



LYRIC WRITING

Thoughts, Ideas,
& Prompts



DISCLAIMERS:

1) THERE ARE A THOUSAND "RIGHT WAYS" TO WRITE A SONG.

2) THERE IS NO "WRONG WAY" TO WRITE A SONG.

3) YOU HAVE TO KNOW THE RULES TO BREAK THEM. AND BREAKING THE RULES IS REALLY, REALLY FUN.

4) WRITING A BAD SONG DOESN'T MAKE YOU A BAD SONGWRITER. YOU CAN AND SHOULD WRITE A LOT OF BAD SONGS IN-BETWEEN YOUR GOOD ONES.

5) I AM A CONFIDENT SONGWRITER, BUT I'M JUST ONE VOICE AND ONE OPINION OUT OF MILLIONS. TAKE MY ADVICE FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, AND DO WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY!

TALK IT OUT:

A great way to approach lyrics is to consider how you would speak them. Start with a short phrase, like, "I never meant to make you cry." Speak it aloud a few times. Which words get do you naturally emphasize? Is there a natural rhythm in the way you speak these words? Is there a natural rise and fall in your voice that could be mimicked in a melody? Speaking your lyric aloud is one way to find rhythmic and melodic options for your song.

TRY IT OUT:

Snag a nearby book and read a few sentences aloud. Choose a sentence, a phrase, or even just two words. Repeat them a few times, and then consider what rhythms and melodies feel natural on those words!

BACK TO BASICS:

Here are a few concepts to consider when writing. You can look up "literary devices" or "poetic devices" for more ideas on how to write creatively!

1) THEMES - WORDS OR SUBJECTS THAT TIE THE SONG TOGETHER

2) IMAGERY - VIVID VISUAL DESCRIPTIONS

3) COMPARE & CONTRAST - WORDS THAT HIGHLIGHT SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

4) REPETITION - WORDS OR PHRASES CAN BE REPEATED FOR EMPHASIS OR MEMORABILITY

5) REFERENCES - REFERENCE ANOTHER SONG, A MOVIE, OR STORY TO CONJURE IMAGERY AND CONTEXT WITH JUST A FEW WORDS

STUDY THE GREATS:

One of the best ways you can study songwriting is simply by reading and listening to the lyrics of great songwriters. Start with your favorite songwriter and read their lyrics. What sticks out to you? Do they paint vivid images? Do they use intense emotional language? Keep a running list of lyrics that inspire or move you. Check out songwriters like Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan. Look at older lyricists like Dorothy Fields and Billy Strayhorn. In fact, browse the Songwriters Hall of Fame at songhall.org for endless inspiration. Pay attention to song structure, vocabulary, imagery, and any other elements you are naturally drawn to.

RHYME TIME:

to rhyme or not to rhyme?

Rhyming can be a very tricky part of songwriting. On the one hand, our ears (and brains) are trained to expect rhymes in songwriting. But rhyming can easily start to feel stale, or you might stumble upon a word you desperately want to use but there is no suitable rhyme. Here are some things to consider:

RHYME SCHEME - YOU DON'T HAVE TO USE AN AABB OR ABAB

RHYME SCHEME. WHAT ABOUT ABBA OR ABCB?

INTERNAL RHYME - YOU CAN USE INTERNAL RHYME TO GIVE A LYRIC MOMENTUM, EVEN IF IT DOESN'T RHYME WITH THE NEXT LINE!

NEAR RHYME - NEAR RHYME IS MY FAVORITE. YOU CAN LET VOWELS MATCH WITHOUT THE CONSONANTS HAVING TO MATCH PERFECTLY. THIS ALLOWS US TO RHYME "LOVE" WITH "ENOUGH" INSTEAD OF ONLY "GLOVE" AND "DOVE", FOR EXAMPLE.

FURNITURE:

I don't know who first said it, but there's a songwriting concept that you should "put furniture in the room." This means writing with specificity, which actually makes your song more relatable.

"PUTTING FURNITURE IN THE ROOM" MEANS GIVING DETAILS THAT MAKE YOUR LYRIC SPECIFIC. I FIND A LOT OF GREAT EXAMPLES IN OLD "LIST SONGS", LIKE "THEY CAN'T TAKE THAT AWAY FROM ME", "THE THINGS WE DID LAST SUMMER", AND "THESE FOOLISH THINGS".

THESE TYPES OF LYRICS MAKE IT SOUND LIKE YOU'RE EAVESDROPPING ON A CONVERSATION. YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW THE EXACT CONTEXT OR MEANING, BUT YOU'RE ABLE TO PROJECT YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE.

EXAMPLE: INSTEAD OF SAYING "WE DROVE ACROSS THE COUNTRY" YOU MIGHT SAY "WE TOOK YOUR DAD'S FORD FROM BALTIMORE TO BAKERSFIELD."

PROMPTS:

Use these prompts to try on some different ideas or writing styles.

Write as much (a whole song?) or as little (a single line?) as is helpful or fun to you. Feel free to write a bad song or silly song.

- 1) WRITE ABOUT A WILLOW TREE.
- 2) WRITE A LOVE SONG (ROMANTIC OR OTHERWISE) WITHOUT USING THE WORD 'LOVE'.
- 3) WRITE A SONG ABOUT DRIVING SOMEWHERE.
- 4) WRITE A SONG/SONG SECTION THAT STARTS AND ENDS WITH "I'M SORRY".
- 5) THINK OF ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE SONGS. TAKE THE TITLE AND FIRST WORD OR LINE, THEN WRITE YOUR OWN SONG.
- 6) TRY WRITING IN A STYLE YOU'VE NEVER TRIED. WRITE A COUNTRY SONG, OR A POP SONG, OR A CHILDREN'S SONG!