How to Write Songs That Sell

An Advanced Songwriting System for Crafting Songs That People Want to Hear

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INTRODUCTION

If your goal is to write songs people want to buy and listen to over and over again, there are plenty of tools you can use in your music to increase your chances of that happening. This book will outline the best of those tools for you. If you simply write songs for yourself and no one else, you may not care about the methods that can make your song as appealing as it can be to other people. However, there are certain techniques that will be very beneficial to you, if you want as many people as possible listening to and buying your music.

Songwriting is an art, so technically there are no rules. However, a lot of times songwriters don't want to follow any of the standard tools of songwriting. There are certain elements that most successful songs have in common. A lot of writers want to stray from the tools used in successful songwriting, before ever writing their first song. That kind of ambition is fantastic, but the truth is it's most beneficial for your writing, if you understand what tools are available to you, before you decide never to use them. It's usually best to try out a technique before you simply toss it aside as something that's not for you because it doesn't "seem" like something you'd want to use. You'll understand something the best by using it.

And don't worry, by using these tools, you won't simply be conforming to a cookie cutter system. You always have the choice to use what you think works and discard what you think doesn't, after you've tried it. Plus a lot of the techniques you'll learn in this book aren't cookie cutter approaches, but instead will help give you ways to think outside the box when it comes to writing your music.

This book is broken up into five modules. Ideas, chord progressions, melodies, lyrics and even mindset are each given their own module to help you understand the tools for each of those basic elements of a song. Granted, mindset isn't an element of song, but it will help you get into the right head space you need to be in, which is more much important that you may think.

The point here being, if you start with your big idea and know what your song will be about, then you'll know how to approach your chord progressions. When your chord progressions are laid down, you can write your melody, and when that's done, you can shape your lyrics to fit that melody.

Of course that's not the only way to write a song, but it's an approach that flows well. That will be the order of this book. We'll start by talking about big ideas, then chord progressions, then melodies and finally we'll get to the nuts and bolts of your lyrics. I like this approach because it lets you start with *any* idea and turn it into a complete song. However, if you write in a different order, you'll still be able to apply what you use here.

I believe breaking your patterns and writing in ways your normally don't is a great way to improve at what you do. For that reason I think it's important not to stick to the same order each time you sit down to write a new song. However, for the purposes of organization in this book, I've ordered them as previously mentioned, since I think it's a great approach that allows you to write a song about anything you want.

As an added bonus, what you learn in this book will also help you reduce any writer's block you may be experiencing, since you'll be shown specific methods for everything from coming up with ideas for your song to hammering out the details of your lyrics and melody.

A great way to learn is to take in new information, then follow an example and then do it yourself. You'll be learning a lot of new information, and seeing plenty of examples in this book, which is why I recommend you write (at least) one new song as you follow along with the material, in order to maximize what you're learning.

The Methods

The information in this book will be presented in two methods. Each songwriting module will contain a "Find Inspiration Method" and a "Do It Yourself Method."

The Find Inspiration Method will show you how to specifically draw inspiration from other songs. Great artists are always looking to other artists for ideas, so this method will give you some concrete ways with which to do that.

You'll learn the ability to take an existing song, or a piece of a song, and apply massive modifications to it, to make it your own. You can use this method to study any existing song, whether it's a hit, one of your friend's songs, or one of your own. You'll then be able to dismember it, examine the parts, change them and then put them back together to create a whole new song or idea of your own. You'll never understand an existing song so well as when you take this approach. It's also a good approach, because if you're referencing a song that's already successful, you know it has worthwhile elements already built into it.

The Do It Yourself Method will show you techniques to use if you want to make sure all of your ideas come directly from your own head, without the outside influence of any other songs. The greatest songwriters, artists, and filmmakers in history look to what their predecessors have done as a way of getting inspired, so I do recommend looking to other works of art for coming up with your own ideas. However, if that's just not your thing (at least not for the time being) I've got some other options for you in the Do It Yourself Method.

You'll typically see the best results when you use a combination of these two methods, as inspiration from other successful artists added to your own creative ideas can be a very powerful way to make music.

MODULE 1: THE BIG IDEA

This module will present you with an organized way to brainstorm ideas. Having a central focus for your song will help you to make decisions about your song as you write it, because if you know what your song will be about, you can better plan out the *feel* of your song when you write chord progressions, melodies and finalize your lyrics.

Songs work best when their overall ideas tie into their overall mood and feel. What your song is about (its overall concept or "big idea") will be revealed in the lyrics, while the mood or feel of that idea will predominantly come from your chords and melodies.

For example, if the big idea for your song is about a guy and girl falling in love and being happy together, then it would best suit your song to have a happy sounding melody and chords, probably in a major key, with an upbeat feel. Conversely, if you know your song is going to be about the loss of a loved one, then the feel and mood of your song will be much sadder. You'll probably be in a minor key, with a slower tempo. Having all of the elements of your song working towards one single idea in this way is referred to as prosody. It's something you'll want to keep in mind whenever you're working on your music. We'll be discussing prosody and how to apply it to your music throughout this book.

The point here being, if you start with your big idea and know what your song will be about lyrically (without necessarily having the actual lyrics written yet), then you'll know how to approach your chord progressions, melody and the details of your lyrics.

With that being said, let's look at some ways for coming up with a solid central focus for your song.

The Find Inspiration Method

Drawing Inspiration for Your Music from Other Songs

Big Idea Inspiration

There are a number of ways you can draw inspiration for a song idea by listening to other songs. Actually, you're not even limited to songs. You can find inspiration in movies, television shows, or any form of storytelling you'd like. Lyrics are copyrightable, so you obviously can't take something someone says and use it in your own music, but you can draw inspiration from stories you love. Especially if those stories are already popular.

Start by listing a few songs with lyrics you really like. Think big picture here. Think about lyrics that tell a story you enjoy, as opposed to songs that simply have a line or two you think is great. It'll be more appropriate for this exercise. It's the message that's important at this point, as opposed to how it's being said.

I have a couple of examples of my own we could start with. Two songs with ideas I like that came to mind for me were "Unwritten" by Natasha Bedingfield and "Viva la Vida" by Coldplay. You can do an internet search for those lyrics, if you'd like, but like I said, this part is more about the story, and jotting down what the big ideas of these songs are to you.

With that in mind, the lyrics to "Unwritten" are about having a future that is completely within your control. It's about being able to do whatever you want, and it delivers this message in a positive way.

Conversely, "Viva La Vida" has a pretty negative message, and is mainly about being stuck in the past. It's about once having had it all, then losing it and being left to look back to wonder how it all went wrong.

I could easily use either of those ideas as a starting point for a song of my own. If my music is more upbeat and I'm inspired by the positive message in "Unwritten," my big idea could be

about all the possibilities the future holds. If I decide to write music that's more of a downer, and I want my lyrics to reflect that, I could write a song inspired by the story in "Viva La Vida," which discusses all of my losses.

So just by flipping through some old favorites, I've already got a couple of overall ideas that could be the basis for a new song. These two ideas are opposites so I've got a whole range of stuff in between them that's available to me as well.

When you write a list of songs or other stories you like, don't just limit yourself to two. Instead, write down as many as you can. The more big ideas you have, the easier it'll be for you to write lyrics of your own, since you'll have options. Plus, writing down many ideas can only offer you more choices later.

Remember, you can also do this with movies or books. If a movie has a good story you love, just write down the main message, or the overall idea. We're starting big here and we'll be drilling down more and more specifically as we move forward.

Altered Perspective Inspiration

What we just saw was a pretty general way of getting ideas. But we can get more specific than that. A technique I learned from Shane Adams, who's a teacher at Berklee College of Music's online extension school, is to look at an existing song from a *different* perspective than it currently does.

Let's try it, by going back to "Unwritten." That song is sung in the first person. It's about someone with possibilities before her. She can do whatever she wants.

What if we wanted to write a song where we were looking at a second or third person perspective? What if the perspective was from the *mother* of the character in "Unwritten"? She's watching her daughter grow up to realize her full potential. We could then talk about the

joy we felt, *as the mother*, seeing her daughter come into her own to discovering the limitless possibilities in her future.

We could even talk about how we once had those same feelings of limitless possibilities when we were younger too. And now our own limitless possibilities and hopes for the future have been realized in our daughter, who has just come to terms with the same possibilities. The daughter is keeping the cycle moving.

That's just an idea. I'm riffing. It doesn't have to be that. Another thought would be to look at "Unwritten" from the perspective of the current narrator's arch rival. You can write lyrics from the perspective of someone who's competitive. This person would see Natasha Bedingfield's character in "Unwritten" reaching for dreams and aspirations, and it would drive her crazy. In this perspective we'd be able to look at why it *wouldn't* be good if Natasha Bedingfield's character achieved her wildest dreams. That's starting to put a negative twist on our originally positive idea, but that's okay. We're open to practically anything at this point.

If we choose either of these ideas, they're definitely a departure from the original song's idea. So, it's not like we're just copying the main idea from "Unwritten," although that would be fine too, as mentioned in the previous section.

Now let's see what a different perspective can do for us when looking at "Viva La Vida" by Cold Play. In this song, Chris Martin's character talks about how he once was king, and now he's fallen. We could write a song from the point of view of one of the king's servants who has witnessed the king's decline. Did we enjoy this fall, or were we on good terms with the king, and were saddened when it happened? What happened to our family now that's there's a new ruler? Are we left poor? Or maybe we were part of the movement that overthrew the king.

You don't have to stop there. If you really want a departure from what the original song was about, or you just want to keep pushing it to see how many ideas you can come up with, you can. For example, now we have this idea about a guy who helped to overthrow a kingdom. What if we took the perspective of the wife of the man who helped overthrow the kingdom?

What did she witness while seeing that all go down? If you keep pushing these thoughts, the possibilities you can come up with are endless.

When you change the perspective of the song and decide who the speaker will be, you also have options of who you want to be speaking *to*. If we were Natasha Bedingfield's character's mother, would we be talking back to Natasha Bedingfield's character? Or would we be talking to our husband, who's the father? Or maybe it would be more of a narration, where's she's just speaking to herself as she watches her daughter grow up through the years. Thinking about who is being spoken to, and changing that from the original reference song will also help give you new ideas to use.

Three Questions

There's another way to think about changing the perspective of an existing song. I took a lyric writing class with Berklee College of Music's Lyric Writing professor, Pat Pattison. He mentioned there are three questions to ask yourself before writing a song:

Who's talking?
Who is he talking to? and
Why?

Asking yourself those three questions before you start a new song is a great approach in itself. However, you can also apply these questions to changing the perspective of a song you want to draw inspiration from. Let's look at "I Want to Hold Your Hand" by the Beatles as an example. By answering those three questions we get this:

Who's talking?   A guy
Who is he talking to?   His girl
Why?   He wants to hold her hand

Simplistic enough. Now we can start to manipulate those answers to generate our own ideas. You can change any combination of the three answers. In this case I'm going to change the answers to all three, while only leaving the big idea of "handholding" in place. So I'll try this:

Who's talking?   The friend of a boyfriend/girlfriend couple

Who is he talking to?   Another friend of that same boyfriend/girlfriend couple

Why?   He's noticing that the boyfriend wants to hold his girlfriend's hand, but he's too nervous because he doesn't know if that's what she wants. He also sees that the girlfriend clearly wants her hand to be held. It's in her body language, but both of them are too afraid to make a move, even though they both want the same thing. They fear that the other one doesn't want it. It's interesting to witness as a third party.

You can see that by changing the perspective of the first two questions, we are given a whole new idea about handholding in the third question. If we wanted to keep going and re-answering these questions to get new ideas, we could. We could come up with a bunch of options from "I Want to Hold Your Hand" alone, and then we could move on to more songs for even more ideas.

When you start thinking about other perspectives, you'll really get some ideas flowing for all the potential options for what your song could be about. Look at all the options we have here already, and we've only looked to three songs for inspiration.

The Do It Yourself Method

Finding Your Own Inspiration for Your Music

Start Simple

A good way to come up with song ideas is to start simple, and then slowly expand on your initial thoughts. Starting with a word, or a short phrase can snowball into bigger and bigger ideas. Words and phrases like "airport," "neon sign" or "porcelain" can become song ideas. You might be thinking "those aren't ideas for songs!" You're right. They're probably not…. yet. So let's vamp on them a bit.

Let's start with the word "airport." The best stories are typically going to be about people, so start to think about how people relate to an airport. Who's there? Where are they going? What are they doing there? Ask yourself questions about what's going on there, to get your creative gears cranking.

When I start to ask myself these questions about an airport, it makes me think about someone who's working at the airport. He's seeing thousands of people pass him by everyday who are traveling to, or coming from all different parts of the world. He shows up every day and stands at the world's gate, but never gets to actually go anywhere himself. That's the start of a song idea. There's certainly a story to be told about that employee.

Let's not forget we can go back to what we learned in the Find Inspiration Method, and apply some of those same concepts to our *own* idea. For example, now that we have this idea about a guy working at the airport who sees all these different world travelers pass him by, we can flip the perspective. A separate idea would be to look at the view of one of the world travelers who's constantly bouncing around the globe. Someone like George Clooney's character in the movie "Up in the Air." How does he look at the airport employee at each airport? Maybe he thinks that while they're technically different people at every airport he arrives in, he sees them as exactly the same, because they're stagnant to him. There are certainly some song ideas in that too.

Let's try another one. Another phrase we came up with was "neon sign." We can ask ourselves questions about that. Why is it there? How bright is it? Who sees it? When I start to ask myself these questions I think about a fading, or flickering neon sign. A fading neon sign could be a nice metaphor for someone past their prime. Or it could be referring to someone who never reached their prime in the first place. Both are valid starting points for a song, with a nice metaphor built in from the start. If you think about an inanimate thing as your starting point, it can be a good way to come up with a metaphor for a person in a story. Just think about what characteristics that object could share with a person.

Now let's go to the third word we came up with, "porcelain." What are its characteristics? What defines it? I start to think about something that's cold and hard. That could be a metaphor about a person with those characteristics. My choruses could outline the fact that this song is about someone who's cold and hard, like porcelain, and my verses could develop the story about how they got that way.

When you take this approach of starting with simple, random things, get into the habit of asking yourself questions about these things to turn them into song ideas. I'll get you started with some questions below, but you'll want to come up with your own questions too, to really dive deep and pull a story from the object you came up with. These will help get you started once you've come up with a few words or phrases of your own:

Who sees it/him/her?

Who interacts with it/him/her and in what way?

What emotions does it/he/she make people feel?

What are its/his/her characteristics?

What makes it/him/her unique?

What else has similar characteristics?

When no one else is around, what's it/he/she doing/thinking?

When people are watching, what is it/he/she doing/thinking?

Focus your questions on what can create a story and involve people in an interesting way, and you're bound to develop a ton of great ideas.

Ideas from a Title

A song's title is typically the central focus of your song. Because of that, I'll make the argument that if you can come up with a strong title, you can potentially come up with a strong song, lyrically. Think of it this way: A title sums up your song's overall idea. Your chorus expands on the title. Once you have a chorus, you have a main idea, and just have to fill in the actual details of your story in your verses.

We'll come back to that concept shortly. First let's get some ways to come up with titles, and then you'll see how they can turn into full song ideas.

Listen to Conversations

If you're a guy with a good woman in your life, you've probably heard the phrase "you don't listen" more than you care to admit. And if you're a woman with a good man, you've probably *said* that phrase plenty of times. Well listening is not only good advice for your everyday life, but it's also great advice for coming up with titles for songs.

When you're in a conversation with someone and you really listen to what the other person is saying, you'd be surprised at how many song titles you can come up with. The trick is not to just listen, but to listen for titles, specifically. This is a great technique I learned from Motown songwriter, Clay Drayton. I'll give you an example of how it works. Let's say you're talking to someone and they say this:

I meet up with my daughter for coffee the other day. It was good to see her. It's been a while since the last time I saw her. She's going through some tough times right now, because she can't find work and the economy's tough. It's an uphill battle for her, but she's hanging in there and I'm proud of her. I help her out when I can. She's a good kid, and I

can't wait to see her again. I learned so much about what's going on with her the other day. It's amazing what you can learn over a cup of coffee.

That's a pretty standard portion of a conversation you might have with someone. Now, let's take another look at what was said, while specifically scanning for titles the whole time. I'll put the potential titles I heard in bold:

*I meet up with my daughter for coffee the other day. It was good to see her. **It's been a while since the last time** I saw her. She's going through some **tough times** right now, because she can't find work and the economy's tough. It's **an uphill battle** for her, but she's **hanging in there** and I'm proud of her. I help her out when I can. She's a good kid, and I can't wait to see her again. I learned so much about what's going on with her **the other day**. **It's amazing what you can learn over a cup of coffee**.*

To recap, the potential titles I saw were:

It's Been a While Since the Last Time
Tough Times
An Uphill Battle
Hanging in There
The Other Day
It's Amazing What You Can Learn Over a Cup of Coffee

It kind of looks like the back of an album already, doesn't it? Those are the ones *I* saw as potential song titles. Of course, you probably saw different ones than me. Granted, some of these are cliché and not too interesting, while others have the potential to be completely fresh ideas. It takes a little more work to make a cliché phrase a fresh new idea, but it can still be done, so keep all your options.

Alternatively, you can modify what you heard, too. For example: "It was good to see her" could become "It was good to see you." "I help her out when I can" could become "I help when I can,"

and so on. The point being, you have options. And all from one little portion of a conversation. Imagine if you trained yourself to listen for titles in every conversation you ever had? You'll never be short on ideas.

And in case you think I worked backwards and laced that paragraph with titles to make my point, I assure you I didn't. In fact the paragraph I presented you with is based on an actual conversation I had with someone.

Additionally, you can use this conversation technique even if you're by yourself. If you go to a coffee shop, you can just sit down, have a coffee and listen to other people's conversations. Sit there with a notepad or laptop and jot down ideas for ten or twenty minutes.

If you're not comfortable eavesdropping on someone else to come up with your song ideas, then you can do this by turning on the TV or radio and listening to conversations there.

How Your Listeners Perceive Your Titles

Your song's title is essentially a headline for your song. If someone sees a list of your songs' titles before they hear your music, the titles are an opportunity to create intrigue to make a potential listener want to hear your song.

For example, let's say you were looking at a list of song titles and you saw these two:

I Love You
Three Things You Never Knew About Me

Which of these two songs would you be more likely to listen to just based on the title alone? Right, the second one. Me too. "Three Things You Never Knew About Me" creates an intrigue because there's a curiosity arousing element to it. You'll find yourself wondering what those three things are. Then you'll listen to the song to find out. "I Love You," is an overused idea that

doesn't leave much to the imagination. As a title alone, it gives you no reason to want to hear it.

On the flip side, if someone hears your song, *before* they know what the title is, the title is their opportunity to be able to find your song, if they like it. A lot of times listeners will hear a song they like, then go to a search engine and look for the phrase they assume is the title. Listeners will assume the title is the phrase that repeats the most, or is in the most highlighted position in the song. With that in mind, make it easy for people to find your songs when you decide on your title.

A trick you could use to find out if your title is "the obvious one" is to play your song for a few friends, without telling them the name of your song. If your friends can tell you what the song is called, just by listening to the lyrics, you probably have a strong, findable title. If they don't know, you probably don't have a strong, findable title. Your title should help your potential fans find your song easily, after hearing it once. It can only help you get more people listening to your music.

Plan Out Each Section of Your Song

Once you have the big idea for your whole song, it's wise to figure out what the big idea for each *section* of your song is, in order for your story to be coherent.

Before we look at an example of how to do that, let's look at how each section of a song functions, so we'll know how to best come up with the big idea for each section.

Verse

Lyrically, the verses of your song will move your story forward. The chorus or refrain is likely to have the same words each time, so the verse is your chance to keep your ideas moving along. Verses are generally more specific and detailed oriented than the chorus. The verse will set the scene by giving the important details, and introduce the characters. Verses will also

become the reason why the emotion and idea contained in the chorus is relevant. In other words, verses set up the choruses.

Chorus

Think of your chorus as the big idea for what your song's all about. It's the main emotion or idea. That's partly why your title is most likely to show up in your chorus. Your title also sums up what the song's about.

Melodically, the chorus will be the catchiest part of your song. This is what people will have stuck in their head long after your song is over. That's another reason it's good to have your title in the chorus. When people get your chorus stuck in their heads, they'll easily know what your song is called and can find it later when they want to hear it again.

Pre-Chorus

The pre-chorus is an add-on before the chorus. If a song has one, it usually repeats the same lyrics each time, the same way a chorus does. Pre-choruses typically set up the choruses, to drive home the overall idea of the song. A trick is to think of the following types of words in between the pre-chorus and chorus: "so," "because," and "now."

Musically, the pre-chorus often creates a nice build up to what's coming in the chorus. It'll build a tension or momentum that will be released in the chorus.

Bridge

The bridge is a departure from what we've heard in a song, previously. This goes for both the lyrics and the music. Lyrically, it's an opportunity for a new perspective, different from what the verses and choruses were offering. Musically, it's a chance to offer the listener something they haven't heard before to keep the song interesting.

Refrain

In the AABA, or AAA structures (you'll learn more about these a little later), the refrain is the line that draws all the attention in your verses. It's usually at the beginning or end of each verse and is often the title of the song, if you song doesn't have a chorus.

Hook

The hook doesn't necessarily refer to a specific section of a song, except to say it's the catchiest part of a song. Most of the time, it will be your chorus, if your song has one. If your song doesn't have a chorus, your hook will most likely be your refrain. As hit songwriter, Clay Drayton, has said "A fish knows the hook… Once it's in you, it's hard to get it out."

That's the overview. We'll look at the different kinds of song structures in greater detail a bit later, but for our example, let's assume our song structure will be like this: verse / chorus / verse / chorus / bridge / chorus. From there we'll decide what each section will do. Going through this exercise will help you take something that's "just a title" or "just an idea" and turn it into a more complete idea for a full song.

I liked the title we came up with in our conversation exercise, "It's Amazing What You Can Learn Over a Cup of Coffee." It's a bit long for a title, but I think it's interesting, so let's use that as an example here. Since we have a title, we also have the big idea of learning more about someone over coffee. Now let's plan out our sections.

We'll start with our choruses, since we're starting big picture and drilling down more and more. The chorus is where the big picture idea should be. This is the easy part. The chorus idea is the same each time, plus it comes from the title and the overall idea of our song. So we can start with this:

Big Idea: Learning something intricate about someone over a simple cup of coffee

Overall Idea for Each Section:

Verse 1 - ?

Chorus - It's Amazing What You Can Learn Over a Cup of Coffee

Verse 2 – ?

Chorus – It's Amazing What You Can Learn Over a Cup of Coffee

Bridge – ?

Chorus – It's Amazing What You Can Learn Over a Cup of Coffee

Look at that! We're halfway done with laying out the ideas for each section! I always like to keep the "big song idea" at the top, just to keep all of my smaller ideas in check. Also note that I labeled the verses as "verse 1" and "verse 2," while the choruses are simply labeled "chorus." This is just to remind me that the verses will not only be different from each other, but they'll be advancing my story, while the chorus information will stay the same each time.

Now for the hard part. What are the verses going to say? When you're coming up with an idea for each verse, make sure the story advances from verse to verse. If you say the same thing in both verses, it won't be too interesting to your listeners.

I like the idea of learning something a little complicated over a simple cup of coffee. It's time to brainstorm some ideas on what that complicated thing could be. So let's revisit our three questions for inspiration: 1. Who's talking?, 2. Who are they talking to? and 3. Why?

For the first two questions, I'm going to stay with the relationship from the actual conversation that gave us this title. I'll make the person talking a dad, and the person he's talking to his

daughter. He's in his late fifties and she's in her early twenties. To answer the third question, the reason they're talking is because they haven't seen each other in a while and they need to catch up.

As I ponder ideas for my first verse, I like the idea of her dropping exciting news on him. I'd like that news to be that she just got her first job out of college and she wants to let him know that he's been her inspiration the whole time. He's her hero and she wants to approach life just like he has.

I like that idea, but now that I think about it, that'd be a lot of information for the first verse. Where would I go from there? If that was my first verse, I'd pretty much had dropped the bulk of my information, and might not have anywhere else to go with it.

Sometimes when you think you wrote your first verse, you should try it out as your second verse. Just because you write it first, doesn't mean it has to come first in your story. If I make verse two about the daughter letting her dad know he's been her inspiration all along, then I can make the first verse about the dad getting filled in on all the *little* things going on in her life. Things that seem mundane, but since he hasn't spoken to her in a while he's happy to hear about. Both of those verses would play into the whole "It's amazing what you can learn over a cup of coffee" idea well. So let's go back and check out how our ideas for each section are flowing:

Big Idea: Learning something intricate about someone over a simple cup of coffee

Overall Idea for Each Section:
Verse 1 – A dad hasn't seen his daughter for a while, so he's getting filled in on all the little things going on in her life. They might seem mundane to most, but since he hasn't spoken to her in a while, they're exciting for him to hear.

Chorus - It's Amazing What You Can Learn Over a Cup of Coffee

<u>Verse 2</u> – The daughter reveals that not only does she have her first job out of college, but her dad's been her inspiration the entire time. The dad is brought to tears by this information.

<u>Chorus</u> – It's Amazing What You Can Learn Over a Cup of Coffee

<u>Bridge</u> – ?

<u>Chorus</u> – It's Amazing What You Can Learn Over a Cup of Coffee

Okay, so now we're getting there. We have a story evolving. The only section we need a concept for is the bridge. As I mentioned earlier, the bridge is typically a departure from what we've heard in a song, previously. This goes for the lyrics too, not just the music. It's our chance for a new idea or perspective, instead of simply pushing the story forward as we were doing with our verses. With that in mind, let's use this opportunity to have the *daughter* learn something from this conversation with her dad. After all, the verses were all about the dad learning things. Since we have a chance for a new way to look at things in the bridge, we'll let it be the daughter's turn to learn something interesting.

We can have the bridge be about the dad returning his daughter's nice words by letting her know that raising her to be who she's turned out to be is *his* biggest accomplishment. It'll be a nice "full circle" notion to the song.

Now the chorus will refer to what the daughter learned instead of what the dad learned. The phrase "It's Amazing What You Can Learn Over a Cup of Coffee" doesn't specifically apply to the dad, so we can use it to cover what the daughter learns as well. That's another reason it's good to not make your choruses too specific. So finally, we get to this:

Big Idea: Learning something intricate about someone over a simple cup of coffee

Overall Idea for Each Section:

<u>Verse 1</u> – A dad hasn't seen his daughter for a while, so he's getting filled in on all the little things going on in her life. They might seem mundane to most, but since he hasn't spoken to her in a while they're exciting for him to hear.

<u>Chorus</u> - It's Amazing What You Can Learn Over a Cup of Coffee (referring to the dad)

<u>Verse 2</u> – The daughter reveals that not only does she have her first job out of college, but the dad's been her inspiration the entire time. The dad is brought to tears by this information.

<u>Chorus</u> – It's Amazing What You Can Learn Over a Cup of Coffee (referring to the dad)

<u>Bridge</u> – The dad reveals to his daughter that she is his biggest accomplishment

<u>Chorus</u> – It's Amazing What You Can Learn Over a Cup of Coffee (referring to the daughter)

Now we have a roadmap for what our song will do. If you plan out each section's objective in this way before you write your actual lyrics, it'll help keep your ideas focused and your lyrics coherent. You'll be less likely to lose your listeners by writing a convoluted story, because you'll have a framework to stick to. We'll talk much more about the details of writing complete lyrics later on, but this is a great, organized way to get your song's ideas moving in the right direction.

A Note on Emotions

People respond to emotions. Think about a movie you saw, two years ago. You probably can't remember a single word of dialogue from the film, but you remember that you loved it. If you dig deeper, you'll realize the reason you loved it is because of the emotions it made you feel while you were watching it. Maybe you were filled with joy when the guy proposed to the girl after they were on-again, off-again for the whole movie. Or maybe you laughed yourself stupid, scene after scene during a movie you considered to be hilarious. You may not remember a single scene, but you know you loved it, because of the emotions it made you feel.

Writing a great song works the same way. It can be even stronger in music than in movies. People tend to tie the emotions they experience in their own life with songs they've heard. If you're a wife, you may get choked up every time you hear the song you danced to with your father on your wedding day. The song pulls you back to the emotions you experienced that day. If you heard a song a thousand times because it was smash hit during your last few weeks of high school, it may make you smile when you're reminded of the good times you had with your high school friends in those final weeks.

When you come up with ideas using the techniques just discussed, think about what emotions you want to evoke in your listeners. You'll do that with your overall song ideas, like we talked about here *and* with the music you use underneath. We'll talk about the music part more in the next two modules, but I want you to be emotion-minded when you come up with the idea for your song.

The Character Avatar

A lot of times when we're writing music, we writing based on our own life experiences. When you do that, it's usually pretty easy to jump into the right mindset and emotions of a song, because you know what they are since they happened to you.

But sometimes you'll come up with a great song idea that didn't happen to you specifically (or maybe only a small part of it did). This is especially true if you're using some of the concepts

we've looked at for coming up with song ideas. In those cases, it can be more difficult to deliver the appropriate emotions that would occur in that situation.

In marketing, there's a concept called "the customer avatar," which I learned about from Eben Pagan, who's a well respected marketer. The idea being, when you're marketing what you're selling, you need to envision a very specific person and write to him, *only*. Don't think about the masses. Doing this will help you focus your ideas.

For songwriters, I've modified this concept so that instead of a "customer" avatar, we're coming up with a "character" avatar. The purpose of the character avatar is to be able to focus your thoughts on a character in your song. It'll allow you to get inside the mind of that person to see what they feel. It's an advanced way of stepping in someone else's shoes. When you come up with your character avatar, you'll want to be very specific about who he is, down to the details. This person can be real, or imaginary. That doesn't matter, as long as you focus on his details.

Let's look at an example. Let's say I'm writing a song about a guy whose girlfriend cheated on him. I'll want to develop a character avatar for the guy, so he's not just "some guy" anymore, but a real person in my mind. It'll help me better tap into his emotions, which as we know are very important. So we'll start with his basic information:

Name: Bill
Sex: Male
Hometown: Nashville, TN
Age: 26
Education: Some College
Occupation: Auto Mechanic
Annual Salary: $40,000/yr.
Marital Status: Single
Kids: None
Hobbies/Interests: Cars, Country Music, Football
Personality Traits: Introverted, Logical, Usually Happy & Easy Going

Lifestyle Traits: Suburban, Blue Collar

This is information I made up. Bill isn't based on a real person. He could be, but in this case he's not. You're welcome to create an avatar based on a real person that you know if you'd like. Either way, now we have some basic information for Bill. By the way, have you noticed I've already stopped referring to him as "a guy" and started calling him "Bill?" He's already becoming more real.

You might be thinking "Why would I need to include information like his salary?" The reason is, the more detail specific you are, the more real he becomes. I'm not necessarily going to mention all of that information in the song, but knowing things like his salary could tell you more about the type of lifestyle he lives. In fact, most of the information we wrote down won't come up at all, but it's important to write it out so we can easily picture who we're writing about.

It's also a good idea to include a picture for your character avatar. That'll really help bring him to life. If you're working with someone who's not a person in real life, just search for some images online that fit the physical information you came up with. Use the information I've started with here as a guide for when you create your own avatars. Just write out the same information I did on a clean sheet of paper, and attach a picture. Hang it up when you're writing your song. Now you have a real person to talk about.

If we were writing a movie, as opposed to a song, it would be different. A lot of this stuff would be built in to what we can see onscreen. Also, in a two hour movie, there's more time for the development of these things. But in a song we don't have that luxury, so a lot of times these details simply aren't thought of when we're writing. That can leave our final product with an emotional disconnect, because as writers we never really even understood *who* the song was about in the first place. That's why creating a character avatar can be important.

We can't stop with the information we have so far. It's not enough. We need to tap into Bill's emotions. Remember, people respond to songs that make them feel emotions. A lot of times that will start will the emotions your character is experiencing. So get specific about your

character avatar's emotions too. And don't just write those emotions, but allow yourself to feel them. Get into character. You're essentially an actor here, so feel these emotions to properly get into your role. Tapping into those emotions when you perform the finished song will also greatly help how your song is presented and your vocal is delivered. It's crucial to a great performance.

So ask yourself, what is Bill feeling after this break up? You'll probably write down things like sadness, anxiety, or maybe even anger. It's not enough to just list emotions like that. Take a little time to focus on each one. Start with sadness. Allow yourself to get into that emotion. Reference something that happened to you that made you sad, and allow that emotion to exist inside you for a few moments. Then move on to anxiety and anger and do the same thing. Feel what Bill feels.

By coming up with your character avatar, whether or not you've actually experienced what your song's about in real life doesn't matter as much anymore. You now have a way to understand what Bill's going through. Now you'll be able to write a more emotional song because you know what those emotions are, and who's experiencing them.

If you're writing a song in the first person, you'll probably end up creating a character avatar for the character who's singing the song, so you can get inside the emotions of that song. Like I said, this is especially important if you're writing a song for an idea that you haven't experience yourself in real life. If you have experienced what you're writing about, it'll be much easier for you to jump into the singer's shoes.

This concept also works with songs in the second person. If you have a second person "you" you're singing to, you may find it beneficial to develop an avatar for who the song is being sung *to*. It'll help you sing to her more easily, if she doesn't really exist. You don't have to actually be in love to write a love song, but if you're not, you still need to be thinking about the subject of your song, specifically. You can also create a separate avatar for the singer of the song, but creating one for who you're singing to can help you a lot. And of course, if your song's in the

third person, creating an avatar for each character in your story can only be beneficial to you as well.

Capturing Inspiration

Sometimes you won't need to do anything to come up with a song. It'll just hit you in the middle of the night or when you're taking a shower or. A lot of times that happens, because our best ideas tend to come to us because our minds are relaxed and not trying to figure out other, more stressful things.

It's always best to act on inspiration as soon as it hits. You're much more likely to bring an idea to fruition, if you act on it right away. If you put it aside, there's a chance you may just never get to it. Plus, all those exciting little secondary ideas tend to come to you most flowingly when an idea is brand new. So if you can act on a song idea right away, you should.

However, things don't always work out that way. You might be in a position where you come up with a great idea for a song, but you simply can't work on it in that moment. If that happens the worst thing you can do is say "I'll remember it later." Odds are you won't.

For that reason you should always have a few tools with you to help you capture your ideas. A mini notepad for lyric or chord ideas is important to keep near, as is a mini recorder for capturing chord or melody ideas. Keep these things by your bed at night, in case you wake up with an idea. If you fall asleep without getting it down, it'll be gone for good.

You should have a way to capture your ideas when you're on the go too. The easiest thing for that is to use a few smartphone apps. Minimally downloading a notepad app and a recording app is ideal, if you don't want to carry around the clunkier real things.

You may have some of your ideas on your phone, some on your computer, some written out on a pad and some on a mini recorder. It'll be in your best interest to keep all your recorded ideas and all your written ideas in one place, so they'll be easier to reference later. If you use

multiple ways for capturing ideas, consolidate them at the end of each day, or week at the most. Put a reminder in your calendar to do this. You'll find it's much easier when it comes time to write a song if all of your potential ideas are in one place.

If you keep everything stored on your computer, you may also find it's beneficial to keep a printed version of all your latest written ideas, for easy reference. It'll also act as a back up to what's on your computer. You want to make storing, and looking up your ideas as easy as possible, so when you're looking for something you need, it's really easy to find.

Last Note

We'll talk more about the specificities of lyric writing in a later module. I wanted to present the big idea stuff to you now, because it's important to keep the overall emotion, mood or feel of your lyrics (i.e. happy, sad, etc) in mind as you come up with chords and a melody, whether or not you have the actual lyrics written yet. For the purposes of this book, once we hash out all the music, we'll get past the big idea of the lyrics, and talk much more about the specifics of lyric writing later on. The important thing is, now you have some methodical ways for coming up with great ideas.

MODULE 2: CHORD PROGRESSIONS

If you already have a big idea for your song from the previous module, you'll want to come up with a chord progression to match the intent of your idea. If your idea's aggressive, you'll want a fast tempo. If your idea's sad, you'll want it in a minor key, and so on. Whichever you decide, in this module you'll get a lot of ideas for coming up with chord progressions that will match the intent of your song's idea. You'll probably want to keep your guitar or keyboard nearby for this one, so you can play along with some of the ideas we'll be looking at.

The Find Inspiration Method
Drawing Inspiration for Your Music from Other Songs

Use the Chords From Another Song

A great way to find inspiration from songs you like, when it comes to chord progressions, is to simply use those same chords yourself. Chord progressions on their own can't be copyrighted. Technically, if you take the chords from a song you like, you're within your rights to do that as long as you put your own original melody and lyrics on top of it. Plus, if you're using a chord progression from a song that's already a hit, you know it's a chord progression that people like the sound of, so you're already on your way to creating a song people would want to buy.

I should note that I'm talking strictly about chords here. So, if you're referencing someone else's chord progressions, make sure you're not carrying over *any* melodic elements of those progressions to your song, like signature guitar licks. I'm only referring to the actual chords themselves. That's it.

With that in mind, an example of a commonly used chord progression is the I-V-VIm-IV chord progression. In the key of D, that would be the chords D-A-Bm-G.

If you haven't already seen it, type "Axis of Awesome – 4 Chords" into a search engine. Axis of Awesome is a group that put together a video that strings together a ton of popular songs using the I-V-VIm-IV chord progression. It's incredible when you see just how common that chord progression is. You've heard all these songs, but you probably never realized they have the same chord progression when you're listening to them. Check out that video now and then come back.

While you can technically use the chords in another song, what we'll be looking at in this section will be doing more than simply swiping the chords from another song. We'll look at some ways to change how those chords are played to make them your own. Even though you

can use whatever chord progression you want, it's still best if you give your songs a feel that's congruent with your style. With that in mind let's look at some ways to do that.

Chords from One Song and the Rhythmic Pattern of Another

The rhythmic pattern of a chord progression is simply the rhythm with which the chords are being played. It's the timing of your chords. One approach I love for coming up with a chord progression is to take the rhythmic pattern of one song and apply it to the chord progression of a completely different song.

For example, let's say you like the chords in the song "American Pie" by Don McLean, and you want to use them as a basis for a song you're writing. You decide you'll grab the chords from the Chorus, when the lyrics say "Bye, bye, Miss American Pie. Drove my Chevy to the levy, but the levy was dry." The chords in that section are G – C – G – D.

Play these chords. When you do, you may notice you play them just like they're played in "American Pie." But if you were using them in your own song, you'll want something that sounds different.

The chords in "American Pie" are played pretty openly, so let's pick a second song with a very different rhythmic pattern. Let's use a rhythmic pattern similar to that in the verses of Jack Johnson's "Upside Down." If you're not familiar with that song, please check it out on YouTube.

You'll notice the rhythmic pattern in the verses of "Upside Down" is much tighter and more staccato than that of "American Pie." Ignore the notes and chords of "Upside Down" and just listen to the *rhythm* of the guitar. Now try playing the choppy rhythm of "Upside Down" on the G – C – G – D chords from the chorus of "American Pie." You'll be superimposing Jack Johnson's rhythmic pattern onto Don McLean's chord structure. The rhythmic pattern of "Upside Down" lends itself well to being played on a guitar, because of its muted nature, but if you're a piano player you can still try it with this song. Just keep your notes short and choppy.

Do you hear how different it sounds? By mashing those two aspects from two different songs together, there's not much of either original song left. And all you've changed was the rhythmic pattern of the chords.

Using the rhythmic pattern from one song and the chord progression from another is a fun and quick way to change the feel of a chord progression, and come up with one that's your own.

Change the Tempo

You don't necessarily have to reference two songs, if you like the chords in one song, and you want to make them your own.

Tempo is one way in which we can alter the feel of a chord progression if we're only referencing a single song. I want to mention this one early, since a lot of times tempo goes hand in hand with some of the other techniques we'll be looking at.

The tempo of your song will set its mood. As a general way of thinking, consider your heart rate as wanting to gravitate towards the tempo of the song you're listening to. Your heart rate, when you're at rest on your couch, could be around 70 bmp (beats per minute). This explains why, when you hear a rock song that's 165 bpm, you feel pumped-up and want to get aggressive. There's a big difference between 70 bmp and 165 bmp. Alternatively, a much more slowly paced song will calm you down.

If you take a guitar or piano riff from a song you're working on and play it at different tempos, you'll notice a big change in the mood of your song. Speeding it up gives it a very different feel from slowing it down. There are also all the tempos in between. To get a feel for what tempos to use, get a metronome app for your phone, or check out an online metronome to keep you in check. Or you can do the old-fashioned thing and buy an actual metronome.

With that in mind, rather than changing tempo separately from some of the other techniques we're talking about, I'd like to change it in tandem with them. For example, you may have

noticed that when you played Jack Johnson's rhythmic pattern on top of Don McLean's chords in the previous section, you probably changed the tempo of "American Pie." That's because when you were mimicking Jack Johnson's rhythmic patterns, the tempo followed suit to fit the feel for that rhythmic pattern.

If you notice a tempo change during any of these other techniques, it's simply a matter of feel for what's being played. You are more than welcome to experiment with tempo separately from any of these other techniques to see what it does to your song. You can only benefit from that experimentation. You may notice yourself intuitively mixing a new tempo in with the following techniques. I just wanted to make you aware that examining and modifying tempo on its own is certainly an option worth exploring as well.

Change the Length of Each Chord

Another easy change we can use to modify a chord progression we like, is to change the length of each chord, independent of its strumming pattern, tempo or anything else. Two of the easiest ways to do this are:

Lengthening each chord (doubling each chord is usually easiest to apply)
Shortening each chord (halving each chord is usually easiest to apply)

Or you can use a combination of the above. Shorten some chords, and lengthen others. You can even keep one or two chords the same length as they were in the original song.

Let's go back to using the chords in the chorus of "American Pie" as an example. They were G – C – G – D. The song is in 4/4 time and each one of those chords is played for about 2 beats. Grab your guitar or keyboard and play those chords either to a metronome, or while tapping your foot to get a feel for the length of each two-beat chord. Got it?

Now play those same chords, but play each one for four beats instead of two. Do you see how it gave the song a different feel? It sounds like you're playing it at half tempo now. It sounds different than the original, but let's change it some more.

Try this. Play the first and third chords (the G chords) for two beats each, and play the second and fourth chords (the C and the D) for eight beats each. So in 4/4 time, it'll be like this:

G (for 2 beats) – C (for 8 beats) – G (for 2 beats) – D (for 8 beats)

Do you hear how different that sounds from "American Pie?" You have the same exact chords, with the same exact tempo and strumming pattern, but by simply changing the length of only two of the chords (the C and the D), we have a completely new sound. This is a great way to look to another song's chords for inspiration, without blatantly copying what they're doing.

The Same Length of Each Chord with a Different Amount of Notes

This idea goes back to changing the strumming pattern, like we talked about a little while ago, but now we'll be a hair more technical about it. Instead of just lifting the strumming pattern from a different song we like, we'll just modify the timing of the strumming pattern that's currently there.

With that in mind, let's look at "Mary Jane's Last Dance" by Tom Petty this time. Let's say we like the chords in this song's verse and we want to use them as a basis for a new song we're writing. The verse chords are Am – G – D – Am. The song's in 4/4 time and the chords are typically played with eight and sixteenth notes, enhanced with some hammer-ons and pull-offs on the guitar. Each of the four chords are played for roughly two beats.

Grab your guitar or keyboard, and play the song with these four chords. Keep each chord to about two beats, the way Tom Petty plays it, but instead of strumming the chords the way they're strummed in the song, just play each chord as a half note – just strum it once.

It definitely has a different feel from "Mary Jane's Last Dance," doesn't it? Let's try something else. Instead of strumming the chords the way they're strummed in the song, play every chord as a sixteenth note. There'll be some quick strumming here – four notes to every beat. But keep each chord to two beats in length. Again, we get a sound that's pretty different from Tom Petty's song.

Now let's mix it up even more. Play the first and third chords for a half note, then play the second and fourth chords as sixteenth notes. Keep each chord to two beats in length. So with each chord being played for two beats, the chord progression will look like this:

Am (1 half note) – G (8 sixteenth notes) – D (1 half note) – Am (8 sixteenth notes)

It definitely has a different feel now, right? While the feel definitely changes from the original, it still feels a bit stiff, since we've been playing the chords strictly on half and sixteenth notes. You don't have to rigidly stick to those note lengths. To inject a little more feel into the song, you can start with a specified set of note lengths, as we just did above, and then modify them by adding a touch of feel, to liven them up. What we've done here is really just a starting point. Ultimately, your finished product has to fit your style and present this new song the way you want it to be presented.

Arpeggiate Your Chords

Arpeggiating your notes simply means to play the notes of the chord individually, as opposed to strumming the chords. Technically, if we were arpeggiating the chords, we'd play the notes of the chord in order, but we won't necessarily stick to that here. It'll give us a cooler sound if we play them more randomly. A good example of a song that uses arpeggiated chords in this way is "Don't Cry" by Guns and Roses.

This time let's use the song "What's Up" by 4 Non Blondes as an example, since it's a pretty strum-heavy song. If you're not familiar with it, you can search for it out on YouTube.

The chords in the verse are A – Bm – D – A. Play those chords while keeping the same tempo and chord length as 4 Non Blondes. The only thing I want you to change here is to arpreggiate the notes, similar to what's done in "Don't Cry" by Guns N Roses.

When you do that, you'll see that the song takes on a calmer feel. You can almost use the arpeggiated version as an intro to "What's Up." It definitely gives the chords a different feel from the 4 Non Blondes' song.

Conversely, if a song you like is already arpeggiated, like "Don't Cry," you can strum those chords to give them a feel that didn't previously exist in the song you were referencing. Arpeggiating the chords is also a good technique to mix with a change in tempo. A lot of times when you arpeggiate the chords, you may notice yourself playing the chords at a slower tempo than used in the original song. It's a nice way to give the chords your own flavor.

Change the Arrangement

The arrangement of your song is all the instrumental pieces that make it sound like it does. For example, the arrangement of your song could include heavy, distorted electric guitars, a full pounding drum kit, and a screaming lead singer. Or your arrangement could simply be an acoustic guitar, a delicate vocal and a tambourine.

One way to change up the sound of a song you're referencing is to change the arrangement of the current song. If you're referencing the chords of an AC/DC song, you might play those same chords on a piano, as opposed to playing them with a distorted guitar. Instead of a full drum kit, you might not have any percussion at all. Providing a new arrangement will be a great way to steer a song's sound to your style.

Change the Key

This section will get a bit technical. We're going to get into some theory. It may seem a little dry, but I assure you, it can only benefit your songs.

That being said, before we talk about changing the key, let's talk about the major scale. The major scale is also known as the Ionian mode and has seven notes in it. If we were to play a chord for each one of those seven notes, we would have seven chords that are within the key. For example, here are the notes in the C major scale:

C – D – E – F – G – A - B

Which means that each one of those notes has a chord in the key of C major. The chords in the key of C major are:

C - Dm - Em - F - G - Am - Bdim

In this notation, the "m" denotes a minor chord, and the "dim" denotes a diminished chord. It may seem strange that a minor chord (or a diminished chord) is in a major key, but it makes sense because all of the *notes* in those minor (and diminished) chords appear in the major scale. For example, the Dm chord is in the key of C major. The notes in a Dm chord are: D, G and B. All three of those notes appear in the C major scale.

We can denote the chords within a key with roman numerals that relate back to the notes in the scale, instead of the actual chord names. So if we said I – IIm – IIIm – IV – V – VIm - VIIdim, that would correspond to C - Dm - Em - F - G - Am - Bdim for the key of C major, which you saw above. The "I" chord is called so because it's the chord that matches the first note of the scale. The "II" chord matches the second note of the scale, and so on. Sometimes the minor chords are denoted as lower cased roman numerals, but for the purposes of this book, we'll notate the minor chords with an "m" behind the number.

Writing the chord names in terms of roman numerals can be helpful if you want to change the key of your song. If you have a song with the chords I – V – VIm – IV, you can easily transpose them into any key, as long as you know the chords in that key. I've got a handy chart for you that will help you easily transpose keys.

Ionian Chords (Commonly Referred to as "Major" Keys)

I (Key)	IIm	IIIm	IV	V	VIm	VIIdim
Ab	Bbm	Cm	Db	Eb	Fm	Gdim
A	Bm	C#m	D	E	F#m	G#dim
Bb	Cm	Dm	Eb	F	Gm	Adim
B	C#m	D#m	E	F#	G#m	A#dim
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim
C#	D#m	E#m (or Fm)	F#	G#	A#m	B#dim (or Cdim)
D	Em	F#m	G	A	Bm	C#dim
Eb	Fm	Gm	Ab	Bb	Cm	Ddim
E	F#m	G#m	A	B	C#m	D#dim
F	Gm	Am	Bb	C	Dm	Edim
F#	G#m	A#m	B	C#	D#m	E#dim (or Fdim)
G	Am	Bm	C	D	Em	F#dim

Let's go back to the chords we were looking at for "American Pie". They were G – C – G – D.

When you're transposing your song to a new key, an easy trick is to assume the first chord in your song is the key of your song. That chord will become your I chord, when you go to the chart I've provided. So for our example, we can assume "American Pie" is in the key of G major. By looking at the chart above, we'll see the G is the I chord, the C is the IV chord, and the D is the V chord. Now, we can write our progression like this: I – IV – I – V.

We can take the roman numeral version of our chords, enter the chart and find out what chord to play if we wanted to transpose this song to any other major key. For example, knowing our chords are I – IV – I – V, we now know that if we wanted to play this song in the key of C major, our new chords would be C – F – C – G, based on the chart. If we wanted to play the song in the key of A major, our new chords would be A – D – A – E. Try playing those chords to see what they sound like. You might find it hard to sing the chorus of "American Pie" on top of them in their new key at first, because you're used to the pitches being somewhere else, but that's normal.

You may be thinking that the newly transposed versions of these chords sound pretty similar to the original chords. So why would you want to transpose the key of a song anyway?

For starters, it will help to distinguish it from the original version, by the nature of the shift in pitches. Additionally, changing the key of a song can help you get a song in a vocal range that's comfortable for you. If you decided on a melody on top of a certain chord progression, but you can't hit all of the notes in your melody, you can play the chords in a lower key. The melody will drop down along with the chord progression and then you'll be able to hit the high notes, because now they'll be in your vocal range. We'll talk much more about melodies later, but I just wanted to give you a good reason to change the key of your song, if necessary, based on your vocal range.

Another reason to change the key of your song could simply be that chords in one key are easier for you to play than chords in another key. It could simply be a matter of convenience.

If you're a guitar player, using a capo can make changing keys a lot easier. Here's another chart that will show you what chords you're playing while your capo's on. Sorry piano players, this one's just for the guitarists!

Guitar Capo Chart							
(chords played in the open position without capo)							
No Capo	C	G	D	A	E	F#	B
(new chords played by using the open positions above)							
Capo on 1	C#/Db	G#/Ab	D#/Eb	A#/Bb	F	G	C
Capo on 2	D	A	E	B	F#/Gb	G#/Ab	C#/Db
Capo on 3	D#/Eb	A#/Bb	F	C	G	A	D
Capo on 4	E	B	F#/Gb	C#/Db	G#/Ab	A#/Bb	D#/Eb
Capo on 5	F	C	G	D	A	B	E
Capo on 6	F#/Gb	C#/Db	G#/Ab	D#/Eb	A#/Bb	C	F
Capo on 7	G	D	A	E	B	C#/Db	F#/Gb
Capo on 8	G#/Ab	D#/Eb	A#/Bb	F	C	D	G
Capo on 9	A	E	B	F#/Gb	C#/Db	D#/Eb	G#/Ab

I'll give you a quick example for how to use this chart. Let's say you're playing a song that has the chords C, G and D without a capo. If you put a capo on the second fret, but keep the finger positioning (or shape) of those three chords the same (but moved up two frets on the fretboard), the new chords you'll be playing will be D, A and E, per the chart above.

Cover Songs

You may notice that using most of these techniques for changing the way a chord progression is played can also be used as a basis for coming up with a cool new cover version of an existing song. In addition to being able to use these techniques to transform the chords of a current song to a new song of your own, you can also use them to come up with creative new cover versions of the original songs.

If you do that, just make sure the changes you make match what the lyrics mean to you. For example, drastically reducing the tempo of a song with aggressive lyrics, could take away or change their meaning. If you took the song "For Those About to Rock (We Salute You)" by AC/DC and drastically reduced its tempo, while changing the arrangement to a solo acoustic guitar, the lyrics about rocking would practically lose their meaning. They may even become comical, because the song would be doing the exact opposite of rocking. It would be mellow. Make sure the song still means what you want it to mean.

Change the Mode

This section will get also be a bit technical. This topic is an important one to cover, as it's a great way to get ideas for new songs.

Despite what you learned in the previous section, you may not see any real reason to change the key of a song. That's fine, but one thing you may want to experiment with, is changing the *mode* of a song.

A mode is a type of scale. There are seven modes in modern music. Each mode can be thought of in terms of being a variation of the major scale (the major scale is also known as the Ionian mode). We'll look at the seven modes and their deviations from the major scale here.

Ionian (commonly known as "the Major Scale")

This is the standard on which the deviations of the other six modes are based. We can call out the notes in this scale as follows:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

Where we used roman numerals to indicated chords, as you saw earlier, here we're using numbers to indicate the individual notes of a scale. In the key of C major, or C Ionian, the notes in scale would be:

C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C

Dorian

Like all the modes, we can relate the Dorian mode back to the Ionian mode. The difference being that the 3rd and 7th notes of the major scale are flatted by a half step. In other words, the Dorian mode would look like this:

1	2	3♭	4	5	6	7♭	1

So in C Dorian, the notes would be:

C	D	E♭	F	G	A	B♭	C

Phrygian

The Phrygian mode relates back to the major scale by having a flatted second, third, sixth and seventh notes. So in relation to Ionian, it would be:

| 1 | 2♭ | 3♭ | 4 | 5 | 6♭ | 7♭ | 1 |

C Phrygian would be:

| C | D♭ | E♭ | F | G | A♭ | B♭ | C |

Lydian

The Lydian mode relates back to the major scale by having a raised fourth note. In relation to Ionian, it would be:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4# | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 |

C Lydian would be:

| C | D | E | F# | G | A | B | C |

Mixolydian

The Mixolydian mode relates back to the major scale by having a flatted seventh note. In relation to Ionian, it would be:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7♭ | 1 |

C Mixolydian would be:

| C | D | E | F | G | A | B♭ | C |

Aeolian (commonly known as "The Natural Minor Scale")

The Aeolian mode relates back to the major scale by having flatted third, sixth and seventh notes. In relation to Ionian, it would be:

1   2   3♭   4   5   6♭   7♭   1

C Aeolian (or natural minor) would be:

C   D   E♭   F   G   A♭   B♭   C

Locrian

The Locrian mode relates back to the major scale by having flatted second, third, fifth, sixth and seventh notes. In relation to Ionian, it would be:

1   2♭   3♭   4   5♭   6♭   7♭   1

C Locrian would be:

C   D♭   E♭   F   G♭   A♭   B♭   C

The Ionian, Lydian and Mixolydian modes are all considered to be major scales. When you refer to "the major scale" in music, you're specifically referring to the Ionian mode, but the Lydian and Mixolydian modes are also considered different types of major scales as well. The Dorian, Phrygian and Aeolian modes are considered to be minor scales. The Aeolian mode is what's generally referred to as the "natural minor scale." What distinguishes the major modes from the minor modes is the minor modes have flatted thirds. That gives them their characteristic minor sound. The Locrian mode is hardly ever used because of the sound created by the flatted fifth. It sounds very unstable, and is rarely used in songwriting. I've mentioned it here just so you know it exists.

So why did we just learn all that? How will that help you look to other songs for inspiration? Well, in the same way there were certain chords that fit into any major key (or the Ionian mode), as we saw in the previous section on changing keys, there are also specific chords that fit into the keys of *all* seven of modes we just looked at.

In the last section we changed the key of "American Pie" by shifting it from G major to C major, and then A major. When we changed the key, we were staying within the Ionian mode. All of those key changes were "major," or Ionian. This time we're going to stay in a G key, but we're going to play in a different *mode*.

The chords we were looking at from "American Pie" were G – C – G – D. Again, from our Ionian mode chart in the previous section, we saw that the G is the I chord, the C is the IV chord, and the D is the V chord. So our progression looks like this: I – IV – I – V.

Ionian Chords (Commonly Referred to as "Major" Keys)

I (Key)	IIm	IIIm	IV	V	VIm	VIIdim
Ab	Bbm	Cm	Db	Eb	Fm	Gdim
A	Bm	C#m	D	E	F#m	G#dim
Bb	Cm	Dm	Eb	F	Gm	Adim
B	C#m	D#m	E	F#	G#m	A#dim
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim
C#	D#m	E#m (or Fm)	F#	G#	A#m	B#dim (or Cdim)
D	Em	F#m	G	A	Bm	C#dim
Eb	Fm	Gm	Ab	Bb	Cm	Ddim
E	F#m	G#m	A	B	C#m	D#dim
F	Gm	Am	Bb	C	Dm	Edim
F#	G#m	A#m	B	C#	D#m	E#dim (or Fdim)
G	Am	Bm	C	D	Em	F#dim

This chart is showing you the Ionian chords again, with the key of G highlighted. To get a totally different feel, let's try playing this song in G Aeolian (or G Natural Minor). I've provided you with another chart to see the chords that are available in G Aeolian.

Based on the notes that are in the Aeolian scale, which we just learned about, the following chart will show you the chords that are associated with the Aeolian mode. The chart shows the

Aeolian mode in each key, but the G Aeolian chords are highlighted so you can easily reference them, since that's the key we're talking about right now.

Aeolian Chords (Commonly Referred to as "Natural Minor" Keys)

Im (Key)	IIdim	IIIb	IVm	Vm	VIb	VIIb
Abm	Bbdim	Cb (or B)	Dbm	Ebm	Fb (or E)	Gb
Am	Bdim	C	Dm	Em	F	G
Bbm	Cdim	Db	Ebm	Fm	Gb	Ab
Bm	C#dim	D	Em	F#m	G	A
Cm	Ddim	Eb	Fm	Gm	Ab	Bb
C#m	D#dim	E	F#m	G#m	A	B
Dm	Edim	F	Gm	Am	Bb	C
Ebm	Fdim	Gb	Abm	Bbm	Cb (or B)	Db
Em	F#dim	G	Am	Bm	C	D
Fm	Gdim	Ab	Bbm	Cm	Db	Eb
F#m	G#dim	A	Bm	C#m	D	E
Gm	Adim	Bb	Cm	Dm	Eb	F

Our Ionian chords in G were this: G – C – G – D

Now that we changed the mode, our new *Aeolian* chords will be this: Gm – Cm – Gm – Dm.

When we make this change, it'll have a big impact in what our song sounds like. The original song's melody won't fit these new minor chords because our melody now has to be in G Aeolian, like our chords, but that's fine since we're making this a whole new song and changing the melody anyway. We'll talk much more about melody writing later on.

I've also provided you with chord charts for all of the modes in a separate document that came with this book called *The Chord and Melody Writing Cheat Sheet*. Now you'll be able to experiment with changing songs from mode to mode, the same way we did here. It'll be a great opportunity for you to try out different sounds for your music.

Some of these modes lend themselves to popular songs better than others. Obviously, the Ionian mode is very popular. It's definitely worth experimenting with the sounds you can get from some of the other modes as well.

Combining These Ideas

Ideally, to make the chords from an existing song sound new for a song you're writing, you'll want to experiment with using a handful of the ideas you were just presented with at the same time. The only one that's really capable of completely obliterating the old sound of a song on its own is changing the mode of the chords, as you just saw.

But when using the other techniques, it's best to use a few at once. For example, let's say we like the chords in the song "Behind Blue Eyes" by the Who and we decide to use the first three chords in the verse as a basis for our own verse. The chords are Em – G – D when the words "No one knows what it's like" are sung. The song is in 4/4 time with the Em being played for four beats, the G being played for four beats and the D being played for eight beats. The chords are also arpeggiated in this part of the song. Based on that, let's say we decided to make these three changes:

1. We strum the chords, instead of arpeggiating them
2. We double the current tempo
3. We play the Em for 4 beats, the G for 8 beats and the D for 4 beats.

Trying playing that and see how it sounds. You can add each of those changes one at a time if that helps. When you do, you'll see the final result sounds very different from "Behind Blue Eyes" and could certainly be the starting point for a new song.

You can keep tweaking it further, if you'd like. You're not limited to only using only three techniques. I just did that here to keep it easy enough to follow along with. But you can use as many of these techniques as you like to get an existing chord progression to sound how you want.

Writing Full Songs

So far, we've been looking at the chords for one section of a song, and not a full song, because if we modified a full song for everything I wanted to show you, each example would get very long. But it should be noted that these ideas can also be applied to full songs. You can just carry out the ideas we looked at here through each section of a song you're looking to for inspiration.

If you're referencing a song you like, you can use some of the techniques you were presented with in your verses and different ones in your choruses to really get an original sound. For example, maybe you wanted to modify the chord progression in "High and Dry" by Radiohead. You could try arpeggiating and lengthening the chords in their verses, but you can use the rhythmic pattern of a different song that you like in the choruses.

Some of these techniques will likely have to be used throughout your entire song, if you decide to use them. I'm mainly talking about key changes, mode changes and tempo changes. It would be your safest bet not to change those from section to section (although they could work in some cases), but for the rest of the concepts we looked at, feel free to experiment with what works best in creating your own sound.

Using some of these concepts in your verses and others in your choruses will also help create contrast from section to section which is a definitely something that will help your song come along.

Another thing you can do when coming up with the chord progressions for your entire song is to look at a song you like and use its verse chords as your chorus chords and vice versa. You can still modify the sections with the techniques we looked at, but this way you'll be starting with a whole new landscape with which to lay your melody and lyrics on top of, while still using the chords of a successful song.

And of course, you can also reference two different songs, if they're in the same key. You can grab the verse chords from one song you like and the chorus chords form another. That could

get tricky and take some time, but the option's there if you're interested in that. You can use the supplied chord charts to help you figure out if two songs are in the same key.

The Do It Yourself Method

Finding Your Own Inspiration for Your Music

Common Chord Progressions

Even if you don't reference a different song directly, there are a few common chord progressions to be aware of in popular music. Some of the popular progressions in a major (Ionian) key include:

I – IV – V – V

I – IV – V – I

I – I – IV – V

I – IV – I – V

I – IV – V – IV

I – V – VIm – IV

I – VIm – IV – V

I – VI – IIm – V

I – IV – V – VIm

To play these chords in any key, simply reference the Ionian, or major key chart provided earlier, or in *The Chord and Melody Writing Cheat Sheet*.

As you play through these progressions, and toy with the rhythm a little, you'll probably start to hear a few hit songs that you like that use these progressions. You can try out these progressions in any key that suits your vocal range for the melody you come up with.

You can experiment with and modify these progressions by using any of the techniques we looked at in the Find Inspiration Method. For example, you can start with any of these chords and arpeggiate them, change the length of each chord being played, or make any of the other changes we discussed previously.

Using the Chord Charts

Even if you don't want to stick to the common chord progressions used in popular music, you can still play around with *any* chords in a key to see what you come up with. Let's look back at our chart for the major key chords.

Ionian Chords (Commonly Referred to as "Major" Keys)

I (Key)	IIm	IIIm	IV	V	VIm	VIIdim
Ab	Bbm	Cm	Db	Eb	Fm	Gdim
A	Bm	C#m	D	E	F#m	G#dim
Bb	Cm	Dm	Eb	F	Gm	Adim
B	C#m	D#m	E	F#	G#m	A#dim
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim
C#	D#m	E#m (or Fm)	F#	G#	A#m	B#dim (or Cdim)
D	Em	F#m	G	A	Bm	C#dim
Eb	Fm	Gm	Ab	Bb	Cm	Ddim
E	F#m	G#m	A	B	C#m	D#dim
F	Gm	Am	Bb	C	Dm	Edim
F#	G#m	A#m	B	C#	D#m	E#dim (or Fdim)
G	Am	Bm	C	D	Em	F#dim

If you're writing a song in G major, you can trying playing around with *any* of the following chords, according to the above chart: G, Am, Bm, C, D, E, and F#dim. This will give you a nice selection of chords you can use to write a song in the key of G.

Alternately, if you want to write a song in C, based on the chart above, you'll know your available chords are C, Dm, Em, F, G, Am, Bdim.

Simply reference the chart and try messing around with some chords in any key and see what you come up with. The chords shown here are only for the Ionian, or major key. But I've also provided charts for the other modes in the accompanying document, *The Chord and Melody Writing Cheat Sheet*, so you're welcome to try writing a song with those modes as well. It can only open up your possibilities to new sounds for your music.

Song Structure

When you write a full song, you'll need to decide on a song structure for that song. Your song structure will help you take the chords you've come up with and organize them into sections.

Like chords, song structure can't be copyrighted either. In fact there are really only a handful of common song structures used in popular music. So another thing you can do, before you even start to lay out the chords of your song, is you can look at the song structures of other songs you like, and use that as your song's skeleton. Otherwise, you can just be aware of the common song structures, which we'll look at in a moment.

Song structure is important because it organizes our songs. You don't have to reinvent the wheel in order to be creative. Think of the most common types of song structures as universally agreed upon roadmaps for your songs. They tell us where the song is going. We've heard the most common structures so many times that we're practically trained to know what section is coming next. While that might seem like a bad thing, it's not because it brings a familiarity to our music which makes people want to hear it, if you're doing everything else right too.

Earlier in this book, we looked at the different sections of a song, and their functions. Here, I'll list a few common song structures and how the sections we previously looked at fit into each structure. I'll also list some hit songs that use each structure, as an example. I'd recommend listening to those songs to see what their song structure does, as you read along here.

Verse / Chorus / Verse / Chorus / Bridge / Chorus

This one's also known as an ABABCB structure, where A is the verse, B is the chorus and C is the bridge. This one's extremely popular. Radiohead's "High and Dry" is a good example of this song structure.

Verse / Pre-Chorus / Chorus / Verse / Pre-Chorus / Chorus / Bridge / Chorus

This one's a slight variation of the first structure we looked at. The only difference here is the addition of a pre-chorus which shows up before the choruses. A good example of this structure is Katy Perry's "Firework." The part that starts on the words "You just gotta ignite the light…" is the Pre-Chorus.

In both of these song structures it's fairly common for the chorus to be repeated a second time at the very end of the song to really drive the hook of the song home to the listeners.

Verse / Verse / Bridge / Verse

This one's a bit of a departure from the first two structures we looked at. It's also known as an AABA structure. This time A denotes the verse, while B denotes the bridge. There's no chorus in this type of structure. Instead, each verse usually ends (or begins) with a refrain. A refrain is a line or two that repeats throughout the song. Since it's usually the title, the words of the refrain typically stay the same, while the rest of the verse lyrics change.

A lot of times this song structure will have a lot of variation in the verse melody, since the verses repeat often. That variation keeps their melody from getting boring during all the repetition.

The Beatles and Billy Joel have used this song structure a lot. The song "We Can Work it Out" by the Beatles uses this structure. The title line "We Can Work it Out" is the refrain in the verses. The section starting on "Live is very short…" is the bridge.

Any of these structures can be modified as appropriate for your song. You may have noticed that in "We Can Work it Out," the bridge is repeated twice. This is a pretty common modification of the AABA format since a lot of times a simple verse / verse / bridge / verse structure often makes for a very short song.

Those three song structures are the big ones. There are two others that are also common, but they're used less because they don't have a bridge.

Verse / Chorus / Verse / Chorus

Also known as an ABAB structure, this one is a simplified version of the ABABCB structure. The only difference is there's no bridge. The verse and chorus may be repeated more than twice. "Somebody That I Used to Know" by Gotye is a good example of this type of song structure.

Verse / Verse / Verse

This one's also know as an AAA structure. It's not used often because it's hard to keep things interesting if all you have is one section being repeated over and over. Like the AABA structure, this one also makes use of a refrain in the verses, as the central focus. Bob Dylan uses this song form in "Tangled Up in Blue." Take note of the variation in the melodies throughout a typical verse in that song. An interesting melody is crucial in a song with this structure in order to keep the melody from getting boring.

A bridge helps to change up the sound of a song and keep it interesting. It prevents a song from simply being a repetition of one or two sections. That's why these last two song structures don't show up as much as the first three we looked at, but you should know they exist in songwriting.

Contrast Your Sections

When you're writing a song, it's important to have your verse sound different from your chorus and your bridge. Contrasting your sections is how you keep each section sounding interesting again. Here are a few ways you can create contrast between your sections, in reference to your chord progressions:

Use Different Chords in Each Section

If you use the same chords throughout your whole song, you'll be relying very heavily on your melody to provide an effective contrast between sections. It's usually more interesting to simply use a different progression of chords from section to section. Plus, when you contrast your melody *too*, it'll create even more contrast.

Use a Different Rhythmic Pattern in Each Section

For example, if you strum the chords slowly in the verses, try a quicker paced rhythm in your chorus. If you arpeggiate your verses, try strumming your choruses.

Start Each Section on a Different Chord

If your verses start on the I chord, try starting your choruses on the V chord, for example. Having each section start on a different chord will clearly let the listener know a new section has begun.

Play Your Chords for a Different Length in Each Section

If the chords in your verses are four beats each, try making the chords in your chorus two beats each, as an example. This is a great way to create contrast.

Implementing moves like these will help you create a contrast between sections of you song, even before you've laid down any melody, so you'll already be off to a good start. Experiment with these ideas, to see what works best for you song. Contrast is a great way to keep people interested throughout the course of your song. Without it, your song can get boring pretty quickly.

Last Note

In the first module, we looked at some ways to come up with big ideas for what your song will be about. In this module, we looked at a variety of ways for coming up with chord progressions for your song.

Now that we have these two pieces of our song, we can start to think about how we want to tie them together, in terms of our song's prosody. A good place to start when you're only looking at chord progressions and what your song will be about is to decide whether your song will be in a major or minor key.

If you decided on an uplifting, or positive message in the last module, you'll probably want your song to be Ionian, Lydian or Mixolydian. Conversely, if your song is going to be more of a downer, idea-wise, you may want to consider an Aeolian, Dorian or Phrygian mode for your song.

Tempo is another concept that will strongly tie into your song's big idea. It's best to experiment with the different possibilities for your song's speed and see what sets the best mood for your song's idea. Doing this will greatly benefit your song and make more people want to hear it.

MODULE 3: MELODIES

Now the pieces are starting to come together. We looked at ways to come up with a song idea, which will guide us through all the decisions we make for our song. We even have some chord progressions and a song structure. Now it's time to lay down a melody on top of that.

All melodies are essentially made up of two parts: rhythm and pitch. Think of a melody in terms of a two-dimensional graph, where what happens up and down is the pitch, and what happens from side to side is the rhythm. Anything outside of rhythm and pitch is no longer melody, it's vocal delivery. That includes, volume, emotion and energy. None of those elements are carried in the actual melody, they are contributed by the individual singer in his vocal delivery, not in the notes that are on a page of sheet music.

The melody will be the most defining element of our song. It'll determine whether or not your listeners get your song struck in their heads and want to hear it again and own it. Melody is the main ingredient of a song that can make it a hit, or prevent it from ever being one. Having said that, let's take a look at how we can come up with some strong melodies.

The Find Inspiration Method

Drawing Inspiration for Your Music from Other Songs

Disclaimer

Unlike chords or song ideas, melodies are copyrightable. You can't swipe someone else's melody, or even a piece of it, and use it in your own music.

You can use other artists' melodies as inspiration for your song, though. If you take this approach, you have to be very careful you thoroughly change the original artist's melody, so you're not plagiarizing. When talking about modifying someone else's chords I recommended you use more than one of the techniques you learned to make the chords your own. In reference to melody, it'll become a *requirement* to modify multiple aspects of an existing melody until it sounds nothing like the original. Again, melodies are copyrightable, and it's imperative that you completely shake the sound of the original, if you're referencing someone else's song. You can keep some of its style, but you *have* to make it your own.

In fact, if you use an existing song as a starting point to write your own melodies, I'd recommend showing your melodies to a few friends who can give you some honest feedback. If your friends think these melodies still sound too much like the originals, you'll want to go back to the drawing board, and make further tweaks. Additionally, if you're referencing someone else's melody when writing your own, it'll best suit you to make sure you're using different chords beneath that melody. If you do that, the melody most likely won't be able to match the original as much.

With that being said, we'll be looking at ways to manipulate the pitches and rhythms of current melodies to create our own. You'll notice that some of these ideas will be similar to what we learned about changing chord progressions. The nice thing about referencing the melody from a hit song, is you know it has the elements of a hit melody built in, which can help out your own melody a lot.

Truncate the Original Melody and Lengthen the Notes

Let's say you're stuck on coming up with a melody, so you start listening to other music for inspiration and you hear a melody that inspires you. Let's use the first line of the melody heard in "Deck the Halls" as an example.

Aligning the notes with the words, the notes in that part of the melody work out to be something like this:

Deck	*the*	*halls*	*with*	*boughs of*		*hol-*	*ly*
C	B♭	A	G	F	G	A	F

The song is in 4/4 time and almost all the notes are quarter notes, with one note per beat. Let's focus on the first four notes, as they have a nice descending pattern. We'll change the timing of each of the first four notes to give them a new sound. Try playing each of those four notes for *two* beats each, instead of how it's currently played. It'll sound much slower. Play the notes on your piano or guitar if it helps. You can keep the same words for now to make it easier to follow along. Play each of these notes for two beats:

Deck	*the*	*halls*	*with*
C	B♭	A	G

We did two things here. We lengthened the notes and shortened the original melody by chopping off the "boughs of holly" part. We're left with a new piece of melody we can now use, and repeat in our song. We'll call this small chunk of melody a motif.

Motifs

Before I move on to another technique, I want to talk more about what melodic motifs are, since we'll be discussing them a lot in this module.

The best melodies are kept simple, so they're singable. The main ingredient of melodic simplicity is repetition. But the key is to be repetitious, without being overly repetitious. That's where the idea of a melodic motif comes in.

A motif is a part of a melody that's repeated throughout your song. It helps to shape the sound of your song. It's what makes it memorable. A good motif is not a line of melody that's repeated over and over again as-is, but it's one that's repeated and slightly modified. That makes for a melody that's both memorable, and not overly repetitious.

Listen to the four lines of melody in the chorus of "Firework," by Katy Perry, as an example. All four lines *start* with the same melody, but then each of those four melodic lines *ends* differently. Sing it out loud to see what I mean. It keeps the chorus familiar and singable, without being overly repetitious.

It's important to note your song won't be based on a single motif, but a couple of them. You may have two different motifs that appear in your verses, and a third that happens in your chorus. A good rule of thumb is not to have more than two melodic motifs in each section of your song. It'll help keep it memorable, without it getting too complicated.

Now that you have a better understanding for what a motif is, let's go back to the one we just came up with, and use some more techniques to make it our own.

Repeat and Add to the Motif

An example of adding to a motif can be heard in the Beatles song "She Loves You." The song opens on a motif that happens in the melody when they sing "She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah." That melodic motif gets repeated twice in the exact same way. The third time they sing it, that melodic motif is changed, slightly, by adding an extra "yeah" at the end of the original motif. Sing it to see what I mean.

For our example, let's stick with the melody we came up with before as our melodic motif. We'll change the words "Deck the halls with" to "la la la la" since we're not going to be keeping those lyrics.

la	*la*	*la*	*la*
C	B♭	A	G

Remember, in our melody, we're playing each of these four notes for two beats, in 4/4 time. That's our motif in this example, so now we can try adding to it, to make it our own. We'll say this is part of a verse to our song. Assume all the notes listed below are half notes. You can play along on your guitar or piano, if it helps. So let's try this:

Melody Line 1

la	*la*	*la*	*la*
C	B♭	A	G

Melody Line 2

la	*la*	*la*	*la*
C	B♭	A	G

Melody Line 3

la	*la*	*la*	*la*	*la*
C	B♭	A	G	F

All we did was repeat our motif three times, but at the end of the third repetition, we added a half note F, which made the melody sound different and closed it off. That's how adding to a motif works. You don't have to keep the added portion as simple as we did here, but it easily lets you see how it works.

Shorten the Motif and Add Spacing

Another way we can change the current motif is by keeping the motif the same, but truncating it and adding space where the old melody continued. This is a cool trick for making a melody sound original pretty quickly and easily. Let's go back to our original reference melody, where each note is two beats:

la   *la*   *la*   *la*

C   B♭   A   G

Now let's try subtracting from that melody. Again, do everything here on half notes:

Melody Line 1

la   *la*   *la*   (2 beat rest)

C   B♭   A

Melody Line 2

la   *la*   *la*   (2 beat rest)

C   B♭   A

Melody Line 3

la   *la*   *la*   *la*

C   B♭   A   G

Here we truncated our reference melody the first two times around and then kept our original idea as a longer third melody line. You could also look at this one as having a lengthened third melody line.

We could apply the idea of shortening the motif and adding spacing in a different way too. We could make the last line the one that gets shortened. Like this:

Melody Line 1

la	la	la	la
C	B♭	A	G

Melody Line 2

la	la	la	la
C	B♭	A	G

Melody Line 3

la	la	la	(2 beat rest)
C	B♭	A	

Subtract from the Motif

You're probably starting to get the idea of how we can chop up our motifs to make memorable and somewhat repetitious melodies. If we decide to shorten a motif, we don't necessarily have to subtract from the end of a motif, we can also subtract from the beginning of a motif.

The Beatles song "Can't Buy Me Love" is a good example of that.
Look at the first three lines of lyrics:

Can't buy me love

Love

Can't buy me love

The melody that happens on the first line, "Can't buy me love" established the motif for this section of the song. The Beatles didn't wait until the third time to change the melody. They did it on the second line. They omitted the melody on the words "Can't buy me..." and only included the melody on the word "love." By clipping the first part of the original motif, we're hearing something familiar without hearing the whole motif again. Then, the full motif is repeated on the third line when they go back to the line "Can't buy me love" again. You can see how memorable that makes the melody.

Keep the Notes and Change the Rhythm

We looked at a similar concept when we were talking about chord progressions in the last module. We can apply this same idea to melodies.

This is also similar to what we talking about in the melody section on lengthening the notes. But here, we're changing the *entire* rhythm, so some notes may get longer while others can get shorter. The idea is to keep the current song's notes, while completely changing the rhythm. If you recall, the notes in "Deck the Halls" were as follows:

Deck	*the*	*halls*	*with*	*boughs of*		*hol-*	*ly*
C	B♭	A	G	F	G	A	F

Let's look at those notes aligned to the beat. The numbers on top represent the beats of the measures:

1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
laaaa	*la*	*la*	*la*	*la*	*la*	*la*	*la*
C	B♭	A	G	F	G	A	F

Let's try keeping those same notes while changing the rhythm to come up with our own altered melody:

1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Laaaaa		*la*	*la*	*la*	*la*	*laaaaa*	
C		B♭	A	G	F	G	

If you play these notes on your piano or guitar to the new beats I've assigned to them, you'll see the melody takes on a completely different feel. As I've shown, play the first C as a half note for two beats, the next four notes will be eight notes spanning two beats, and the final G will be a half note. So we've either shortened or lengthened all of the original notes to give them an entirely new rhythm. As you can hear, if you played along, it doesn't resemble the melody to "Deck the Halls" at all.

You'll also notice I deleted the last two notes from the original melody in "Deck the Halls" (the A and the F), which also helped change up the sound of the original melody a bit.

There are endless ways in which I can keep the same notes as an existing melody, while modifying the rhythm, to come up with something new. You can experiment with some other rhythms to see what works best for you.

Reverse the Order of the Notes

What we've looked at so far were ways of changing the rhythm of an existing melody. As I mentioned at the beginning of this module, melodies are composed of both rhythm and pitch, so now we'll look at how to change the *notes* of an existing melody to make it your own.

A cool trick to try for changing the notes of a melody is to keep the rhythm exactly the same, but invert the notes. So you'll play all the exact same notes, but they'll be in reverse order. Let's take a look at the rhythm and notes of "Deck the Halls" again:

1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
laaaa	*la*	*la*	*la*	*la*	*la*	*la*	*la*
C	B♭ A	G	F	G	A	F	

Now let's invert the melody to create a new one:

1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
laaaa	*la*	*la*	*la*	*la*	*la*	*la*	*la*
F	A	G	F	G	A	B♭	C

If you played along with that, you'll see that the melody sounds pretty different from that of "Deck the Halls," even though the rhythm is the same. All I did was reverse the order of the notes. Of course, this idea won't work with a song that has a single note melody.

You can also try scrambling the notes in a random order, as opposed to just reversing them, while keeping the same rhythm, to see what possibilities it will present. You can even experiment with changing both the notes and the rhythm to really get a melody that's completely original. I recommend trying that as well.

The Do It Yourself Method

Finding Your Own Inspiration for Your Music

Use the Notes in Your Chords

If you're stuck on coming up with a melody and you don't want to reference someone else's, an easy place to get started is to experiment with using the notes in your chords as a basis for your melody.

For example, let's say you have a verse that switches back and forth between a C chord and a G chord. Knowing that a C chord is composed of the notes C, E and G, you can use those three notes as a basis for your melody when you're playing the C chord. A G chord has the notes G, B and D, so when you switch to the G, you can use those three notes in your melody.

You still want to write with motifs, as we discussed earlier, so you can compose a motif that will span both of these chords. Maybe the notes of your melody become C – E – G, over the C chord and then G – B – G over the G chord. So your motif will be composed of the notes C – E – G – G – B – G, over the C and G chords. You can experiment with different rhythms for the notes to see what works best, but this can be a good place to start. You can use some of the techniques we looked at in the Find Inspiration Method as a basis for tweaking the rhythm of the notes you come up with.

Modes

When coming up with melodies, it's important to talk about different modes (Ionian, Dorian, Lydian, etc.), as they'll generally be the basis for your melodic motifs. In the last module, we talked about the different modes and how you can use their chords to come up with chord progressions for your songs. Here, we'll look at how you can put their scales on top of those chords to write your melodies.

Whichever mode your song is in, you can use that mode to create melodies. In the previous module on chord progressions, we learned your song can be in the key of C Ionian, D Aeolian, G Mixolydian, or any other possible combination of notes and modes based on the chords you're playing.

If your song uses C Ionian chords, you can use any of the seven notes of the C major scale over your chords to come up with a melody. Once you've established a melodic motif, you can modify it by using any of the techniques we've already discussed as part of the Find Inspiration Method.

I won't go through every mode here, since the concept is the same for each one, and we already discussed all the different modes in the last module. However, I will be providing you with charts in *The Chord and Melody Writing Cheat Sheet* for the modes we've looked at, in each key. This way you'll be able to use them as a reference when you're coming up with a new melody over *any* chords. You'll know exactly what notes will work for the mode you're in, and you can mess around with them accordingly.

With that being said, we'll look at an example of what I'm talking about in the key of D Aeolian. Let's say the chords in our song are Dm – Gm – Am. We know this is D Aeolian, because when referencing the chord charts with all the different modes, D Aeolian is the only one that has all three of these chords, when Dm is the root chord, or the I chord. Therefore, we can use the D Aeolian scale to come up with a melody on top of these chords. If you remember back to our earlier discussion on modes, the Aeolian mode relates back to the Ionian mode by having a flatted third, sixth and seventh notes. So in relation to Ionian, it is:

$$1 \qquad 2 \qquad 3\flat \qquad 4 \qquad 5 \qquad 6\flat \qquad 7\flat \qquad 1$$

Since we're working in D Aeolian here, the notes will be:

$$D \qquad E \qquad F \qquad G \qquad A \qquad B\flat \qquad C \qquad D$$

Since our chords are in D Aeolian, we can use the notes of the D Aeolian mode to come up with melodies over our chords. Record a chord progression of Dm – Gm – Am with any rhythm you'd like. Then play around with the notes of the D Aeolian scale over that progression to see if you can come up with a melodic motif you like. Remember, you're not soloing here. Instead you're looking for a short catchy piece of melody you can use and modify to become the basis for your melody. I've included guitar tabs for the different modes in *The Chord and Melody Writing Cheat Sheet*, so you can easily use it as a reference when writing melodies if you play the guitar. You can develop the melody on your guitar or piano, and then sing it once you've found the notes and a rhythm you're happy with.

This concept applies to each mode. You don't have to memorize all the notes in all the modes (although it wouldn't hurt). As I said, I've provided charts for you with all of the chords of the major and minor modes, along with the scales and tabs that go along with them in a separate document that came with this book. As long as you know what mode your song is in, you can use the charts to come up with a melody for your chords. If you're not sure what key your song is in, just assume the first chord is the key. Then go to the charts and see which of your chords are in the appropriate mode.

For example, if I didn't know the track we just played was in D Aeolian, I could assume we're in a minor D key, just because the first chord of our song is a Dmin. Because of that our song is likely to be in either D Dorian, D Aeolian, or D Phrygian. I'd then go to the leftmost column of those three chord charts in *The Chord and Melody Writing Cheat Sheet* and find the "D." That's the key. Now we need to figure out the mode. So far, we only know it's minor a key.

Look at the rest of the chords in our progression. We have: Dm, Gm and Am. If I look at the key of D Dorian, it has a Dm and Am, but it has a G major chord, instead of a Gmin. So we're not in Dorian. If we look at the chart for the key of D Phrygian, we'll see it has a Dm and a Gm, but it's A chord is diminished, so we're not in D Phrygian either. When we look at the chart for D Aeolian, we'll see that all three of our chords are there: Dm, Am and Gm. So we're in D Aeolian and we can use the D Aeolian scale as a basis for our melodies.

Pentatonic & Blues Scales

You're not limited to using the scale of your song's mode to come up with melodies. You have other options too. The pentatonic and blues scales are also great melody writing tools.
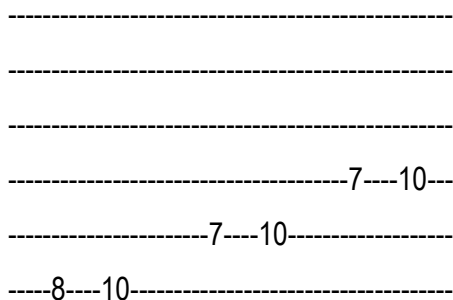
Major Pentatonic

The major pentatonic scale is based on the Ionian mode, but it only has five notes in it, hence the "penta-" prefix. The major pentatonic scale can be thought of as the root, second, third, fifth and sixth notes of the Ionian mode. In other words, it looks like this:

1   2   3   5   6   1

So the C Major Pentatonic scale would be:

C   D   E   G   A   C

Play it to hear what it sounds like. If you're a guitar player, the first position of the C major pentatonic will play out like this on your fretboard:

```
-------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------7----10---
---------------------7----10-------------------
-----8----10-----------------------------------
```

The cool thing about the major pentatonic scale is that it can be played over *any* chord progression in a major key. That includes the Ionian, Lydian and Mixolydian modes. You can use the notes in the C major pentatonic scale (C, D, E, G, A) to come up with a melody for a song in C Ionian, C Lydian or C Mixolydian. It'll work with all three major modes, so it's fairly universal in that sense. Experiment with this scale to find out what works best with your style.

Most importantly, trust your ears. They'll tell you whether or not something's working for you song.

As long as you stick to those five notes, your melody will be based on the C Major Pentatonic scale. You can riff around on those notes and see what you come up with. You can play them in any order, in any octave, with any note lengths. Just stick to those five notes. It may be helpful for you to play the notes on a guitar or piano, so you can clearly hear where they are. Then you can hum or sing them as a melody.
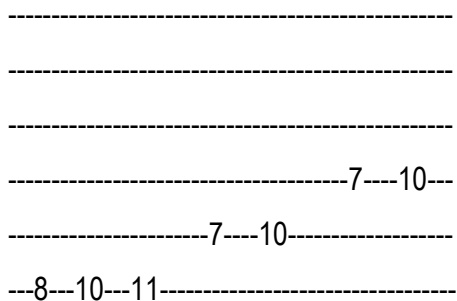
Major Blues

Just like the major pentatonic scale, the major blues scale can also be played over any chord progression in a major key. If you add one little note to the major pentatonic scale, it becomes the major blues scale. That note is a flatted third. So in relation to the major scale, the major blues scale is defined as:

| 1 | 2 | 3♭ | 3 | 5 | 6 | 1 |

The C Major Blues scale would be:

| C | D | E♭ | E | G | A | C |

It'll look like this on the fretboard:

```
-------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------------
--------------------------------------7----10---
----------------------7----10-------------------
---8---10---11-----------------------------------
```

Play it. Do you hear that bluesy texture the extra flatted third note adds? It's a bluesy, rock kind of feel. As long as we stick to those six notes in our melody, our melody will be based on the C major blues scale. So riff around on those notes and see what you come up with.

Minor Pentatonic

In the same way the major pentatonic scale uses only five of the notes of the major (Ionian) scale, the minor pentatonic uses only five notes of the natural minor (Aeolian) scale. It uses only the first, third, fourth, fifth and seventh notes of the natural minor scale.
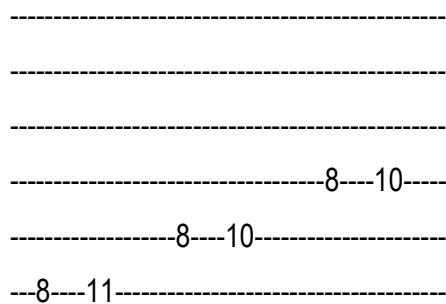
So relating back to the *natural minor scale* (not the major scale), the minor pentatonic uses these notes:

1   3   4   5   7   1

The C minor pentatonic scale would be:

C   E♭   F   G   B♭   C

It'll look like this on the fretboard:

```
-------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------
-------------------------------------------
----------------------------------8----10-----
------------------8----10--------------------
---8----11-----------------------------------
```

Play it to hear what it sounds like.

As long as we stick to those five notes, our melody will be based on the C minor pentatonic scale. The cool thing about the minor pentatonic scale is that it can be played over *any* chord progression in *any* key, major *or* minor. That includes the Ionian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Dorian, Aeolian *and* Phrygian modes. You can use the notes in the C minor pentatonic scale (C, D, E, G, A) to come up with a melody for a song in the major keys of C Ionian, C Lydian or C Mixolydian, and you can also use the scale to come up with melodies for the minor keys of C Dorian, C Aeolian, or C Phrygian. It'll work with all six of those modes, so it's very universal.

Now you may be saying "But this is a minor scale! How come I can play it over a chord progression in a *major* key?" *That's* the power of the minor pentatonic scale. Unlike the other scales, it can be played over practically any chord progression, major or minor, and it will sound good. It's sort of a shortcut to coming up with melodies, if you don't know whether a song is in a major or minor key. But again, I encourage you to experiment with this scale to find out what works best with your style, and to get a feel for the sounds it creates.

Try taking the chords from one of your songs, and see if you could come up with a new melody for it, based on the minor pentatonic scale. It'll help give you a feel for the sounds that scale has to offer. Then try it over another one of your songs to see how it varies over a different chord progression.

Minor Blues

The minor blues scale is the same as the minor pentatonic, with the addition of the blue note. This time the blue note is the addition of a flatted fifth, in reference to the natural minor (Aeolian) scale. So the minor blues scale uses the first, third, fourth, flatted fifth, fifth and seventh notes of the natural minor scale. The cool part is, the same deal applies for the minor blues scale as applies to the minor pentatonic scale. You can use it over *both* major or minor keys.
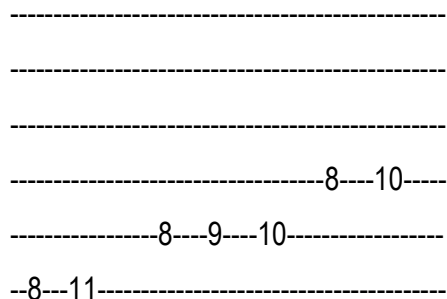
Relating back to the *natural minor scale* (not the major scale), the minor blues scale uses only these notes:

    1   3   4   5♭   5   7   1

The C minor blues scale would be:

    C   E♭   F   G♭   G   B♭   C

Again, if you're a guitar player, it'll look like this on the fretboard:

```
---------------------------------------------
---------------------------------------------
---------------------------------------------
----------------------------------8----10-----
----------------8----9----10-----------------
--8---11-------------------------------------
```

If our melody holds to those six notes it'll be based on the C minor pentatonic scale. Try jamming around on those notes over a chord progression in C that's major, or minor. You can do it with your guitar or piano and then translate that to a vocal later. Try to come up with a short catchy motif.

If you're hard-pressed for melodies *and* you don't know (or care) if your song is in a major or minor key, the minor pentatonic and minor blues scales are a cool place to start. Just play a recording of your song's chord progression, and head on over to your keyboard or guitar and start tooling around on those scales. See what you come up with. There's usually some cool stuff hiding out in those five or six little notes. Have fun experimenting with them.

These scales will sound better over certain chord progressions and musical styles than others, but they're worth trying out if you're in a rut with coming up with a melody. You're bound to be able to get something from them.

These scales may not be something you want use every single time you write a melody, as your melodies could potentially start to sound similar, but it's nice to have them in your back pocket, if you need them.

Pentatonic and Blues Scales Summary

You can see we've got some flexibility when we use the major and minor pentatonic and blues scales as a basis for our melodies. As long as you're in any major key (whether it's Lydian, Ionian or Mixolydian) you can use the major blues or pentatonic scales to write melodies. What's even cooler is you can use the minor pentatonic and blues scales to write melodies in any key, major or minor. It's pretty powerful stuff for coming up with creating melodies.

The pentatonic and blues scales are great "shortcut" scales for coming up with great melodies, because they sound good because of the reduced number of notes. Remember, those scales are simply based on some of our other scales, with some notes omitted (and then adding a blue note in the case of the blues scales).

I've provided a chart of the major and minor pentatonic and blues scales in each key in *The Chord and Melody Writing Cheat Sheet* for your reference as you come up with melodies. It includes guitar tabs for them as well.

Organize Your Pitches Into Patterns

Now that we know the scales, we have a basis for our melodies. It's always worth experimenting with just jamming on the scale in your key, over a recording of your chord progression. If you do this on a piano or guitar, it can be a great way to come up with some cool ideas for melodic motifs.

But if just knowing the scales and hoping you can stumble upon a melody isn't enough for you, we can also look at some ways to specifically modify the scales to come up with melodies. Let's look at a few ways to force out a melodic motif.

Simple repetition

This one's easy. You just repeat the same note over and over. It's actually a great way to experiment with different rhythms to use in your melody, because if you only have one note in your melody, the only variable becomes the rhythm.

If you use this approach, it usually works best to make a slight note change at the end. Katy Perry's "Part of Me" is a good example of this. The first few lines of melody in the song are all sung on one note, until the very last note of the line. Then there's a change.

An Ascending Pattern

Using an ascending scale pattern can be an easy way to come up with a melodic motif. You can experiment with different ascending patterns in addition to different rhythms. For example, you can try using the first, second, third and fifth notes of your scale. I'll denote that like this: 1 – 2 – 3 – 5. Or you can try the 1 – 3 – 5 notes of your scale. You can even try repeating notes on your way up your motif. Maybe the notes of your melody will do something like this: 1 – 1 – 2 – 2 – 3. Try out each ascending pattern with different rhythms to present yourself with a bunch of potential motif ideas.

A Descending Pattern

If we can have an ascending pattern as our motif, then we could also use a descending pattern in the same way. You can use the notes of your scale to create patterns like: 5 – 5 – 1, or 3 – 2 – 1. There are a ton of opportunities here too.

A Zig Zagging Pattern

Zig zagging the notes of a scale is another way to come up with "shapes" for the pitches in your melodic motif. To create a pattern like this, you would simply jump up and then back down, and then back up again. Something like: 1 – 5 – 3 – 8 would be an example of a zig zagging melodic pattern.

Raise the Pitches

Once you have a pattern established, you can modify that motif, by keeping the rhythm the same while raising its pitch the next time you hear it. For example, if the notes you've established in your motif are E – F – G, you can change them to F – G – A the second time they're sung. If you do this, you can keep the rhythm the same as it was in your original motif, but now you're modifying your motif based solely on the pitches being presented.

When you're experimenting with any of these different ways to organize the pitches of a scale to create a melody, you should also experiment with the rhythm of your notes. You can try playing all the notes as eight notes, then holding out the last note as a half note. Then try reversing that order. As you saw in the Find Inspiration Method of this module, keeping the same notes, but changing the rhythm can give you a wide variety of sounds to come up with.

In the Find Inspiration Method, we also looked at some ways to modify a motif to keep it interesting throughout your sections. Once you've established your motif by organizing the pitches of a scale in a pattern, you can modify it in the same ways you saw earlier.

Contrast Your Sections

Earlier in this book, we talked about the different sections of a song and how each section functions. What primarily sets the different sections of a song apart from each other, is contrast between each section. In the last module, we looked at some ways for creating contrast from section to section by using your chord progressions. Here we'll look at some ways to create contrast in your songs by using your melodies. Of course if you contrast both your chord progressions and your melodies together, you're likely to find the best results of all.

Vocal Range

This is a big one, because it's so effective. It's pretty common in many popular songs to have the verses sung in a lower register, and then the choruses sung close to the top of the singer's vocal range. It's a great way to let you know when one section has ended and another is beginning. Also, when the chorus is sung higher than the verses and bridge, it's a great way to make your chorus stand out, which is what it's supposed to do.

Another way to incorporate vocal range as a way to distinguish one section from another is to keep a very tight vocal range in your verses, but then use a much wider vocal range in your choruses. A good example of this can be heard in the song "Brighter Than the Sun," by Colbie Caillat. In her verses, she keeps her vocals in a pretty tight knit range, staying mainly between a G and a D the entire time. But once she hits the chorus, she jumps up an octave to a higher G, and hops around *within* a full octave to get her catchy hook across.

The Rhythm of the Notes

As we discussed earlier, a melody is composed of rhythm and pitch. While changing your vocal range from section to section is a way to achieve contrast with your pitch, you can also change the rhythm of your melody from verse to chorus to bridge to achieve contrast.

If you have short choppy notes in your verses, you can use longer, more drawn out notes in your choruses. If you have a lot of space between the phrases in your verses, you can use almost no space between the phrases in your choruses.

In other words, if you establish one rhythmic idea in your verses, by simply changing it to its opposite in the choruses, you'll be creating a nice contrast for your melody. A great example of changing the rhythm of each section happens in the song "It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)" by R.E.M. The melody in the verses is very quick, and choppy, while the chorus melody is much more drawn out.

This same idea is used in the song "Over the Rainbow" by Judy Garland. The verses have very drawn out melodies, while the bridge has much shorter choppier notes, starting on the line "Someday I wish upon a star." It makes for a very effective contrast.

Start the Melody on a Different Beat

This is a good one, that's often not considered. The beat you start your melody on can affect the mood of your song. A lot of times songwriters write their melodies starting on the downbeat (or the first beat) of a measure, because it tends to come more naturally to do so. If you do that all the time, it can become tedious. That's why if your chorus starts every melodic line on a downbeat, it can be an effective strategy to start your verse's melodic lines on a beat other than the downbeat.

It's also important to note that whatever word lands on the downbeat will tend to be the most highlighted in your phrase. That's why if the title of your song is one word, and it falls on the first beat of a measure, it can be an effective move for highlighting the title. We'll talk a lot more about that in the next module on lyric writing.

Tips & Tricks

Here are some additional tips and tricks to help open your melodic flood gates.

Practice Makes Perfect

Obviously, the more you do something, the better you'll get at it. For that reason you should be writing melodies every day. If you don't have the time for that, that's okay. A great tip I learned from hit songwriter Clay Drayton, is to constantly be putting melodies to phrases, sayings and signs you come across in your everyday life. If you see a street sign that says "Mulberry Road," sing a melody to that.

A lot of what you come up may not be that good, but that's okay. Writing melodies is a skill to be developed. A lot of what you come up with may not be that good, but the more you do it, the better you'll get.

Plus, this exercise will fine tune your mind to be more melody conscious. When it's time to write a song, writing a melody will come more easily to you. If you're carrying around something to record your ideas, you can easily capture something you like, and use it in a song when it's time to write.

Using Nonsense Syllables

Great melodies are memorable and singable. As a result, they're usually fairly simple. Our minds like simple. In terms of music and melody writing, simple means easy to remember, repetitious and easy to sing along to. As songwriters, a lot of times we like to overcomplicate our melodies. One of the ways we do this is by writing lyrics that are too wordy. Wordy lyrics can get in the way of your melody and overcomplicate it enough so that it's barely even melodic anymore.

Think about how much easier it would be if you didn't have to focus on lyrics, but *just* on the melody. That's actually an approach used in a lot of hit songs. What if you could use simple

one-syllable sounds instead of words? Then your wordy lyric problem would go away, and you'd find yourself focusing *only* on a melody. Plus if your words are just simple sounds, your melodies become simple too, because simple melodies plus simple words/sounds go hand in hand.

For that reason, if you write a simple melody where there are no words, but just vocal sounds, it can make your song more marketable. Let's look at a few examples of when this has been done.

- In the first few measures of Pink's song, "So What" she sings the whole intro by repeating "nah."

- In the first 45 seconds of Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance," the intro is all vocal sounds, with the exception of the phrase "caught in a bad romance."

- In the first ten seconds of "King of Anything" by Sara Bareilles, the melody is sung entirely on the sound "oh."

- Aerosmith's "Love in an Elevator" starts its memorable melody entirely on hums.

- In Alice in Chains' classic rock hit, "Man in a Box," the vocal intro has no real words at all.

- In Cream's "I Feel Free," there are multiple layers of non-words happening in the intro (with the exception of the phrase "I feel free" that keeps popping in).

- The first few bars of "From Me to You" by the Beatles makes use of nonsense syllables to support its melody. And don't forget they also wrote "Oh-Bla-Di, Oh-Bla-Da." Simple sounds are even in the title on that one.

If you're not familiar with any of these songs, I recommend you check them out to see how catchy their melodies are without any actual lyrics. These examples come from pop songs and rock songs alike.

Obviously, you can't just have silly sounds repeat throughout your entire song if you want to keep it marketable. You'll need some real lyrics. But if you start a song this way, it can rope in your listeners from the very beginning, the same way all of the examples above did. Then you can repeat that melody throughout your song. If you do that, you're establishing a melodic motif that you can work from when you write the rest of your melody (which *will* have lyrics). If you write the nonsense lyric part first, the rest of your melody will be easier to write, because you'll already have a piece of your melody established. Once you have that, the rest will flow.

You can use this concept, even if you don't keep the nonsense syllables in your song. You might simply find it more freeing to just write an easy melody with simple vocal sounds, without having to think of any words. Then you can put words to it later, if you want. It's certainly worth trying, if you're stuck in a melody writing rut. And if the nonsense syllables work, you can keep them. It certainly worked for all the songs you saw above.

Making Your Listeners Want to Hear Your Song… One More Time
One technique which I think is a great little trick to keep your listeners coming back to your songs is to establish a catchy melody throughout your song, and then at the very end of the song, cut that melodic motif short and leave them wanting more.

The best example I can think of this happens in the song, "We Are the Champions," by Queen. The chorus repeats three times in the song. The first two times we hear the chorus, it ends on Freddie Mercury singing the phrase "… Of the world," after singing the line "We are the champions." In the last chorus, at the very end of the song, that phrase "of the world" is omitted and the song ends on "We are the champions." By simply omitting the line "Of the World," they make you want to hear that song over and over again.

It's important to note that had Queen simply omitted the line "Of the world" from the song entirely, we wouldn't be craving it at the end. Instead, they established a standard with that line during the song, and then they deleted it at the very end of the song. *That's* what makes us want to hear it again. We were given something and then it was taken away.

Last Note

We can modify the pitches and lengths of an existing melody to make it our own, or we can use chords and scales as a basis to come up with new melodies. Of course, just popping out a melody off the top of our heads is always an option too, but we're trying to look at some more concrete songwriting approaches in this book.

Whichever approach you use, now you've got some options for writing melodies. If you just use a handful of the techniques learned in this module, you should never have melodic writer's block again. Plus you'll be writing melodies people will actually be excited to hear.

MODULE 4: LYRICS

So far we've looked at coming up with the big idea for our song, writing our chord progressions, and creating melodies. All that's left is getting to the nitty gritty of writing our lyrics.

With that in mind, this module will look at some very specific ways to take the ideas you came up with in the first module, and hammer them into your lyrics. At the same time you'll be tying your lyrics into your music in a way that will create prosody, which we've also been talking about.

While we're on the topic of lyric writing, I also want to recommend a book for you to read on the subject. It's called *Writing Better Lyrics* by Pat Pattison. As far as I'm concerned it's the Bible when it comes to writing lyrics and you would definitely benefit from its information. I'd advise you to check it out.

The Find Inspiration Method

Drawing Inspiration for Your Music from Other Songs

A Word on Referencing Lyrics Written By Others

In each of the three previous modules, we looked at two methods for doing things: The Find Inspiration Method, where we'd reference other songs to write our own, and the Do It Yourself Method, where we've learned how to come up with ideas that are from our own minds.

As far as writing lyrics are concerned we can really only reference other songs the way we did in the first module about coming up with the big idea for a song. Once you get into the nuts and bolts of writing your lyrics, you're pretty much on your own. You can always reference and draw inspiration from a line of another lyric, here and there, but for the most part writing lyrics is up to you. For that reason, the extent of the Find Inspiration Method for coming up with lyrics, was already covered in the first module, when we discussed coming up with your song's idea.

The only other suggestion I can make to you as far as drawing inspiration from someone else's lyrics would be to reference what they do *outside* of the actual words they use. For example, you can use the same number of lines per section as done in another song, you can use the same rhyme scheme as used in another song, and you can use the same line lengths as used in another song.

If you think those items worked in another song and you want to mimic them, you're welcome to do that. We'll be looking at each of those items in detail in the Do It Yourself Method, so you can see what kind of impact they can have on your song. Then you can decide if you want to come up with them yourself, or reference them from another song.

The Do It Yourself Method

Finding Your Own Inspiration for Your Music

Specificity

Specificity in your lyrics can be a great way to pull your listener into you story. It may seem counterintuitive, but typically the more specific, detail oriented, and personal something is, the more universal it is. We've all had situations *like* the specific ones we hear about in a well written song, even if the situation isn't exactly the same as what happened to us. The similarities in the details enable us to relate to well written stories. It lets us see ourselves in them, which bring us into the story emotionally.

Alternatively, saying vague things like "I'm happy" tends to create a disconnect, because they're so general, no one knows what they're referring to.

There is a place for both general and vague statements in a song. As mentioned earlier in this book, the verses are typically where your story moves forward. Therefore, being very detailed and specific with the language in your verses is usually a good strategy. Once you've established your verses to be specific, they'll work well as a set-up to the chorus, which typically tends to be more general. It's okay if the chorus is said in a more vague language, because it's led up to by very specific and detailed oriented verses. Those verses will support the more general information in the chorus.

Writing the general stuff is easy. We already looked at some ways to come up with titles, which lend themselves well to writing a full chorus. So in the next couple of sections we'll look at some strategies for being specific that can engage your listener, and get your listener interested in your story. Again, it's not a hard rule, but you'll most likely be using these strategies mainly in your verses so you can deliver a detail oriented story.

Engaging the Senses

A great way to be detail specific when delivering your story is to engage the senses. When we remember things, we tend to remember what they looked like, what they sounded like, what they smelled like, how they felt and how they tasted. That's why incorporating sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste into your lyrics can help drive your specificity by tapping into your listener's memory banks. Let's look at some examples.

Sight

Sight can be the most instinctive one to start with. Here's a line that engages the listener's vision.

The old paint is cracked and curled as it barely clings to the wall

In this example, we're getting a nice visual of old paint that's pretty easy to see in our mind because of how specific it is. It would have been much less effective to simply say "the paint was old." That doesn't "paint" the picture for us. Here are two more:

The rusty copper and brown pipes formed domed beads of dew

The jagged edges of the broken glass met at a sharp point that looked like a knife

You can see how in both of these it becomes very easy to picture these objects in our minds, because of how they were described to engage our vision. Everyone will picture these items differently, based on their own past experiences with them, but the important thing is that the listener is able to clearly visualize them in his own way.

Sound

Describing what can be heard is another great way to create a scene for your listener. Look at this line:

The leaves are crunching as they play in the woods

The sound of leaves crunching is a specific sound that everyone can relate to because it's most likely a sound that everyone has experienced hearing. Now look at this piece of lyric:

My pen furiously scratching as it digs into my page
So many thoughts come to mind about you

You can see how much more descriptive this is than simply saying "I write about you." Now, we can hear the pen tearing into the page. It's putting us in the scene. Let's look at one more:

The volume of her footsteps lessens as she walks away
When it's silent I'll know I lost her

Here we're seeing sound being tied into the idea of loss. This is a good time to mention that the sense of hearing is an important one, since music is an audible-only medium. As a result it can give you your best opportunities for moments of prosody in your song.

For example, in this last example the idea of the volume of footsteps lessening as she walked away could get played out in the music. Maybe the beats of the music resemble footsteps and they start to fade when that line is sung. You can have some fun when mentioning sound in your lyrics to develop prosody in your song.

Smell

Smell seems to be a less thought of sense to engage when writing, which is why it can be effective when used. Take this line as an example:

A musty odor fills the old, vacant home

That musty smell puts us there in the house. Combining senses can work well too. Look at this one:

The aroma of incense accompanied the dark atmosphere in her room

Here, we're given the visual of a dark room, but it's added to with the smell of the incense. Now we have a good feel for what it's like in that room. Let's look at one more:

The smell of rotting food invaded my nostrils

Rotting food is impossible keep out of your nose. Here smell is being used with metaphor. We'll talk more about that shortly.

Touch

Touch can be a powerful one too. Have you ever walked by a stone wall, or a fountain and couldn't stop yourself from touching it, just to see what it felt like? That's why sprinkling those moments into your song can work nicely. Look at this example:

My bare feet against the cool, moist grass

That's certainly one our minds (and feet!) can relate to. How about these two:

The steam from my coffee warmed my chin

Her cold, hard skin felt like porcelain

You can see how these moments place you in the story better than lines like "the coffee was hot," or "her hand was cold." These lines are descriptive by talking about *how* they feel. That makes them much easier to relate to.

Taste

Taste is another one that's easy to forget about, which is why it can be powerful. Look at this line:

His nerves get the best of him as he tastes the dryness in his mouth

Or this:

The saltiness of her skin on my lips as I kissed her neck

This one taps into what you taste and see:

I can taste the chalkiness of the dust as I watch him drive off
Leaving nothing but a brown cloud behind

We can see the brown dust cloud as we tasted it too. Descriptions hitting multiple senses can be a great tool, as we saw before.

Organic and Kinesthetic

In addition to the standard five senses, you can also discuss the organic and kinesthetic senses. Your organic sense is your awareness of what's happening in your body, like a heartbeat, the tense feeling in your fingers and forearm as you clench a fist, or sore muscles.

Kinesthetic sense is your relation to the world around you. When you spin around you see the world as a blur, while you get dizzy. An astronaut looking down on the world would certainly have his kinesthetic sense engaged as well. So would a snorkeler looking out into the vast ocean.

An example of a line that relates to the organic sense would be this:

A felt a jolt in my chest as if lightning struck my heart

It explores what panic could feel like, since it hits us from the inside.
These lines are speaking to our kinesthetic sense:

I gripped the handrail of the roller coaster so tight
It was the only thing around me that didn't appear blurred

It's relating us to the world around us. These next two lines take into account both organic and kinesthetic senses:

The bad news seemed to slow time around me
As my heart decelerated to what felt like a beat per minute

The world slowing is kinesthetic, while a reference to a heartbeat is organic. These two senses can be great tools to use to create specificity, in addition to the standard five senses.

Metaphors

Another way to deliver the specifics of your story is by using metaphors. The best way to think of a metaphor is that it's taking two normally unrelated ideas, finding something they have in common and then mashing them together through a common element. Let's look at one of the lines we previously discussed:

The smell of rotting food invaded my nostrils

While this line engages the sense of smell, it's also a metaphor because of the word "invaded." In the literal sense, a smell is incapable of invasion. It's just a smell, not an army. But when we think about the idea of "the smell of rotting food" and the concept of invasion, we can link them together because they both share the same idea of going where they're not wanted. If you were writing this line and you got stuck at "the smell of rotting food," you can then ask yourself "what does a bad smell do?"

At that point you'd probably throw out an idea like "gets where it's not wanted." Then you can ask yourself "what *else* does that?" At that point, you'd land on "invasion," or maybe some other cool metaphor. Let's look at another example:

I'm pregnant with ideas

Clearly, you can't literally be pregnant with ideas. You can only be pregnant with a child. But when you mash together "pregnancy' with "ideas" through their common link, you get a metaphor. When someone's pregnant, they're carrying something inside them that will soon come into the world to take on a life of its own. An idea also has that property. That's what links them together and makes that line work as a metaphor.

If you were looking to come up with a metaphor for the word "idea," you'd first ask yourself "what qualities does an idea have?" If you decided on "it's something carried inside you, until it leaves and takes on a life of its own," then you can get to "pregnant with ideas" as a metaphor.

Let's look at one more. Then you can start coming up with your own.

His loneliness echoes inside him

What's the common ground between loneliness and echoing? Time's up. It's emptiness. Someone who's lonely is likely to feel empty, or not complete. At the same time, echoes are created when there aren't any barriers to absorb sound. In other words, they happen in empty space. Emptiness is the linking element that allows "His loneliness echoes inside him" to work as a metaphor.

Try coming up with a few of your own metaphors right now. Think of two completely random items and force them into a metaphor by finding any element that links them together. I guarantee you'll have fun doing it, plus you'll probably come up with some cool lines you can use in your lyrics.

Number of Lines

Now that you have some ways to create specificity in your lyrics, we're going to look at some tools you can use in your lyric writing to get your message across in the best way possible. Simple concepts like the number of lines in each section are things you use all the time as a songwriter. However, you probably haven't given much thought to how to use concepts like that to enhance your song. We'll do that here.

Even or Odd

A lot of songwriters don't give much thought to the number of lines they use in each section, unless they're thinking about doubling, (or halving) the length of a verse or chorus, in which case, they'd simply double (or half) the number of lines.

The number of lines you use in each section can say more than you'd think. It's pretty typical for a songwriter to write almost all of his sections using an even number of lines. That's

because it feels balanced, and it tends to be what comes naturally when writing a song. It's similar to how using an ABAB rhyme scheme somehow feels like the right thing to do.

That's fine if your song is about feeling good, positive or upbeat. It makes sense to play into the idea of positive lyrics by supporting them with a similar feeling in the number of lines you use. It's prosody. For example, let's say these are your lyrics:

On top of the world
You're right by my side
You be my girl
I'll be your guy

Try to ignore the cheesiness of these lines, if you can. Instead focus on the fact that they're about feeling complete. The even number of lines contributes heavily to that feeling of completeness. It creates prosody in our work. On the other hand, what if these were our lyrics:

I feel like a wreck
I need you here now
I worry and wait
In skin packed with doubt

These lyrics don't exactly give us that warm and fuzzy feeling. They're about waiting for something that probably isn't going to happen. They're about feeling incomplete. So it would probably be more effective to use an odd number of lines, since that would also feel incomplete. Let's try three:

I feel like a wreck
I need you here now
I worry and wait

Did you notice how that worked better for the lyric? We were waiting for a fourth line, and when it didn't happen the section felt incomplete, just like our lyric. We used prosody by having an odd number of lines contributing to what our words meant.

When you make a move like this, it works even better if you establish a more complete lyric first with an even number of lines, and *then* go into an odd number of lines. So in the case of the three lines of lyric we just looked at, if we had four lines before that, it would solidify that we would be expecting another four lines the second time around. Then we'd only have three, ending on the line "I worry and wait," and our listeners would feel our pain right along with us. Our whole section would still be using an odd number of lines with seven, so it would have a similar effect. It's powerful stuff if you use it well.

Aside from just making the whole section feel off balance, using an odd number of lines creates another feeling too. It leaves us wanting to move forward. Let's look back to our previous examples:

> *On top of the world*
> *You're right by my side*
> *You be my girl*
> *I'll be your guy*

After line four hits, since it feels complete, we can stop there. At that point we can go on to a new section, since we feel satisfied that this one is over. One the other hand, if we have an odd number of lines, it leaves us wanting to move forward, since we're expecting an even number of lines.

> *I feel like a wreck*
> *I need you here now*
> *I worry and wait*

After you hear the third line, you're anticipating a fourth line. Probably one that rhymes with "now" and has a line that's about as long as the second line. But it doesn't happen, so it rolls you forward into the next section. It doesn't stop and wait for the next section to start, it pushes you into it. That's another reason using an odd number of lines can be good for creating anticipation in a section.

Highlighting Your Phrases

Another thing to consider when thinking about the number of lines in your section is the strength that certain lines hold. The last line of a section is typically very strong and it's a great place to highlight a phrase. There are a couple of reasons for that.

As I mentioned, if your section has an even number of lines, the last line balances out the section. Since it closes the section out, it draws attention and highlights the lyrics that sit there. Let's look back to our previous example, with that idea in mind:

> *On top of the world*
> *You're right by my side*
> *You be my girl*
> *I'll be your guy*

Did you notice how when the fourth line closed the section, it demanded a little extra attention than the other three lines? Read it again. When you look at it that way, you realize the line "I'll be your guy" probably isn't the best line for that position. Aside from just being way too similar to the line before it, it just isn't important enough to warrant the highlighted last position.

It would probably make more sense if we shuffled these phrases around bit. If for some reason we were dead set on keeping these lyrics, the phrase "On top of the world" would probably be the line that deserves the most attention. Check it out:

I'll be your guy
You be my girl
You're right by my side
On top of the world

Feels better, doesn't it? I mean the lyrics are still cliché and not too interesting, but the phrase most deserving to be highlighted is now getting the attention it should get.

Even if we have an odd number of lines, the last one typically demands the most attention, because it comes as a surprise. We're usually expecting one more (or less) line to round out the section. When it doesn't happen, the last, odd-numbered line draws attention and highlights the lyrics that sit there. Let's look at our previous three line section as an example:

I feel like a wreck
I need you here now
I worry and wait

Do you see how "I worry and wait" gets more attention than the other two lines? "I need you here now" is probably the line that would be best suited to be in that position, so let's try this:

I feel like a wreck
I worry and wait
I need you here now

That feels better. The three lines still play into the idea of longing, but now the overall idea of the section is brought to light with the last line. Also, since the third line tends to create motion into the next section, it would be nice if our final, odd-numbered line created a good segway into what the next section would be talking about. So if the chorus repeated the phrase "Because you're mine," the last line "I need you here know" would be a good way to move forward into that next section.

The first line of a section usually holds lot of weight too, simply because it's the first thing we hear. This applies even more so for the very first line of the entire song. The first line is the gateway to whether or not you'll be holding people's attention with your lyric. If it's a good one, they'll probably be sticking around for more. If not, they may check out.

For that reason, it's probably best to avoid vague phrases for your opening line, like "I was thinking about you," or "Isn't this nice?" They don't do anything to pull a listener into your story. Instead, think about a descriptive scene or detail that your listener can easily visualize and relate to. Listen to the first line of the Bravery's song, "Believe," to hear a good line that'll draw you into their story. They make great use of metaphor to immediately get you interested in their story with a collision of two ideas that don't otherwise belong together: people who don't smile, and the cracking of something rigid. As we saw earlier, metaphors can be a great way to get people interested in your lyrics.

Since the last lines (and sometimes the first lines) of a section typically demand so much attention from your listeners, it's usually a good reason to put your song's title there. It's a big reason why if you have an AABA song structure, the refrain typically sits at the last line of the verse. It sometimes occurs at the first line as well. Those spots are highlighted, so it makes sense to put the refrain, and title of the song there so they stand out. You can make it stand out even further by contrasting the melody of your refrain with the melody of the rest of your verse.

The same idea applies to songs that have a chorus. A lot of times it makes sense to sit your title in the last line of your chorus since it's such a highlighted position. The title can also appear as the first line in your chorus. It's very common for a title to appear multiple times throughout a chorus, but putting it as the first and/or last line is usually an effective strategy.

When you think in terms of your most highlighted lines, you'll be on your way to creating titles that pop out of your song.

The Rhythm of Your Lines

Melodic rhythm and the rhythm of a spoken phrase are two different things. That makes our jobs as songwriters tough, because ultimately we want the rhythm of our words to align with the rhythm of our melodies when we're singing. That's why we'll look at how we can make sure we tie these two rhythms together to get properly functioning lyrics.

Stresses in Words

The rhythm of a line happens as a result of a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables within that phrase. We can notate the unstressed syllables with "ba" and the stressed syllables with "BUM." For example, the phrase "Loving woman" has this rhythm: BUM ba BUM ba. Do you hear it? The syllables "Lo-" and "Wo-" are the stressed syllables in their respective words, while "-ving" and "-man" are the unstressed syllables of those same words. If you say the phrase out loud, you should hear it. The accented syllables are louder, longer and higher in pitch, which is what makes them stressed.

The combination of stressed and unstressed syllables in the phrase "Loving Woman" (or in *any* phrase, for that matter) helps to create its natural shape. These types of rhythms in speech patterns are what prevent us from having to pause between every word we speak in a sentence.

If you need to figure out the stresses in a multi-syllable word, you can usually hear them just by sounding them out. For a word with more than two syllables, like "promises," it's usually best to listen for the accented syllable, and assume the remainder of the syllables are not stressed. But if you need help, you can always check a dictionary. It defines which syllables are stressed and which aren't when you look up a word with more than one syllable. For example, when I look up the word "loving," I'm presented with this pronunciation: **luhv**-ing. The stressed syllable is given in bold.

Single syllable words are trickier, as some of them are stressed and some aren't. Again, it's best to listen to them within a phrase to determine which are stressed and which aren't, but if

you get stuck you can reference this rule of thumb, since you won't find the answer in a dictionary for single syllable words: Assume single syllable nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs *are* stressed. In other words, words that carry meaning are accented. Other words are not.

Stresses in Music

When you write a melody, you want its musical rhythm to line up appropriately with the rhythm of the spoken lyric, in order for the phrases to sound natural within the song.

When our words are set to music, we're still accenting certain words, but the position of the words in the measure determines which words get accented, and which words don't. That's why it's ideal to align the strong stresses of a spoken phrase, with the strong stresses in the music. You have to *make* that happen. It won't always be automatic. This is where the craft of lyric writing comes into play.

Each measure of a song has beats within that measure that are stronger than other beats. For example, in 4/4 time, the first beat of the measure is the strongest, while the third beat is the next strongest. After that is the second beat and then the fourth beat of the measure is the weakest of the four. You can even break it down further from there, by acknowledging that the beats between those four beats (the ones that end with "and") are even weaker. For example the 1+, 2+, 3+, 4+ beats (pronounced "one and," two and," etc.) are weaker than the 1, 2, 3 and 4 beats.

The main point we need to take away from this is that the first beat of the measure is the strongest. If we place a word on the first beat of the measure, it'll tend to sound more accented than a beat that is on the second, third or fourth beat. Although the stress on the third beat is pretty powerful too. It's a close second.

It's also worth mentioning that a higher pitch, a longer note or an increase in volume when you sing will tend to bring more attention to a syllable, as it does in every day speech, but it isn't nearly as impactful for stressing a note, as landing that note on a strong beat.

Singing is simply an exaggerated form of speech, so in order for our lyrics to resonate with our listeners and sound natural, we need the phrases we sing to have the same sonic shape as the spoken version of those phases, by placing the accented syllables on the accented beats. Well look at some examples.

Writing Words to Music

When I'm writing lyrics, I usually like to write them out into their accented patterns, so I know they'll fit well into my song. So let's say these are my lyrics:

Lessons that I learned
Promises I've earned

Those lines would look like this if I looked at their accents in speech (I'll capitalize the stressed syllables):

LES**-sons that I **LEARNED
PRO**-mises I've **EARNED

Or we could write them in their accented patterns to isolate the stresses:

BUM** ba ba ba **BUM
BUM** ba ba ba **BUM

You can see by writing these out that they have a good rhythm, which is obviously important since they're going into a melody. Both lines have the same rhythm, which is important as well, assuming the rhythm of the melodic motif is the same for both phrases.

Now that their natural spoken rhythms are isolated, how do we apply that to the melody?

Well, there are a few options. We know the first and third beats of a measure are the strongest, so we could put our strong stresses there. With the numbers on top representing the beats in a measure, it would look like this:

1	2	3	4
LES-sons	*that I*	**LEARNED**	
PRO-mises	*I've*	**EARNED**	

That works pretty well. Tap your finger and say the phrase to feel how it fits. Pretty good, right? The "that" and the "I've" are getting some stress by being on the second beat, but they're not overdoing it which is okay for these particular words.

A common mistake songwriters make would be to take a phrase like this one, which has a naturally occurring BUM ba ba ba BUM pattern, and try to force it into a BUM ba BUM ba BUM pattern, which would force accents on the words "that" and "I've." Those words don't warrant stress. That might look like this:

1	2	3	4	1	2
LES-sons	*that*	**I**		**LEARNED**	
PRO-mises		**I'VE**		**EARNED**	

If you tap along with your finger while saying the phrase this way, you'll see the "I" and "I've" have become accented as a result of being on the third beat of the measure. The only time accenting the "I" or "I've" would be valid, would be if you were trying to say "*I'm* the one who learned those lessons. Not you, but *me*!" That's the effect accenting a pronoun has. It draws attention to who the pronoun refers to, in particular. It's fine if it's truly what you're trying to say. But if it's not, you should probably pass on accenting it. In this lyric, we're not trying to say "it's me, not you," we're simply trying to say "I've learned lessons and earned promises." So it's probably best if we don't accent the pronoun.

Another option we could try would be to put the "LES-" on the first beat and the "LEARNED" on the second beat. Those are the two strong stresses in the sentence, and the second beat would work as a strong syllable in that case, because it's *stronger* than where all of the unstressed syllables have been placed (in between the first and second beats). But then we'd be cramming three unstressed syllables between one beat, and they'd probably sound very crammed and rushed in there, so it's probably not a good option.

A mistake would be to put an unstressed portion of the phrase on a heavily accented beat, like the first or third beat. Something like this wouldn't work too well:

3	4	1	2	3	4
	Les-	***SONS*** *that*	*I*	***LEARNED***	
	Promis-	***ES***	*I've*	***EARNED***	

Do you hear how unnatural that sounds? It's because the "-sons" in "lessons" and the "-es" of "promises" shouldn't be accented based on how they're spoken. But because they're falling on the downbeat of the measure, they're sucking up all the accent. Moves like this should be avoided at all costs. They'll make the lyric sound unnatural, and your listeners may mishear what you're singing as a result.

Let's go back to looking at the stresses that were lined up well, within the measure. Even when we do it right, we still have a choice to make. As you recall, this one sounded pretty good:

1	2	3	4
LES*-sons*	*that I*	***LEARNED***	
PRO*-mises*	*I've*	***EARNED***	

Let's call that one Option 1. Since beats one and three are both so strong, *and* we have two words that warrant accenting, this would work too:

1	2	3	4	1	2
		LES-sons	*that I*	**LEARNED**	
		PRO-mises	*I've*	**EARNED**	

Let's call that one Option 2. There's a subtle difference between these two options, but there is a difference.

In Option 1, "lessons" and "promises" fall on the downbeat, which is always the strongest beat, so those words carry a little more weight than "learned" and "earned," which are on the third beat. So these lines become predominantly about the lessons and promises.

In Option 2, "learned" and "earned" are on the downbeat, so now the phrases focus on learning and earning, as opposed to *what's* being learned and earned. Like I said, the difference is subtle, but it's there.

In addition to choosing which word you want to be more accented, you also have to realize the beat you start your melody on affects your song in another way. In Option 1, the melody starts on the downbeat, which typically tends to have a very complete, fulfilling feeling.

Option 2 starts on the third beat, which feels a little more unstable. The beat you start your melody on is another thing that will play into the meaning of your lyrics, so you have some decisions to make.

The easiest way to verify any of the information you learned in this section, is to tap a beat and sing the lines as you're writing them to make sure the appropriate musical and speech stresses are aligned. As a rule of thumb, consider the first and third beats to be the strongest within any measure of a song in common time, and align your stressed syllables accordingly. If you only have three beats in your measures, just assume the first beat is the strong beat. At the end of the day, you always want to trust your ears to lead you in the right direction.

Line Lengths

Now that we looked at stresses and rhythms, you'll have a better understanding of what determines the length of a line, and how you can use line lengths as a tool to assist your lyric writing.

We can measure the lengths of our lines by how many accents, or stresses are in each line. This applies musically, but if you're doing your job right, as we discussed in the previous section, it applies for the words you use as well.

For example, the phrase "living every day," or BUM ba BUM ba BUM, can be said to be three stresses long.

Acceleration and Deceleration

One way to use line lengths is to create a sense of acceleration, or deceleration within your section, by changing the line length you've established. Let's look at an example. Check out this section of lyrics:

Leave them all behind
Whipping past
Can't be last
Flying fast

You'll notice a certain length was established in the first line, and then it was shortened, which made the next three lines feel faster. Let's look at the stresses. I'll put the number of stresses in parenthesis after each line:

LEAVE them ALL be-HIND (3)
WHIPP-ing PAST (2)
CAN'T be LAST (2)
FLY-ing FAST (2)

You can see by establishing our section to have three stressed syllables in the first line, it makes the next three lines with only two stresses feel faster. There's also prosody happening since the last three lines are about speed.

On the other hand, we could also decelerate a line, by establishing a certain length, and then increasing it. Let's modify our previous lyrics to say this:

> *Whipping past*
> *Can't be last*
> *Flying fast*
> *But I ate their dust again*

If we look at the stresses, we'll see the lyrics do this:

> ***WHIPP**-ing **PAST** (2)*
> ***CAN'T** be **LAST** (2)*
> ***FLY**-ing **FAST** (2)*
> *But I **ATE** their **DUST** a-**GAIN** (3)*

In this case, you can see by increasing the length of the last line, we've slowed it down to create prosody with what the lyric is saying.

Contrast Between Sections

Another way to use line length as a tool in your song is to create contrast between your sections. For example, if you have short lines in your verses, using longer lines in your choruses will create a contrast. Let's modify and add to our previous example to understand how this works:

<u>Verse</u>

I'm paused at the line while my engine is revving

I wait for that red to be green

My eyes on the light while my heart is so heavy

In a second my soul will be free

<u>Chorus</u>

Whipping right past

Can't come in last

Flying so fast

Like I'm a blast

If we look at the accents in these phrases, this is what we get:

<u>Verse</u>

*I'm **PAUSED** at the **LINE** while my **EN**-gine is **REVV**-ing **(4)***

*I **WAIT** for that **RED** to be **GREEN** (3)*

*My **EYES** on the **LIGHT** while my **HEART** is so **HEAV**-y **(4)***

*In a **SEC**-ond my **SOUL** will be **FREE** (3)*

<u>Chorus</u>

***WHIPP**-ing right **PAST** (2)*

***CAN'T** come in **LAST** (2)*

***FLY**-ing so **FAST** (2)*

***LIKE** I'm a **BLAST** (2)*

If you say these sections out loud, while accenting the appropriate words, you'll see the chorus feels contrasted from the verse, and we haven't even added any music! We've kept the pattern of each line the same in each of these two sections, by always having two unstressed syllables between each accent (or BUM ba ba). However, we've created our contrast by having a verse section that varies between three and four accents in length, and then switched to a shorter chorus which stays at two accents on each line.

Aside from the chorus simply being shorter, it uses the same amount of accents in each line, while the verse varies between three and four accents in each line. This is another element contributing to the contrast. One section varies its line lengths, while the other doesn't. Let's look at the stress patterns, so you can see all of these ideas working together:

Verse
ba **BUM** ba ba **BUM** ba ba **BUM** ba ba **BUM** ba
ba **BUM** ba ba **BUM** ba ba **BUM**
ba **BUM** ba ba **BUM** ba ba **BUM** ba ba **BUM** ba
ba ba **BUM** ba ba **BUM** ba ba **BUM**

Chorus
BUM ba ba **BUM**
BUM ba ba **BUM**
BUM ba ba **BUM**
BUM ba ba **BUM**

Aside from simply creating contrast between these two sections, we've also used prosody. The verse is about waiting at the starting line and being anxious to get going, while the chorus is about actually being in a race. So it would make sense if the chorus felt fast, compared to a slower verse. We did this by shortening the phrases from three and four stresses in the verse to only two stresses in the chorus, while keeping the stress pattern the same. This made our chorus feel fast, just like our lead character.

Aligning Melodic Lines with Lyrical Lines

Since we're on the topic of the line lengths in your song, it's also important to talk about how your lyrical lines align with your melodic lines. Ideally, you want each line of melody to align with a line of lyric. If one gets longer than the other, things can start to sound strange.

For example, let's say you had two lines of lyric that said this:

I'm trying to call home
To talk to you

Those are certainly two thoughts that are part of the same idea, but warrant being spoken in two separate phrases, or lines. They each stand on their own.

But what if the way your melodic motif worked out, it forced your line into sounding like this:

I'm trying to call **[on melodic motif #1]**
Home to talk to you **[on melodic motif #2]**

If you sung "I'm trying to call" on one line of melody and "Home to talk to you" on another, it would be problematic, since it would be splitting the lyrical idea into two separate portions of melody. It would make the lyrics sound awkward, and there'd be a disconnect when we heard them. It would be as if I said to you "I'm trying to call. Home to talk to you."

Think of each melodic phrase as a sentence. If you do that keeping your lyrical phrase *within* each melodic phrase will become easier. It's the ideal way to write lyrics to music.

Rhyming

Rhyme is another tool you can use to enhance your lyrics. We'll start by looking at some different kinds of rhymes and then you'll see how to use rhyme to support what your lyric is saying.

Masculine, Feminine and Triple Rhymes

Masculine rhymes are easy to understand. Any one-syllable word being rhymed with another one-syllable word is a masculine rhyme.

"Pie" and "tie" are masculine rhymes. "Love" and "glove" are masculine rhymes. Easy enough, right? The feminine rhyme is a bit more complex.

As we saw earlier, multi-syllable words have stressed and unstressed syllables. Rhymes typically happen on the stressed syllable of a word. In the case of the word "rhyming" the "rhym-" syllable is the part we'll want to rhyme with, because it's the stressed portion of the word.

With that in mind, the words "rhyming" and "timing" are feminine rhymes. It's not just because they have two syllables, but because the strong stress (or the rhymed stress) happens at the *next* to last syllable and not on last syllable. The last syllable can be a rhyme too, but it can also be an identity (which is a repetition of the exact same sound). I'll put the stressed, rhyming syllable in bold, so it's clear:

Rhym-ing

Tim-ing

Do you see that? The rhyme happens away from the last syllable, while the last syllable is an identity. So this is a feminine rhyme. The same goes for words like "flighty" and "mighty." They're feminine rhymes because the rhyme happens on the next to last syllable. If you say

the words out loud, you'll hear that the "flight-" and "might-" syllables are the stressed syllables, so they hold the rhyme.

But what about a multi-syllable word that *ends* on a strong syllable, like the word "sublime?" Well, what I didn't tell you earlier about masculine rhymes is that not only are they one syllable words, but they also happen for multi-syllable words that *end* on a stressed syllable.

Say the word "sublime" out loud. Do you hear how the "-lime" syllable is the stressed syllable? It gets more emphases than the "sub-" part. For that reason, it's a masculine rhyme. The cool part is we can rhyme it with another masculine word that's only one syllable long. For example "sublime" and "time" rhyme.

As long as the last syllable is stressed, we'll have a masculine rhyme. That's why one syllable words are masculine rhymes. They only have one syllable, so by their nature, it's the last syllable.

There are also triple rhymes, which occur for words that have their stressed syllable as the third syllable from the end. A good example of a triple rhyme occurs with the words "national" and "irrational." The word "national" has three syllables, with the strong syllable happening on the "na-" syllable, which is third from last. The word "irrational" has four syllables, with the "ra-" syllable being the strong one. That syllable also occurs at the third from last syllable. For that reason, "national" and "irrational" are triple rhymes. The last two syllables in each of those words are identities. They have the same sounds.

Perfect Rhymes and Identities

Independent of whether a rhyme is masculine, feminine or triple, there are a few different types of rhymes you can use in your lyrics. A perfect rhyme is usually what we refer to when we talk about a rhyme. It's when two words have the same vowel sound, the same consonant after the vowel sound (if it exists at all) and a *different* consonant sound before the vowel sound. That's what makes it a rhyme. If two words have the same consonant sound before the vowel sound,

they're not rhymes, they're identities. For example the words "steak" and "mistake" aren't rhymes, they're identities. They both start with a "st" sound, while ending with the same vowel and consonant sounds.

Identities don't have the same effect that rhymes do. Rhymes create a strong sonic connection because of their similarities, while identities are just a repetition of the same exact thing. As a rule of thumb, try to avoid using identities in place of rhyme. Most of the time they just won't contribute to a lyric the way an actual rhyme will.

Imperfect Rhymes

Imperfect rhymes occur when two words have the same vowel sound, a different consonant sound before the vowel sound and a different consonant sound *after* the vowel sound too. They differ from perfect rhymes only in that the consonant sound after the vowel sound is different in the two words. For example the words "stoke" and "boat" are imperfect rhymes. They have different consonant sounds before and after the vowel sound, but the vowel sound (a long "o" sound) is the same. The vowel sound is the sonic connecter between the two words.

There are a broad range of imperfect rhymes you could use. For example, family rhymes are when the consonant sounds after the vowel sound are very closely related, like in the rhymes "whim" and "skin." The "m" and "n" sounds are very similar, so they make for a close sonic connection.

Assonance rhymes, on the other hand, end in consonant sounds that don't sound anything alike. An example of this would be rhyming "fork" with "torn." Both words have the same vowel sound, but one ends in a hard "rk" consonant sound, while the "rn" sound is nothing like it. Even though they both share an "r" in the consonant sounds following the vowel, the "k" and "n" sounds are very different.

We could get into the technicalities of how the consonant sounds relate to each other, but at the end of the day it's important to trust your ears to know which sounds are close connections and which aren't. We'll look at when to use sounds that are close and sounds that aren't a little later.

Open, Additive & Subtractive Rhymes

An open rhyme is one that ends on a vowel sound. The consonant sounds before the vowel sound must be different, otherwise we have an identity and not a rhyme. The words "glow" and "snow" are open rhymes. They end in a "w," on paper, but when we hear them, the last part of the word we hear is a vowel sound. Rhyming is about what we hear, not what we see on paper.

Additive rhymes are when you start with an open rhyme, and rhyme it with a word that ends with a consonant. So if you end one line with the word "go," and the next line with the word "boat," you have an additive rhyme because you added a consonant sound to the second word.

Subtractive rhyme is almost identical, except you'll be starting on the word that ends with a consonant sound, and then subtracting it. So if you start with the word "boat" in one line and end the next line with the word "go," you have a subtractive rhyme.

Alliteration and Consonance Rhymes

Alliteration isn't a form of rhyme, but it is a sonic connecter, so it's worth mentioning here. Unlike the rhyme types we looked at so far, alliteration doesn't require the vowel sounds of a word to be the same. It simply requires the same consonant sound at the beginning of the words.

Also unlike rhyme, alliteration typically happens in successive words, as opposed to at the end of a line, which is how rhyme is most often used. For example the phrase "Great, ghastly

ghosts!" has alliteration, because all of the words in that line start with the same "g" sound. It makes the phrase memorable.

A consonance rhyme is similar to alliteration in that it really isn't a rhyme at all. It defines two words that have a *different* vowel sound, with the same consonant sound *after* the vowel sound. That's how it differs from alliteration. For example, "fun" and "can" are consonance rhymes, because they both end on an "n" and don't have matching vowels.

While consonance rhyme can be used like alliteration, within successive words of a single line, it can also be used more like a typical rhyme, by placing it at the ends of lines to create a sonic connection between multiple lines. Alliteration typically isn't used that way. For example, the lines below show consonance rhyme being used similar to how a standard rhyme would be, at the end of two lines:

We can have fun
I know we can

The "n" consonants at the end of "fun" and "can" act as loose connectors between the two lines. Additionally, the line "We can have fun" uses consonance rhyme *within* the same line, similar to how alliteration would be used.

Using both alliteration and consonance rhyme together can occasionally be an interesting tool to use within the line of a song. It can be tricky to pull off, but if you do it can create some interesting connections. For example, the phrase "riff raff" has both alliteration and consonance rhyme. So does "hell hole." The only thing that changed from word to word was the vowel sound. Both the beginning and ending consonance sounds were the same.

When to Use Different Rhyme Types

Now that we have an overview of the different types of rhymes, we can look at how to use them to make our music more effective.

The rhyme types we looked at can be masculine, feminine, or triple rhymes. They're independent of how many syllables the rhymes have. For example, "bumming" and "strumming" are perfect, feminine rhymes, while "black" and "that" are imperfect, masculine rhymes. It's important to realize that the number of syllables in your rhyme doesn't matter so much, as long as it fits your melodic lines well.

Throughout this book, we've been talking about prosody, as a way to keep all of the ideas in your song working towards one idea. Prosody applies to the types of rhymes we use. When you have an idea that is very complete, balanced or happy, using a perfect rhyme makes sense, because perfect rhymes tend to create a sense of completeness. For example, look at these two lines together:

All my dreams came true
And it happened 'cause of you

Isn't that fitting? A perfectly happy, fulfilling thought which is complemented by a perfect rhyme. Makes you feel all warm and fuzzy, doesn't it?

The opposite end of the spectrum is using an imperfect rhyme or consonance rhyme at a time when our idea is feeling unbalanced. Like this:

It's only been a year
But you feel so far

In these lines we have a sense of distance and longing, which is matched with a consonance rhyme. Remember, a consonance rhyme isn't even really a rhyme, since the vowels sounds are different. It's a very loose connection made with matching consonant sounds at the end of

two words. In this case, it's the "r" sound at the end of "year" and "far." It's *just* enough to connect the two lines, but it doesn't hold them together very solidly, which is why it's a good choice for this lyric, in terms of creating prosody.

Perfect rhymes and consonance rhymes are the two extremes when it comes to rhyme types. Perfect rhymes are the closest match between two rhyming words, while consonance rhymes make *almost* no connection at all. But there's also a whole word of possibilities in between those two types. Those possibilities come in the form of imperfect rhymes, additive rhymes and subtractive rhymes.

Depending on how close the consonants are at the end of two words, imperfect rhymes can either be used for lyrics that are more complete and balanced, or for lyrics that are not. You have to trust your ear when it comes to imperfect rhymes. Let's look at a couple of examples.

Before we met I was in the dark
Now there's a spotlight on my heart

"Dark" and "heart" are pretty close. They share the "r" before their final consonant, and the "k" and "t" are both hard sounds that match well. So using this rhyme words in lieu of a perfect rhyme, for a lyric with a happy feel. Especially considering that when these lines are sung, the vowel will probably be held out more than when we say them, so less focus will be on the consonants the words end with.

On the other hand, check out these lines:

I just want to escape
I hope you feel the same

"Escape" and "same" are pretty distant imperfect rhymes. The vowel sound connects them, but that's about it. The consonant sounds don't sound anything alike. The plosive "p" isn't anything

like the nasal "m." So this rhyme works well for a lyric that implies the idea of longing. It leaves us longing a more definitive rhyme.

You may be thinking you only want to stick to perfect rhymes for complete, balanced lyric ideas and only consonance rhymes for lyrics that are the opposite of that. But the truth is, if you start to introduce imperfect rhymes into your lyrics, you'll open up a *much* wider range of choices to pick from, giving your lyric a much better chance of being interesting.

That leaves us with additive and subtractive rhymes. They're more "middle of the road" rhyme types. They usually don't feel too complete, but they don't feel too unbalanced either. So use them accordingly.

Let's look at another example:

> *Look at all I've seen*
> *Across the world I've roamed*
> *Then you left me*
> *And now I'm feeling broken*

In this case, "seen" and "me" are subtractive rhymes, so they're sitting on the fence in terms of connecting the two words together. "Roamed" and "broken" on the other hand, are pretty different. While they share the same vowel sound, the "m + ed"" sound in "roamed" is different from the "k + en" consonant sounds in "broken." Plus "roamed" is a single syllable masculine rhyme that's being rhymed with the feminine rhyme, "broken." It creates dissonance between those two lines, which is fitting. The lyric is about feeling broken, and the rhyme is supporting that idea. At the same time, the words "seen" and "me" aren't creating as many waves, since they're subtractive rhymes. They're just kicking back, waiting for "roamed" and "broken" to deliver the bad news.

Another thing to consider when choosing a rhyme is whether you want to use an open or closed rhyme depending on how you hold out the note in your song. Open rhymes don't end on hard consonants, so they're good to use when you have a note at the end of a line that needs to be held out when you're singing your melody. Conversely, if your rhyme is closed, you might be ending on a consonant that makes you close your mouth. For example, you'd want to avoid singing a word that ends with an "m" or "p" sound on a note you'll be holding out at the end of a line.

Reasons to Use a Rhyming Dictionary

The task of coming up with a rhyme is not an art. A lot of songwriters think it is, so they consider the use of a rhyming dictionary to be sacrilegious. Discovering all of the possible rhymes you can use can only benefit your song.

I recommend buying a rhyming dictionary. You may be thinking you don't need one, because you use an online dictionary. You could do that, but I find the real thing to be better for a couple of reasons.

One thing I used to notice about the online dictionaries was they had trouble distinguishing between masculine and feminine rhymes. They would force rhymes that didn't fit. If you typed in a masculine rhyme like "bling" they would give you back some feminine options that wouldn't make much sense. Words like "fighting" might make the cut. "Fighting" is feminine rhyme. The stress is on the "fight-" syllable, not on the "-ing." If you try to rhyme "Bling" with "fight-ING" you'll be forcing the stress to be on the last syllable, where it doesn't belong. This will make your lyric sound unnatural. Say the word "fighting" out loud with the stress on the "-ing" and you'll see what I mean. "Fight-ING." Sure, I guess that rhymes with "bling" now, but it sounds weird.

To their credit, in my more recent searches in the online dictionaries, they seem to be doing a better job of displaying masculine and feminine rhymes, when appropriate. If you do use an

online rhyming dictionary, be on the lookout for potential masculine/feminine rhyme problems, and avoid using rhymes that don't work.

Aside from that, it's nice to have a physical rhyming dictionary, because you can flip through the pages and examine a lot of different options at one time. They break the masculine, feminine and triple rhymes into separate sections, so there's no confusion.

Let's look at an example of how a rhyming dictionary can be helpful. Let's this is a line in our song:

I remember when we first kissed

We've decided our next line is going to rhyme and we need a word to rhyme with "kissed."

As an exercise, how many words that rhyme with "kissed" can you think of off the top of your head? Try it. I've got: missed, bliss (a subtractive rhyme), fist and dissed. I'm pretty much out of ideas after those four.

Now I'll look in the masculine section of my rhyming dictionary for more options. I've got: assist, exist, list, dismissed, insist, enlist, twist, persist, resist. There were a lot more in there, but I just pulled out the ones that looked like they could pertain to the idea of being kissed. Plus, I only pulled out the perfect rhymes. If I used close imperfect rhymes, the list would get much bigger. And I've already got more options than I did off the top of my head with all of these words pertaining to the meaning of the lyrics.

Finding a rhyme is not an art. It's okay to use a rhyming dictionary. It can only give you more options. So go nuts. I promise it doesn't make you any less of a creative artist.

How to Use a Rhyming Dictionary

If you have a physical rhyming dictionary, you'll notice it's broken up into three sections. One section for masculine rhymes (which may also be referred to as single rhymes), one for feminine rhymes (which may also be referred to as double rhymes) and one for triple rhymes (which may also be referred to as three rhymes).

When you know which type of rhyme you're looking for, you can enter that section of the rhyming dictionary. For example, if I was looking for the word "oak," I would go to the masculine section.

All of the words are arranged by their vowel sounds. On each page, you'll see a series of reference vowel sounds. For example: āle, câre, ădd, mē, ĕnd, ōld, ôr, ŏdd, and so on. That list appears on each page and shows your reference sounds. It uses common words to help you hear the vowel sound you're looking for.

In our case, if we were looking to rhyme with the word "oak," by referencing the vowel sounds shown on each page we'd know the "o" sound we need would be similar to the vowel sound used in the word "old", which we find at the bottom of the page listed like this: ōld. So now we know we're looking for an "o" with a line above it since "old" and "oak" have the same "o" vowel sound. We also know our word, "oak," ends in a "k" sound. So if we go into the masculine section of the rhyming dictionary and look in the section labeled "ŌK," we'll find perfect rhymes for the work "oak."

You can also open up the rhymes you search for by looking for imperfect rhymes in your rhyming dictionary. If we wanted to find a rhyme that was pretty close to a perfect rhyme, we'd just keep our same "o" vowel sound, and enter the rhyming dictionary looking for words that end in consonants that sound similar to "k." So we could look under "ŌT," or "ŌP," to find a bunch of words that rhyme with "boat," or "hope," which are pretty close imperfect rhymes for "oak." Now we'll have a whole arsenal of words to choose from, exploding our selection of choices.

Conversely, if we wanted to find imperfect rhymes that weren't very close to the word "oak," if our lyric supported that idea, we could do that too. In that case, we'd just pick our same "o" vowel sound, and enter the rhyming dictionary looking for words that end in consonants that sound different from "k." So we could look under "ŌS," or "ŌM," to find words that rhyme with "blows," or "home." Trust your ears on which consonant sounds are distant from the one you're starting with.

Unfortunately, you can't look up consonance rhymes in your rhyming dictionary. You're on your own for those.

Rhyme Schemes

Now that we understand more about rhyming, we can better organize our rhymes into rhyme schemes. A rhyme scheme is simply the order in which we put our rhymes, for each section of our song.

Let's start by looking at some commonly use rhyme schemes. In these models, x indicates a line without a rhyme, while A and B are lines with a rhyme. The A lines rhyme with each other, and the B lines rhyme with each other.

AAAA

xAxA

AABB

ABAB

ABAA

AAB

AAABCCCB

While it's important to know the common rhyme schemes, it's even more important to know how to use a rhyme scheme to enhance your lyrical idea. A lot of songwriters think of rhyming as something they just have to do so their song doesn't sound weird, but it can be so much more if used effectively. We just saw some common rhyme schemes, but now we'll look at how we can use these rhyme schemes to our advantage when writing a song.

Rhyme and Our Expectations

The rhyme schemes you just saw are very common, so when we hear the beginning of one of them, we typically know how it's going to end. For example, an ABAB rhyme scheme might have lyrics that end with these words:

Fight (A)

Mistaken (B)

Might (A)

Awaken (B)

Once we hear the words at the end of the first three lines, we can be fairly certain that the fourth line will end with a word that rhymes with the word at the end of the second line. In the case of the example above, we can be certain that a rhyme of "mistaken" is coming. So if these were our lyrics:

Born to fight (A)

I'm not mistaken (B)

Filled with might (A)

I will awaken (B)

These are just nonsense lyrics to make my point, but do you notice how you anticipate the rhyme on the fourth line before it even happens? This idea holds true for other common rhyme

schemes too. The xAxA rhyme scheme acts in the same way the ABAB rhyme scheme did. Except instead of the first and third lines rhyming, they don't. However, the expectation for the fourth line to rhyme with the second line still happens.

Let's look at the AAAA rhyme scheme to see that the same thing happens here.

Born to fight (A)
Here tonight (A)
Filled with might (A)
You're not right (A)

Once we hear that the third line rhymes with the first two, we expect the fourth to do the same.

In most aspects of lyric writing, there's a time to stick with the expected standard, and a time to deviate from it. Usually it works out best to stick to the expected if your song has a more positive message, to create prosody. If the message is more negative, a lot of times deviating from the standard, to highlight your less-than-happy meaning, can be an effective approach to lyric writing. Let's look at a modification of one of our earlier examples:

Look at what I've been through (A)
Across the world I've roamed (B)
Then I met you (A)
And now I know my home (B)

This section is about being complete, or happy. So it makes sense that the completeness is complemented with a fulfilling rhyme scheme that meets our expectations. It makes the section feel familiar, and grounded, kind of like the "home" discussed in the lyrics.

Now let's look at an example where steering away from the expected would make more sense:

Look at all I've seen (A)

Across the world I've roamed (B)

Then you left me (A)

And now I'm feeling lost (x)

This was a modification of the ABAB rhyme scheme to be an ABAx rhyme scheme. By not rhyming on the fourth line, we didn't give into the rhyme that was expected. In this example it makes, sense since the last line is "And now I'm feeling lost." The listener who was expecting a rhyme is also lost. It's prosody.

In addition, the lyrics are sad and longing. By not playing into the rhyme expectation we get an "I'm not fulfilled" feeling, which ties into the lyrics.

Rhyme as an Accelerator

In addition to rhyme being able to create expectations, it can also be used to accelerate lyrics. Just like when using rhyme to play into, or deviate from expectations, using rhyme as an accelerator is also based on the rhyme scheme we choose.

Rhyme is a sonic connector. It links identical vowel sounds. When we hear the same vowel sound repeated often, it can sound accelerated. Let's look at a few examples of what that means.

Let's say we have a rhyme scheme that starts as an xAxA rhyme scheme, so only the second and fourth lines rhyme. We'll modify an example we looked at previously:

Leave them all behind (x)

Whipping past (A)

Can't see what's ahead (x)

Flying fast (A)

We have a common, expected rhyme scheme here. If we increase the frequency of the rhyme that's expected, it can add acceleration to our section. For example, what if we went back to the exact lyrics we looked at when we were talking about line lengths:

Leave them all behind (x)
Whipping past (A)
Can't be last (A)
Flying fast (A)

Earlier, we saw that by shortening the last three lines, they felt sped up. In addition to those last three lines being shortened, they also rhyme with each other. This increases the feel of acceleration even further.

In this section, once we get past the second line, "whipping past," we're expecting either an xAxA rhyme scheme or an ABAB rhyme scheme with a third line that matches the length of the first. Instead, we get line three rhyming with line two, which was unexpected. We weren't expecting a rhyme there. And if it did occur, it would have rhymed with the first line. This contributes to making the second line sound accelerated, and sped up. Then when we get a third rhyme on the fourth line, it really drives home that notion. While rhyme and shortening the line lengths are both contributors to accelerating lyrics, they usually work very well when used together, as you can see in this example.

In the case of these lyrics, you can see it makes sense, because accelerating the lyrics with rhyme and line length plays into the lyrical content, with phrases like "whipping past," "can't be last," and "flying fast." Granted this example is a bit "on the nose," but it helps get the point across of what you can do with acceleration.

You can use the same concept to decelerate your rhymes, should it pertain to your lyrics. For example, if the first four lines in your verse have an AAAA rhyme scheme and then the next four lines had an ABAB rhyme scheme, those last four lines would sound decelerated, because the rhymes would be spaced further apart. If your lyrical content had anything to do

with slowing down, not be able to move on, or anything like that, it would make sense to use a decelerating rhyme scheme to create prosody.

When you're using approaches like this in your songwriting, it's important to note that *you* set the standard from which to alter to change the feel in your song. If you start with an AAAA rhyme scheme and then switch to an ABAB scheme, the ABAB portion will feel slowed downed because of the standard *you* set by starting with the AAAA rhyme scheme.

You could even make an AAAA rhyme scheme sound slower than a preceding section that had rhymes *within* each line. Make sense? You set the standards.

Inversions

Sometimes songwriters like to contort lines, to force a rhyme they want. They take a phrase and prevent it from sounding conversational and natural by flipping the phrase, in order to get the word they want to rhyme where they want it to be. Let's look at one of our previous examples, so you can see what I mean:

> *Look what I've been through*
> *Across the world I've roamed*
> *Then I met you*
> *And now I know my home*

The second line in this section feels unnatural. "Across the world I've roamed," isn't how we'd normally say that phrase in everyday speech. We'd say "I've roamed across the world." But to get something to rhyme with "home" in this example, I've created an inversion. I don't recommend doing that, as they can create a disconnect in your lyrics. As a rule of thumb, ask yourself if your line is written the same way you would say it to someone. That usually holds all the answers when it comes to whether or not you have an inversion on your hands.

Cliché Rhymes

As long as we're on the topic of things to avoid, this would be a good time to talk about cliché rhymes. It seems like a lot songwriters feel the need to use cliché phrases or rhymes, either because they come easily, or they're easy to understand. The truth is, when we hear a phrase or even a rhyme that's cliché, it's generally boring too us, because we've heard it so many times already.

Cliché rhymes can include rhyming words like "love," with "above," "fire" with "desire," or "chance" with "romance." You'll know them when you hear them, because you've already heard them plenty of times.

Using a rhyming dictionary will make you less likely to use cliché rhymes, because you can actively seek out words you know aren't cliché. What comes off the top of your head is likely to be cliché, since it'll be based on rhymes you've heard a lot already. Just keep an ear out for the rhymes that seem to present themselves again and again in other songs, and try to come up with something more original to tell your story. That's another reason using imperfect rhymes that sound close to perfect rhymes can work very well. Typically the most overused rhymes are perfect rhymes.

Cliché Phrases

This is a good segway into talking about cliché phrases in songs. The reasons to avoid cliché phrases are the same as those for avoiding cliché rhymes. Here are a few examples you've probably heard before:

Broken hearted

What doesn't kill you makes you stronger

Set me free

I feel blue

Never let me go

I like it like that

Hold me in your arms

There are plenty of them out there. You'll know them when you hear them. Sure, some hit songs use them. But the thing about cliché phrases is some of them started out as a cool idea, but after being overused so much, they just don't mean much anymore. For example look at the phrase "broken heart." We know it means to be hurting over lost love, but beyond that it's a cool metaphor. The idea of a heart being torn in half is a good representation of what we feel when we're in that situation. However, we don't stop to think of that metaphor anymore because of its overuse. It's lost on us now.

As a rule of thumb, avoid using cliché phrases unless you can sprinkle some originality back into them again. One way to do that is to set up a cliché phrase to mean something other than what we've always known it to mean.

For example, in the Demi Lovato song "Give Your Heart a Break" she uses that phrase as another way of saying "give your heart a rest." It's a nice twist on the old classic, and gets us interested in hearing it again, since it becomes new again.

Another attempt you can make to bring a cliché phrase back to life would be to add prosody to a phrase we've already heard. Regina Spektor does a nice job of this in her song, "Fidelity." In the song, she sings the phrase "and it breaks my heart," but when she sings "heart," the word is very choppy and broken up. It's a use of prosody to subtly remind us what the visual of a broken heart should be.

More on Titles

We talked about titles earlier, but now that we have a better understanding of alliteration, rhyme, rhythm, and cliché, I want to mention a few more things to keep in mind when writing a memorable title. The use of alliteration, rhyme and a flowing rhythm helps create memorability. Let's look at some examples of memorable titles and why they work.

"Hell's Bells"

This one uses rhyme and a short, yet consistent rhythm: **BUM BUM**

"Rockin' Robin"

This one can be considered an imperfect identity. The only thing different between the two works is the "ck" and "b" consonants following the "o" vowel sound. As a result, it uses alliteration, matching vowel sounds, and it has a good, flowing rhythm too: **BUM** ba **BUM** ba

"Kiss with a Fist"

This one has an additive rhyme with "kiss" and "fist" on its stressed syllables, in addition to a flowing rhythm: **BUM** ba ba **BUM**

"Seven Devils"

Here we have an imperfect feminine rhyme, with a flowing **BUM** ba **BUM** ba rhythmic pattern.

"Back in Black"

This one has it all. Alliteration, perfect rhyme, and a nice rhythm: **BUM** ba **BUM**

"Helter Skelter"

Perfect rhyme and rhythm: **BUM** ba **BUM** ba

I think you get the idea. We saw a few examples here that have good rhythms, which basically means their rhythms are flowing consistently. That's important because this is music, but also because it makes them easy to say, and memorable. For a title to have less effective rhythm,

the rhythm would be inconsistent. It might do something like this: ba ba BUM ba ba ba ba BUM ba ba ba BUM. That doesn't exactly flow so well.

You're title doesn't *have* to have these things going for it. A lot don't. But these are the details that help make memorable titles. If someone can remember your title, and they like your song, that's a good position for you to be in. For those same reasons, it's also worth mentioning that these are good techniques to consider when coming up with your band name, stage name, or album name as well.

Also since we recently spoke a lot about avoiding clichés, keeping them out of your title would certainly be a good idea, if you can help it.

Recoloring

Now that we looked at some techniques to use within each section and from section to section, let's look at a lyrical approach you can use with the big picture of your whole song in mind.

If you recall from earlier in this book, the verses are the place to move your story forward, while the chorus highlights the overall idea of the song. A lot of times songwriters get stuck with the "second verse curse" where all of their ideas for moving their story forward were used in the first verse. Then they have nothing new to say in the second verse, except the same thing they said in the first verse, said in a slightly different way. But that's not interesting.

That's why the idea of recoloring a chorus is an important technique for moving your story along. When recoloring a chorus, we put new information into each section preceding a chorus that will make the same chorus seem new again. Let's look at an example, so you can see what I mean. This is the first verse and chorus from a song called "Now I Know My Home":

Verse 1

The clock's hands spin with my wheels
I can't wait to arrive
Buildings glowing at night
Soon not my destination but my source of light
The distant city slowly grows
As my tires reel in the road
This time I'll stay for good
I say hello

Chorus

I've bounced from place to place, connecting dots on a map
Living life just like a pinball that won't fall through the flaps
Chased happiness across the globe
But now I know my home

To sum up these two sections, the verse is telling us that our lead character is about to arrive somewhere, and he's excited about it. The chorus lets you know he's been traveling for a long time and he's finally found home. Let's move on the second verse and the next time we hear the chorus.

Verse 2

I'm forced to say goodbye
To a city that told me lies
Smells were sweeter from afar
My car is sketching another line
Between places that I've been
The road's where I live

Chorus

I've bounced from place to place, connecting dots on a map

Living life just like a pinball that won't fall through the flaps

Chased happiness across the globe

But now I know my home

The second verse advances the story with new information. It's not simply a rehash of what happened in verse one. It lets us know that our lead character ended up not being happy with the place he was about to call home in the first verse, so he's moving on to another place. He's decided traveling from place to place on the road is his home, because he'll never be happy in just one place.

When we take that new information into the second chorus, which uses the *same* words it did the first time (as choruses typically do), it makes those same chorus words mean a whole new thing. Check it out. Our chorus says this:

I've bounced from place to place, connecting dots on a map

Living life just like a pinball that won't fall through the flaps

Chased happiness across the globe

But now I know my home

The first time around, we took that chorus to mean his home is the new place he's arriving. But when we hear the lyrics in the second verse we realize he'll never consider any single, stagnant place his home. You can thank the line "The road's where I live" for that. It lets us know the road's his home. Now the chorus means something different. Now when we hear the phrase "Now I know my home" (and the lines leading up to it) in the chorus, it's referring to him realizing he's always on the road and doesn't settle down in one place. It's where he lives. The chorus has been recolored. We see it in a new light, even thought the words didn't change.

Before we get to the bridge, remember from earlier in this book that the bridge is an opportunity to offer a departure from what we've heard so far, both musically and lyrically. It's a chance for a new perspective. With that in mind, let's see what the bridge does:

> *My map shows the lines*
> *Lines on my face*
> *The face of the earth*
> *Connect the dots 'til I die*

The bridge is taking a new approach here. There's a connection being made between each line. At the first three lines, each line ends with a word that the next line begins with. It creates prosody with the idea of "connecting the dots" that the last line talks about. Those words are connecting the dots between each line. It's a perspective we haven't seen yet in this song. Plus the line "connect the dots 'til I die" lets us know that he'll be on the road his whole life. It's where he lives now, and it's where he'll always live. We can take that info with us as we enter the final chorus, which is the same as the first two:

> *I've bounced from place to place, connecting dots on a map*
> *Living life just like a pinball that won't fall through the flaps*
> *Chased happiness across the globe*
> *But now I know my home*

Never knowing where to be is "home." It's his destiny. With all that in mind, take a look at the complete lyric, from top to bottom and see how the chorus can change itself like a chameleon:

Verse 1
> *The clock's hands spin with my wheels*
> *I can't wait to arrive*
> *Buildings glowing at night*
> *Soon not my destination but my source of light*
> *The distant city slowly grows*

As my tires reel in the road

This time I'll stay for good

I say hello

Chorus

I've bounced from place to place, connecting dots on a map

Living life just like a pinball that won't fall through the flaps

Chased happiness across the globe

But now I know my home

Verse 2

I'm forced to say goodbye

To a city that told me lies

Smells were sweeter from afar

My car is sketching another line

Between places that I've been

The road's where I live

Chorus

I've bounced from place to place, connecting dots on a map

Living life just like a pinball that won't fall through the flaps

Chased happiness across the globe

But now I know my home

Bridge

My map shows the lines

Lines on my face

The face of the earth

Connect the dots 'til I die

<u>Chorus x2</u>

I've bounced from place to place, connecting dots on a map

Living life just like a pinball that won't fall through the flaps

Chased happiness across the globe

But now I know my home

I've bounced from place to place, connecting dots on a map

Living life just like a pinball that won't fall through the flaps

Chased happiness across the globe

And now it's time to go

Repeating the chorus a second time at the end of a song is a common move. It's also not uncommon to change a phrase in the second repeat. In this case, the last line was changed to "and now it's time to go," which could be implying the lead character has skipped across the planet until his death, or simply that the song has ended.

More on Prosody

Throughout this book, you've seen a lot of ways to have prosody make an appearance in your song. We'll look at a couple of extra tricks here.

Continued From Before

Earlier in this book, we looked at how you can make listeners want to hear your song one more time, by establishing a melody in your motif, and then cutting the motif short the last time you hear it. We saw how Queen used that approach in their song "We Are the Champions" by omitting "Of the world" in their final chorus. Now that we've talked more about lyric writing and prosody, I want to add to that idea.

It's worth mentioning, that moves like snipping the melody short the last time we hear it generally work best when they're tied together with the lyrics to create prosody. I like how

Queen used this move in "We are the Champions," but, I think it could have been even better if it had to do with what the lyrics were saying.

For example, let's say we had a song just like "We Are the Champions." Except let's pretend our song is called "One Minute You're Here." That title line would be the one that shows up in every chorus in the same way "We Are the Champions" does for Queen. And in our song, let's pretend the line "And then you're gone" is the one we hear in the first two choruses, but then it disappears at the very end of the song. Our choruses would read like this:

Chorus 1
One minute you're here
And then you're gone

Chorus 2
One minute you're here
And then you're gone

Chorus 3
One minute you're here…

Do you see how that could be really impactful as a listening experience? Our lyric would be practicing what it preached in the first two choruses. It would be gone, just like it said it was in the previous choruses. Plus we'd get that added effect that Queen had of people wanting to hear our song again because we left them hanging. Cool stuff. Another example of prosody in action.

Again, the trick of eliminating the previously established last line definitely works well on its own, as you saw in "We Are the Champions." However, any time we can fuse our words together we our music, we're writing songs that can be even more impactful than they'd be otherwise.

Moments of Prosody

Prosody tends to work best when it happens on a big scale as we've talked about a lot, like playing a happy song in a major key. But sometimes you can have prosody happen on a smaller scale within your song. I call these "moments of prosody." We'll look at a few examples, so you can get a feel for what these moments are like, and how you can use them in your own music. I encourage you to listen to these songs for these moments, if you're not familiar with them.

- In "Sober," by Pink, she sings the line "I don't want to be the girl that has to feel the silence" while all the instruments fade out when she hits the word "silence" to tie the music to what she's singing about. It's a "moment" of prosody.

- In "I'm Yours" by Jason Mraz you'll hear him sing the line "so I drew a new face and I laughed." He adds gentle pauses when he sings the word "laughed" to hint at making the word sound like laughter. This one's subtle, which I why I like it.

- In the title line of Sheryl Crow's "You Don't Bring Me Anything But Down," you'll notice she slides her melody downwards when she sings the word "down."

- The opposite happens in John Mayer's song "Bigger Than My Body." When he sings the phrase "Someday I'll fly, someday I'll soar," his melody goes up at the word "fly" and then he peaks out the range of his falsetto when he hits the word "soar." He created a couple of moments of prosody in one line, by having his notes go upward when his lyrics implied gaining altitude.

- John Mayer uses a similar move in "No Such Thing" when he sings the phrase "I wanna scream at the top of my lungs." He goes way up into his falsetto when he hits the words "top of my lungs," to emulate the lyrical idea in his melody.

You can see how moments of prosody appear in music all the time. If you start listening for moves like this, you'll hear them a lot. One that comes up often is stopping the music (or just

the melody) when a singer uses the word "stop" in a phrase. Sparingly sprinkling some creative ones like these into your own music can be a nice little gesture when you're writing.

Last Note

Now you have some important tools for taking the ideas we came up with in the first module and turning them into concrete lyrics people can get excited about. Not only that, but you have all the components you need to craft a great song by sitting those lyrics in your melody, on top of your chord progressions. Now you can really perfect your skills at the great puzzle of piecing an entire song together.

BONUS MODULE: MINDSET & PRACTICE

This module will focus on what you have to do to get the results you want, whether it's writing better songs, having people buy your music, or any other goals you may have related to your music and even other aspects of your life.

My original intent was to make this the first module because getting into the proper mindset is an important thing to tackle before you work on your songs. But I also knew you'd be anxious to get into the actual songwriting information right away and I didn't want you skipping this part, so instead I saved it for last. Also, hopefully by putting it last, it'll help you get inspired to finish up this book and go write.

Limiting Beliefs

Songwriting can seem like a tough business to be in, so having the right mindset and a positive attitude is important. A lot of people create limiting beliefs about themselves that hold them back from accomplishing what they want. Songwriters do it all the time.

A limiting belief is something you believe that holds you back from achieving what you want. The kicker is, they aren't even true. What's so powerful about beliefs is that they're more than just ideas. They're ideas that are supercharged with our emotions, so they can *seem* impossible to shake. But you don't have to let it be that hard.

An easy way to get rid of your limiting beliefs is to ask yourself: "Was there ever a time when that wasn't true?" You'll be surprised to see that the answer is basically always "yes," which means you'll be able to accomplish what you want. Let's look at some common limiting beliefs songwriters have, and how to dispel them.

Limiting Belief: I can't make it in the music business. I don't have any connections. It's all who you know.

The Truth: Now more than ever, independent musicians are creating opportunities for their own success. Tools like social media sites and home recording studios have made it possible for someone to create and distribute their own music with relative ease. It's a better time than ever to be approaching music on your own. Websites like Taxi give you direct access to submitting your music to industry professionals. It happens constantly that independent musicians make a living without having an "in" in the industry.

Having said that, it *is* good to know people too. For that reason, if you don't have connections, start getting them. Start networking with other musicians. Go to songwriting conventions and classes, and get involved with social media groups online. When you get involved with these things, don't just meet people and tell them what you want. Instead build relationships with them. Your relationship with one person can lead to another through

mutual friends, and so on. Before you know it, you'll have a solid foundation of industry contacts.

Limiting Belief: I'm too old to start making money with my music.

The Truth: People start making money with their music at all different ages. Again, it happens all the time. Susan Boyle was almost fifty when she started getting millions of hits on her YouTube videos. What if she would have told herself she was too old to try? Do record labels typically look for people in their teens or early twenties to be the face of pop music? Sure, but becoming a pop star in that sense is not the only road to the music business. Like I said, if you make it as an independent songwriter, you won't be relying on a label anyway. Get great at what you do, so you can become irresistible to who you're trying to attract.

Limiting Belief: I'm too young to be a songwriter.

The Truth: I'll hear kids say things like "I'm trying to be a songwriter." If you've written a song, you *are* a songwriter. Period. Eliminate the word "trying" from your vocabulary, and simply do. If you think you're too young to make money with your music, there are plenty of precedents that shatter that myth. If you're still concerned about being too young, just wait a while and it'll go away.

Limiting Belief: I can't build a fan base. No one wants to hear my music.

The Truth: Things like email lists and social media sites make it easier than ever to build a fan base and maintain a relationship with your fans. Indie artists do it all the time. Why would you be different? And if you're concerned that your songs aren't good enough, an education and more practice with songwriting will help you with that. That's why you're

reading this book, so you're already on the right track. You just have to be persistent and keep doing it.

Now it's your turn. Make a list of your own personal limiting beliefs and then come up with reasons they're not true. Find examples of when they haven't been true. There will be plenty. It'll help you realize you're capable of so much more than you thought. The truth is, whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're probably right. So start realizing you can. We're only bound by the shackles we put on ourselves. It's up to us to remove them.

Setting Routines

It's not enough to read some of this book, get inspired for five minutes, and then put it away and not act on it. You have to act, with specific plans. People are creatures of habit. We fall into the same routines day in and day out, whether we realize it or not. We can let this ruin us, if we form bad habits, or we can use it to our advantage by building a routine of good habits.

Think about how many people fail at keeping their New Year's Resolutions. The main reason for that is most people make their resolutions too vague. They say something like "I'm going to spend two hours a week writing songs." That's bound for failure due to lack of specificity.

Someone much more likely to succeed would be the person who says "I'll set aside time to work on my songs every Saturday and Sunday from noon to 2pm, and again on Tuesday nights from 8pm to 10pm. And If I have to miss one of those writing sessions, Thursday will be my back-up day from 8pm to 10pm." *That* person is bound to make that his songwriting habit stick. He has a plan. He's worked a routine into his week. He played into the fact that we're creatures of habit and used it in a positive way.

It may be difficult to stick to the schedules you set for yourself when you first add them into your daily or weekly routine. That's why if you're vague about adding a new routine to your life,

you're much more likely to stop doing it. Force yourself to stick with your new routine for a month. The first few days will be easy, since you'll be excited about it. After that it'll get tougher, but once you get to the end of the month it'll be old hat. If you want to add more than one new routine, stick to only adding one per month. It'll allow you to focus all of your will power on a single routine for the entire month. By the time it's routine for you a month later, you can add a new one and then focus all of your will power on that. Just remember to be specific each time you add a new routine.

Keep Yourself Motivated

Sometimes when you're first coming up with goals and plans for yourself, it'll seem like you can handle any task you give yourself, simply because you're excited to get started. As time goes on, the motivation can slip away making it harder to stick to your plans. If that happens, there are a few things you can try.

Have a Friend Hold You Accountable

If you're afraid adding specific new routines might not be enough to keep yourself motivated, you can enlist some help. It's always best to be intrinsically motivated, but if you think that may not be enough, you can have a friend hold you accountable to your new routine.

For example, you might add the routine we mentioned for working on your songs. If you feel adding that routine is important, but you're afraid you might bail on it, you can tell one of your close friends when you're planning to set aside time to work on your songs. Then you can say something like "After each of my scheduled songwriting sessions, I'm going to email you to let you know I did it. If I miss a session in my schedule, I'm going to give you five bucks!" Having to give up a couple of bucks can be a powerful motivator for you to get things done.

Find Like Minded People

Another great way to keep yourself motivated is to find like minded people and form a meet up group. You and a couple other songwriting friends can work on your material solo according to the schedule you've come up with as previously described, and then you can get together once a week to discuss what you've accomplished and when you worked on it. Having to report to others, while they report to you can be a powerful motivator.

If you're interesting in starting a meet up group, but don't have any other friends who write songs, a great place to start would be to go to some open mics in your area. The more you play and hang out with other songwriters, the more relationships you'll develop. At that point it'll be easy to get together.

You can also take your efforts online. There are a ton of songwriting forums out there. If you put "songwriting forum" into a search engine you'll see a handful of contenders right away. Handle the forums the same way you would handle in-person conversations. Start conversations and develop relationships. If you just go into a forum and put up a post asking for something you want, you're much less likely to get it than if you get involved in conversations and get to know some of the people in the forums. Once you've developed some relationships with people online, you can either meet up in person, if the people are in your area, or you can talk via video chat.

Collaboration

Aside from simply meeting up and discussing what you've accomplished, you can also collaborate with other songwriters to write together. Working with someone else in itself can be a great motivator. In addition to that, collaboration is great because if you find a partner with complementary skills, you can create great songs, just by having more strong skill points covered than you would have alone. Also, when two or more people start talking about ideas on a subject, there's a likeliness that new ideas will come from it that neither of them would have considered on their own.

Napoleon Hill has a good metaphor on this topic in *Think and Grow Rich*. He says:

A group of electric batteries will provide more energy than a single battery. An individual battery will provide energy in proportion to the number and capacity of the cells it contains. The brain functions in a similar fashion. This accounts for the fact that some brains are more efficient than others, and leads to this significant statement – a group of brains coordinated (or connected) in a spirit of harmony will provide more thought-energy than a single brain, just as a group of electric batteries will provide more energy than a single battery.

One way to get creative juices flowing when you collaborate is for you to start with an idea. Let's say it's a melodic idea. Next, your friend takes that idea and tweaks it just a little. Now you take his idea and tweak it further. You can ping-pong out an entire song this way, and you're both contributing equally. You can do that with chord progressions, melody and even lyrics.

Daily Affirmations

Daily affirmations are another way to keep yourself motivated and working towards your goals. Our subconscious minds tend to take the information we feed them and act on it, whether the information is positive or negative. If we leave them to their own accord, it can be an easy way to let negative thoughts slip in, if we're predispositioned to think that way. For that reason, it's a good idea to start everyday either writing out, or repeating aloud affirmations about your songwriting, or your life in general. Some of your affirmations might include:

I am a confident person

Every song I write is better than the last

I will be a professional songwriter

I take a lesson from every mistake I make

I love who I am and the songs I write

And so on. These might seem a little silly when you just read them, but if you say them aloud a few times each, or write them out, and *believe* what you're saying, it'll help fuel your subconscious mind to make these thoughts true. You really need to stick to this and do it every day for it to help you. This is a perfect opportunity to add a new routine to your life. Add daily affirmations every morning, first thing when you get up.

When you do this, it's also a good time to repeat aloud, or write down some well-defined goals, to keep them fresh in your mind and to keep you working towards achieving them. We'll talk more about your goals shortly.

Eliminating Distraction

Getting distracted takes away from our ability to be creative and get things done. We're in a time when distraction plagues us more than ever before in human history. We can be all alone in a quiet room, yet emails, text messages, phone calls, social networking and tons of other distractions tug at our attention until we give it to them. And that usually takes about three seconds.

The human mind has an amazing ability to focus on *one thing at a time*. Multi-tasking is very counterproductive in most cases. In order to create our best work, it's necessary to be in an environment where we can easily focus, without distraction, for an extended period of time.

Before you sit down to dedicate time to a song, turn off anything that beeps or dings to get your attention. Close down your cell phone, email, social networking sites and anything else that could take your attention away from your song. Forget about owing it to yourself, you owe it to the song and your listeners.

The most productive way to work is to take one to two hour blocks of focused time and dedicate them to your song, and your song *only*. No email, text messages or conversations. After that dedicated period of work time, take a break, to completely unplug from the work you were doing. Lay down or get something to eat. Get yourself into a clearly defined rhythm of work and rest.

I typically structure my work time with two hours of focused work, followed by a half hour break. Then I'm back to another two hour work block and so on. The two hour block is completely focused on my work task at hand. When the break hits, I stop looking at the work entirely and let myself unwind. It's important to let yourself have a defined work/rest rhythm. You should use a timer when you do this so you don't get lost in the work block, or the period of rest. When the timer hits, immediately stop your work and take a break. Time your breaks too.

I found myself becoming so much more productive when applying this method. I once decided to take two days to write newsletters for Success For Your Songs. On Monday, I put in four two-hour work blocks, each with a half-hour break in between them. I did the same thing on Tuesday. In that time I focused only on writing content for the newsletters. After the two days I had ten articles completed. For sending out a weekly newsletter to my email readers, that gave me enough content for two and a half months, in two days of work, because I focused my efforts. Working like this will let you hit your goals much more easily and efficiently.

Too many times, we don't allow ourselves to focus our time in this black and white manner. Instead, we live in a world of grey, where we say we worked for eight hours, but it's hard to say, because a lot of that time was spent on our phones and the web, and we can't even really quantify how much time we spent on what. I guarantee your productivity will sky rocket if you start implementing this way of working.

Writing Bad Songs

I've heard songwriters say things like "would you rather write 1,000 songs and have a bunch of crappy ones, or really focus hard on a handful of songs and make them all great?"

A question like that is sort of silly. The truth is, to be great at anything you have to do it a lot. Imagine if at the beginning of his career, Michael Jordan would have said "I'll only take a few shots in my career, and I'll make sure they all go in." That wouldn't make much sense, would it? How can you make sure they all go in without a lot of misses to learn from?

I'm not sure why songwriters tend to view their craft differently than any other skill. If you want to become a great songwriter, you have to write a lot of songs. Some of them will be bad, but that's okay. It's a learning process.

Maybe you're afraid to write a lot of songs because you're one of those people who wants to *only* write great songs. You're a perfectionist and you're afraid to write something that might not be amazing. If that's you, realize that everyone who's considered great at what they do has hit stumbling blocks and weak points along the way. They've had to. It's contributed to them being great. They've learned from what tripped them up and they moved on. Not only that, but they became better for having experienced the hardships.

Don't be afraid to take risks and try things that might not work. If it doesn't go as planned, take a lesson from it. Take note that what you tried didn't work and maybe you shouldn't use it again. Or maybe it's something to be tried again later in a different context. Evaluate what you did and let it help you move forward.

Some people think that songwriting, singing and guitar playing are only about natural talent. Either you have it or you don't. It's not true. Natural talent is a factor, but it can only get you so far. It takes a lot of practice to become great at what you do. Of course Slash is a naturally gifted guitar player, but he's admitted to practicing for eight hours a day when he was learning.

In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell makes the case for this exact point. He makes the argument that it takes about 10,000 hours of practice to become a master in your field. He made that point by referencing musicians, specifically. To put that in perspective, 10,000 hours equates to almost five years of time, assuming you're putting in forty hour weeks, every week of the year. If you put in twenty hour weeks, every week of the year, it'll take you ten years to become a master. So, how many hours a week are you spending writing songs?

Additionally, getting good at anything takes education *plus* experience. A lot of songwriters have a lot of experience with writing songs (except those who only write a handful of songs hoping they'll be the "great ones") but they don't bother to *learn* anything about their craft. Reading this book is a great way for you to get into the educational side of songwriting. I also recommend attending songwriting conventions and classes too. Getting educated feedback on your songs is another hugely important learning tool. Learn your craft, apply what you've learned, and repeat. Constantly continue this loop and you can only improve.

Making Decisions

Successful people make quick decisions. They don't wait around and ponder things for months, worrying if they're making the right choice. They decide, and if they end up making the wrong choice they process the information and use it as a knowledge base for a future decision. They learn from their mistakes, and turn them into advantages. It helps make them wise.

The people mentioned in the previous section, who are only writing a few songs hoping they're all great, aren't making decisions quickly. How can they be, if their final result is only a few songs? They'll write a melody, and then change it again and again, because it never feels right. They can't decide on a melody because they're too afraid of writing one that's wrong or bad. This indecision regarding what melody to use holds them up from writing lyrics, and so on, until they're left with a handful of incomplete songs. I'm not saying you shouldn't rewrite your songs. It's actually a big part of becoming a better songwriter. But you do need to make

decisions and move forward, even with your rewrites. I'll show you two people, and see if you can decide who's more likely to be successful with his music.

Songwriter A comes up with a chord progression for a song. He's unsure if he wants to end the progression on a C or an Am, so he puts the progression aside, hoping the answer will come to him at a later time. A few weeks later he revisits the chord progression. Still unsure about whether to use the C or the Am, he uses both of the chords. He uses the C at the end of the first chord progression and the Am at the end of the second. He gets to use them both.

Now it's time for him to write a melody for the song. He has three ideas for how the melody can go, but he's not sure which one to use. He puts the song away for another week, hoping the answer will come to him. Again, unable to decide between the three melody ideas, he crams all three of them into the song, so he doesn't have to pick only one.

Three months later the song is done. He's not even sure if he likes it. Maybe it's because there are too many things happening for one song.

Songwriter B comes up with a chord progression for a song. He's unsure if he wants to end the progression on a C or an Am. He decides to end the progression on the C. He revisits the song the next day and realizes the C sounds good, so he stays with it. He doesn't bother going back to the Am anymore.

He has a few melody ideas. He picks the first one he came up with. He listens back to it the next day after having a little distance from the song, and realizes the second one is the strongest. He changes it and doesn't revisit the melody any more. He knows the current one is strong.

A week later the song is finished. He gets some feedback on it. Some musician friends he trusts made good suggestions on things that can be improved. They gave him ideas he could even use for future songs, not just this one. He decides to leave his current song as is, and use the newfound ideas as he writes his next song. A week later that next song is done too.

By looking at these two scenarios, Songwriter B is way more likely to succeed with his approach. He makes decisions quickly, which allows him to get more information, do more work, learn more and move forward. Songwriter A is indecisive and as a result, lazy. He's not getting much done, so he's not learning from what he's doing.

Get into the habit of making quick and effortless decisions. Do *something*. Don't just ponder forever and never take action. You want there to be thought behind the moves you make in your songs, but make the decisions for those moves and then move forward and make more decisions. Those who act and those who don't will be the difference between those who become successful and those who don't.

Your Roadmap

Defining goals for yourself is the first step towards reaching them. Being specific with your goals and writing them out will greatly improve your chances of reaching them. Putting deadlines on your goals is important too. It'll prevent you from putting off what you have to do to reach your goals.

Having an overall goal of what you want to achieve is important, but it can be overwhelming. For that reason, breaking your overall goal up into smaller, more specific chunks is a great way to achieve what you want.

For example, a songwriter might have an overall goal to get his song played on a television show. That's a great goal, and it's important to outline what you want in that way, but by itself it doesn't have much direction.

A more proactive songwriter would take that goal of getting his song played on a television show and break it up into smaller, more achievable pieces, with deadlines. He might make his first goal to learn about songwriting as it specifically applies to writing for film and television. He'll read books and take classes to teach him what he needs to know about writing songs that get placed on TV shows, and how to get his song there. Reaching your goals is largely about education *and* experience, so while he's learning, he'll be applying these techniques to songs he's writing. His first goal may be something like "By January 1, I'll have read a book and taken a class specifically geared towards getting my music on TV."

His next goal might be to start making contact with music supervisors. Knowing it's best to develop relationships with people, before simply contacting them to get something from them, he may make his next goal read something like this: "By March 1, I'll have attended a songwriting convention and have met and exchanged information with three music supervisors there. I'll also research and contact 10 music supervisors online by that time."

These goals will keep getting refined and refined until he's getting what he wants. And by being specific and adding deadlines, he's much more likely to succeed in achieving his goals.

If you don't hit a goal specifically, don't fret. You've still made progress. It's best to set each specific goal to be a little out of your reach. Each small goal will be a stepping stone to your overall goal, which might seem monumental when you think about it alone, but when you break it up into smaller, more achievable tasks, it won't seem so bad.

Another important thing to mention is it will benefit you not to measure your own progress by other people's success. You don't succeed by beating others, you succeed by growing yourself.

An easy way to make yourself seem insignificant is to think about all the success someone who's well established has (or to think about all the things you want to achieve, but haven't yet) and then think about yourself *now* and how you don't have any of that stuff yet.

Don't do that. Instead measure yourself against how far you've already come. Think about the goals you've achieved and all the improvement you've made in the past 6 months, two years, or the last decade. Measure yourself against your old standards, and keep moving forward and making progress.

If you fail to meet your goals, it's okay. Persistence is crucial in achieving success. If you have plans for a goal that didn't work, try different plans to hit the same goal. Many times people who have failed, simple gave up before they found the right answer.

Getting Outside Your Comfort Zone

The best things in life typically happen when you get a little outside your comfort zone. Think about when you've done it. Maybe it was asking out someone you liked, or starting your own business.

The same applies to your songwriting. Maybe the idea of getting your songs heard and critiqued scares you. Or maybe you hate the thought of playing in front of a crowd. If you know that doing something can potentially lead you on a path to success and the only reason you're not doing it is you're afraid or anxious about it, you're cheating yourself.

A routine you may want to set for yourself would be to take the steps you know are necessary, despite being afraid of them. You can start small and build on them. For example, if you fear performing in public, you can start with an open mic where you'd only have to play one song. Or maybe start by playing a song or two for a couple of friends. If it makes you feel anxious but you know it'll be good for you, do it. You'll slowly start expanding the limits of your comfort zone, and start to grow confidence as a result.

Making Decisions from the Future

Sometimes your fear can impair your judgment. You might let your fear get in your head and convince you to not do something. You'll even rationalize it to yourself so you don't have to do it. If you fear rejection, you might say something like "I'm not going to pitch this song to a music supervisor, because it's probably not the type of song they're looking for anyway." If you've ever told yourself something like that, you're allowing yourself to use an excuse as a way of rationalizing your fear.

Times like these are when you can make a decision from your future. It sounds crazy, but what I like to do when I find myself in a situation like the one just described is to ask myself "If it were five years from now, would I have wished I would have done this now?" If the answer is yes, you're probably telling yourself an excuse because you're scared. It's an excuse that can be holding you back.

This is a good way to pull yourself outside of the situation to get away from the emotions that may be blocking your judgment. You'll then be able to make a better decision about the right thing to do to better yourself.

The 5 P's for Success: A Summary

You may have heard me discuss the idea of the 5 P's for success in songwriting before, but I'd like to end with it here as it makes for a good summary of some of the ideas we looked at in this bonus module. It's crucial to keep these ideas in mind as you move forward on your songwriting journey.

1. Purpose

It's important to know what you want to achieve as a songwriter or performer in order for you to get there. That may sound obvious, but it's often neglected. A lot of times amateur songwriters walk around with the mindset of simply hoping "something's" going to happen for them, without knowing what that something is.

Whether you want to become a chart-topping performing songwriter, be on a songwriting staff in Nashville, or simply enjoy songwriting as a hobby, you need to define that for yourself. Knowing your purpose is the first step to getting there.

2. Planning

Once you know your purpose, you need to know *how* you're going to get there. Planning is crucial to achieving your goals. A lot of songwriters go around hoping that "someone will discover them." That's not a plan. With that mindset, you can also plan to win the lottery. It doesn't mean it's going to happen.

Instead, come up with clearly defined plans to achieve your goals. Keep your overall purpose in mind when you lay out your goals. It's important to put dates on your goals, so they're not open ended. You're much more likely to reach your goals if you put an achievable timeframe on them.

I'd recommend laying out plans for the short, mid and long term. It's okay to modify your goals as you move along, as long as you always have a plan for achieving them in place.

3. Persistence

As crucial as planning is, it's important to realize that occasionally your plans aren't going to work out the way you hoped. That's okay. It happens to every successful person. When this happens you'll need to be persistent. Persistence sets those who succeed apart from those who fail. Keep modifying your plans, until you find one that works. Most people give up at the first sign of failure and as a result never achieve the success they've hoped for.

4. Passion

This one's pretty easy for most songwriters. I don't think I've ever met a songwriter who doesn't love their craft, but it's important to talk about anyway.

Your passion for what you do is the fuel that's going to carry you through everything else we've talked about. When times get hard, and you need to be persistent, your passion will keep you going. That's why it's so important to love what you do, if you want to be truly successful at it. As Napoleon Hill says in *Think and Grow Rich*, "Weak desires bring weak results, just as a small amount of fire brings a small amount of heat."

Love what you do, so when things get tough, you can still power on to move forward.

5. Practice

As important as the previously mentioned points are, they won't do you any good if you don't practice your craft. As a performing songwriter, this includes practicing your instruments (vocals, guitar, piano, etc), practicing your performances, and practicing writing songs.

As strong as your will to succeed is, you've got to be damn good at what you do to achieve your goals. And you can absolutely get there with practice and learning.

LAST NOTE

You now have a plethora of concepts to sprinkle or dump into your songs to get them to be the best they can be. You might look at one small section of this book, and think "that technique alone won't make me a great songwriter," but when you start combining these ideas together, you'll realize the true potential your songs can have. It may take practice for you to write incredible songs, but anything worthwhile will. Just stick with it and your songwriting can only improve drastically.

Experiment with the different ideas you've learned to see which work best for your songs. You can apply them in any order you want. You can stick to the order we used here (song ideas, chord progressions, melodies then lyrics), or try any different order. You'll benefit a lot from experimenting with a different order each time you write. Breaking your patterns is a great way to improve what you do. What you've been presented with here are tools to make a song appealing to your listeners, while keeping the song entirely your own. The order in which you get to that song is up to you.

I also recommend you use a combination of the Get Inspired Method and the Do It Yourself Method together, as you'll most likely see the best results that way. Great artists are always looking to other artists for ideas, while at the same time innovating from their own minds. If you combine these two methods, you have a great opportunity to do that yourself.

Just make sure when you're using the Get Inspired Method, you make significant changes to the songs you're referencing. Never plagiarize. If you're going to use someone's work as inspiration, change it significantly so it becomes *yours*. Ask a friend, if you think an element of your song sounds too close to the original. If it does, it'll be good practice for you to keep tweaking it until you've come up with something completely new.

I'm looking forward to your progress. Thank you for reading this book and best of luck to you on your songwriting journey. I wish you all the success you're looking for!

Do me a favor and email me your thoughts on this book, good or bad. You can reach me at anthony@successforyoursongs.com.

Thanks again,
Anthony