

**Pat Pattison Songwriting Seminar Summary**  
**October 4-5, 2008**

Primary Job: Keep listener interested all the way through the song.

Goal: Listener is most interested at the end of the song.

Think “inside the box”. (Set of 3 progressively growing boxes.)

Song gains weight as it moves forward.

Start with an idea (could be the title or hook) and check to see how it moves through the boxes.

Example: “I just wanna know.”

Box 1: What’s up? I just wanna know.

Box 2: What have you been doing?  
Did you cheat?  
Did you hide my picture?  
I just wanna know.

Box 3: All I wanted was an honest relationship, did you?  
I just wanna know.

Very Important:

When you have a song idea, run it by your six best friends:

Who, What, When, Where, Why, How

Who: Point of view, ask questions about who is the character, who’s talking

When: Point in time it is happening, describe the season, mood changes with each season; e.g., morning, evening, time of day, special occasion (wedding, anniversary, death).

Where: Place conversation or action happens; describe the surrounding and circumstances.

Where often is ignored.

Chorus: Definition of chorus is many people singing together. That’s why you want the words to remain the same; gives it commercial appeal. Chorus stands on its own, makes its own statement.

Your job is to make the chorus more interesting with each repeat. The same words mean something different each time.

Song Tempo

Example of a song where the first 2 lines take up 8 bars, next 4 lines take 8 bars  
Song moves forward, picks up pace.

Vary where in the measure the lyric phrases start

Starting on ½ bar (off-beat) is a more laid-back feel

Starting on the beat is a more aggressive feel

## Lyric Concepts

Use specific, sense-bound language to give listener a mental image; they participate more in the song.

Trigger line: Last line (or thing) you hear before going into the chorus.

Check flow of lyrics:

    Last line of verse and first line of chorus

    Last line of chorus and first line of next verse (perhaps not as critical)

Chorus must work with all verses.

Make sure all lines of chorus work with the verses.

The title is a device for the most memorable part or line in a song.

## Musical moods

Whining:      Minor thirds

Happy:        Major thirds

Questions:    Fifths e.g. "Don't we?"

## Rhyming

Primary Purpose:    Tells listener when you're done (with phrase, thought, etc.)

Secondary Purpose:  Provides street signs to guide you along.

## Rhyme Types: Scale of Resolution Strength

Most Resolved < ----- > Least Resolved

Perfect-----Family-----Additive/Subtractive-----Assonance-----Consonance

Perfect:        Identical ending vowel & consonant sound, different beginning.

Family:        Group of related consonants

    Plosives:     Interrupt air flow

    Fricatives:  Impair air flow

    Nasals:      Tongue on pallet

    Similar final consonant sound.

        mud ---- rub ---- rut ---- cup ---- truck

Partners, or companions table:

	Plosives	Fricatives	Nasals
Voiced	b g d	v TH z zh	m n ng
Unvoiced	p t k	f th s sh ch	

Additive/Subtractive:            examples: tree---breeze, breed---free

Assonance:                        different consonant sound: tide --- life

Consonance:                      different vowel sound: friend --- wind

“Rhyme type is a film score that comments on the idea.”

Rhyme type makes a comment on the content.

Rhyme work preparation:

First, talk to your “six best friends”.

Use sounds in the title and a rhyming dictionary to find potential words.

Rhyme schemes.

Two-line couplet – stops every two lines.

Change line length or scheme.

Change scheme in chorus; save something for the chorus.

Making it all work together.

Aristotle said a great work of art is when everything works in unity.

Prosody: An appropriate relationship between everything.

Start with a title or a hook and build a rhythm around it, build a motif and add variation.

Lyrics → Rhythm → Melody

Always be on the lookout for song titles. Write them down when you hear them or think of them. You will NOT remember it later!

What’s the point of the song?

Weave the past, present and future tenses into it.

Define the point of view.

Third person narrative: He, she, it did this.

First person narrative: I did this.

Direct address: I & You, “Let’s go do this.”

Point of view establishes the relationship between performer and audience.

Keep point of view consistent.

Put in present tense to make it more intimate.

Move into future tense to tell how it will be better or worse in the future.

Ask of the song: Why are you telling me this?

When you enter the chorus, make it special.

The important words in lyrics should be the spotlighted notes. Notes in between are not lighted.  
If this is not the case:

1. Change lyrics to match melody, or
2. Change melody to match lyrics.

To make things stand out:

- Use longer note values.
- Put it where it is most noticeable.
- Stress the important words.

Specific verses are much better than vague ones.

Musical motion:

- Tonic: Stable
- Subdominant: Moves
- Dominant: Stable, but wants to go somewhere.

List-type songs:

- List should be non-reversible, gaining in importance or complexity
- Every element where it belongs; can't change position of an element - it would be out of place.

Tone of music must match the nature of the lyrics.

For example, angry lyrics shouldn't have a mellow melody.

Use a simple drum beat to experiment by saying lyrics on and after the downbeat.

- On the downbeat is front heavy: Where are you going?
- After the downbeat is back heavy: What did I do?

“Travelog” songs

Avoid combining several non-related sights. Better to have related sights that build upon each sight. Illustration: Walking half way up a mountain and rolling down three snowballs. Each grows, but is small and independent. Compared to: Walking all the way up the mountain and rolling down one snowball which grows and encompasses all three smaller snowballs.

Passive and Active voices

- Passive: There was a young man who loved ..... indirect and wordy
- Active: A young man loved ..... direct and concise

Verses must say something new

If the second verse says the same thing as the first, the second chorus will be weaker than the first chorus. Examples of the “building box” approach with verses:

- I ----- You ----- We
- You ----- I ----- We
- Past ----- Present ----- Future

Make the melody or lyric stand out

Illustration: If you describe 11 swans swimming on a pond, details of one swan are lost; it's just another swan on the pond. If you concentrate on only one swan, you can describe its reflection in the pond, the curves of the

neck, color and texture of feathers, how it glides through the water.

Notes by Tim Zbikowski, member, Minnesota Association of Songwriters