patten appears again, in a lovely dip to the flat 7th note. Then on the word *love* (led in again by the almost whimsical, resigned flat 7th), he starts a circular phrase *in the tonic* while he's still in the 5 chord—a very common but effective ploy by writers in the day. But it's served Hank well. The circular phrase is pleading—*Can't you see I'm in pain??* He's back where he started.

The second half of the verse (is this the verse? The fact it's unclear makes the song and its lyrical and emotional payoff *stronger*) has the same pattern, with a new set of information that makes the payoff even sadder and more pleading. There is another guy. And the thing that really hurts is that he looks like he is enjoying what used to be yours...

Somebody else stood by your side^[L]^[SEP]And he looked so satisfied

The melodic framework is already established. Now the additional information reinforces it without becoming cloying.

The payoff on the 2nd line of the verse is the same lyrically and has the same chord structure, but the melody firmly returns to the tonic. Less pleading, more statement of fact. Here I am.

I can't help it if I'm still in love with you

Then for the erstwhile chorus, he has to return to the pleading again, much like one would in conversation, as his thoughts turn to the past:

A picture from the past came slowly stealing^[L]^[SEP]As I brushed your arm and walked so close to you

The melody cries again to the C# and stays there almost uncomfortably long, resolving eventually to the 3rd of the tonic on the words *stealing* and *feeling*. How appropriate is that? It's almost like the first one, on *stealing*, set up the second, more important word: *feeling*. Thinking in advance of how to move the song beautifully to the payoff line, almost like a great blues guitarist *pre-bending* a string...

^[L]^[SEP]Then suddenly I got that old-time feeling

And here we are to the central idea again. Full circle, back to the tonic note, as the chord moves back to the 1.

I can't help it if I'm still in love with you

Just as in the verse, the second chorus moves from reflections on the past to a bitter present underscored by the presence of another:

It's hard to know another's lips will kiss you And hold you just the way I used to do

This is a remarkable sense of symmetry from verse to chorus which, after all, reinforces the central theme: I used to have you, someone else does now, but I still love you. The second line of chorus melody is within the 5 7th chord, resolving to the major third of the tonic, meaning that he isn't finishing speaking and lingering on the idea that again, *this used to be his girl*. And, painfully, in the last moaning appeal to C# and a higher power, he confesses that every day he lives with the past:

Oh, heaven only knows how much I miss you

Which, of course, only reinforces the central idea, stated plainly one more time, resolving itself natural to the tonic:

I can't help it if I'm still in love with you

And then it's done. No need to repeat the verse or add another chorus. It's done, it's a full circle and complete, a true egg of an idea ready to be hatched in front of the world.

I'm convinced Hank didn't consciously think of *any* of this as he was riding in the backseat of the Cadillac. His mind knew a great lyric and knew how to perfectly match it with a great melody. Naturally, simply. And that is the brilliance of Hank and of a great song.

Can you do the same? Can you channel his instinct for matching lyric and melody and make it part of your unconscious arsenal

every time you write?

Something Out of Nothing: 21 Songwriting Tips

by [Ken Hill](#) - [Torchlight Creek Music](#), Posted May 2nd 2003

Back to [The Academy](#)

This is not a how-to article. This is just on some songwriting tips that I want to share with you to help you become a more versatile songwriter. Take the hints that you feel help you out and discard the ones you don't agree with.

#1) Authors and Musicians...

I have had some people tell me that composing music is easy, and that anyone can do it. Yes, anyone can do it, but few can really do it. Writing a song is much like being an author. Yes, we all have tools to write (everyone has a brain I hope!), but that doesn't all of a sudden make us best selling authors. Authors work at their abilities, often every day. The prime goal of an author is the same as a musician, which is to emotionally connect with the reader in some way or another. Writers do this by using motivation, characterization, and powerful word combinations among other things. Composers, like authors, have a lot in common. Our main goal is to connect with the listener emotionally.

This is where our first tip comes into play: Never stop working at your abilities. If our main goal is to connect emotionally, we should want to have as many tools as we possibly can to achieve that goal. The more abilities that we have, the more choices we can make musically. It's important to have a wide arsenal of choices at your disposal, because if we keep doing the same 'tried and true' methods, their emotional effects will wear off as the songwriting becomes caged into a predictable movement.

#2) Who are you writing your music for? Know your goal.

The reason why you need to know this is because when you make music for yourself, there is no limit to what you can do to be 'expressive'. If you are making music for other people, you will have to be aware of how people relate to it. It is like this: when you are a computer genius and you want to tell someone how to fix their computer, you have to speak in their terms so they can understand what the heck you are saying. If you speak in your lingo, you will most likely lose them in techno-talk. Another example is the author. He can write a story with the largest, most sweeping words he knows- but if the reader does not know what

those words mean, the entire meaning gets lost.

We, as musicians, face the same predicament. Overcomplicated songs will lose the average listener. Now, other hardcore musicians will greatly appreciate your abilities and probably get more feeling from it- but the common person will most likely not be able to follow. Once again you should ask yourself when you write a song: Who am I making this music for and will they be able to relate?

#3) Scratching in the dirt

Minds are like flowers. If you let it sit there without soaking anything up, it will dry up. Not to say that you can't invigorate your mind again, but it is saying that it is harder to do so. Just like weight lifting. If you haven't worked out in awhile, it is quite hard to lift as much as you did when you were lifting every day. So this is my first suggestion. Practice. I'm not talking about technical ability this time (although you should practice that too!). I'm saying that you should practice making new songs. Make a goal to make 1 new song every week, even if it is only 50 seconds long. It is the fact that you are working your brain out. Once you begin the song, you can latch onto ideas rather quickly. That is not the purpose of the exercise. The purpose is to get your brain to find new avenues by exploring different ideas. It's about trying something new every time.

#4) Music vs. Robots

Music is an art form. It is a way to wordlessly communicate. There are computer programs that are designed to 'make songs' on the fly. How much do you think that communicates? Please don't be a robot! Don't give in and throw in random notes that fit in a scale just to fill a passage. Make a reason for why every part of your song exists. Find parts in your lead passage that really hook you. Now delete all the other parts. Now build off of the hook. Get it? Computers cannot find hooks, but your ear can. If you can't feel anything interesting from a part, get rid of it. Unless of course you want to have a "boring" part to build into something grand! There's a nice strategy.

#5) The song's opinion is better than yours! Nyah!

When you think in the best interests in the song, you may have to rid yourself some very good ideas that you wanted to do. I have come up with very creative ideas that really didn't work with the song I was currently composing. Don't mess up your song by trying to fit it in! If you can fit it in and it feels right to put it there- good shot! If it doesn't- well then you have an idea for your next song to go! Remember, the song's opinion is better than yours!

Oh, here is a good one. Just because you got a new toy, does not mean every song needs to have it! There, I said it. Just because you get a wah-wah pedal for

your guitar, now every song you make after that needs to have a wah-wah?? I think not! Think about what the song needs not what you want. The both of you might have varying opinions. When you make the music bigger than you are, then you'll understand what I mean- it tends to have a mind of its own.

#6) Where does inspiration come from?

Quite often when I write a song, I think back to a moment in my life. I use what has happened in my life as an inspiration to make music. The more I do in my life, the more I can write music about- new experiences. Sometimes just getting out of the house and doing something you haven't done in a long time (or never done!) can open up the doors to musical inspiration. Open up a photo album, read old letters, visit family, friends, go do an activity, do anything but music! Read poetry, watch ballet, go see a movie, walk around in a museum, look at oil paintings and sculptures- these are all different forms of art. Music is an art form too. Sometimes other forms of art can be inspiring to the musician. Come back, after your mind has been freed, and try to write a song about it.

#7) Oops I made an accident.. er- no I didn't!

Once we begin a song, our minds begin to formulate where to go next, and most of the time- we excitedly travel down the road. Throughout the excitement, we can make good mistakes. We hit the wrong key, and all of a sudden, our mind is opened to a new avenue. Mistakes can be good things, because it is an unexpected thing. I think the best music sounds familiar enough to know where it is going, but unpredictable enough to avoid musical clichés!

Sometimes I will click on a random sequence of notes- not to actually use it in a song, but to see if I can find maybe a simple pattern that I can build off of. About 95% of the time, I just hear musical mush that I can't use. The other 4% it is good stuff, and 1% of it is amazing! Accidents can be good things. Remember that. If you don't have an inspiration, sometimes just 'playing around' is a good answer!

#8) Country?!? I make rock songs!

It is hard to compare Clint Black to Korn. That is not to say there isn't something to be learned from different styles. The best way to be able to attack a song from every angle is to have as many techniques and styles as possible. Your talent will tell you which ones would work for your song. Learn country, rock, alternative even try polka! Learn as much as you can. There might be a place to use that knowledge somewhere in the future!

#9) A + B =C. A + B = XYZ???

Don't use the same formulas for your songs! Just because you found a winning formula, that may only work for that particular song. Try different avenues. There

are artists that you hear (even on the radio) that seem to have all of their songs to sound alike. Be creative.

#10) Don't retrograde your V into a IV??!? Are you crazy?!

Don't be a music theory lawyer, but use it to your advantage. Knowledge of the rules of music can be a great thing- if you also know that it's okay to break them. If you stay theoretically sound, you may have a generic sound. Dissonance can be a powerful tool.

#11) That musician can't play himself out of a paper bag...

Ahh, how many times have I heard one musician talk about another behind their back. The reason why refraining this can help your songwriting is because when you stop comparing to the outside world, you can learn from them. Maybe the guitarist isn't the most technically sound, but maybe he can fingerpick like you wouldn't believe. Learn from his strengths so they can be yours too. Examine his style and abilities and see if there isn't something you can't learn from him.

#12) I feel like listening to...

Maybe you're brain fried but you feel like writing a song. Why not toss in a CD of someone who inspires you to write. Examine the style, the mixing, how the entire song is constructed, when each instrument blends in and out of the mix, etc. etc. You'll find that many times you can get ideas from other artists. I'm not saying steal their riffs (but go ahead if it makes you feel better) but you can take some of their ideas and blend them into your own style. Steal an idea and then bend it to the inner workings of your mind!

#13) Let's write a Metal song next to a Kinder care...

Location is a very important aspect to songwriting. When you're next to a lake, you probably get the feeling of relaxation. When you're at a concert, I doubt you will feel so relaxed. Where you are can impact your music. If you are lucky enough to have your own private place in your home to play music, you most likely have it decorated with posters or something that puts you in the mood. If you don't... try it! I had a guy tell me that he couldn't write a song unless he turned off all of his lights except for one... and it was blue. If you create an atmosphere, it will most likely affect your music. When you are in a store you act differently than at home. Even your kitchen will invoke a different type of feeling than your living room. No doubt about it.. Try to get a room that can match your musical personality and write there. Test out different places. I, personally, write my music in the dark. No blue light here.

#14) It sounds okay... I guess...

Get rid of it! To exercise your mind, you have to work it to its full capacity. Back to

weight lifting, if you can curl 45-lbs, don't settle for 20 lbs one day. You won't get stronger. Half-hearted songs don't count in my opinion. Playing around is nice and all, but your ultimate goal should be to write a song like you've written before. It is how we expand as musicians. Writing songs with methods that we've done before is like lifting 20 lbs. Using new ideas and methods, that our mind would have only thought of because we've mastered the old- that's your 45 pounder! Keep it fresh! Don't fall into the habit of generic music!!!

#15) Ideas.. Ideas.. Ideas...

Sometime I write a song off a central idea, instead of emotion. For example, my idea might be: well what if I wrote a dance song with a heavy guitar? What if I wanted to write a song uses a distortion over drums? Ideas don't always evolve into songs, but they help you be creative! The important thing is that since they are ideas (kind of like a hypothesis) you shouldn't come to a conclusion till you have tried it. In other words, if you have an idea that running distortion over drums would sound cool over a love song, and when you try it- you may tell yourself... "no- distortion with drums sounds good on a hard rock song."

#16) I like it, but what do you think???

Let me start by saying that your friends and family members will most likely be very biased about your music. Ask them what they think if you want a self-esteem booster. I take compliments more to heart from strangers who like my music. The most important thing is that you like the music. Will others like it as well? Maybe, maybe not. If they offer suggestions, consider them... There is no right or wrong way to write a song. There are only songs that people can and can't relate to. And I'm sure that almost any song that was ever made could probably relate to at least 1 other person in this world.

#17) Catchy phrases for lyrics

If you're planning on writing lyrics, then I offer you this suggestion: Use words that people use everyday. Why? Because if those same words are used in just an everyday conversation, it will remind that listener of your song. For instance, if I said "I was outside last night and saw a twinkle twinkle little star", immediately that song pops into your mind. Of course no one would talk like that, so if you mold your song around an everyday phrase, then it will remind people of your song easier. Just think of Staind, "It's been awhile". Every time someone says that phrase it reminds me of that song.

#18) Be healthy. Eat, sleep and exercise regularly as part of your daily routine.

Strange to think how proper sleep, exercise and food come into play, but it can. Just think of this: Food is your body's fuel. Without fuel, your body wants to shut

#21) Have fun

Have fun!? What kind of topic!? Guess what. People don't have fun making music all the time. It's really sad. If you don't believe me, think about all the people who have been upset because of something their band did to them. Revert to the very beginning, when you first realized that you loved to create music... and have fun!

MERRY GO ROUND

Songwriters: Kacey Musgraves / Joshua Shaun Osborne / Shane L Mcanally
Merry Go 'Round lyrics © Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd., Warner/Chappell Music, Inc,
Universal Music Publishing Group, Spirit Music Group, Audiam, Inc

If you ain't got two kids by 21,
You're probably gonna die alone
At least that's what tradition told you

And it don't matter if you don't believe,
Come Sunday morning you best be there
In the front row, like you're s'posed to

Same hurt in every heart
Same trailer, different park

Mamas hooked on Mary Kay
Brothers hooked on Mary Jane
And Daddies hooked on Mary two doors down

Mary Mary quite contrary,
We get bored so we get married
And just like dust we settle in this town
On this broken merry go 'round and 'round and 'round we go,
Where it stops nobody knows,
And it ain't slowin' down, this merry go 'round

We think the first time's good enough,
So we hold on to high school love,
Say we won't end up like our parents

Tiny little boxes in a row,
Ain't want you want it's what you know,
Just happy in the shoes you're wearin'

Same checks we're always cashin'
To buy a little more distraction

Cause Mamas hooked on Mary Kay
Brothers hooked on Mary Jane
Daddies hooked on Mary two doors down
Mary Mary quite contrary
We get bored so we get married
And just like dust we settle in this town

On this broken merry go 'round and 'round and 'round we go
Where we stop nobody knows
And it ain't slowin' down, this merry go 'round

Mary Mary quite contrary
We're so bored until we're buried
And just like dust we settle in this town
On this broken merry go 'round
Merry go 'round

Jack and Jill went up the hill,
Jack burned out on booze and pills,
And Mary had a little lamb,
Mary just don't give a damn no more

Please refer to the massive *Songwriters on Songwriting* by Paul Zollo.
<https://www.amazon.com/Songwriters-Songwriting-Expanded-Paul-Zollo/dp/0306812657>

JOHN LENNON

“Songwriting is about getting the demon out of me. It’s like being possessed.”

STEVEN TYLER

“Songwriting is a bitch. And then it has puppies”

JIMMY WEBB

“Songwriting is hell on earth. If it isn’t, then you’re doing it wrong.”

TRACY CHAPMAN

“Songwriting is a very mysterious process. It feels like creating something from nothing. It’s something I don’t feel like I really control.”

JAMES TAYLOR

“When I was young, I wrote on pure inspiration. As I got older, I realized that inspiration was not enough and I had to learn how to write songs.”

JIMMY BUFFET

“Songwriters write songs, but they really belong to the listener.”

JONI MITCHELL

“My style of songwriting is influenced by cinema. I'm a frustrated filmmaker. A fan once said to me, 'Girl, you make me see pictures in my head!' and I took that as a great compliment. That's exactly my intention.”

BOB DYLAN

“It is only natural to pattern yourself after someone... But you can’t just

copy someone. If you like someone's work, the important thing is to be exposed to everything that person has been exposed to. Anyone who wants to be a songwriter should listen to as much folk music as they can, study the form and structure of stuff that has been around for 100 years."

JANIS IAN

"One of the hardest things of all is to start. Just sitting down and getting over your own intimidations. Every professional songwriter I know — people who do it 100% for their living — is terrified every time they sit down to write. You're always convinced that your next song is going to be your last, or that it's going to be your worst, or that you'll never be able to write anything as good as your hit. It's a constant terror. I think all artists live in a constant state of terror. And part of our job is to know our own chaos well enough to be able to make sense of it when you can."

MORRISEY

"The title is often more important than the song because more people will read the title than hear the song, and the title will draw them in or repel them. It's very important to me that the words have very soft edges and are easy to say."

DAVID BOWIE

"You write down a paragraph or two describing several different subjects creating a kind of story ingredients-list, I suppose, and then cut the sentences into four or five-word sections; mix 'em up and reconnect them."

NEIL YOUNG

"I don't force it. If you don't have an idea and you don't hear anything going over and over in your head, don't sit down and try to write a song. You know, go mow the lawn... My songs speak for themselves."

NICK CAVE

"Inspiration is a word used by people who aren't really doing anything. I go into my office every day that I'm in Brighton and work. Whether I feel like it or not is irrelevant."

SEAN LENNON

“For me, songwriting is something I have to do ritually. I don’t just wait for inspiration; I try to write a little bit every day.”

PATTI SMITH

“Poetry is a solitary process. One does not write poetry for the masses. Poetry is a self-involved, lofty pursuit. Songs are for the people. When I’m writing a song, I imagine performing it. I imagine giving it. It’s a different aspect of communication. It’s for the people.”

PRINCE

“Attention to detail makes the difference between a good song and a great song... When I write an arrangement, I always picture a blind person listening to the song. And I choose chords and sounds and percussion instruments which would help clarify the feel of the song to a blind person... I love the idea of visual sounds.”

DOLLY PARTON

“It’s like a feeling of creating, not that the same stories ain’t been told before, but it ain’t been told through my point of view. Songwriting is a hobby and to me it’s therapy. It’s a joy. It’s a thrill. It’s like mind exercises or something.”

LAMONT DOZIER

“I don’t think about commercial concerns when I first come up with something. When I sit down at the piano, I try to come up with something that moves me.”

ALICIA KEYS

“For me, writing comes directly from a specific source. Like something that just happened to me, a conversation, a strong emotion, a line in a book, a word... Usually I seize that exact moment to write down what [I] felt, even if it makes no sense or it doesn’t rhyme... Or I will call my [voicemail] and leave my self a message if I have no pen, or only a melody. Later, when I

have time alone, I like to sit quietly, most times at my piano... and I revisit what I felt. I allow myself to say everything that my heart feels about it with no judgement, [until] I get all I need out... and I feel the spirit in the song. Then I begin to arrange it, or share it, or get feedback. The most important thing for me when I write is that I properly express that emotion that struck me so deeply.”

IRON AND WINE

“Do I start with the lyrics? No. Quite honestly, it’s the opposite. I generally get the melody first — I kinda fiddle around on the guitar and work out a melody. The lyrics are there to flesh out the tone of the music... I think sometimes that if you write a poem, it should remain as just a poem, just... words.”

JOHN LEGEND

“I have a structured songwriting process. I start with the music and try to come up with musical ideas, then the melody, then the hook, and the lyrics come last.”

LEONARD COHEN

“I’m writing all the time. And as the songs begin to coalesce, I’m not doing anything else but writing. I wish I were one of those people who wrote songs quickly. But I’m not. So it takes me a great deal of time to find out what the song is.”

THOM YORKE

“What happens a lot with songwriting is that a melody or rhythm or something stays with you like catching a cold. And during that time what happens is that I can then fit things on to it, it all fits and glues together. Sometimes its crazy ‘cos it can almost be anything. But if you catch the cold then the nonsense makes sense. It’s like you’re getting beamed it, like with a ouija board and something’s pushing your hand. It’s not a pleasant experience necessarily.”

CARRIE NEWCOMER

“Something good happened to my writing when stopped being afraid to do something simple, for the fear that people might think I couldn’t do something more complex. Don’t be confused by the word simple. Simple is

not easy, it is clear voiced, and fearlessly elegant.”

MARY GAUTHIER

“Creating something beautiful out of pain helps ease the pain. So, that's kind of how I got to songwriting - quite honestly out of desperation.”

PAUL SIMON

“It's very helpful to start with something that's true. If you start with something that's false, you're always covering your tracks. Something simple and true, that has a lot of possibilities, is a nice way to begin.”

MERLE HAGGARD

“The best songs feel like they've always been here.”

“Songwriting gets harder and harder, unless you just want to try to write a better version of what you've already done,”

KRIS KRISTOFFERSON

“Everything that I write is sort of autobiographical, and I don't know that I'm getting better, but I'm certainly running out of time... ‘Sunday Morning Coming Down’ was more or less looking around me and writing about what I was doing.”

TOMMY COLLINS

‘When your song is called ‘XYZ’ or whatever, every line has got to make sense against your title.’

RODNEY CROWELL

“You realize that giant metaphors work in songs because you have so few words. Standing alone on a page, they threaten to be overblown in a hurry.”

TOM WAITS

“For a songwriter, you don’t really go to songwriting school; you learn by listening to tunes. And you try to understand them and take them apart and see what they’re made of, and wonder if you can make one, too.”

NEIL PERT

“What I've learned over the years is that the craft of songwriting is trying to take the personal and make it universal - or in the case of telling a story, taking the universal and making it personal.”

TOWNES VAN ZANDT

“I don’t think you can ever do your best. Doing your best is a process of trying to do your best.”

Richhoncho's Songwriters Links

Songwriting Checklist

(source:

<http://www.angelfire.com/music2/richhoncho/check.htm>)

I don't think you can be a good songwriter without knowing all of the following, equally I don't think you can be great songwriter adhering slavishly to every point.

This list was supplied by Bob Dobbins who approves of it being freely circulated.

FORM: 1. Is the first line original and catchy? 2. Is the song form appropriate to the story and the song style? 3. Does the story progress logically? 4. Does the bridge (if it exists) add a new dimension to the plot? 5. In a verse/chorus format, is the chorus the logical conclusion to all the verses? 6. Is the title a synopsis of the story? 7. Did I repeat the title enough so that a listener would know the title after 1 listening? 8. Does the rhythm change from verse to chorus to bridge? **STORY:**

1. Is the setting clearly defined? Where is it? 2. Does the location or time change during the song and (if so) is it clear? 3. Does the plot develop with each verse or is it a restatement of the same idea over and over? 4. Halfway through the song are the questions (who, what, where, when and why) answered? 5. Does the dialogue/monologue maintain consistency throughout the lyric? 6. Is there one single idea in the song? 7. Are any

aspects of the plot unstated? Are any questions left? 8. Is the lyric male/female or unisex?

EMOTION:

1. Is the tone and language consistent? 2. Do any lines call too much attention to themselves? 3. Is the singer in an attractive light? (No anger, sarcasm, self-pity) 4. Do I preach or moralize? 5. Is there an emotional payoff? Is it a good one? 6. Is the meaning universal? 7. Can you imagine any artists singing these words?

SYNTAX:

1. Are the verb tenses consistent? 2. Is the language conversational? 3. Are the pronouns in place to show who is doing the thinking and feeling? 4. Is it clear when someone else is speaking? 5. Are all paper phrases removed (chairman of the bored)? 6. Have any natural word orders reversed been? 7. Is every quote clear? 8. Are the clutter words removed (very, a little, sort of, etc.)? 9. Have the trendy expressions been removed?

RHYMING:

1. Is the rhyme scheme consistent? 2. Is the rhyme style consistent? 3. Are the tricky/unnatural rhymes removed? 4. Are the types of rhyme varied?

PROSODY:

1. Are the accents on the words natural? 2. Are any unimportant words on sustained notes? 3. Are there any sibilant singing situations (lots of s's)? 4. Can the singer breathe and phrase? 5. Are open vowels on sustained notes?

SONGWRITING TIPS

(most of these are my observations. Others from different sources, including Rikky Rooksby, *How to Write Songs on Guitar*, the workshop *You Can Write Hit Songs* by Robin Frederick, and others)

Songwriting is **good for you**. Several studies show it has well-established emotional, health and social benefits: less stress, improved mood, immune function, even improves short-term memory, liver function (don't know about that one lol), less sick and down time, quicker re-employment after layoffs, overall improved mental function. It builds confidence and articulation.

The four elements of a song:

Lyric

Melody

Harmony (chords)

Rhythm

Songwriting is a **synergy**. A combination of different things that create something different and hopefully greater. And they are literally hallmarks of left and right brain--lyric and music/beat, so it's difficult by nature. And personal. When you write, do you use the logical, linear, sequential, mathematical, analytical, verbal left-brain to guide you or the holistic, intuitive, rhythmic, emotional, creative, visual, feeling right-brain? Or Both? Is this an argument for co-writing?

To WRITE or CO-WRITE...

ADVANTAGES OF SOLO WRITING:

- 1) It's YOURS (\$ wise, creatively, etc.)
- 2) Easier to say exactly what you want
- 3) Learn how to write from start to finish
- 4) You have to know how to apply all these rules YOURSELF
- 5) Lets you find your own voice as an ARTIST (painter, sculptor, etc)
- 6) Shows you are versatile
- 7) You can write anywhere, anytime, on YOUR schedule
- 8) Easier to get the THERAPEUTIC EFFECTS

ADVANTAGES OF CO-WRITING:

- 1) Different perspectives make a better song (Two heads...)
- 2) Allows different strengths to be best used: Melody, Lyric
- 3) Forces you to work and FOCUS
- 4) You may be part of something great that you had NO IDEA about before
- 5) Network building
- 6) Learn more about your own strengths, weaknesses, open new doors to ways of writing
- 7) Adds fun, excitement, improves creativity
- 8) Improves CRAFT

GREAT COWRITING TEAMS:

Gilbert & Sullivan (Pirates of Penzance, The Mikado, Thespis)

Rodgers and Hammerstein (Sound of Music, South Pacific, Oklahoma!)

Lerner and Lowe (My Fair Lady, Camelot, Brigadoon)

John and Taupin (Crocodile Rock, Rocket Man, Candle in the Wind, Tiny Dancer, Your Song)

Lennon and McCartney (duh)

Whitfield and Strong (Heard it through the Grapevine, War, Papa was a Rolling Stone)

Ashford and Simpson (Ain't No Mountain High Enough, Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing, Reach out and Touch)

Bryant and Bryant (Wake Up Little Suzie, Rocky Top, Bye Bye Love, Love Hurts)

Lieber and Stoller (Hound Dog, Yakety Yak, Charlie Brown, Stand by Me)

Jagger and Richard (Can't Get No Satisfaction, Honkey Tonk Women, Can't Always Get What You Want)

Bacharach and David (Raindrops Keep Falling, Walk on By, Way to San Jose, Say a Little Prayer, What the World Needs Now)

Gershwin and Gershwin (I Got Rhythm, Rhapsody in Blue, Embraceable You)

Goffin and King (Natural Woman, Up on the Roof, Locomotion, Will You Still Love me Tomorrow, Take Good Care of My Baby)

Mann and Weil (On Broadway, You've Lost that Loving Feeling, Soul & Inspiration, Somewhere Out There, I Will Come to You)
Holland, Dozier and Holland (Baby Love, Stop in the Name of Love, How Sweet it Is, Heat Wave, I Can't Help Myself (Sugar Pie Honey Bunch))
Sherman and Sherman (Disney songs—)
Henley and Frey (Hotel California, Lyin' Eyes, One of These Nights, Tequila Sunrise)
Goble and Drumm (Big Spike Hammer, Blue Virginia Blues, Natural Thing to Do, Walking Through my Memory)

GREAT SOLO WRITERS:

Bob Dylan, James Taylor, Hank Williams, Merle Haggard, Carter Stanley, Bill Monroe, Bob McDill, Paul Simon, Mozart, Jimmy Webb, Leonard Cohen, Tom T. Hall, Billy Joel, John Prine, Townes van Zandt, Kris Kristofferson, Chuck Berry, Darrell Scott, Smokey Robinson, Joni Mitchell, Stevie Wonder, Brian Wilson, Springsteen, Prince, Van Morrison, Woody Guthrie, Buddy Holly, Dolly Parton, Jackson Browne, John Fogerty, Diane Warren, Robbie Robertson, Neil Diamond, Stevie Nicks, Tom Waits, Willie Nelson, Roger Miller, Loretta Lynn, Kacey Musgraves, Jason Isbell, Chris Stapleton, Max D. Barnes, Harlan Howard, Paul Overstreet, Guy Clark, Hank Cochran, Jerry Jeff Walker, Alan Jackson, Steve Earle, Vince Gill, Larry Cordle, Dean Dillon, Kim Williams, Mickey Newbury, Don Schlitz, John Hartford...

One thing's for sure: **There's no right or wrong way.** (see quotes)
So all I can give you are TIPS.

General Tips:

Keep a journal, idea book or hook book—be aware at all times that a song idea might be there, and *always* write it down; phrases, sayings, signs, Facebook posts, things friends and others say to you, billboards, fleeting impressions, something on TV, something a family member said, church bulletin boards, random observations

Use a **recorder** of some kind to record *every* melodic idea you get

Use a **rhyming dictionary** of some kind (www.rhymezone.com,

NEAR RHYMES: <https://www.rhymedesk.com/>, <http://www.b-rhymes.com/>)

I use ColorNote on my Android, and Easy Voice Recorder

On my iPad, I currently use Songwriter's Pad and HD Recorder Plus (Masterwriter...)

Know the **market** you're writing for

MODERN BLUEGRASS—themes are generally trains, murder, neotraditional, nostalgia (esp. for old Bluegrass), home, Conservative values, older Country music, gospel—different in different TENTS (small, medium, large)—BG TODAY charts

TAYLOR SWIFT—You may hate her, but she knows her market. She continues to know how to talk like them—“We are never, *ever* getting back together again.” Even as she turns 30 later this year, she can still appeal to girls age 12-19. And you don't want to make her mad... (Kanye, boyfriends) One-note melodies extremely catchy, easy to remember and sing—BIG influence on modern country. But she can write profound melodies and songs—“Ronan.” Wow.

“We are Never Ever Getting Back Together Again” Taylor Swift

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA4iX5D9Z64>

“Look What You Made Me Do” Taylor Swift

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tmd-ClpJxA>

“Ronan” Taylor Swift

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0J2OF1S3iSI>

<http://www.cmt.com/news/1693529/offstage-the-story-behind-taylor-swifts-song-for-ronan/>

Start with a good **TITLE**

Is it good enough to put at the **END** of the song?

“The Dance” Tony Arata/Garth Brooks

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpwdwbO1uvM>

Or at the **BEGINNING**?

“War” Strong/Whitfield—Edwin Starr

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztZI2aLQ9Sw&list=PLgc5OCyd3_OOPkktm_fIDFw60zbeuHZL-

Do you have any **TATTOO LINES**? —Lines so good people would tattoo them on their bodies

DEVELOP A “SONG SENSE” about what would make a good song

REAL EXPERIENCES, REAL PEOPLE (Ballads...)

**“Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree”
Tony Orlando & Dawn**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-RILFygCkk>

“Candle in the Wind” Elton John

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoOhnrjdYOc>

“Sweet Caroline” Neil Diamond

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2w-_Vttrfc

“Wrecking Ball,” Miley Cyrus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=My2FRPA3Gf8>

“Fire and Rain” James Taylor

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOlo4IEpsPY>

“Maybe I’m Amazed” “Hey Jude” McCartney

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cm2YyVZBL8U>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQER0A0ej0M>

“How do you Sleep?” John Lennon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bu9GMFvxWiE>

“Layla,” Derek & the Dominoes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSquilVLhrQ>

“American Pie” “Vincent” Don McLean

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAsV5-Hv-7U&start_radio=1&list=RDuAsV5-Hv-7U

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxHnRfhDmrk>

**“Killing Me Softly with his Song” written *about*
McLean**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgJ-VRdXr7I>

“The Boxer” Paul Simon *about* Bob Dylan

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3LFML_pxIY

“You’re so Vain” Carly Simon *about...*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j13oJajXx0M>

Write what you KNOW, but learn to make it UNIVERSAL and RELATABLE

Avoid corny hooks unless you're writing for that market

“Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer” Elmo & Patsy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ok5WsPYcj5Y>

“The Streak” Ray Stevens

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtzoUu7w-YM>

Anything by Weird Al Yankovic, Cledus T. Judd

Go to a bar or restaurant and *listen* to people, then write down the ideas on a napkin (HARLAN HOWARD)

“I Fall to Pieces” Patsy Cline

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuZTk1hdpMs>

“Pick Me Up on Your Way Down” Charlie Walker

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZjNJ8pjPsl>

“Heartaches by the Number” Ray Price

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plsrnXJFuLk>

“I’ve Got a Tiger by the Tail” Buck Owens

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5XVtinryZo>

“Why Not Me?” Judds

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYdqKFBCJ0>

“Busted” Johnny Cash, Ray Charles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yEAv56kC1k>

“Somebody Should Leave” Reba

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l5mxVD07DDg>

“Life Turned Her That Way” Mel Tillis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXpz2Zg2lm4>

READ—get ideas from newspapers, magazines, novels, ONLINE

BOOKS

“Both Sides, Now” Joni Mitchell and “Rain King” by Counting Crows inspired by *Henderson and the Rain King* by Saul Bellow

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pbn6a0AFfnM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwQTd8Avz5Y>

"Tom Joad" Woody Guthrie, inspired by *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dimhKln0KBg>

"Goodbye Yellow Brick Road" Elton John, inspired by *The Wizard of Oz* by Frank L. Baum

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vgy6ANiEaY8>

"Rhiannon" Fleetwood Mac, inspired by *Triad* by Mary Leader

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_aYibUx1B8

"White Rabbit" Jefferson Airplane, Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWWsfrfq69A>

NEWSPAPER/ONLINE

**"A Day in the Life" "She's Leaving Home"
"Happiness is a Warm Gun" Beatles**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usNsCeOV4GM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dypv4SLyAfg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdvnoH060Qg>

"Big River" Johnny Cash

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S34hOJE-DpU>

"Heartbreak Hotel" Elvis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9BLw4W5KU8>

"Paradise" John Pine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEy6EuZp9IY>

"Frozen Man" James Taylor

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ue_qbHaUJ44

"Bleeding for a Little Peace of Mind"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYiKECBzjv8>

Write or type as fast as you can stream of consciousness, then go back and pick out good phrases and ideas

PROBLEMS: 1) lack of CONTEXT; 2) lack of FOCUS; 3) lack of DIRECTION

Compose away from your instrument

Compose on a drum machine first

Pastiche—compose a song in the style of a particular artist

Learn the elements of **STRUCTURE**

INTRO

VERSE—your **STORY**; sometimes first repeated

CHORUS—your **MESSAGE**

BRIDGE—your **REVEAL, TWIST** or **INSIGHT**

SOLO

OUTRO

Don't be afraid to **MIX THESE UP**; sometimes putting the chorus **ONLY** at the end is more effective, dramatic

“Don't Stop Believing” Journey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcjzHMhBtf0>

“Hey Jude” Beatles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cm2YyVZBL8U>

Borrow the structure of a song you like and make your own from it (the “ghost song”)

Some structures are more complicated and don't follow standard verse/chorus/bridge conventions, but are a collection or **suite** of complete sections

“Bohemian Rhapsody” Mercury/Queen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJ9rUzIMcZQ>

Intro, piano ballad, guitar solo, pseudo-operatic section, hard rock, Outro

“Scenes from an Italian Restaurant” Billy Joel

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUz48xw_OiM

Scenes end up describing scenes in life; return back

“A Day in the Life” Beatles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usNsCeOV4GM>

First and last parts like a dream—B part wakes up; absurdity of life

Don't pressure yourself—jot down ideas and keep coming back to it

Give yourself a deadline and stick to it—Make RULES for yourself; they FOCUS your writing

If you have emotions but no craft, people will not understand you. If you have craft but no emotion, people will not care. (People have to FEEL something while listening)

Write or start a song every week

GET UP and MOVE (always stimulates thought)

Tips for melody writing

Listen to the radio on very low volume for melody ideas

Always be conscious of plagiarism—has it been done?? Research it online immediately

“My Sweet Lord” George Harrison—“He’s So Fine” Mack/Chiffons

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sYiEesMbe2I>

Fogerty vs. Fantasy, 1993—“Run Through the Jungle” and “Old Man Down the Road”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=47&v=J5eXV2VeSO4

Can someone copy themselves??

Williams, Thicke, & Harris v. Bridgeport Music, Inc. & Gaye, (a.k.a., the “Blurred Lines” case, 2016)

“Got to Give It Up” Marvin Gaye—“Blurred Lines” Robin Thicke/Pharrell Williams

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fp7Q1OAzITM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyDUC1LUXSU>

FEEL and GROOVE close... Dangerous case

“Let’s Get it On” Marvin Gaye—“Thinking Out Loud” Ed Sheeran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lp-EO5I60KA>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=21&v=x6QZn9xiuOE
CHORD PROGRESSION and INSTRUMENTATION too alike? Dangerous...

APPS: Soundhound, Shazam (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/soundhound-music-discovery/id355554941?mt=8>, <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/shazam/id284993459?mt=8>)

HOW TO PREVENT PLAGIARISM: Don't listen to music the day you are writing

Match the melody to the lyric—does it invoke the lyric without words?

What sounds good to you? what will move people? Why? Think about your favorite melodies—what moves you?? Why?

Symphony No.7, Allegretto—“King’s Speech” Beethoven

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCHREyE5GzQ>

“Benediction” Brian Keane

“Bringing Mary Home” Country Gentlemen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYKIOK0LGLs>

Choruses—up; verses—down (Just like in SPEECH: *Oh No. OH NO!!*)

“I Will Always Love You” Dolly Parton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9nPf7w7pDI>

“My Heart Will Go On” James Cameron/Will

Jennings Celine Dion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHG2oizTlpY>

“Eleanor Rigby” Paul McCartney

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuS5NuXRb5Y>

PAUL MCCARTNEY BREAKS DOWN HIS MOST FAMOUS SONGS

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u97_inloBmY

Speak the lyric and note tonal exaggerations and differences, then use those to compose the melody; you speak in pitches (try talking like a robot and see...)

IF you stumble on a great melody, first record it, then play it as many times as you can, then block it out with “dummy lyrics”

“Eleanor Rigby” Paul McCartney

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuS5NuXRb5Y>

“Yesterday” Paul McCartney

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCV9oqtwyVA>

Try composing on a different instrument

“The Open Door” Darrell Scott

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnxRiV7fluo>

Work in more notes that “sit outside” or even against the chord

“Yesterday” Paul McCartney

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCV9oqtwyVA>

“Across the Universe” Beatles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90M60PzmxEE>

“Vincent Black Lightning 1952” Richard Thompson—Del McCoury

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Fpwlae4ZYc>

EXERCISE: TAKE A CHORD PROGRESSION: C-Am-F-G. 2) Make a simple melody that fits the major scale; 3) Make a melody that holds the 5th of the tonic; 4) Combine; 5) Try different melodies that sit OUTSIDE

“I Will Always Love You” Dolly Parton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9nPf7w7pDI>

“Crocodile Rock” John/Taupin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QS-YZIJLCbM>

“She’s Everything to Me” Brad Paisley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCjXaEbrLdw>

“One More Day” Diamond Rio

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xi8O7JdA4Sg>

Use mainly “stepwise” moving from one note to another without skipping, with occasional leaps (melodic range of one octave, not more)

Melodic leaps usually imply lyrical flight

**“Somewhere over the Rainbow” Harburg/
Arlen—Judy Garland**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mcjdderXqg>

Keep your tonic in mind in the chorus

“I Will Always Love You” Dolly Parton

Avoid narrow-range melodies

Adapt your melody to a cool chord structure

**“25 or 6 to 4” Chicago/“Brain Stew” Green
Day**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iUAYeN3Rp2E>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPeJ7iM55hc>

“Rolling in the Deep”/“My Heart Will Go On”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYEDA3JcQqw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHG2oizTIpY>

**“Bleeding for a Little Peace of Mind” [Autumn
Leaves]**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYiKECBzjv8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gsz3mrnIBd0>

But be careful... Don't make the melody the same...

**“You're the reason God Made
Oklahoma”/“Rocky Top”**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWVdKv4-CEg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPM-M79Lfrw>

MINOR—sad, lonesome

“Eleanor Rigby” Paul McCartney

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuS5NuXRb5Y>

“Sixteen Tons” Merle Travis/TN Ernie Ford

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjLJukOry7E>

“Rolling in the Deep” Adele

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYEDA3JcQqw>

“Wrecking Ball,” Miley Cyrus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=My2FRPA3Gf8>

“Funeral March” Chopin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47qUk8B1A3s>

MAJOR—happy (TRY turning one to the other!:)—see Children’s songs, Christmas

“Here Comes the Bride” Wagner

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4sNsGePgs8>

“Happy Birthday to You”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCJSNMqub8g>

“For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_HpcfLyLz4

“Singing in the Rain” Freed/Brown—Gene

Kelly

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1ZYhVpdXbQ>

“One Love” Bob Marley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsP3MdJYbIY>

Even within songs, MINOR chords imply movement into or through sadness and darkness or poignancy

“Fields of Gold” Sting

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dnj1zshmTE0>

“Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas”

Martin/Blane—Judy Garland

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKG5X0QMSWA>

Moving from major to minor in the same key means darker, gray, cloudy, less hopeful, negative.

“I Think It’s Gonna Rain Today” Randy

Newman/Tony Rice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tV5G7Pq4wE>

Minor to major in the same key implies hopeful, optimism, clearing Skies, future, positive.

“Take Me Out to the Ballgame”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eltTJehqMIQ>

Think in terms of **harmony vocal** when writing choruses

Be aware of your **melodic “fingerprint”** to avoid making all your songs sound the same

Experiment with **different rhythms** behind lyrics—**syncopate** more notes

Never decide that your song *has to be a certain way*

Use repetition in the melody, but don't be too repetitive (“repetition with variety”)

“Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald” Gordon Lightfoot

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vST6hVRj2A>

Vary the **length** of melodic phrases

Use similar rhythms behind different melodies within a song

Turn melodies **inside-out**

Turn ending phrases the **opposite** of intro phrases

“Yesterday” Paul McCartney

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCV9oqtwyVA>

Can people **sing along** to your chorus?

“Wagon Wheel” OCMS

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gX1EP6mG-E>

“I’m Yours” Jason Mraz

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RILP53OR63k> HMM...

“Pretty Woman” Roy Orbison

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KFvoDDs0XM>

Is your song an ear worm? Or can people at least remember it? Sing along?

“Wagon Wheel” OCMS

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gX1EP6mG-E>

"Call Me Maybe" Carly Rae Jepsen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWNaR-rxAic>

“American Pie” Don McLean

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yHTpGog0IY>

Is your song annoyingly catchy?

“Wagon Wheel” OCMS

“YMCA” Village People

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vc0gYbTNctU>

“Uptown Funk” Bruno Mars

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPf0YbXqDm0>

“I’m Yours” Jason Mraz

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RILP53OR63k>

Notes that **sustain** for a long time exaggerate a lyric and tell your audience "this is important."
Usually the CHORUS.

“I Will Always Love You” Dolly Parton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9nPf7w7pDI>

Or half-time the Chorus.

“I’m Yours” Jason Mraz

“I Won’t Give Up” Jason Mraz

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cNhplzUrel>

Ending the last strong syllable on (or near) the **downbeat** is a great way to emphasize your title.

“Wichita Lineman” Jimmy Webb—Glenn Campbell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxSarBcsKLU>

restating your verse melody or raising the song an octave higher is a time-honored formula for success

**Symphony No.7, Allegretto—“King’s Speech”
Beethoven**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCHREyE5GzQ>

“Iris” Goo Goo Dolls

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNO6yd66PpA>

**“My Heart Will Go On” James Cameron/Will
Jennings Celine Dion**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHG2oizTlpY>

“Say Something” Great Big World

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVgixOjGhVU>

“House of the Rising Sun” Eric Burden

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uS90B4sZf7U>

But make sure it is singable.

Make the melody follow what the lyric is saying

“Hey Jude” (take a sad song and make it better...)

“Rock Island Line” Leadbelly, Johnny Cash

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FX1BPItDcDo>

**“I Heard That Lonesome Whistle Blow” Hank
Williams**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQzeuPWJGlo>

“Blue Train” John Loudermilk, DLQ

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljza2rCrgmw>

“Midnight Flyer” Paul Craft/Eagles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJRiAkklyyo>

Construct an **Intro Hook** (although sometimes an arrangement issue, but...)

“Pretty Woman” Roy Orbison

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KFvoDDs0XM>

“Smoke on the Water” Deep Purple

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUwElt9ez7M>

“Stairway to Heaven,” Led Zeppelin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXQUu5Dti4g>

“Fire and Rain” “Never Die Young” James Taylor

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOlo4IEpsPY>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcS_AjKtlQ0

“Black Dog” Led Zeppelin (a recurring instrumental hook)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBuub4Xe1mw>

“100 Years” Five for Fighting (also the melody)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tR-qQcNT_fY

Tips for lyric writing:

Has it been done? Song Titles and ideas aren't copyrightable, but...Research it online immediately

Master the use of metaphor and simile

“Angel from Montgomery” John Prine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=toJ3ZYWRh24>

If dreams were lightning thunder was desire

This old house would have burnt down a long time ago

“A Change of Faith in TN” Blue Highway

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDVfjuEGDUo>

Someone losing their religion faith/ losing faith in someone

Can you say MORE WITH LESS?

Writers—Hemingway, Cormac McCarthy
(Hemmingwayapp.com)

“You are so Beautiful” (31 words)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpMkdPDthT8>

Write down everything you can think of about your subject before starting—words, phrases, images suggested by the title

Make a list of *opposites* of what you've written down

Ask **questions** about your idea once you decide to write, and write down the answers

Construct a narrative about the characters, plot, motives, and outcome of your song. **AT LEAST KNOW YOUR CHARACTERS, WHAT THEY WOULD DO, HOW THEY'D ACT, WHAT THEY'D SAY**

Avoid clichés or make clichés different

Do you have any **TATTOO LINES?** —Lines so good people would tattoo them on their bodies

What's your **HOOK?**

Know when to hit your audience over the head and when to be **subtle**

HOW DO WE SAY THAT WITHOUT SAYING IT??

“Angel from Montgomery” John Prine

There's flies in the kitchen I can hear 'em there buzzing, And I ain't done nothing since I woke up today.

How the hell can a person go to work in the morning And come home in the evening and have nothing to say.

“Out Among the Stars” Adam Mitchell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwKRHakwBwo>

He pictures the arrival of the cruisers, Sees that old familiar anger in their eyes
He knows that when they're shooting at this loser, They'll be aiming at the demons in their lives

The evening news carries all the details, He dies in every living room in town
And in his own a bottle's thrown in anger, And his father cries, he'll never live this down

Avoid filler words—hey, well, Baby, just, really (unless it's modern country lol)

Rewrite your opening line unless it's an epiphany; it's too important

NON-LINEAR THINKING. You don't always have to think linearly. don't have to start and end the same way every time. If you have a good line, it can be the end of a verse maybe not the title. Write the last line of the chorus first. A great Melody line that would make a good chorus may come to you first thing. Don't wait, go ahead and write it. You don't have to have a verse written first. Don't always have to be a slave to the idea, or

the process. Don't be afraid to **flip** phrases to the end, middle or front of phrases, verses or choruses.

After you've written a song, head it "Dear Jane," and read it. If it doesn't read like a story, make it one

Know the rules of **prosody** and how they affect your song

Use **inner rhymes**

"Oh my Darling Clementine"

Near a cavern, across from a canyon,
Excavating for a mine,
Lived a **miner, forty-niner**
And his daughter Clementine
How i missed her, how i missed her, how i missed my
Clementine!
Til' i **kissed her little sister**, and forgot my
Clementine.

"Don't Stop Believing" Journey

A singer in a smoky **room**, the smell of wine and
cheap **perfume**
Working hard to get my **fill**, everybody wants a **thrill**
Some will win, some will **lose**, some were born to sing
the **blues**

Don't force rhymes—let them flow. Don't let the desire for a perfect rhyme or lyrical trick overwhelm your message

Avoid **Slang**—often becomes dated fast

Learn when vowel or "near" rhymes are okay and when perfect or "exact" rhymes are vital.
SOMETIMES IT DOESN'T HAVE TO RHYME. (But laziness isn't a good reason)

“Moonlight in Vermont” Suessdorf/Blackburn —Frank Sinatra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgzaZaPf9Hc>

“Suzanne” Leonard Cohen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svitEEpI07E>

“America” Paul Simon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eo2ZsAOlvEM>

“Fields of Gold” Sting

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dnj1zshmTE0>

Watch 2nd syllable rhyming. Is the syllable you are rhyming emphasized in the word? If not, don't rhyme it.

*Here's the **thing**
It's what he was **liking***

Use **alliteration**-- The repetition of the same sounds or of the same kinds of sounds at the beginning of words or in stressed syllables, as in “on scrolls of silver snowy sentences” (Hart Crane). Modern alliteration is predominantly consonantal

“Let it Be” Beatles (*Whisper Words of Wisdom...*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDYfEBY9NM4>

“Bad Blood” Taylor Swift (*Baby now we've got bad blood...*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qcly9NiNbmo>

“Big Yellow Taxi” Joni Mitchell (*They paved paradise and put up a parking lot...*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=94bdMSCdw20>

“Merry Go Round” Kacey Musgraves (*Mary Mary quite contrary, We're so bored until we're buried...*)

Use repetition in interesting ways

“I Can't Make You Love Me” Allen Shamblin/

Mike Reid, Bonnie Raitt

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nW9Cu6GYqxo>

Turn down the lights

Turn down the bed

Turn down these voices inside my head

“Merry Go Round” Kacey Musgraves

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZfj2lr3GgQ>

Mamas hooked on Mary Kay

Brothers hooked on Mary Jane

Daddies hooked on Mary two doors down

Mary Mary quite contrary, We get bored so we get married

And just like dust we settle in this town

On this broken merry go 'round and 'round and 'round we go

Where we stop nobody knows

And it ain't slowin' down, this merry go 'round

PAYOFF lines after repetitions are good spots for profundity

Vary rhyme patterns, but stay consistent within a song

Never decide that your song *has* to be a certain way

Concentrate on **imagery** without being obscure

“Moonlight in Vermont” Suessdorf/Blackburn —Frank Sinatra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgzaZaPf9Hc>

think of vocal **phrasing**—does it sing? Don't put too many words in a line

It doesn't matter if both verses are good if they aren't **good together**

Is your lyric **precise** enough to convey your meaning and **poetic** enough to be moving?

Learn how to **turn a phrase**. Use the same lyric to mean different things.

“Blowing Smoke” Kacey Musgraves

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEsEUpk5rU8>

Not just wordplay, or puns

"She Got the Goldmine (I Got the Shaft)" Jerry Reed

"Friends in Low Places" Lee/Blackwell—Garth Brooks

"When You Say Nothing at All" Schlitz—Overstreet/Keith Whitley, Alison Krauss

"On the Other Hand" Schlitz/Overstreet—Randy Travis

Change pronouns and/or points of view. 1st and 2nd preferable—You, I, us and we; more personal

keep the **emotional integrity** of the song intact no matter how many changes

Walk away from a lyric for a while if you've reached a dead-end street

Avoid being **redundant** (Did you already say this in the first verse or chorus?)

Say something **new** in your second verse

Absence of other lyrics around the title eliminates distractions from it. During this space, your audience can think about the words they just heard, and this will help them remember your important lyrics.

"All by Myself" Eric Carmen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r36GG2j9ff8>

Use **common phrases**, ones people use every day for titles (search **IDIOMS**)

IDIOM—A saying that means something specific, and the words usually aren't taken literally

*It's raining cats and dogs
He kicked the bucket*

Some songs ARE IDIOMS

“Time after Time” Cyndi Lauper

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdQY7BusJNU>

“Poker Face” Lady Gaga

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bESGLojNYSo>

“Never Gonna Give You Up” Rick Astley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQw4w9WgXcQ>

Follow the song—where is it leading you?

In historic songs, try speaking as the individual rather than narrative (usually more effective)—not always!

**“Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald” Gordon
Lightfoot**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vST6hVRj2A>

More effective because no one survived! The mystery...

Put OPPOSITES together

“Always Never Enough”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PH6sqka3-Q>

**“I’d Trade All my Tomorrows for a single
Yesterday” Kris Kristofferson**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQ-QfMv7Fzw>

**“Nobody in His Right Mind Would've Left Her”
George Strait**

**“Three Wooden Crosses” Williams/Johnson—
Randy Travis**

It's not what you take when you leave this world

behind you; it's what you leave behind you when you go

Tips for Harmony (Chords, harmony):

TOOLS: Hook Theory Chord/Song database: <https://www.hooktheory.com/trends#>
CHORD GENERATOR: http://www.hotfrets.com/chord_progressions

Tips for writing two- or three-chord songs:

Put emphasis on melody and lyric

Vary tempo

Change chord order in different sections

Use first and second inversions of chords

Key changes—MODULATE

“Mack the Knife” Weill/Brecht—Bobby Darin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEIIHMWkXEU>

“My Heart Will Go On” James Cameron/Will

Jennings Celine Dion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHG2oizTlpY>

Change bass note to imply a change of chord

“Wichita Lineman” Jimmy Webb—Glenn Campbell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxSarBcsKLU>

Vary song structure (start with chorus, bridge, longer verses, etc.)

Reharmonize—keep the melody

“She Loves You” Beatles

Em7-A-C-G6

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGbWU8S3vzs>

Don't be afraid to Reharmonize your melody with different chords

EXERCISE: Sing one of your melodies with three different chord progressions

Chord progressions cannot be copyrighted

Start your verse melody on a different chord than the chorus (it's a different idea)

“Walkin’ Man” James Taylor

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmQmx8OED3w&list=OLAK5uy_m79-qF6dxXiOKMoPbhyPnh1Q_PX3QE9YQ

Start your melody on a different chord than the 1, IV or V.

“Fields of Gold” Sting

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dnj1zshmTE0>

Resolve somewhere besides the I after the V chord

Try V minors instead of majors (implies something darker)

“Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald” Gordon Lightfoot

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vST6hVRj2A>

Change chord centers

“Penny Lane” Beatles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7sylvxQCquo>

Construct an opening Chord Hook

“Hard Days Night” Beatles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AMSiHdrHI0g>

Find ways to make chords that fit the song

“Midwestern Town”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6z9fINQNY1o>

Try composing in alternate tunings or unusual chord VOICINGS; don't use a capo

“Sail Away and See the World”

Be thinking of harmony vocal lines against a chorus melody

“White Dove” Carter Stanley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhc0N06bg2g>

“Knoxville Girl” Louvin Brothers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhMiKeSffns>

Use chords Outside the key

“Across the Universe” Beatles

D-Bm-F#m7-Em7-Gm-D

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90M60PzmxEE>

If the verse is complex chord-wise, make the chorus simple, or vice-versa

“Across the Universe” Beatles

chorus: A-G-D-A-G-D

Try something unique

“I Can’t Make You Love Me” Allen Shamblin/

Mike Reid, Bonnie Raitt

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nW9Cu6GYqxo>

(Verse never goes to the I)

Tips for Rhythm:

TRY COMPOSING SOLELY TO A RHYTHM GROOVE

Why are some genres more dance friendly? The rhythm: Cajun, Salsa, Rhumba, Funk

“Valio La Pena” Marc Anthony

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ns9YYSqLxyI&list=PLuWtICA5i7Gk3y6fYe2lcHO>

WHAbgswPJW

“Corazon Espinado” Santana

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6omUxqhG78>

“The Back Door” D.L. Menard

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nf0he709d1k>

Based on “Honky Tonk Blues” by Hank Williams

“Superstition” Stevie Wonder

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CFuCYNx-1g>

Does the song SWing to the lyric?

“Let’s Groove” Earth, Wind & Fire

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=37&v=Lrle0x_DHBM

Find a groove or drum track on Youtube; Isolate the groove. What does it make you feel? Now slow it down; then speed it up—what does that evoke?

An unorthodox rhythm may fit a song better; but is it too cerebral? Can you clap to it? (sober)

Sometimes a straight rhythm fits a complex lyric; sometimes vice/versa

“Superstition” Stevie Wonder

Sometimes one instrument can make a different rhythm to change the entire feel

“Ashes of Love” Johnny & Jack

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAPXKU63gtc>

RHUMBA, from the BASS

Match your lines in terms of “metric feet”—does it meter? [COUNT]

Construct a RHYTHMIC HOOK to begin the song (often an arrangement issue, but....)

“Wheels” Dan Tyminski

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dU8HD1510EQ>

“Midwestern Town” Ronnie Bowman

“Superstition” Stevie Wonder

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CFuCYNx-1g>

“Copperhead Road” Steve Earle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvaEJzoaYZk>

Listen to hip-hop and rap and REGGAE for rhythmic ideas and how syllables are phrased for ideas

“One Love” Bob Marley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsP3MdJYbIY>

Simplify chorus rhythms to match the emotional delivery (more quarter/8th note, less syncopations)—makes it **easier to sing**, remember, more emotionally accessible

The **lyrical delivery** of a song is as important as the lyric in delivering the song’s emotion

“Papa Was a Rolling Stone” Temptations

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXiQtD5gcHU>