

# SONGWRITING SECRETS

HOW TO BE A BETTER SONGWRITER  
THAN YOU EVER IMAGINED POSSIBLE



WORLD RENOWNED SONGWRITING MENTOR, AND FOUNDER OF SONGWRITING PLANET,  
**K E V I N T H O M A S**  
PRESENTS 16 LITTLE-KNOWN WAYS TO BE THE ABSOLUTE BEST SONGWRITER YOU CAN BE!

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## Getting Started

### **How to NEVER Run Out of Great Song Ideas Again...**

#### Bursting Outside of the Songwriting Box

Did you ever notice that most of the time when you sit down to write a song you begin the EXACT SAME WAY. Maybe you pick up an acoustic guitar and start strumming, maybe you grab a pencil and notebook for writing lyrics, or possibly you just start belting out some melodies.

There is nothing wrong with any of these methods; the problem lies in doing the exact same thing every time. It is important to practice a writing strategy enough times to get consistent results, but having an unalterable routine is the complete OPPOSITE OF CREATIVITY. Being creative implies trying different things, experimenting, and thinking OUTSIDE OF THE BOX

There are many components to a song, and as long as the pieces all fit together in the end, you can begin with any of them. Below I've listed the 12 BEST METHODS to begin a song. Try picking three or four of the categories from the list below, and cycle through them, applying a different starting method each time you sit down to write a new song.

#### Starting a Song from:

Lyrics: just the words

Electric Guitar Riff: not just chords, create up a riff

Bass Line: can be played on piano or guitar if you don't have a bass

Melody: vocals only

Drum Beat: from drums loops, a computer sequencer, keyboard, or drum machine

Acoustic Guitar

Piano or Keyboard

Unusual Instruments: Ukulele, Violin, Xylophone (real instruments, or simulated from a keyboard)

Sound Effects: Helicopter, explosions, factory sounds, bees buzzing, waterfalls, etc. This can set the mood and imply a musical direction for the song

Computer Software: Pro Tools, Sibelius, Garage Band, Logic, etc. Begin creating the

whole songs from within the capabilities of the software.

Concept or Emotion: The meaning of the number 5, Life as an Octopus, Anger, Longing, Celebrating, Desire, (be very specific; for example: the desire to date a girl whom you know you would never get along with)

### Combining Starting Points

When starting with a new writing method, at first it may seem like the writing process becomes slower and less comfortable. That is normal. You are not looking for something comfortable here; this is a way to break you out of your box, and **EXPAND YOUR CREATIVITY**.

After you get comfortable with three or four of these methods, try adding another one each week. Then try combining several together. The potential combinations are enormous. Whenever you become stuck creatively just take a look at this list and try a method you haven't used before.

Think of this as a new creative songwriting program. Apply this method just 20 minutes a day for 30 days. Don't worry about finishing the new songs yet, just new ways of starting them and expanding your creativity. In just one month you should begin to notice how far you have bursting beyond your old songwriting box.

### **What is the Best Time of the Day For Songwriting?**

When do you normally write? Is it on the weekends? At night after work? In the morning right when you wake up? Do you have one or two writing times a week, or do you fit it in between work and sleep whenever you can? Do you always write at the same time of day, or do you wait until inspiration hits before you begin?

Think for a minute about your typical songwriting routine, and then I will tell you the **Absolute Best Time For Writing Songs**.

Ok, are you ready? Here it is. The best day and time for songwriting is - whatever day or time you are currently Not accustomed to writing. For instance, if you always write at night before bed, try switching to the mornings before you start your day. If you always write for two hours on Saturdays, try writing for ten minutes each day right after work.

The reasoning behind this has to do with expanding your creative boundaries, and thinking outside of the box. Large leaps in creativity often coincide with breaks in routine, and unexpected occurrences. Many inventors have had their biggest scientific breakthroughs when something unusual, even annoying, got in the way of their research, but also acted as a catalyst for a new discovery.

For instance, Radial Keratotomy is a mild surgical technique that can improve vision in

people who have poor eyesight. It was invented after a Russian eye doctor removed glass from the eye of a patient who had fallen and broken his glasses while they were still on his head. The amazing thing was that this patient's vision actually improved from the injury, after the glass was removed. The doctor then went on to develop a technique for correcting poor eyesight.

Now I don't recommend that you should get glass in your eye in order to write better songs, but the point is that the number of great inventions, and brilliant artistic creations, that occur by accident seem to outnumber the ones that are planned. Therefore, having a strict practice and writing routine, which can be great for developing technical skills, can sometimes inhibit creativity when followed too closely. Deviating from that routine can snap you into new creative perspectives. It can create subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, paradigm shifts that can dramatically transform your songwriting experience.

If you are used to the smell of damp morning grass and fresh coffee when you write, as sunlight splinters across a dusty hardwood floor, how would the smell of aromatic candles affect your writing as moonlight soaks through the cool black air of a silent sleepy town? It is these variations of time and space that create the stages for our inspiration to mingle with, and become secret homes for the ancient muses to dance through.

So if you have a regular practice and writing routine that works for you, stick with it. It is that type of disciplined consistent work that will develop your skills as a songwriter and musician, and improve your productivity. However, now you can add Variations in Routine as a category in your practice schedule, and you can consciously employ unusual writing times as an important component of your songwriting work.

### **Melody Tips**

#### **What is the Most Important Part of Your Song?**

When someone asks you "Do you remember the song that goes like....?" Do they sing to you the chord progression? Mouth the drumbeat? Describe the structure of song sections? Speak the lyrics to you?

No, Of Course Not! They sing the MELODY. And the lyrics come in a close 2<sup>nd</sup> place, because they are usually just as memorable, but they are almost always remembered as Attached To The Melody. The Melody is the key.

Over 99% of the time, the HOOK of the song is the Melody in the Chorus.

A Guitar Riff, or catchy Bass Line, is sometimes a strong Instrumental Hook, but these

are also Melodies, just ones that are played on Instruments rather than sang.

So, as important as Solid Song Structures, Good Chord Progressions, Touching Lyrics, Cool Band Arrangements, and a Well Produced Recordings are to a song, without a Strong Melody THE SONG BECOMES A LOSER.

And a Strong Melody WILL STILL SHINE, even over weak lyrics, chord progressions, song forms, and arrangements. That is not to say that you don't need to spend time on those components too, their development will be essential in turning that GOOD MELODY INTO A HIT SONG.

SURPRISINGLY, however, courses on melody writing are not even taught even at most of the best music colleges. Melody often takes a back seat to learning about Chords. This occurs for two reasons: One, chords are more mathematical and easier to teach; and Two, our system of chords is a unique feature of Western Music (Music developed from Western Europe and America) which can get quite complex, and does require an in depth study to thoroughly understand.

So if MELODY IS THE KEY to a great song, how do you write a good one?

Here a few QUICK TIPS

1. **SHORT AND EASY TO SING PHRASES:** There is no sense writing complex melodies that no one can sing along with or remember.
2. **PITCH RANGE:** Keep it reasonable, usually less than an octave for a song section, and an octave and a half for the whole song.
3. **DRAMATIC EFFECTS:** Use stepwise motion to keep melodies easy to sing, and leaps in pitch for Energetic Effects.
4. **CREATE BALANCE:** Preceding and following leaps with movement in the opposite direction of the leap usually balances a melody well.
5. **STARTING POINTS:** Begin melodic phrases for different sections of your song on different beats of the measure. Starting every phrase of every section at the same place will bore people to death.
6. **ADD VARIETY:** If you use quick conversation rhythms for one section, try holding out long notes for another.

Keep the concept of melody writing high up on the IMPORTANCE SCALE, and you will quickly start HEARING SONGS IN A WHOLE NEW WAY.

### **How To Write A Song With Any Famous Band You Like!**

Do you ever find yourself singing along to the radio in your car, maybe even just silently

following a song in your head, and then your mind starts making up new words or melodies to the rhythms and chords of the song? Many songwriters commonly have this experience. It is our creativity at work. It is your inner writer emerging from the depths of your subconscious mind to co-create with the band.

If you have never had this experience, don't worry, you can consciously try it now from time to time. The advantage of creating new melodies to someone else's song is that you have a completely finished product, which is starving for your creative input. There will be a structured song form, chord progressions, rhythm section arrangements, and a groove, for a song that was probably selected over tens of thousands of others, as one of the best to put on the radio. And you get to be the new lead singer to write a melody for it.

You will have to ignore the singer on the recording of course, but you are not looking here to write an entire song with someone else's music. The goal is to utilize top-notch recordings to jump-start your inner melody writer. You will have a chance to focus exclusively on THE MELODY with a completely finished song.

I sometimes find myself pulling out a bank receipt, or some other random piece of paper while driving, and jotting down lyric ideas that I came up with while playing around with melodies to someone else's song. Other times I might be at a bar or restaurant and ask the waitress for a pen so that I could jot down my ideas on a napkin quickly before they are forgotten. It could be my lyrics that seem worthy of saving, but many times it is the melodies, with disposable lyrics that I attach to them as placeholders for better crafted ones that I might write later. The lyrics will remind me of the melody when I get home, and then I can write some better words and develop the ideas further.

It is really a cool experience when this happens. Maybe you have been at work and haven't heard any music yet today, and when you are finally released from the slave driver's whip, upon hearing some cool songs, your inner songwriter kicks in like A MAD MAN DEMANDING TO PARTICIPATE.

There may be a few people who are reading this and thinking, isn't that kind of like stealing other peoples songs? Well, music is in the air everywhere. None of us write songs in a total vacuum. We all hear the music of our times, and we write music that has similarities to the current styles. If we were back in seventeenth century France, we might all be inspired to write local folk songs, or classical compositions, depending on what our social class happened to be. We would certainly not be writing Rock or R&B songs. Today, however, we are all influenced by the popular styles that surround us, and our songs will show some resemblances, unless we are aspiring to write Ragtime, Gypsy dance music, or some other less common style.



By the time you take the melody that was originally inspired by another song, and transform it at home with your own songwriting skills, it will become a completely different song. All you really need to do is change a couple things, like the tempo, or the chords, to make it sound unique, but you will most likely change many other components of the song as well.

You are simply using this method to kick-start the songwriting process with a catchy phrase or melody, which you can then build out with new chords, song sections, and different grooves, and then develop it into your own unique song.

I encourage you to give this a try anytime you are listening to music. It is a totally valid method of starting a song, and many writers use this technique quite a bit. If we, as songwriters, are going to be subjected to the songs of other artists at random times throughout our days, then we should take advantage of these moments, and rather than simply become passive listeners, we should use the music that surrounds us as vehicles for our own creativity.

## Arrangements

### **How to Write Songs With a Band, and Not Break Up?**

We have all heard the stories about famous bands writing songs together. Creating great music with friends can be almost like having a second family.

But the truth of the matter is that writing songs with an entire band is a very rare situation. Even when all the names of band members are listed as co-writers, it is usually just one or two who did the majority of the writing.

What commonly occurs when attempting to write with a band is that too many people sit around doing nothing, while one or two work out song ideas. This often ends up wasting precious rehearsal time.

A better way is for band members to write individually, or pair-up for writing in twos, or threes at the most. This way, you can easily switch around writing partners, and everyone will be bringing completed songs to rehearsal so that no time will be wasted.

It is always a good idea to give the other band members a recording of the song to learn a head of time. There is nothing more tedious than having to teach band members every part of a song in a group setting, when they could have easily come prepared.

If during rehearsal other band members contribute to the completed song in a significant way, and their new parts or editing ideas take the song to a whole new level, always add

them to the credits as co-writers.

Be aware that some writing partners will like to stick together, and other just won't click so well. This can be very similar to dating, so don't let jealousy or other emotions interfere with developing great songs for the group. You are part of a team; BE A TEAM PLAYER, all good songs benefit you and the whole team. Think of it Like a Business and be professional. Don't let your emotions get the best of you, but definitely do let those emotions flow into the writing.

Also, realize that some players won't have a knack for writing at all, and that is ok. Many players will not even want to writers.

Additionally, sometimes drummers or bass players will learn to hack out chords on the guitar or keyboard and sing, to get more involved with the writing process. Overlook their inadequacies on a new instrument, listen to the quality of the song despite a most likely mediocre performance, and help them with the performance aspect, and possible co-writing of their songs. They might have a brilliant musical mind underneath that lack of experience on songwriting instruments, and they could add tremendously to the group if given a chance.

The descriptions above are how most band writing situations work, rather than everyone writing together in the same room. When I realized this it COMPLETELY DE-MYSTIFIED band songwriting for me, and ELIMINATED THE STRUGGLE AND ENDLESS SEARCH of trying to find the Ultimate Brotherhood Writing Team in a band.

There is no magic lineup, just go with what you've got and take it as far as you can. If you find a miracle songwriting partnership along the way, like Lennon and McCartney did, then the heavens have truly opened up for you. But don't depend on it, just do the work and manage the songwriting relationships that befall you like a professional.

## **Chord Progressions**

### **How to Write Chord Progressions that Pull Listeners in...**

Guess How You Can Write Chord Progressions the will ALWAYS SOUND GREAT with your Melody, and make listeners feel TOTALLY CONNECTED to the song.

How? It's Simple: DON'T GUESS!

Many songwriters simply guess which chords to use with their melodies; they try a variety of different ones until something sounds right.

There is nothing wrong with using your ear to find good sounds, but just guessing which chords might work with a melody is like trying to find a new car to for sale by driving up and down every street in the city looking for one, rather than simply going to the new car lots. You might eventually find a good one, but you would be really doing things **THE HARD WAY**.

For Songs, the big car-lot of chords that will **ALWAYS SOUND GREAT** with your melody will come from the Same Scale. When car shopping, if you want a Chevy you go to a Chevy dealer, if you want a Ford you go to a Ford car lot. It is no different in songwriting. If your melody comes from a D major scale, a G minor scale, or a Bb Blues scale, you need to know the chords in that key.

This works the other way around also. If you begin with the chords, your melody should come from the same scale that the chords come from.

### HOW DO YOU FIND THESE MYSTERIOUS CHORDS?

Let's quickly go over major keys, and stick to triads (3-note chords) for now to keep this simple. In any major key, which will contain 7 notes, the chords follow the scale tones in this order: I is major, ii is minor, iii is minor, IV is major, V is major, vi is minor, and vii is diminished.

So in the key of C here are the chords: C Dm Em F G Am Bdim.

In the key of D we get these chords: D Em F#m G A Bm C#dim.

The order of major, minor, and diminished chords will always be the same, no matter what major key you are using.

So here is the **BLUEPRINT**: If you begin with a melody, determine what scale you are using, know what chords are in that key, and choose from them.

You can also do this the other way around: chords first, melody second. If you begin with the chords, determine what scale they belong to and create your melody from that scale.

This takes less than a minute to figure out, and Everything will match up **LIKE MAGIC**.

You can always choose a chord or two from outside of the key for Interesting Flavors, but most of the chords and melody notes need to come from the same scale, or song will taste like a Pizza with Tuna and Peanut Butter toppings.

To Attain Chord Charts in Every Key, go to:  
<http://www.songwritingplanet.com>

## Seventh Chord Heaven

If you typically use a lot Major or Minor Triad chords in your songs, one way to spice up your songwriting would be to start adding in some Seventh chords.

Triads are the most common type of chord construction. They contain the Root of the chord, which is where the chord will get its letter name, such as G or D. And they also contain the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> of the chord. You basically just pick a note in the scale to start with for the root of the chord, and then add every other note in the scale until you also have the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. (The difference between major and minor chords is that for a minor chord the 3<sup>rd</sup> will be a half-step (one pitch) lower, or closer to the root)

This is very easy to conceptualize on a piano keyboard, but it is a bit tricky to visualize on the guitar fretboard. I usually explain chord construction to my guitar students using a keyboard, and then I let them know that on the guitar the theory is the same, but the fretboard patterns can be a little confusing at first.

Any of these three notes within the chord can be doubled an octave higher, and the order of the notes can be switched around. This is referred to as the particular Voicing of the chord. If you are a guitar player you have probably already realized that there is more than one way to play a G chord, by switching between open chords and bar chords, for instance. This switch changes the order and the octave doublings of the root, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>, which creates a new voicing of the same chord.

Continuing in the manner above, a Seventh chord will contain the Root, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> note from the starting point within a scale. The seventh will be one note before the Octave. The octave is a repeat of the Root note at exactly double the vibrations per second. It just sounds like a higher version of the same pitch, like when a guy and a girl sing the same pitch together.

For major chords there are two variations of sevenths. If the seventh is a half-step (one pitch) below the octave, the chord will be considered a Major Seventh chord, which has a somewhat pretty sound. If the seventh is a whole-step (two pitches) below the octave the chord will be considered a Dominant Seventh chord, also commonly referred to as simply a Seventh chord, which has a more dissonant sound. For minor chords all sevenths will be a whole-step below the octave, and it seems to create a more open sound, although these terms are somewhat subjective.

If you write Rock, Country, or Folk music you are most likely using a lot of Triads. You



can now try changing some of the chords to Seventh chords to spice up your songs.

If you are writing a lot of R&B or Jazz you probably already have a lot of 7<sup>th</sup>s in your chords. One way to change the flavor and add variety to your chord sounds within these styles would be to reduce the chords down to Triads.

The Seventh chords in the key of C major are as follows:

Cmaj7 Dm7 Em7 Fmaj7 G7 Am7 Bm7(b5)

This order of chords is the same for all 12 major keys (Roman numerals are used to designate the order, upper case for major and dominant seventh chords, lower case for minor and half diminished seventh chords):

Imaj7 iim7 iiim7 IVmaj7 V7 vim7 viim7(b5)

(note: the last chord is a diminished triad with the 7<sup>th</sup> added. It can either be called a half diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord, or, more commonly, a minor seven flat 5 chord.)

If you write Blues songs you have most likely realized that the Blues utilizes Dominant Seventh chords almost exclusively on the I, IV, and V chords, turning them into I7, IV7, and V7 chords, which, in the key of C blues, would be C7, F7, and G7.

You could try turning all your blues chords into triads and playing them with a straight feel rather than a shuffle. A lot of great rock tunes have emerged from this technique. You could also try turning the I and IV chords into Major Seventh chords, which would transform your Blues Song into a Major key chord progression. (For instance, in the key of C Major, I, IV, and V chords would be Cmaj7, Fmaj7, and G7, respectively, but in C Blues they would all be Dominant Seventh chords, C7, F7, and G7).

So add a few sevenths, and take a few a way, open up some new sound palates for your songs, and you will quickly find yourself in Seventh Chord Heaven.

### **Writing in Different Styles**

#### **6 Tricks to Make Your Songs Rock**

Although any song could be rearranged to fit virtually any style of music, writing in a particular style from the start will ALWAYS influence the way a song is written. Therefore, it is important for songwriters to be adept at the unique components of different musical styles.

Here is quick guide from the world of Rock music. A Rock song can be written in a number of different ways, but there are certain common features that are

**GUARANTEED** to make your song **ROCK!** Incorporating as many of these tactics as possible into your song will give you great ability in this style.

**MINOR KEYS:** As opposed to early 50s and 60s Rock and Roll, most Rock songs from the 70s through today are written in minor keys.

**POWER CHORDS:** These chords contain the Root, 5<sup>th</sup>, and Octave only. There are no pretty thirds, and there are definitely no 7ths or upper extensions such as 9ths, 11ths, and 13ths. This creates a hollow, almost medieval sound, and one can't tell if the power chords were meant to imply major or minor tonalities, without analyzing their roots in order to determine their placement in the scale.

**RIFFS:** Repeated rhythmic melodies played on the lower strings of the guitar or bass (occasionally riffs are written for higher strings, and on a piano or other instrument). They are most commonly played in the verses.

**SHORT TITLE:** Belted out, and sometimes repeated for every line of the chorus

**STRAIGHT EIGHTH NOTES:** There is usually little room for funky syncopated sixteenth note feels, or shuffle, swing, or hip-hop rhythms, in a strong rock tune. Keep a straight eighth note-feel for both your vocal melodies and for the rhythm section.

**GUITAR SOLO:** Playing Minor Pentatonic, Blues, or Minor Scales, with distortion of course. This is more of an arranging component than a songwriting one, but identifiable guitar sections are often the **STRONGEST PART** of a song in this style. How far would Ozzy Osbourne's songs have gone if it wasn't for his list of legendary rock guitarist, such as Randy Rhoads, constructing solos, interludes, and instrumental hooks as if they were masterful compositions in themselves, with the vocal parts being almost secondary?

So there you have it. The **SIX TRICKS TO MAKE YOUR SONGS ROCK!!!**

## **Successful Song Structures**

### **How to Write a MONSTER HOOK for Every Song**

I remember when I first began writing songs. I would grab an acoustic guitar, strum chords, sing melodies, makeup lyrics, and jot ideas down in a notebook. Sometimes I would just work on lyrics, and other times just the melodies or guitar parts.

This is the way that many of us begin writing; it is the **GETTING STARTED** Phase, and it is still a great way to Brainstorm ideas.

But the feedback from my songs was usually the same from everybody:

EVERYTHING SOUNDS LIKE A VERSE.  
THERE'S NO HOOK.  
WHICH SECTION IS THE CHORUS?

In my quest for Improvement I discovered an Incredible SECRET that the Pro's use:

BEGIN WITH THE HOOK!

Keep doing the Brainstorming, but don't commit to developing a song until you have a Central Concept, Title, and Melody, that you can build into a great chorus.

One way that many great writers do this is by keeping a List of Titles right at the beginning of their notebooks. Stay Alert throughout your day for potential titles, and add them to your list.

When it is time to write, go through your title list first, and see if one of them evokes a concept to write about, or a catchy melody. Work with that one line, or even one word, until you can weave it into a CATCHY HOOK, and then build your song from the chorus down.

If you've done a lot of the brainstorming phase in the past, the rest of the song should come MUCH EASIER.

### **How to Write an Awesome Prechorus**

After you have written a verse and a chorus for your song, sometimes there will be a need for a transitional section between them. This could be due to the relationship between the lyric content of the two sections requiring some explanation, or it could be because the music from the verse needs to build energy into the chorus. Those are the two main purposes for adding a prechorus. The term *prechorus* will sometimes go by various other names such as the *climb*, or the *transitional bridge*. Not every verse-chorus song needs a prechorus, but if you feel that yours does, here are some tips on constructing a really good one.

Keep your prechorus short. Having a prechorus that is too long is the number one mistake that new songwriters make when constructing this type of section. Remember, a prechorus is a transitional section between two primary sections. About half the length of your verse or chorus is usually adequate, so if those two sections are about eight measures long each, then a four-measure prechorus would be a good length.

However, an asymmetrical section, one that has an odd number of measures, often works even better here for the overall structure of your prechorus section. If you construct your prechorus with three or five measures, instead of four, it has an off balancing effect that will push the music ahead into the next section, where the asymmetry will usually be brought into balance by a section with an even number of measures.

Here are some tips for the rhythm of your prechorus melodies. Shorter phrases in the prechorus, and/or phrases that enter more quickly, can build momentum into the next section. Additionally, employing faster rhythms, such as sixteenth notes, within your phrases can help build energy.

Here is the most commonly effective technique for the pitch content of your prechorus melodies. Gradually raising the pitch throughout the prechorus can be very effective at building energy into the chorus. This technique can also function as a connecting transition if the chorus is set at a higher pitch.

As for the lyric content of the prechorus, use it to explain the relationship between the verse and the chorus. Sometimes just a few short phrases will make all the difference in the world between your song making sense and completely losing your listeners.

Another important concept to keep in mind when it comes to the prechorus is contrast. Anything you can do musically to contrast this section with the sections that it is connecting will usually add helpful musical variety to the whole structure, so long as the contrast is not too extreme like changing the key or the time signature. Try using different chords, varying the pace at which the chords change, starting your phrases on different beats than that of the verse or chorus, and starting their melodies on different pitches. There are, of course many other ways to contrast sections, but these are the ones that I typically look for first.

So there you have it, the quick start guide to writing a great prechorus!

### **Mindset**

#### **Going Down in Flames, or Giving Gifts Back to the World?**

We've all heard the many stories about musicians living on the edge, burning the candles at every end, dripping the hot melted wax of drug and alcohol abuse all over their friends and fans, and skyrocketing to a glorious early demise.

We sometimes idealize and deify those who gave everything of themselves, while



simultaneously digging an untimely shallow grave, littered with dead flowers, empty wine bottles, and spray painted graffiti.

Writers who do not perform their own songs are a little more immune to these extravagant lifestyles. But as musicians, we all share the characteristics that lend themselves easily to decadence and self-destruction. The biggest ones being the constant uncertainty of not knowing where that next paycheck is going to come from, and the burning inner passion to get our creative ideas out into an often cruel world that easily dismisses this magic as frivolousness.

If you are hooked on the wild ride, and want to hang on to the runaway train blasting out magnificent music while it tumbles off a mountain cliff, more power to you! I am not one to judge personal choices; I have had my own Dances with the Devil, and felt the flames on my toes.

I would just like to bring to light the FLIP SIDE OF THIS COIN, the other heroic figure in music. These are the songwriters and performers who find a way to walk this tightrope of the music business without a net, and NEVER SEEM TO FALL. They stick around for a long career and give something back to the world.

A couple examples that come to mind are Bono, from U2, who fights for humanitarian causes all over the world, and Paul McCartney, who dedicated his whole career to the promotion of love and world peace through music.

The key to becoming a gift giver to the world often lies in finding inner BALANCE, and dedicating some of your life to PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT.

There are shortcuts to personal empowerment that that many artists and songwriters use to cut through this sometimes harsh world like a machete through the Amazon jungle, and bring out our magical gifts much more quickly. If you work on changing yourself first, it becomes much easier to help make the world a better place for everyone. I am a big advocate of applying methods of self-improvement to enliven the GREAT SONGWRITER WITHIN. Please share any methods of inner growth that you have found effective.

And if you can think of more great examples of the second type of heroic songwriter, please post them below as well.

### **Lessons: Block Your Creativity, or Lead You To Excellence?**

One of my sister's kids started playing guitar and writing songs recently. My brother-in-law told her she should take some lessons with me while I was in town. But the response

was something to the effect of “But all the really good musicians never took lessons, and that is how they were able to be so creative.” I have actually heard many variations of this concept throughout the years, such as “I don’t want to be good, ‘cause then I will sound too technical, and I won’t have enough emotion.” I’d like to address this issue here. Will music lessons stifle your creativity and strip you of emotion?

Let’s look at an example of what I call *The Myth of the Prodigy*. I once heard Eddie Van Halen say that he never took guitar lessons, and that was why he was able to be so creative. This reference to some innate inner genius works wonders at creating a god-like persona, and marketing departments highly encourage it, when not outright manufacturing it out of thin air. However, what Eddie fails to mention is that he took years of classical piano training as a child, and performed in many talent competitions. Additionally, his father, Jan Van Halen, was a successful sax and clarinet player, who no doubt encouraged his son, and taught him much about music during early childhood.

By the time that Eddie switched to guitar as a teen, he already had a thorough understanding of chords, scales, keys, rhythm, reading music, and many other aspects of music theory. I would definitely agree that Eddie Van Halen has developed his own unique guitar style to a very high degree, and in that sense he is an innovative genius, but his distinctive creativity emerged AFTER years of lessons and music education. Furthermore, if you trace back the marketing myth of many successful popular artists, you will often find a similar Hidden Biography.

Some musicians can go quite far without lessons, and sometimes be very creative, but sooner or later they always hit a ceiling. Without a solid background in the fundamentals of music, what often occurs as you try to be emotional and creative is that you end up stumbling over your own inabilities, and the passion cannot get out.

Creative inspiration utilizes a different part of the brain than the actual skills that are required to write and perform music well. Inspiration is something we all have or we wouldn’t be musicians at all. Skill and technique are things we need to learn and develop. And it is the balancing between the two that will make an artist or songwriter truly great.

I remember once during music college that I forced myself to completely quit thinking and analyzing songs for two months, because I had learned so much, so fast, concerning music theory and analysis, that it actually started blocking my creative flow. I had too much attention on one area of the brain. So I spent a couple months being totally creative, without any analyzing or editing what so ever, and it snapped me out of it. But after that, when I applied the knowledge I had learned in school to the editing process of my songs, I was able to improve them dramatically, and take them to a much higher level.

So if you continually attempt to discover which side of the equation is coming up short, you can then either seek more training and education, or spend more time nurturing your creative passions. Over time you can bring these two together in a beautiful musical balance. Then if you choose to create a myth about yourself as the prodigal genius, that is fine, you just need to do it after you have reached a high level of musical development for it to be an effective marketing angle, not before.

### Rule #1 of Great Songwriting

I have rebelled against RULES most of my life. And I know that you, being a creative songwriter, are probably not so big on rules either. When I am teaching the sometimes elusive craft of songwriting, I generally like to teach more in terms of flexible guidelines, and helpful suggestions, than to ever use the term “rule.” However, this is one songwriting guideline that I suggest ALL songwriters commit to memory as a RULE.

### Editing and Production

#### **Rule #1 of Great Songwriting: Your new song is only a “ROUGH DRAFT!”**

I have seen way too many songwriters spend merely a few hours writing a new song, start rehearsing it with their band, and then perform it live a month or two later, having never altered, edited, modified, or improved a single word, note, chord, or rhythm! And when asking why I will often get some pretty funny responses, such as: “The song was 'inspired' in the moment, therefore I cannot change anything.” But the reality usually has more to do with the songwriter knowing very little about songwriting as a craft, and the techniques that could transform their songs from mediocre drafts into magnificent masterpieces!

There are three problems with this. One, if you ever get the chance to work with a professional producer, it could cost you a fortune in the amount of time he will want to spend editing your song before it will be ready to be recorded. Two, your songs will probably never make it to a professional producer, publisher, or record label, due to the fact that the songs will retain an unfinished quality to them. And three, it will be difficult to keep fans interested in your songs when they could be ten times better with a little editing.

Occasionally you will get lucky and write an amazing and complete song in one sitting, if you do a lot of writing. But occasionally people who buy lottery tickets on a regular basis will win some money as well. They will be certain to make money if they work for it though, just as you will be certain to write better and better songs if you put in the

work learning the craft of songwriting rather than relying only on inspiration.

I don't mean to imply that anyone reading this is an amateur, you are probably a great writer, but if you normally skip the most important part of the songwriting process, the editing, then you are missing the fullest potential of your songs.

Professional Songwriters will sometimes spend the same amount of time as amateurs with the initial writing phase, but they will think of it as a Rough Draft. Then, over the next few weeks or months, they will continually come back to the songs that had potential and build them into marketable songs, using the techniques of the trade.

Which brings us to the real issue here. One of the main reasons why so many songwriters just fly by the seat of their pants, and never take time to learn the techniques that professional songwriters use on a daily basis is that it can be very difficult information to find. Most songwriters are not even aware that songwriting can be taught and learned. And in actuality, the secrets of great songwriting have been closely guarded among music industry insiders ever since the industry became such a big money maker.

That is one of the main reasons why I have created Songwriting Planet and developed online songwriting courses, to level the playing field, and give you the tools and techniques necessary to weave your rough drafts into the best songs they can be.

So from now on, think of every a new song you complete as only a rough draft, and take some time to learn songwriting techniques, so that you will know what to look for when editing your song to take it to a much higher level. You will be AMAZED at the difference it will make.

### **Stop Editing; Just Write!**

I've talked about how important it is for songwriters to edit their songs. I've discussed how common it can be for amateur and intermediate level songwriters to consider a song complete after only the first draft, whereas professional songwriters will often spend hours editing their songs, crafting them into much more refined finished products. But now I would like to discuss the flip side of the coin, DON'T EDIT YOUR SONGS!

I don't mean don't ever edit them. I simply mean that you should completely avoid any editing of your songs while you are in the initial phase of writing. The first draft needs immense freedom to allow life to breath into your new child. This is the brainstorming process, where unbridled passion draws upon the limitless creative potential in the depths of the subconscious, primal, and spiritual realms. As lyrical and musical ideas emerge from these inner realities and higher planes of consciousness, it is always best give them the utmost respect. Let the ideas take on a life and direction of their own,



transforming and taking shape into magnificent songs, guided only by inspiration and intuition.

This may seem like common sense, and many songwriters will be thinking that this is what they normally do anyway. However, can you remember times when that creative flow stopped? Every songwriter gets stuck at one time or another, or has the experience of writers block, running out of ideas, not knowing where to take a song to next, and a myriad of other creative impasses.

So where did the creative flow go? Did you just run out of creativity? Maybe that is all that you were born with. Maybe you just don't have it as a songwriter. No, don't let that inner critical voice fool you; that is not the problem. If you did not have it as a songwriter you would not even have gotten to the current paragraph of this article. You have it; you just lost the door keys.

The doors to creativity close when we align ourselves with its two archenemies: logic and analysis. These forms of thinking utilize very different parts of the brain than that which the creative process uses. Emotions, relationships, feelings, and for that matter the true nature of reality, are quite often not logical at all.

Isaac Newton created a very logical framework within physics, which led to many amazing inventions, but then Albert Einstein came along and showed us that the world is not quite as it appears, that time and space are really one and the same, which led to even greater technologies.

Logic and analytical thinking are psychological attempts to gain control over what is often an inherently illogical environment. But we don't need Einstein to prove this to us, just try using logic to fix a relationship problem, and a couple nights sleeping on the couch will prove it real quick. As writers, when we let go of the analytical side of our brains, our intuition begins to embrace the deeper levels of reality, and give our listeners glimpses of the way the world is really working.

Now don't get me wrong, logic, analysis, rational thinking, they all become essential in the editing process of songwriting. You should utilize them to their fullest capacity to craft your songs into masterpieces. But the cure for writers block, and the key to limitless creativity, is to shut them off almost completely when you are starting a new song, until you have enough material to edit. This will allow your inner music to emerge from much deeper places, and to continue to flow from the vast reservoir within.

### **Lyrics Writing Secrets**

#### **How to Write Colorful Lyrics**

[www.SongwritingPlanet.com](http://www.SongwritingPlanet.com)

Did you ever have to read a textbook in school? Remember how hard it was at times to keep your mind from wandering every five or ten minutes? On the other hand, do you remember reading novels or stories as a kid that you just couldn't put down? Maybe you'd even stay up late at night turning pages under a blanket with a flashlight so your parents didn't find out that you were still awake.

How can we make sense of the difference between these two types of reading experiences? The answer lies in using your common sense, or your common SENSES I should say.

It was the Images, Sounds, Tastes, Smells, and Touch that kept you reading that great book. And it was the lack of examples that made it so difficult to read the textbook. Don't allow your lyric writing to become textbook style abstractions; you will have a very hard time captivating listeners with a style that is lacking in concrete images.

The more you can paint a picture with your lyrics using the senses, the more it will draw listeners in, so that they will almost instinctually be compelled to listen deeply to the whole song.

A great technique to help you achieve this is to write all your lyrics twice. Write them the first time in whatever way they emerge from that burning volcano of creativity within. Then go back and check your lyrics line-by-line and replace any abstract phrases with concrete examples that you can See, Hear, Touch, Taste, or Smell.

Additionally, there are two other senses that are important. They are: the Organic Sense, which includes the internal body feelings, like an ache in the back or butterflies in the stomach; and the Kinesthetic Sense, which has to do with the feeling of body motion in relation to the world, like your stomach dropping when jumping off a high step, or feeling the motion on an accelerating subway train.

Here are two short examples to demonstrate these different styles of lyric writing:

#### 1: Abstract Lyrics

It's so lonely without you here  
My mind's confused and my thoughts unclear

#### 2: Rewritten in a Poetic, Sensuous, or Picturesque style

I float through the dark on an iceberg bed  
Sea sick as waves of perfume haunt my head

It could easily be argued that these two sections make exactly the same statement. However, the second example, due to its use of sensual rather than abstract ideas, contains many more layers of meaning. A symbol often has dozens of connotations, and multiple meanings, whereas an abstract statement usually only contains one denotation, which may be precise and clear, but usually lacks the depth needed to touch a heart, set a mood, or inspire passion. The manner in which we weave the sensory information of symbols and images together will often determine the unique character, personality, and depth of our lyric writing.

This is really the **BIGGEST SECRET** to Great Lyric Writing. So I Hope this tip helps you to literally - Come to Your Senses!

### **How to Guarantee a Big Hook in Every Song**

Descriptiveness, story telling, and rhyming are often what most songwriters will focus on at first when developing their lyric writing abilities. Once you have enough words, a title theoretically should emerge that can be woven into a chorus. This is an important phase to go through. You want to be capable of generating enough raw lyric material for filling in your songs with content.

Phase two, where is the hook? Once you become good at basic lyric writing you quickly realize one of two things. One, a succinct title does not always emerge from your lyrics. Or two, there really is no central concept at all to what you have written. You may have fairly well written verses, but there are often no choruses, or the verses are not really describing any specific topic or situation.

Solution, start with the title. Keeping a list of potential new titles is a great way to bring your lyric writing into focus, and ensure that your songs are bequeathed with the catchy hooks that they deserve. If you already know what the title is, you not only have the foundation of your whole chorus, you also have a central concept to write about in the verses. Of course, you can change the title as you go if your writing takes you in new directions, but always starting with the verses could send you wandering around aimlessly in search of that ever-elusive hook.

What many songwriters do throughout their daily lives is stay vigilant for words or phrases that could be used as good titles. They write them down, and when at home add them to the current songwriting notebook. If you keep a list of titles at either the beginning or end of your notebook, when ready to write, you can simply go through your list of titles and pick one to write about.

Even though choruses often have a lot less words than verses, weaving those words into

a hit chorus is a very high art form, and not always so easy to do. Chorus literally means a group of people singing together, therefore it is the part of your song that should be simple enough to allow lots of people to quickly learn and remember it the first time they hear it, That way when chorus number two arrives they will all be singing along.

Pay attention to the lyric content of choruses for a couple weeks and you will discover that the title is usually in the chorus, it is sometimes only one or two words, and that there are often not all that many other words around it. The trick is taking that short phrase and making a great melody out of it, which can sometimes take hours, if not years, of experimentation.

It is still a useful practice to write about any topic your mind takes you to after you pick up a pen, but alternating this kind of freeform songwriting with a focus on building a song from the titles could bring your songs into a new kind of focus and clarity.



## Extra

### Marketing and Business Plan

#### **Greatest Music Marketing Secret – Don't Ever Book a Gig**

That's right, unless a friend or club owner, or if you are at a higher level, agent, concert hall, or festival promoter, contacts you about a gig, Don't Book Them. Do not waste your time chasing and trying to convince anyone to book your act. How will this help you get ten-times more promotion?

If you come to a nightclub that showcases bands, for instance, and tell the owner that you want to fit in to one of his 45-minute time slots, you are literally the last person he wants to speak with. He has many other priorities dealing with inventory, payrolls, accounting, and various other business related duties. If you can track him down at all, he might just tell you to come back another time, when, of course, he will be unavailable. He has a handful of proven acts already that bring decent crowds, and he doesn't want to deal with reordering a schedule. And for higher-level gigs, IT IS EVEN HARDER!

Trust me on this one. I have booked gigs for my own original bands all over the US, and it is not the way to do it.

Then How do I Promote my Songs if I don't book for gigs?

This is the greatest Promotional SECRET that took me years to learn. The answer is, CREATE AN EVENT. Below is my 3 Phase process.

PHASE 1: If you tell the same club owner: I want to book an EVENT at your club, I have four bands, with YOU AS THE HEADLINER, and they will each bring their fans, you have just taken a huge weight off of his shoulders. With a little networking and Internet searching, it will be fairly easy to organize a few bands for an event. Most of them will be as hungry as you are for gigs, and will JUMP AT THE CHANCE!

PHASE 2: Make it a multi-artist-genre event. Imagine telling the club owner that you will also have local artists displaying their paintings, comedians doing stand-up between bands, dance teams from the local dance school performing opening routines, and social activists speaking about pertinent community issues, and they will each be bringing their fans. With similar networking and Internet research this can easily be organized.

PHASE 3: Contact a few dozen local TV channels, college radio stations, and entertainment new papers, and tell them about the event. Make note of which ones are

coming, and tell the club owner about the press that will be attending.

You have just become this club owner's best friend! He will make lots of money and get lots of publicity for his club, and you will never have to worry about bringing enough fans to satisfy him, because you are now both the MC AND THE STAR OF THE SHOW.

Is this a lot of work, actually it can be A LOT OF FUN connecting with so many cool people. Just make sure that most of them know from the start that the gig is for promotional purposes only, that way you can pocket most of the profits (if you decide to make it a paid event), in exchange for the time and effort spent.

This is my MASTER 3-PHASE PLAN for getting exposure for your songs at a local level. You become the Center of the Music Community!!!

There will be much more info on local promotion and marketing, from regional to International levels at Songwriting Planet, in addition to info on getting your songs into TV and film, and published or recorded by successful performers.

**This book was written by Kevin Thomas, founder of Songwriting Planet**

**Songwriting Planet**

**Learn how to master the craft of Songwriting at  
[www.SongwritingPlanet.com](http://www.SongwritingPlanet.com)**

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