

4 Techniques Used by Expert Lyricists In Their Hit Songs

Writing meaningful and impactful lyrics is a great way to make an emotional connection with listeners. That emotional connection is crucial for getting people to fall in love with your songs.

There are many ways you can achieve this, but here we'll be looking at four specific approaches which have been used in a plethora of hit songs by some of the best lyricists.

The first two approaches we'll look at will show you how to make use of specificity in your writing, which will help you paint a detailed picture your listeners can clearly visualize. The last two approaches will show you how to use rhyme and line lengths as a strategy in your music, so they'll positively impact your lyrics.

We're going to look at a Counting Crows song and a Neil Young song that make use of these techniques, so let's dive right in and check them out.

Technique #1: Talk to the Senses

Recently I was listening to the song "A Long December" by Counting Crows and some of the lyrics really stood out to me, in a positive way. This made me dig a little deeper to find out why.

Overall, the song's about loss. With that in mind, the one section of lyric I felt was the most impactful was this one:

*The smell of hospitals in winter
And the feeling that it's all a lot of oysters, but no pearls
All at once you look across a crowded room
To see the way that light attaches to a girl*

Let's go through this section line by line to see what works about it. We'll start with the first line:

The smell of hospitals in winter

The main reason I like this line is it's talking to your senses. In this case, the sense of smell, specifically. Listeners relate strongly to what they've experienced through their senses, so when you talk about something in reference to the five senses, it's a great opportunity to conjure up memories your listeners can easily relate to. That's always a plus.

In regard to this line, anyone who's been to a hospital is familiar with the smell, so you immediately relate that back to your own past experiences of what a hospital smells like. And just like that, you're in the scene. The idea of a hospital also plays into the idea of loss and longing, since a lot of people associate hospitals with just that, so it ties into the song's big idea.

Technique #2: Using Metaphors

Let's move on to the next line:

And the feeling that it's all a lot of oysters, but no pearls

This line is a cool metaphor that plays into the longing theme we've been talking about. A good metaphor will relate something to another thing that's seemingly unrelated, by finding its common ground. In this case lead singer, Adam Duritz, is relating the experiences going on in his life to oysters and pearls by tying them together through their common ground, which is the idea of looking for something that probably isn't there. So the visual of someone looking through oyster after oyster and never finding a pearl can easily be related back to Duritz's character with the thought that he may never find what he's looking for in his life (i.e., "the pearl").

Back to the Senses

Onto the next line:

All at once you look across a crowded room

This line doesn't carry too much weight in itself, except to say that it's setting up the line that follows it. In addition to that, the thought of "a crowded room" is a pretty visual thought. And like I mentioned earlier, any time you can appropriately engage the senses, you're probably doing a good job of drawing your listeners into your story.

Back to Metaphor

Let's move on to the last line of the section, and my favorite of the group:

To see the way that light attaches to a girl

What a cool metaphor! Light doesn't really "attach" to someone in the sense that it's described here. Well maybe it does, but I'm not a physicist so I couldn't tell you. I *can* tell you that we don't normally think of it as acting in this way. That's why it's so cool when we see it used that way here.

The thought of the light "attaching" to a girl takes us on a journey across that room. In the previous line, we were told "you look across a crowded room," which sets the stage of the room for the light to travel across. Then it finally lands on a girl, being lit up in that way that only a special girl can be lit up. Cool stuff.

These lyrical tools acting one after another make for a nice little section of lyric. If we look at those four lines more carefully, we could say they were laid out like this:

1. Sense bound language
2. Metaphor
3. Sense bound language
4. Metaphor

Not that that layout is any kind of rule or anything, but it just lets us organize our thoughts.

I also want to add that these lines happen in one of the song's verses. Typically being very detail specific by using sense-bound language and metaphors works well in the verses. That's because it allows the chorus to hold back and be more universal, since the verses got to be very descriptive when moving the story along.

Technique #3: Using Rhyme as an Accelerator

When you write lyrics, they tend to work best when the meaning of your words is directly tied into what's happening musically. When all the elements of your song are fused together this way, it's called prosody.

Rhyme can be an incredibly powerful tool for tying the meaning of your words to your music. One way to do this is to use rhyme as an accelerator. For example, let's say you have a rhyme scheme that rhymes on every other line. We'll call this an ABAB rhyme scheme. It might look like this:

Now we're gonna rhyme (A)
It'll be so fun (B)
Do it in four lines (A)
Just like that, we're done (B)

In this ABAB scheme, the 'A' rhymes are the lines with the words "rhyme" and "lines" (an imperfect rhyme) and the 'B' rhymes are "fun" and "done."

Once we've established this rhyme scheme in our song, it becomes what's expected throughout the song. If we change it, it'll change what the song makes us feel.

For example if we establish our lyric to be an ABAB rhyme scheme and then change it to an ABBB rhyme scheme the next time around, it'll feel different. Check it out:

Section 1

Now we're gonna rhyme (A)

It'll be so fun (B)

Do it in four lines (A)

Just like that, we're done (B)

Section 2

Now we're gonna rhyme (A)

It'll be so fun (B)

The lines are gonna run (B)

Just like that, we're done (B)

Lame lyrics aside, how did the second section feel compared to the first? Did you notice the acceleration of the last three lines in the second section? Say these sections out loud to hear it. One of the functions of rhyme is it can act as an accelerator, when you space your rhymes close together.

In the example above we established our rhymes to happen at every other line in section 1. In section 2 we went against the expectations by increasing the frequency of the rhyme, which made the lines feel accelerated.

Let's check out a great example of this concept in action. Who better to learn from than Neil Young? Check out the first verse of the song "Heart of Gold:"

I want to live, I want to give (A)
I've been a miner for a heart of gold (B)
It's these expressions I never give (A)
That keep me searching for a heart of gold (B)
And I'm getting old (B)

This is essentially an ABABB rhyme scheme, in five lines. Technically, in lines one through four, they're not rhymes, but identities, since it's the same word being repeated ("give" and "gold"). But that's beside the point for right now. Let's treat them as typical rhymes for the purposes of this example.

With the ABAB rhyme scheme that's established in the first four lines, there has been a certain rhyme pace that's become expected. So when the fifth line comes in with another 'B' rhyme, it's a surprise that accelerates that line.

Mixing Meaning With Your Rhymes

"So what?" you ask. "The fifth line accelerates... big deal." That's a fair point. But here's why it's cool. This acceleration happens on the line "And I'm getting old." The implication of a line like "And I'm getting old" is "I'm getting old, *quickly*." Except he doesn't have to say "quickly" because that was implied with how the line was written. The acceleration due to two lines of rhyme back to back (after establishing a slower rhyme pattern previously) helps us FEEL the aging process happening fast for him. It's the meaning of the lyric tied to the rest of the song. And in my opinion, it works very well.

Technique #4: Using Line Lengths Strategically

With moves like this, rhyme is often the most obvious contributor, because it stands out so clearly when we hear it. It can't be mistaken. But when you're using rhyme to highlight one of your ideas, it usually works best when combined with other tools. In the case of the line "and I'm getting old," a second tool being used is a change in line length.

If you check out the first four lines of the verse, you'll notice they're longer than the last line, "and I'm getting old." This helps drive home the idea about "I'm getting old *quickly*." When you establish a longer line length in previous lines and then shorten it, it feels quicker. It's a second contributor to the same idea to highlight the concept even further.

More Lyric Writing Examples and Concepts

Experiment with these ideas. If your lyrics give you a reason to accelerate (or decelerate), try supporting that meaning with rhyme, and even line lengths, if possible. See if you like the results you get compared to what you would have done beforehand. Also try using more metaphors and sense-bound language in your lyrics to elevate the level of detail you're providing.

You can see how these concepts worked well in the songs we just looked at and these were only four basic techniques. There are endless possibilities for crafting lyrics that strongly connect with your listeners.

In addition to the example songs we examined here, there are many other concepts that go into writing lyrics that will be meaningful to your listeners. If you're interested in learning them and becoming a more complete lyricist, [How to Write Songs That Sell: The Lyrics Module](#) will show you how to easily craft lyrics that make an emotional connection with your listeners in every song you write.

You can learn more and get started with it immediately by clicking here:

<http://successforyoursongs.com/go/lyrics/>