

Speed Songwriting

How to Write Your Next Song in 7 Fast and Easy Steps



Step 1: Choose a Title, Song Plot, Tempo, and Beat

Title Tips

Put your title in spotlighted positions: In chorus opening lines, closing lines, or both. in AABA form, at the end of each verse (modern) or at the beginning.

A good Title should...

- Express the central idea of the song.
- Be the target of the rest of the lyrics.
- Be able to be developed as the song progresses, so that it gains more impact as we gain more information.
- Be engaging and interesting, either by itself or in the ideas it provokes.
- Be specific rather than general.

Titles Types

DNA Titles

DNA Titles are self-contained. They contain meaning all by themselves.

- Rolling In the Deep, Adele
 - Party Rock Anthem, LMFAO
 - Firework, Katy Perry
 - E.T., Katy Perry
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Parasitic Titles

Parasitic Titles need lyrical context for full effect.

- Just Can't Get Enough, The Black Eyed Peas
- Just the Way You Are, Bruno Mars
- The Time, The Black Eyed Peas
- Only Girl (In the World), Rihanna
- I Wanna Go, Britney Spears

Finding Titles

- Lizard Brain Titles
- Transformed clichés
- Suggest or contain metaphor or simile
- A clever play on words
- Sonic bonding with vowels (assonance), consonants (alliteration), or both
- Opposites
- Repetition
- Variation
- Double meanings
- Advertising
- Book and movie titles
- Interesting things people say
- Songs, especially lines you misunderstand
- References: Thesaurus, Dictionaries of phrases, Rhyming dictionary, Dictionary of alliteration

Song Plots

Song Plot 1

V: The problem

PC: Can the problem go away?

C: Life without the problem

B: The challenges to overcome

Song Plot 2

V: The way things used to be

PC: Is there hope?

C: The way things are

B: Everything's gonna be alright

Song Plot 3

V: The way I'd like things to be

PC: Is there hope?

C: The way things are

B: Everything's gonna be alright

Song Plot 4

V: Describe what happened

PC: Forget about what happened

C: What's about to happen

B: Describe the big realization, the life lesson

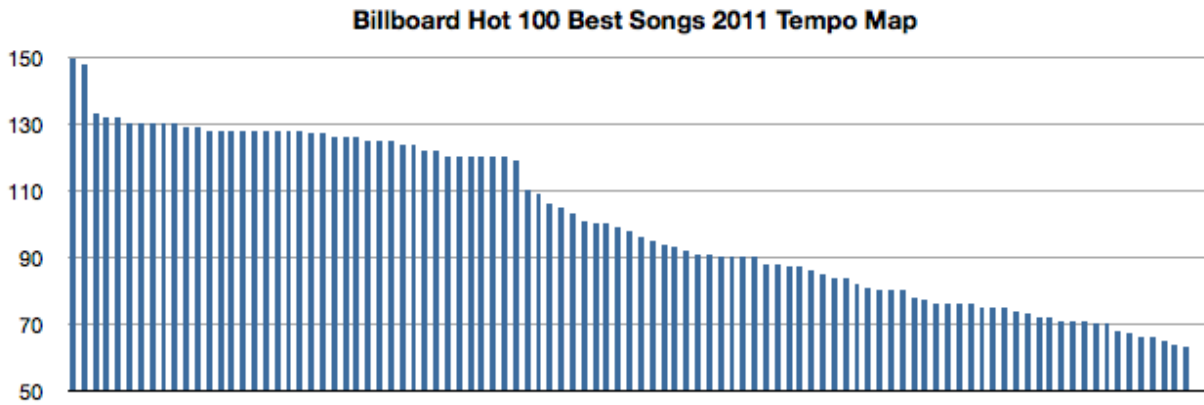
Song Plot 5

V: This is how I feel

PC: I'll tell you why I feel this way

C: This is why I feel this way

Tempo



Beats

Four on the Floor

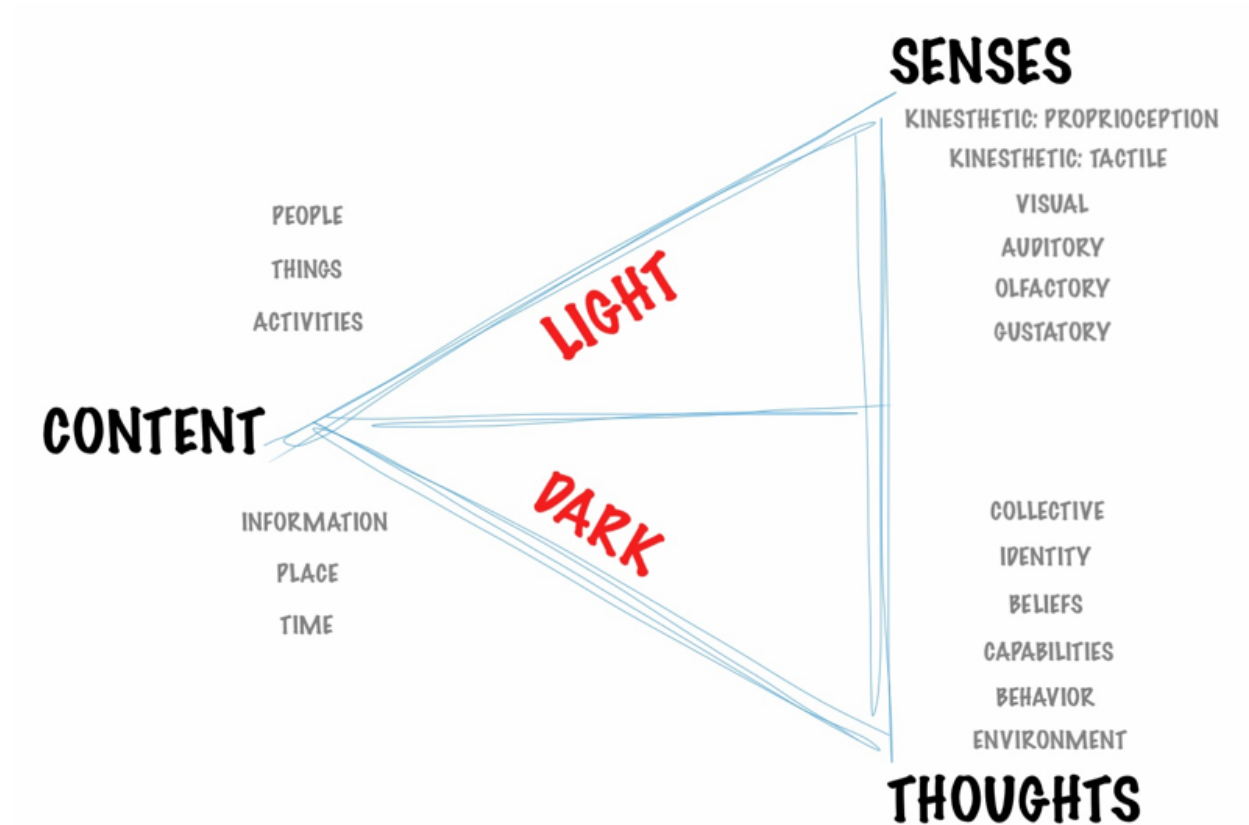
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1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

Eighth Note Drum Beat

Step 2: Find 250 Words from the Lyric Triad and Match with Appropriate Mode

The Lyric Triad



Lyric Triad Legend

Content

Use the content section to decide what to describe.

- People
 - Things
 - Activities
 - Information
 - Place
 - Time
-

Senses

Use the representational systems for external descriptions.

- Kinesthetic: Proprioception
 - Kinesthetic: Tactile
 - Visual
 - Auditory
 - Olfactory
 - Gustatory
-

Thoughts

Use the levels of experience for internal details.

- Collective
- Identity
- Beliefs
- Capabilities
- Behavior
- Environment

Lyric Triad Tips

- Take any prepared or random piece of content, put it into Google Images, describe one of the images using the rest of the Lyric Triad. Divide your description into Internal and External details to create Lyric Triad Patterns.
- Generally, the levels of experience have more power the higher they go, beginning with environmental details and ending with collective details. Move up the levels as the song progresses for increased emotional impact.

Modes

Mode Comparison Chart

Mode	Color	Alterations	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Lydian	bright	raised 4	I	II	IIImin	#IVdim	V	VImin	VIImin
Ionian	neutral	no alterations	I	IImin	IIImin	IV	V	VImin	VII dim
Mixolydian	less bright	lowered 7	I	IImin	III dim	IV	Vmin	VImin	bVII
Dorian	dark	lowered 3, 7	Imin	IImin	bIII	IV	Vmin	VI dim	bVII
Aeolian	darker	lowered 3, 6, 7	Imin	II dim	bIII	IVmin	Vmin	bVI	bVII
Phrygian	darkest	lowered 2, 3, 6, 7	Imin	bII	bIII	bIVmin	Vmin	bVI	bVIImin
Locrian	unusable	lowered 2, 3, 5, 6, 7	Idim	bII	bIIImin	bIVmin	bV	bVI	bVII

Step 3: Find Rhyme Pairs

Perfect Rhyme

Perfect Rhyme has three characteristics:

- The rhyming syllables have the same vowel sounds
 - The consonant sounds after the vowel (if any) have the same sounds
 - The rhyming syllables begin differently
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Family Rhyme

A good substitute for Perfect Rhyme is Family Rhyme.

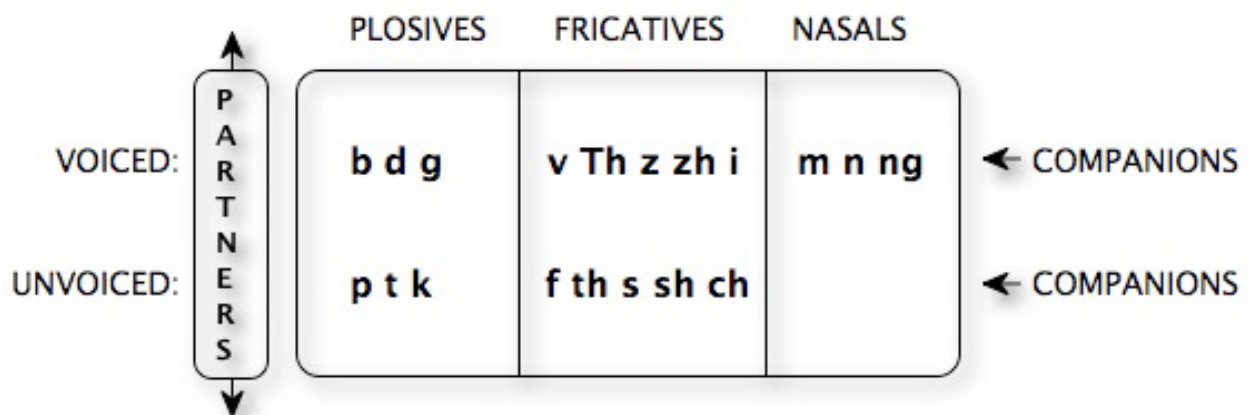
- The rhyming syllables have the same vowel sounds
- The consonant sounds after the vowel are phonetically related
- The rhyming syllables begin differently

In Family Rhyme, there are three phonetic families:

- Plosives: b, d, g, p, t, k
 - Fricatives: v, Th, z, zh, j, f, th, s, sh, ch
 - Nasals: m, n, ng
-

Family Rhyme Chart

You can substitute members of the same family: cut/luck, rich/wish, fun/sung. Use this chart to help you find family rhymes.



Step 4: Build a Chorus and Power Progression

The Chorus

A chorus is the part of the song that keeps coming back. This part of the song usually includes the song title and summarizes the main idea of the lyric. It is also usually the emotional high point—the most intense part of the lyric.

Why is it called a "chorus?" Because the audience is supposed to sing along.

Choruses are usually made up of two alternating types of lines:

Title Line

T represents the title

Swing Line

A swing line is a lyric that is different from the title. The dash “-” represents the swing line.

The title line and the swing line can contrast both lyrically and melodically.

Six Basic Chorus Forms

The most common chorus types are:

T T T T

- Give Me Everything, Pitbull
- Just Can't Get Enough, The Black Eyed Peas
- What's My Name?, Rihanna & Drake
- Good Life, One Republic
- Blow, Ke\$ha
- I'm On One, DJ Khaled
- You Make Me Feel..., Cobra Starship
- Roll Up, Wiz Khalifa
- For The First Time, The Script
- We Found Love, Rihanna
- Pretty Girl Rock, Keri Hilson
- Country Girl (Shake It for Me), Luke Bryan
- Headlines, Drake
- Rhiannon, Fleetwood Mac
- Power To The People, John Lennon
- Born in the USA, Bruce Springsteen
- Spirits in a Material World, The Police

- T - T

- ~~Fuck You, CeCe Lo Green~~
- Super Bass, Nicki Minaj
- Moves Like Jagger, Maroon 5
- On the Floor, Jennifer Lopez
- Just the Way You Are, Bruno Mars
- Tonight (I'm Lovin' You), Enrique Iglesias
- ~~F*ckin' Perfect XXXXX P!nk~~
- Till the World Ends, Britney Spears
- We R Who We R, Ke\$ha
- Black and Yellow, Wiz Khalifa
- Just a Dream, Nelly
- Hold It Against Me, Britney Spears
- Back to December, Taylor Swift
- Remind Me, Brad Paisley
- In the Dark, Dev
- Don't Wanna Go Home, Jason Derülo
- Price Tag, Jessie J
- She Will, Lil Wayne
- Material Girl, Madonna
- Best of My Love, Eagles
- Time After Time, Cindy Lauper

T - - T

- Raise Your Glass, P!nk
- The Lazy Song, Bruno Mars
- The Show Goes On, Lupe Fiasco
- Stereo Hearts, Gym Class Heroes
- Coming Home, Diddy - Dirty Money & Skylar Grey
- Only Girl (In the World), Rihanna
- Just a Kiss, Lady Antebellum
- More, Usher
- What The Hell, Avril Lavigne
- Don't You Wanna Stay, Jason Aldean
- Crazy Girl, Eli Young Band
- Take a Back Road, Rodney Atkins
- Are You Gonna Kiss Me Or Not, Thompson Square
- How Can We Be Lovers, Michael Bolton

- - - T

- E.T., Katy Perry
- S&M, Rihanna
- Born This Way, Lady GaGa
- Down On Me, Jeremih & 50 Cent
- Lighters, Bad Meets Evil
- Dynamite, Taio Cruz
- I Need a Doctor, Dr. Dre
- Rocketeer, Far East Movement & Ryan Tedder
- Hold It Against Me, Britney Spears
- Honey Bee, Blake Shelton
- Barefoot Blue Jean Night, Jake Owen
- Animal, Neon Trees
- Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers, Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers
- The End Of The Innocence, Don Henley
- I Shall Be Released, Bob Dylan
- Don't Think Twice, It's All Right, Bob Dylan
- Separate Lives, Phil Collins
- King of Pain, The Police

T - - -

- Party Rock Anthem, LMFAO
- Firework, Katy Perry
- Grenade, Bruno Mars
- Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.), Katy Perry
- Someone Like You, Adele
- The Time (Dirty Bit), The Black Eyed Peas
- Hey Baby (Drop It to the Floor), Pitbull
- Dirt Road Anthem, Jason Aldean
- Written In The Stars, Tinie Tempah
- Knee Deep, Zac Brown Band
- You and Tequila, Kenny Chesney
- Fortress around Your Heart, Sting
- Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic, The Police
- Acadian Driftwood, The Band
- Stage Fright, The Band
- Good Times, Bad Times, Led Zeppelin
- Sweet Caroline, Neil Diamond
- I Will Remember You, Sarah McLachlan
- Fire and Rain, James Taylor

T - T -

- Pumped Up Kicks, Foster the People
- The Edge of Glory, Lady GaGa
- Tonight Tonight, Hot Chelle Rae
- I Wanna Go, Britney Spears
- Moment 4 Life, Nicki Minaj
- Motivation, Kelly Rowland
- All Of The Lights, Kanye West
- Bottoms Up, Trey Songz
- Life Is A Carnival, The Band
- Genie In a Bottle, Christina Aguilera
- I Knew I Loved You, Savage Garden
- I Wanna Dance With Somebody, Whitney Houston
- Hello Old Friend, Eric Clapton
- Victim of Love, Eagles
- Rock & Roll Hoochie Koo, Rick Derringer

Qualities of a Successful Chorus

- The title has emphasis.
- It stands out.
- The chorus lyric summarizes or comments on the main idea of the verse/prechorus lyric.
- It is the emotional high point of the song.
- It is the most intense part of the song.
- It is the climax of the song.
- It feels like it lifts.
- It is easy to sing.
- It is easy to remember.
- It either fulfills audience expectations or surprises audience expectations.
- It contrasts the other song sections (Verse, Prechorus, Bridge; if they exist)
- It feels different from the other song sections.
- It has a different idea than verse—Lyrically, melodically, harmonically, rhythmically.
- It is developed differently—Lyrically, melodically, harmonically, rhythmically.
- It is the arrival point of the song = "This is what I'm talking about", "This is why I'm telling this story."
- It gains meaning and interest every time it is repeated.
- Big ideas in the chorus, small details in the verse.

You will know you have written a good chorus when:

- I hear the title stand out from everything else.
- I understand the meaning of the lyric and it resonates with my life experience.
- It feels more intense than the other sections.
- The listener is singing or humming along (not always out loud).
- The listener remembers the melody and the lyric long after the song is over.

Power Progressions

Major-Key Power Progressions

- I IV
- I IV V
- I VImin IImin V

Variations:

- I VImin IV V
- IIImin VImin IImin V
- I IImin IIImin IV
- I V/7 VImin I/5 IV I/3 IImin V

Progressions Leading to V:

- IImin IIImin IV V
- IV V
- IImin V
- VImin V

Minor-Key Power Progressions

- Imin bVII
- Imin bVII bVI bVII

Variations:

- Imin bVII bVI V
- Imin Vmin
- Imin IVmin

Mixolydian-Key Power Progressions

- I bVII
- I bVII IV

Dorian-Key Power Progressions

- Imin IV
- Imin IImin bIII IImin

Blues-Key Power Progressions

Repetitive Progressions:

- I7 IV7
- I7 bIII IV

12-Bar Blues:

- I7 IV7 I7 V7 IV7 I7 (V7)

Variations

- Change the progression length
- Change the rhythm of one or more chords
- Change the order of its chords
- Remove a chord
- Add a chord
- Replace a chord
- Add a pedal

Step 5: Choose a Rhyme Scheme, Lyric Triad Pattern

Combine the Rhyme Scheme with a Lyric Triad Pattern.

No. of Lines	Rhyme Scheme	Lyric Triad Pattern
2	XX	ST
	AA	TT
4	XAXA	STST
	AAAA	SSTT
	ABAB	SSST
	AABB	TSST
	AABA	TTST
	ABAA	TSTT
6	XXAXXA	SSTSST
	XXABBA	STSSTS
	XAAXAA	TSTTST
	ABBABB	TTSTTS
	ABCABC	TSTTST
	AABCCB	TSTTST

S=Senses
T=Thoughts

Step 6: Build the Song Sections: Verses, Prechorus, Bridge

The Verse

The verse is a recurring song section and is generally the first section of the song that the listener hears. Each time the verse repeats, the melody stays the same but the lyrics generally change. The verse is more like a narrative which tells the story.

Effective verses should connect to the chorus, build up intensity into the chorus, and strongly contrast the chorus.

Tips

- Present the song's story from the singer's point of view. This solves any problems with verb tense, setting, literary point of view, gender, and so on.
- Setting your verse's melody and lyrics to short notes is more conversational than longer notes. This will help draw your audience into the story. The chorus can then be made of longer notes, where you emphasize just a phrase or two to make it contrast the verse and give your listeners the opportunity to think about the lyrics.
- Big ideas in the chorus, small details in the verse.

Common Verse Types

a b a b

- E.T., Katy Perry
- Fire and Rain, James Taylor
- I Shall Be Released, Bob Dylan
- She Loves You, The Beatles
- I Want to Hold Your Hand, The Beatles
- Back in the Saddle, Aerosmith

a a a a

- Party Rock Anthem, LMFAO
- Roxanne, The Police
- Feelin' Alright, Joe Cocker
- King of Pain, The Police

x a x a

- Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic, The Police
- New Kid In Town, The Eagles
- Born To Be Wild, Steppenwolf
- Owner of a Lonely Heart, Yes

a a b b

- Rolling In The Deep, Adele
- My Generation, The Who
- My Life, The Beatles
- Message In A Bottle, The Police
- Magic Carpet Ride, Steppenwolf

Other Verse Types

- x x
- a a
- a a b a
- a b a a
- x x a x x a
- x x a b b a
- x a a x a a
- a b b a b b
- a b c a b c
- a a b c c b

The Prechorus

It's a musical and lyrical link between the verse and chorus.

Prechorus Tips

- Contrast phrase length
- Increase intensity as it approaches the chorus. Melodic rise.
- Keep the melody below the range of the chorus.
- New chord or progression. Avoid the root chord. Try alternating between two chords.
- Contrast rhythm.

The Bridge

It's a musical section between two choruses, after all the verses.

Bridge Tips

- New melody peak or rise
- New chord or progression: bVI, bVII
- Melodic contrast: lengthen or shorten phrases
- Rhythmic contrast: lengthen or shorten notes, syncopation, break down

Step 7: Edit, Stop Tweaking, and Sort

- Edit verbs for power and tone.
- Control the tense and point of view.
- Lock in the lyric rhythm.
- Lock in the harmony.
- Adjust the melody.
- Stop.

Sort

Top Drawer

Is it really good or really close to being really good? Then it goes in your top drawer.

Middle Drawer

Is it good or usable? Maybe it's not your finest work but it has a commercial application or maybe it's pretty decent but just not all that memorable. It goes in the Middle Drawer.

The bulk of your songwriting will probably go here. The good news is these songs can build up your catalog and also your income. Plus, they lead to the Top Drawer stuff.

Bottom Drawer

Bottom Drawer material gets discarded as practical songwriting exercises.