



Songwriting Struggles and How to Get Past Them

Songwriting Workshop by Chad Shank



**What are your songwriting
struggles?**

“I DON'T HAVE TIME,”

“I Don’t Have Time”

How to get past this.

- Make a system for writing. Take the waiting for inspiration out of it
 - Write each day for just 5 minutes
 - Don’t think of writing a full song right away. Break it into small tasks
 - Do 5 minute freewriting
 - Jam on a chord progression for 5 minutes.
 - LET’S DO A LYRIC EXERCISE!
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LIST OF EMOTIONS



SAD

- Depressed
- Desperate
- Dejected
- Heavy
- Crushed
- Disgusted
- Upset
- Sorrowful
- Weepy

HAPPY

- Amused
- Delighted
- Glad
- Pleased
- Charmed
- Grateful
- Optimistic
- Content
- Joyful

HURT

- Jealous
- Betrayed
- Let down
- Tender
- Wounded
- Impaired
- Damaged
- Criticized
- Abused

CONFIDENT

- Strong
- Brave
- Assured
- Certain
- Prepared
- Successful
- Encouraged
- Peaceful
- Secure

ENERGIZED

- Strengthened
- Motivated
- Focused
- Invigorated
- Determined
- Inspired
- Creative
- Healthy
- Renewed

Now write for 3 Minutes about what happened to cause that emotion.

**What happened =
Verse Material
Emotions = Chorus
Material**

**My melodies are not
that catchy.**

What causes weak melodies?

- Creating a melody from lyrics that lack strong meter.
 - Lack of repetition
- Fitting too many lyrics to a chord progression
 - Melody lacks a shape or contour
- Writing away from a pulse, or metronome

How to write better melodies.

- Write melodies first - fit the lyrics to the melody
- Focus on rhythmic repetition
- Write with a metronome or beat
- Verse melodies are usually lower in pitch - Choruses are usually higher
- Catchy melodies usually follow notes of a scale with a few larger interval jumps.
- Focus on the Pentatonic Scale

I don't know what to write in the 2nd Verse.

- Your first verse usually establishes a WHO, WHEN, and WHERE, or at least 2 of the 3. In your second verse you can advance any or all of those things.
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 - Also, if you establish the problem or situation in the first verse, then you can focus on a solution, or resolution in your next verse. Expand on what is happening.
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My lyrics are too abstract

- Focus on sense based words. Write from the senses,
- Sight, Sound, Taste, Touch, Smell, Movement
- Try to paint pictures with words that **SHOW** the emotion without **TELLING** the emotion
- Sense based Object or Destination Writing is your weapon of choice here.

My lyrics are too concrete.

- Write about the emotions that someone is feeling
- Try to have a mix of Concrete and Emotional content.
- Usually concrete detail comes first. This gives the emotion context.
- What is Happening - - How I feel about it

Songs use BOTH types of language

- Show in the verse, Tell in the chorus or refrain
- Lyric content moves between two types - intimate and vulnerable, broad and universal
- Some genres incl. pop, rock, R&B, dance Tell much more than Show
- Singer/songwriter, some rock, some pop, folk, country, rap, can tend towards more Show

What feels right

5 Minute Sense Writing: Cracked Sidewalk

**Sight, Sound, Taste, Touch,
Smell, Movement**

My lyrics don't sound sincere.

- Avoid using all perfect rhymes
- Are you using everyday, conversational language? You should.
- You may be accenting unstressed syllables. Lyrics are not sung how they are spoken.
- You use words people don't actually say in everyday life.
- You use too many cliches. Words that say nothing.

My songs don't tell a story.

- Start with a Title
 - Write an outline that advances your idea and topic
 - Focus on 1 situation. Don't try to cover too much
 - Use WHO, WHEN, WHERE, WHAT, WHY, HOW to answer questions your listener may have
 - Try to make your Chorus mean more each time it comes around. Your verses do the lifting here.
 - Verse - What is going on
 - Chorus - How I feel about it
 - Verse 2 - What may happen next. Advance WHO, WHEN, WHERE
 - Chorus - repeats
 - Bridge - Where do we go from here?
 - Chorus - repeats
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Songwriting Exercise: In 3 minutes write as many new titles as you can. Use objects where you are.

My songs get boring.

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- Your lyrics aren't creating an emotional connection - Sense writing
 - Try more contrast between Verse and Chorus
 - Song is too long
 - There is not a hook - memorable repetition
 - Your topic may not be universal enough.

I Don't Play an Instrument

- Take instrument or voice lessons
 - You don't have to be a professional player to write amazing songs - knowing chords is enough
- Practice playing chords
- Find a Co-Writer or Songwriting Partner that compliments your abilities.
- Write lyrics to a metronome - focus on meter

I have writer's block.

- The cure for Writer's Block is Know - How and Song Craft
 - If you know the craft, you don't need inspiration. Do the work and the inspiration will come
 - Great songs are not about WHAT you write about, they are HOW you write them.
 - You can break the block by listening to successful songs that you like. Explore different genres and styles.
 - There are thousands of songs that have touched millions of people. Use them to learn. What makes them tick.
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How to define your songwriting style?

- Describe qualities of songs that you like.
- What tools do you need to write like that?
- Practice what you feel weakest at.
- Ask others to describe your music

My songs don't sound “modern.”

- Many times this can be a product of melody and production
 - Listen to current charting songs
 - Pay attention to the rhythms and melodic patterns, and phrases.
 - What is happening in the production?
 - What instruments are used?
 - What is the song structure?
 - Try to write a song with the similar chord progression and similar rhythmic patterns
 - Learn to cover these songs, and play them over and over to learn the “feel”
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**Songwriting Exercise: In 3
minutes, write a Chorus**

My songs all sound the same.

- Whatever you write first, do that last for a few songs.
- Write a song without using an instrument
- Listen to other genres and try to mimick the styles
- Work with different cowriters
- Understand you may have a distinct style, and that's —ok!

**I am stuck using
the same chord
progressions.**

I am stuck using the same chord progressions.

- STEAL THEM.
 - Chord Progressions can't be copyrighted. Use other songs progressions for your songs.
 - Change the order or rhythm of the chords to add a different feel
 - This is such a great way to expand your skills
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Great site for progressions:

<http://www.chordify.net>

What do I do with my song when it is done?

- Decide what your goal is with the song
- Self publish through CDBaby, DistroKid, etc
- Post on your social media
- Pitch to local artists
- Perform your song as the artist - Online or at Live Gigs
- Record it, Write Down the Lyrics
- Submit to Songwriting Contests
- Get the song critiqued
- Send to Sync Libraries
- Try to get it published

How do I get my songs published.

- What do publishers want? = SONGS THAT SELL - They want HITS.
 - You usually need to connect with publishers through networking or attorneys. Most do not accept unsolicited demos
 - To meet the power players you likely need to be in Nashville, or LA.
 - You have to be able to write to the radio. Your competition are songs that have already made it. You have to be as good.
 - If you are not in Nashville or LA you are not hearing recent music. Songs on the radio are 2 to 3 years old. If you chase that, you are already behind the curve.
 - The internet helps, but being around the music centers is key.
 - WRITE HUNDRED OF SONGS. WRITE SONGS THAT ARE AMAZING, and like NO ONE ELSE is writing or has written.
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How do I get my songs recorded by other artists.

- Write songs WITH the artist
 - Focus on local artists and new artists online
 - Network, Network, Network
 - Be able to show what value you bring to someone
 - Make sure you are connecting with people that appreciate your work, and your style
 - Don't get pushy, think of yourself making an album, you probably wouldn't just put any song on it.
 - Every Major Label artist started as a local, unsigned artist - Meet these people on their way up. Become part of their team
 - Do it for fun, and hope for commercial success. This will not be easy.
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Great YouTube Channels

- Songwriting Chop Shop
 - <https://www.youtube.com/user/songworkdotcom>
 - https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=berklee+songwriting
 - <https://www.youtube.com/user/songwritingacademy>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/user/SongTownUSA>
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**What are other
struggles that you
want to chat about?**