



Songwriting Basics

What are the parts of a song?

- Chorus – Repeats melody and lyrics
- Verse – Repeats melody but changes lyrics
- Bridge – Happens only once in a song, has unique melody and unique lyrics
- Parts – Have unique melody and lyrics for each section
- Hook - A hook is the capstone of a well-crafted song. It's part melody, part lyric, and most likely it's both. It's usually the title of the song, repeating throughout the chorus and sitting in the most prominent positions of the first or last line.

What kind of songs can you write and what structures are there?

Through the history of music different structures arise through cultural influence.

- **Aria** (Italian: 'air') An aria is a song, generally used to describe set-piece songs in Opera. Atonal Music in which no key can be established.
- **Air** |What is an air in Irish music? A slow air is a type of tune in Irish traditional music, marked by the absence of strict metre or structure, melodically "open ended" and generally derived from the melody of a sung song but instead played on a solo melodic instrument. The melodies are often drawn from the sean-nós solo singing tradition.
- **Ayre** What is a Scottish air in music? Ayre, also spelled air, genre of solo song with lute accompaniment that flourished in England in the late 16th and early 17th centuries.
- **Air de Cour** Probably based on Italian monody and French air de cour, they were solo songs, occasionally with more (usually three) parts, accompanied on a lute.
- **Ballad** a poem or song narrating a story in short stanzas. (verses)
- **Traditional** having one chorus, more than one verse and sometimes a bridge.

What is the difference between poetry and songwriting?

Poems are meant to be spoken, lyrics are meant to be sung.

Music has three elements: **Time, Tune & Tone**

- **Timing** of a traditional song falls in a reference of musical rhythmic measure patterns. The musical structure requires the lyrics to work within it.
 - Air, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$, $\frac{6}{8}$, $\frac{12}{8}$
- **Tune** is the melody. The lyrics must support the tune and timing of the melody.
 - Melody moves the pitch, the more movement the harder
- **Tone** is the singability of a word and the quality of sound being a vowel or consonant.
 - Eg. Amen / juggle = are both two syllables but sing completely different.

What are the differences between genres?

A genre defines the culture of a song through recognizable timing, tuning and tone.

- Examples: Blues has a common 12 bar repeating chord structure with lyrics that reflect life of loss or hardship. Usually $\frac{4}{4}$ timing, slow, flattens notes in the scale, uses a warm thick tone or crying electric guitar, harmonica...
- Folk uses $\frac{4}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ timing with major and minor scales and lots of 7 chords like D₇ A₇ and often refer to life, love, protest and story telling. Often guitar or other acoustic string instruments.
- Children's songs have repetitive melodies and playful rhythm, tone of playful or soothing instruments.
- Swing uses complex chords, syncopated timing, horns, drums, string instruments.
- Ragtime has a distinctive upbeat rhythm and usually played on a piano.
- Jazz songs have more complicated melodies, timing and often played with percussion, piano, electric guitar, horns.
- Bluegrass has a distinct timing and structure, uses acoustic instruments like banjo, mandolin and fiddle.
- Other genres... singer songwriter, classical, musical, punk, rap, fusion, metal, rock, country... if you don't know what to call it call it indie for independent.

What are different approaches to songwriting?

Let the song choose its genre and type eg or write for a genre and type. Eg country waltz

- Start writing free from flow, an emotion, an inspirational thought
- Create lyrics (careful not poetry) and create a melody
- Create a melody then create the lyrics
- Think of the framework of a genre and write to fit into it. Eg, start singing to a traditional twelve bar blues.

What instruments do you use for tuning and timing support?

Noting the intention of your songwriting and what kind of music you want to create, what instrument can you play or can access to help you with the musicality of the song?

- A metronome is great for timing because you have something to trust where steady is.
 - *tip – timing helps you know what kind of lyrics you have room for.

Tips for Songwriting

These suggestions and tips are from personal experience and have helped me get songs to completion. They are in no particular order and not always applicable.

- **Record** as you go. Use anything you can... phone app, computer, pen and paper, tape recorder, lipstick on the mirror, golf score sheet. Capture the moment as soon as you can to keep the idea fresh and inspired... start repetition. Use the recording for accuracy of learning what you create and not lose the inspirations you want to build on.
- **Repetition.** Repeat what you are creating as soon as you can. Repetition solidifies concepts and helps confirm the creation. If you are free flowing and recording your voice then you can go back and learn from the recording by repeating the lines over and over. If you are creating line by line then go back to what you already know and like and repeat it... see where the song wants to go from there. Repetition solidifies the song as you go and helps build on concepts.
- **Editing** is something you can do by testing the lines through repetition and assessing how singable and suitable they are. Sometimes taking away small words gives more singing time to the next word. Sometimes needing to change a word ends up changing a line. Changing a line can inspire changing the direction of a song. These influences result in the development of defined melody and lyrics.
- **Environment** is important to continue your flow of thinking and creativity. I love writing songs when I am alone so that I don't filter my thoughts for someone else's ears too soon. Have a place you can let your mind get fully absorbed in the process long enough to create.
- **Timing** determines how the song is shared. By shared I mean, can other musicians and dancers interpret the song naturally?
 - The more difficult songs will need special considerations like requiring unique study of: dropped beats, crooked measures, syncopated rhythms and frequently changing or extra measures.
 - Easy songs are usually: predictable, usually 16 measures per verse or chorus, repeat melody and lyrics often and don't use a large or fast changing spectrum of notes. *The more notes, the more difficult of a song.*
 - Song writing while using a good sense of timing, or tested against a metronome or another musician, will greatly improve the song's predictability of timing and iron out oddities.
- **Inspiration!** Stay fresh in the moment so it helps you bring up important ideas for the authentic direction of the song. What image do you want to capture? What feeling do you want to create? If you return to a song after being away a while, try singing it again to get you in the zone. Take your mind to the place or reason for the inspiration.
- **Done!** As an artist it is hard to know when to be done. What is the goal of the song and when is that goal completed? What is the artistic integrity of the song or do you need to tweak it. In this we end where we begin... try recording it. Once it is recorded you have made a commitment.