

STUDENT PRESENTATION GUIDE

SONGWRITING

MISSION

To elevate the ability of those gifted and involved in the worship arts through information and recommendations that are both empowering and quickly accessible.

PURPOSE

By being better prepared for the experience of God's presence, leaders, vocalists, musicians, and worship team members will be able to use their God-given gifts more effectively, resulting in the changed lives of their listeners and furthering the gospel of Jesus Christ.

VISION

To come alongside pastors, worship pastors/leaders, youth pastors, and their churches, giving support to and having influence on as many musicians, volunteers, and technical team members as God has prepared worldwide.

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How to Use Your Student Presentation Guide

With your Student Presentation Guide, you now have access to a variety of materials. These materials allow you to access and learn valuable information related to your presentation—and your worship ministry as a whole now and in the future. Whatever your particular area of gifting, you can find expert tips and recommendations from worship and music industry professionals to improve your specific worship/arts gifts and skills.

Section 1 covers Selection—how to choose ideal song(s) for you or your team’s style, gifts, event, and audience. Section 2 offers help in Communication—ensuring you know the message you want to convey and can find the most effective way to do so. Section 3 deals with Presentation/Technique—not overlooking any aspect of how to employ the proper technique in your musical area to create the best possible presentation of your song(s) and message. Finally, Section 4 wraps it up with Effectiveness—how to assure you do everything you can to effectively bring God’s message to listeners through your performance.

You’ll find the information easy to access. Each chapter lists a number of steps in bold, with an expanded explanation following. These short, organized chapters are filled with tips, instructions, and help for all aspects of your musical gifting and potential future ministry. The table of contents lists each of the smart chapters so you can quickly locate what you want to work on at any given time.

One thing you’ll find in each Student Presentation Guide is repetition. Many areas of musical preparedness overlap, but it’s been proven that repetition is a great way to really learn! So, as you read through your guide, continue to take in all the tips and recommendations with determination and passion as you explore and improve your gifts.

Those who created this guide for you desire that this be a place to discover, develop, and deploy your gifts—and that as a result, your upcoming presentation gives you a goal to work toward as you press on toward God’s gifting and calling in your life now and in the future.



SELECTION

INTRODUCTION

In songwriting, you are choosing to write a song to convey a story, a feeling, a lesson learned, a spiritual message, or any other reason. When you create a song and select it to present to an audience, you must consider its appropriateness, the “feel” of the song, and how it connects to your listeners. If you are presenting the song as part of a worship experience, your selection should present a Christian perspective and message with ministry effectiveness in mind. Finally, your personal song should have an original concept, lyric, melody, and fresh approach.

The following section will focus on four Selection categories: appropriateness, arrangement, Christian message, and originality and their related topics for your consideration.

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

The following chapters regarding Selection contain important information. Use these instructions and the smart chapters that follow as a basis from which to write a new song for your audience.

01. FIRST GRAB A PEN AND A NOTEBOOK WITH BLANKS SHEETS IN IT. BE PREPARED TO WRITE DOWN THOUGHTS, IDEAS, MEMORIES, TITLES, ETC., AS THEY COME TO MIND. OR, PUT NOTES IN YOUR PHONE THROUGHOUT YOUR DAY AS IDEAS AND IMPRESSIONS COME TO MIND.

02. SONGWRITING BEGINS WITH THE SEED, THE IDEA, AND THE INSPIRATION. YOU HAVE A GIFT—A LEVEL OF SKILL, CRAFTSMANSHIP, AND YOUR OWN LIMITATIONS AFTER READING WHAT IS REQUIRED AND FINDING OUT WHAT THE POSSIBILITIES ARE, AS WELL AS THE BOUNDARIES, TAKE IT TO GOD IN PRAYER. ASK GOD FOR GUIDANCE AND INSPIRATION.

03. PRAY THAT GOD WILL OPEN THE EYES OF YOUR HEART AND GIVE YOU A MESSAGE THAT HAS AN IMPACT, AND A SONG WITH A MINISTRY.

04. NOW TAKE SOME TIME TO READ THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES. WRITE DOWN KEY WORDS AND PHRASES THAT JUMP OUT AT YOU.

05. OVER THE COMING WEEKS, AS YOU READ THROUGH THIS GUIDE AND PREPARE TO WRITE YOUR SONG, CONTINUE ASKING GOD FOR THE HEART TO SEE AND EARS TO HEAR WHAT HE WANTS YOU TO KNOW AND WRITE.

I PRAY THAT
YOUR HEARTS
WILL BE
FLOODED
WITH LIGHT
SO THAT
YOU CAN
UNDERSTAND
THE
CONFIDENT
HOPE HE HAS
GIVEN TO
THOSE HE
CALLED—HIS
HOLY PEOPLE
WHO ARE HIS
RICH AND
GLORIOUS
INHERITANCE.

EPHESIANS
1:18 (NLT)

Appropriate Song Selection

1. Stretch yourself.

If you're singing a song that has a high note or two in it, try putting the highest note in the upper part of your range and see how it feels. Often that little reach gives added emotion to your presentation.

2. Be age appropriate.

Make sure that your song is age appropriate. If you are thirteen, you may not want to sing about a "long, lost love."

3. Know your audience.

Knowing your audience is key to your success. Who are you singing to or for? What are your listeners' needs? What are they looking for? Where do they come from? If you are an artist or a songwriter with a message, make sure it is relatable and meaningful.

4. Choose a proper range.

Choose a key that allows you to shine. As a performer, the "you" that needs to come through is your voice, your ability to connect with the song emotionally, and your ability to express yourself onstage. Use the range God has given you instead of trying to be something you're not. A beautiful tone and a relaxed, confident, honest presentation go farther than a note you are desperately trying to hit. If you are struggling and distracted, your audience will feel it.

5. Know your own voice.

A lot of people want to be singers today. If that's your gift go for it. If not, stay away from it. Know your own voice and how your gift is best used. There are many ways to deliver or "sell" your song and you don't have to do it by belting or using a lot of runs. Don't under- or oversing a song. Concern yourself with connecting to the lyric, melody, and message of your song in such a way that others can't help but connect to it as well.

6. Pick the right genre/style.

Similar to knowing your voice, if you are the one presenting your song (and most likely you are) pick a genre and style that lends itself to your vocal type, so you can really deliver the song.

Christian Message

1. Point of view.

As Christians, we have a special relationship with God that brings a certain joy and peace. We live our lives by faith and hold on to things that are unseen. We believe there is nothing stronger than love, but we are not unfamiliar with heartbreak and disappointment. We experience highs and lows, we know the nearness of God, we are tempted, we fall down, we get back up, and at times we might even struggle to hold on to hope. All of these things significantly affect our point of view.

2. The window.

Sometimes your point of view has nothing to do with where you are but, rather, who you are with. For example, both you and an unbeliever might lose everything in the stock market on the same day, but you have the promises of God and the Holy Spirit living inside you. The fact that you know God is with you will impact your point of view and have a strong influence on how you interpret “losing everything,” as well as the kind of hope you have for the future in spite of your trial.

3. Read David.

The psalms of David are a great resource for songwriters. Whether he’s having the time of his life or running for his life, David’s perspective is powerful and encouraging because of his relationship with God. You might find yourself in a situation where you are filled with delight or desperation as well. Either way, your point of view is significant because of your relationship to and with God. Write about finding or looking for God in the moment, or the hope you have because you know God is right there with you.

4. Not just another lyric.

Think about it—the lyrics of David’s songs are so powerful that we forget they were written as songs. Imagine if your songs were written so well that people would keep and read the lyrics for encouragement.

5. Now, get their attention.

Your purpose in writing your song is to capture the heart of the listener and make an impact on his or her life. The question is, what kind of impact do you want your song to have? Who is your audience? What do you want them to feel? Are you leading them in praise, worship, or thankfulness? Do you want them to ask God a question? Do they need an answer? Are you hoping to lead them to Jesus in your song? The more you define your target, the easier it is to hit!

6. Keep your compass with you.

Write your message down in simple form. Now write down what kind of impact you want your song to have. Keep these with you as a reference guide as you write. Use it as a compass to keep you on course.

Arrangement

1. Your four-minute movie.

A song is a lot like a four-minute movie. You've got a story/message with a beginning, middle, and end. You want to convey the story and its emotion to your audience. You want them to feel it. Much like a movie director, every arrangement choice you make should help your story. The tempo, arrangement, and layout of your song are all crucial to establishing the overall effectiveness and lasting impact of your message.

2. Use devices as appropriate.

Also, like the director of a movie, you need to create emotional tension, release, suspense, joy, comedy, etc., in your song. But unlike a movie director, you'll only be using word pictures and music to do it! The tempo, arrangement, and layout of your song will help create this tension and release.

3. Know the basics of song form.

If you feel confused about this, talk to your worship pastor or a vocal coach.

4. Remember: options, options, options.

You have many options as you approach your arrangement, including intro, verse, pre-chorus, chorus, bridge, and outro. In addition, you have a "solo section" and "turnarounds" to move along or build the presentation of your song.

5. Know musical definitions.

Learn the following musical notation definitions to help you gain a full understanding of your song's potential arrangement.

- ⚙ Bar: In music notation, a bar (or measure) is a segment of time defined as a given number of beats in a given duration.
- ⚙ Beat: The beat is the basic time unit of music.
- ⚙ Time signature: The time signature (or meter signature) is a Western musical notation to specify how many beats are in each measure and which note value constitutes one beat. Each time signature brings a certain feel: 4/4, 3/4, 6/8, and so on. Experiment with different time signatures and see what you connect with. Sometimes you can simply change a song's time signature to create a completely different feel.

6. Order and length.

The order and length of your sections are crucial to creating a natural flow in your song. Within each verse, chorus, bridge, etc., you have a number of bars (or measures) to work with. Don't just fall into the trap of writing eight-bar verses and eight-bar choruses. Break an eight-bar verse down in half or try cutting your verse to six bars and create a two-bar pre-chorus that leads into your chorus. The bottom line is you are trying to tell a story. Use these different options to your advantage. Can a change in order or length help create a better telling of your story?

7. Feel.

“Groove,” “swing,” playing “behind the beat” or “on top of the beat”—all these are expressions used to describe the feel of a song. For instance, a drummer who plays “on top of the beat” tends to create a sense of immediacy. If you were to apply this “behind” and “on top” principle to the same piece of music, you would get two completely different songs even though they are played in the same time signature and tempo.

8. It’s all about the song.

Don’t become too protective with your ideas. Stay open to needed changes and avoid taking objective criticism or critiques personally. Always force your ideas to serve the greater good—your final song!

9. Bottom line.

You want a great beginning, a great middle, and a great ending—all laden with a memorable hook. A great story pulls you in and often is over before you know it. This is the result of good arrangement. Think of the story of Little Red Riding Hood: we see Little Red Riding Hood, the cape, the grandmother, the wolf, the forest. The arrangement is the combination of how all these elements join together. In the beginning, we are introduced to a character and setting that we can visualize and connect to. The image is simple but ignites the imagination. In the middle is the conflict with the wolf. Again, something we can imagine without a lot of effort. And in the end, we see the resolution of the conflict. Think of your musical arrangement (intro, verses, choruses, outro, etc.) as a story that should be strategically put together.

TIP

MANY TIMES, A DIRECTOR WILL SCREEN HIS MOVIE FOR A TEST AUDIENCE TO GAUGE THE LAUGHS, THE TEARS, ETC. OFTEN SECTIONS OF THE MOVIE HAVE TO BE REPLACED OR MOVED AROUND TO IMPROVE THE FLOW AND IMPACT AS A RESULT OF THESE SCREENINGS. PLAY YOUR SONG FOR OTHERS AND WATCH THEIR BODY LANGUAGE. THEY’LL SIGNAL TO YOU WHEN THEY ARE IMPACTED OR IF THEY ARE BORED. AGAIN, LIKE THE DIRECTOR, BE OPEN TO LOSING SOMETHING “ON THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR.” DON’T HESITATE TO TAKE SOMETHING OUT IF IT’S NOT DOING WHAT YOU THOUGHT IT WOULD. IN THE SAME WAY, DON’T HESITATE TO SHORTEN OR LENGTHEN SOMETHING THAT NEEDS IT.

Originality

1. Consider how you say it.

Remember, how you say your song's message can be as important as what you say. You might mean it with all your heart, but if you say it the way it's been said a hundred times before, it may be hard for people to hear it.

2. Test market.

Outside of close friends and family, your song is not going to be important just because you wrote it. In order for you to create a song that lasts, you must have something to say and say it in a way that captures the attention of your listeners. Get outside your circle of friends and see how people respond to your song.

3. Mix new with old.

Try taking a current, popular-sounding melody with a fresh set of chord changes and add a variation of an older, traditional lyric. If you try something like this, then your melody and chord changes must be unique and original enough to offset your traditional lyric and capture the listener's attention.

4. Mix old with new.

Now try the opposite and take a variation of an old, standard melody and say something lyrically in a brand-new way. This one might be a little harder than the previous one because the listener might hear the intro and think, "Oh, I've heard this before." You should feel inspired before trying this. You'll need to use the old to help you resonate with your listener, while saying something new enough to redefine the moment.

5. Listen to what everybody's saying.

Some of the greatest gospel, R&B, pop, and rock classics came from someone taking a popular phrase or saying of the day and putting a new musical twist on it. What is happening in the world around you? What are people saying? What are the colloquialisms in your area? Start listening for them, write them down, and try putting a melody to them.

6. Look for another way.

Always ask yourself, "Is there another way I could say this?" Try different rhyme schemes or change the wording. Don't settle until your song really speaks. Even then, be open to changing what you've written. One of the worst things you can do with a creation is to be so close to it that you can't see room for improvement. Be objective with it. Be your own biggest supporter and worst critic. Then be open to others' input and responses but hold your ground when it matters to you. It may be tough but stay committed to writing the best song you can write, then do what it takes to get there.

Selection Notes

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COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

A great definition of [communication](#) is “the art and technique of using words effectively to impart information or ideas.” The bottom line is, with your song you want to effectively communicate a Christian message that has a lasting impact.

Great communicators know their material and their audience. Great communicators can provide a compass to the masses and stir the collective conscious. Consider the power of Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and the important role he played in the survival of the free world. During World War II, “he delivered clear and convincing messages that appealed to both the heart and the head of the listener. He had a marvelous ability to simplify and streamline complex issues and effectively give spin-free fluent ‘executive summaries’ to the nation or the House.” As you write and then perform your personal song to listeners, you will deliver a “clear and convincing message” of your own. And like Churchill you’ll need to “simplify and streamline” your concept and touch “the heart and the head of the listener” with the words you choose.

The Scriptures are paramount in this process. Read and reread. The more you make God’s Word a part of your subconscious, the more it will pour out during your songwriting.

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

This Communication section is all about assuring that your song has a clear message and leaves a lasting impression. We’ll cover how to create a “mission statement” for your song to keep you on track, the all-important lyrical and musical hook, rhyme scheme, and how to create mental images with poetic language.

- 01.** AGAIN, READ THIS SECTION WITH A WAY TO TAKE NOTES NEARBY.
- 02.** AS YOU READ THROUGH THE MATERIAL COVERING HOOKS, RHYME SCHEMES, AND POETIC LANGUAGE, WRITE DOWN WHAT JUMPS OUT AT YOU. STUDY THE SONG REFERENCES MENTIONED AND THEN WRITE DOWN EXAMPLES OF YOUR FAVORITE SONGS THAT EFFECTIVELY USE THESE TOOLS.
- 03.** AFTER YOU FINISH READING THIS SECTION, LISTEN TO THE SONGS ON YOUR OWN PERSONAL LIST.
- 04.** WHILE LISTENING TO THE SONGS ON YOUR LIST, SEE IF YOU CAN DETERMINE WHERE, HOW, AND WHY THE SONGWRITER USES CERTAIN COMMUNICATION TOOLS.
- 05.** AGAIN, WHILE LISTENING TO YOUR LIST, WRITE DOWN WHERE THE USE OF METAPHOR AND SIMILE AFFECTED YOU. DO THE SAME WITH THE HOOK AND RHYME SCHEME.
- 06.** SEE IF YOU CAN DETERMINE A RUNNING THEME THROUGHOUT YOUR PERSONAL FAVORITE SONG LIST. IF YOU CAN, YOU MAY BE ON YOUR WAY TO DISCOVERING NOT ONLY HOW YOU PREFER TO HEAR IT, BUT YOU MIGHT ALSO FIND OUT HOW YOU WANT TO SAY IT.
- 07.** THEY SAY THE BEST SONGWRITERS KNOW HOW TO BORROW FROM OTHER SONGWRITERS. KEEP A RUNNING LOG OF YOUR FAVORITE TITLES, HOOKS FROM YOUR FAVORITE SONGS, ETC., AS WELL AS WHAT YOU COME UP WITH ON YOUR OWN.
- 08.** ALWAYS KEEP YOUR NOTES HANDY. ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO FIND A GREAT HOOK IS BY LISTENING TO PEOPLE TALK THROUGHOUT THE DAY, TO A SERMON AT CHURCH, OR TO PEOPLE PRAY. YOU'LL BE SURPRISED AT HOW THIS CREATIVE LANGUAGE HAS A GOOD CHANCE OF FINDING ITS WAY INTO YOUR SONG.

Clear Message

1. Take a minute and write two sentences on what your song is about.

Think of these sentences as a compass for your song. As you are writing, occasionally reference your “compass” to see if you have stayed true to or drifted from your original concept. If you find yourself straying, you have two options: (1) get back on track with your original concept, or (2) create a new compass by rewriting your two sentences on what your song is about.

2. Keep it simple.

Always look for ways to say something in a simpler fashion. Ask yourself things like, “Can I make the meaning clearer?” “Without being melodramatic, can I evoke even more emotion from this line?”

3. Make sure every line serves the song and points to the theme or hook.

Sometimes we have to throw out our favorite lines because they don’t really serve the song. Force every line to further the theme or hook of your song (and save other lines for another song).

4. Never assume anything.

Just like any book or movie, you can’t assume the audience knows what you know. Avoid inside jokes, implied meanings, etc. Make your characters, message, and theme clear. If you assume anything, assume you are starting from scratch with your listener. The one exception to this rule might be in the worship genre where you are using universally accepted themes about God that the church/listener understands. Also, with country songs you can use more puns and humor because these are built into the culture of the genre.

5. If the meaning is hidden or ambiguous, throw it out.

If it seems unclear or confusing to you, it’s definitely going to be that way for the listener.

6. Don’t take on the world—make sure your theme isn’t too big or broad.

This is so important! Just for practice, take something you’re working on and see if you can sharpen or narrow the focus of your theme. Then do it again, and again. You might be surprised at how tempting it is to take on a grand theme. Remember, you only have about four minutes for most songs. If your theme is too big, you’ll drive yourself crazy trying to fit it all into a small window.

Lyrical Hook

1. What is a “hook”?

The hook could be defined as a part of the song that hooks the listener—either by lyrical melody or instrumental melody, or even by a drumbeat.

2. What does a hook do?

In his book *Shortcuts to Hit Songwriting*, Robin Frederick says the “hook evokes the emotional world of a song.”

3. Add your bait, set your hook.

The fisherman uses a hook to catch his fish; you are using your hook to catch your audience. The idea is to draw the listener in with a great thematic intro, a great first line, and then catch them with your hook. Sometimes the hook is the first thing in a song. If your hook is good enough, the audience will come back again and again, and hopefully find personal meaning and significance in your song.

4. What is your song’s central emotion?

To ensure your hook accurately conveys the central emotional message of your song, take a minute to write a sentence that sums up what your song is about. Write a simple statement in the plainest possible terms, then write your hook lyric next to it to ensure it is saying the same thing.

5. Everything points to the hook!

In the hymn “It Is Well With My Soul” by Horatio Gates Spafford, the theme is simply, “It is well with my soul.” The writers reinforce the theme and the song’s hook by filling the chorus with those lines.

6. Hook is more than just a melody and a lyric.

Some of the greatest hooks have never had a lyric attached to them. For example, in the Christmas song “Angels We Have Heard on High,” the part that sticks with the listener is “Glo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-ria.”

7. I can’t write a lyrical hook to save my life!

There are artists who don’t write lyrics—they write the music and then have other writers come in to write lyrics. Some of the best songwriters don’t write both music and lyrics, so don’t be discouraged if that’s you. You’re in good company!

8. Don’t be afraid to co-write!

Most of the songs you hear are written by two or more people and have had a ton of outside input. Get your friends in on it and have fun collaborating!

9. No one really wants to sing or shout something they don’t fully understand.

Make sure your hook is something that resonates cognitively as well as viscerally. The more people connect with what they are saying as they sing, the better shot the song has of having a lasting impact.

Unique Rhyme Scheme, Wording, Arrangement

1. To begin, choose a new subject or a new perspective on a familiar subject.
A new subject or a new perspective can inspire new words and melodies. This will give you a head start, as opposed to starting with a subject you've tackled too many times before.
2. Why new?
Saying something in a new way can cause the listener to connect or even reconnect with familiar, everyday feelings or universal themes in a brand-new way.
3. Why rhyme?
The rhyme scheme is a device that you will use to help your listener remember the song. It also helps create anticipation for what's coming next.
4. Trends?
Unless you are writing a novelty song, avoid lyrics that sound trendy. This has a tendency to date your song and it can cause the song to sound trite or disingenuous.
5. A rhyming dictionary.
When you are looking for a rhyme, don't just settle for the first thing that comes to mind. Go through the alphabet (A-Z) or check a rhyming dictionary for another rhyme that better communicates what you want to convey.
6. Do they know what's coming?
Sometimes the best thing that can happen in a song is to lay your story out in such a way that the listener can anticipate and embrace what's coming. However, the opposite is just as significant—sometimes you want your listener to be completely surprised by how your story unfolds. The primary point is, whether your audience knows what's coming or not, say it in such a way that the listeners value what they hear in your song.
7. Words work together.
Often good lyrics are about how words work together. Don't just think about what you want to say; take the time to think about how those words go together.
8. Alliteration.
Alliteration (the use of similar consonant sounds, usually at beginning of words) can be a powerful device for getting a hook to stick.
9. Practice listening.
One of the best ways to work on your rhyme schemes is to study the greats. Go online and look up the lyrics to hymns, pop classics, standards, and your current favorite songs and see what these songwriters did.

Use of Poetic Language

1. Similes and metaphors are powerful tools.

Using similes and metaphors are a powerful way to use words sparingly but still say a lot. They can bring a wealth of images and meaning to your song.

2. What is a simile?

A **simile** is “a figure of speech in which two unlike things are explicitly compared, as in ‘she is like a rose.’” Most similes are introduced by like or as: “The realization hit me like a bucket of cold water.”

3. “Like” a bridegroom.

“God has made a home in the heavens for the sun. It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding. It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race” (Psalm 19:4–5, NLT). Here David uses the powerful imagery of the literal sun to help us see how sure, strong, and dependable God is. We never worry whether or not the sun is going to rise, provide heat, etc. In the same way, we don’t have to worry about God being there with new mercies every morning.

4. What is a metaphor?

A **metaphor** is “a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance” or “something used, or regarded as being used, to represent something else; emblem; symbol.”

5. A mighty fortress “is” our God.

In Martin Luther’s great hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” he uses the metaphor: “A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing.” God is “a mighty fortress”; God is a “bulwark” (a fortification, a safeguard). By using a few metaphors to begin his song, Luther creates strong and lasting impressions.

TIP

METAPHORS AND SIMILES CAN BE POWERFUL AND EFFECTIVE IN CLARIFYING YOUR THEME AND CONVEYING EMOTION TO YOUR LISTENER. WHEN USING A METAPHOR, BE SURE TO USE IT IN A CURRENT AND CONVERSATIONAL MANNER. DON’T ENGAGE IN TOO MUCH METAPHOR THAT THE MEANING OF YOUR SONG GETS LOST; INSTEAD, USE IT TO REINFORCE YOUR THEME.



PRESENTATION/TECHNIQUE

INTRODUCTION

The songwriter is the modern poet, theologian, and philosopher. We provide a powerful medium (of words and music) for people to express their deepest feelings, desires, and beliefs to God, each other, and themselves.

You are the director of a four-minute movie, but instead of using film, you are telling your story with words and music. Rather than a forty-foot screen, you are using a more powerful canvas—the human imagination.

The following chapters will help you with key ingredients for the telling of your story. We'll cover everything from melody, phrasing, song form, harmonic structure, theme, contrast, variation, figurative language, and more.

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

The Presentation/Technique section deals with the technique of how to tell your story, or how to write your song. Don't think so highly of your work that you are overly possessive with your ideas. Subject your music and lyrics to scrutiny and always work to make them serve the greater good: writing the best song you can possibly write.

01. READ THROUGH ALL OF THE SMART CHAPTERS PRIOR TO IMPLEMENTING ANY OF THE SUGGESTIONS. YOU WILL DISCOVER THAT MANY OF THE TECHNIQUES OVERLAP AND CAN BE CONSOLIDATED INTO UNIFIED WRITING SESSIONS.

02. SPEND SOME TIME CRITICALLY EVALUATING YOUR SKILLS. YOU NEED TO KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES AS A SONGWRITER. THIS WILL HELP YOU DETERMINE WHERE YOU NEED TO SPEND THE MOST TIME.

03. SCHEDULE TIME FOR BOTH INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE AND CORPORATE REHEARSAL. BOTH ARE ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL FOR A QUALITY PRESENTATION.

04. RECORD YOUR REHEARSAL SO YOU CAN CRITIQUE YOURSELF. MAKE ANY NECESSARY ADJUSTMENTS.

05. SEEK FEEDBACK FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES. YOU CAN'T RELY ON YOUR GUT FEELINGS ALONE. YOU NEED TO HEAR THE VOICES OF OUTSIDERS IN ORDER TO DETERMINE WHETHER YOU ARE ACCOMPLISHING YOUR ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF COMMUNICATION. AND YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU PRESENT YOUR SONG TO AN AUDIENCE.

Clear Theme

1. What is a theme?

A theme is a dominant or overarching idea that unifies the song from beginning to end. Make sure your song has a dominant idea, one that applies to your entire song.

2. The theme should dominate your song.

The above definition of theme can give you great perspective on your song. Is your theme reinforced throughout the song or does it get lost? Is your song ruled by the theme or is the theme merely implied? Ultimately every line should support your theme.

3. Whittle away.

To whittle something means to carve, form, or shape something out of an existing material. The famous sculptor and artist Michelangelo once said, “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.” Giving further insight into his creative approach, he also said, “In every block of marble I see a statue as plain as though it stood before me, shaped and perfect in attitude and action. I have only to hew away the rough walls that imprison the lovely apparition to reveal it to the other eyes as mine see it.”

Sit down and write a paragraph about your song idea. Now view that paragraph as Michelangelo viewed the marble, and chisel away until your theme is crystal clear! Now see if you can sum up your theme in a short phrase or sentence. You might just end up with a powerful hook!

4. Write a melodic motif.

A melodic motif is the melody that recurs throughout your song. Typically, your verses will mirror each other, and your choruses will repeat. Don't let your melody wander around. It should be clearly defined and memorable, and easy to sing and hum.

5. Can you whistle it?

One simple test for a great melody: Can you easily whistle it?

Chord Contrast/Variation

1. Create variations in your chord progression.

You want to have a combination of repetition and variation in your song's musical structure.

2. Repetition.

Variations in your songs need to come in the context of repetition. Thematically speaking, you want to have a common chord progression in your verses and a different common chord progression in your choruses.

3. Variation.

Typically, you will want to establish some variance in your chord progression as you move from verse to chorus. This will help signal the listener you are in a new place in the song. It will also add dimension and avoid making the tune sound too linear.

4. Bar 1, chord 1.

A good rule of thumb is to avoid using the same chord in the first bar of your verse and the first bar of your chorus. Using other similar or shared chords in the verse and chorus are less of an issue, but using the same chord for the first bar of each can make your song feel like it isn't moving anywhere.

5. Use passing chords.

A passing chord is basically a chord that is inserted in between the main chords of your progression and used as you are "passing" from one main chord to another. Another way of saying this would be the movement of one or more harmony notes in a primary chord, that form a transitional chord, while moving to another primary chord.

6. Why use passing chords?

These passing chords can go a long way in creating a feeling or mood. Try using a passing chord on your second verse and see what happens. Doing this can create a subtle variation and make your song feel as if it were evolving emotionally even if you are singing the same melody line.

7. Seventh chords and extended chords.

Try replacing a chord or two with the seventh and extended chord options. Sometimes you can replace just one chord in one place with one of these options, which will create a special place in your song for your listeners.

TIP

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MAJOR KEYS (WITH SEVENTH AND EXTENDED CHORDS)

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii
Major	minor	minor	Major	Major	minor	dim
Maj7	min7	min7	Maj7	Dom7	min7	dim7
Maj9	min9	min9	Maj9	Dom9	min9	min7b5

Harmonic Structure

Definitions

Understanding harmonic structure begins with defining the terms used here and in other sections.

1. Root.

The root is the fundamental note of any given chord. When playing a C chord, the root note would be C.

2. Triad.

A triad is a combination of a root note and two other notes that relate to the root note at different intervals. A major triad has a root note with two other notes (one a major third, and another a perfect fifth above the root note). The notes in a major C triad are C, E, and G. A minor triad has a root note with two other notes as well (one being a minor third and another a perfect fifth), both above the root note.

3. Chord.

A chord is created when you play two or more notes simultaneously. In tonal music the fundamental chord is called the triad.

4. Voicing.

Voicing is the specific placement of each note in a chord. A few examples that affect voicing would be which note in the chord has the highest pitch, which notes are doubled, and where you place the root note in the chord.

5. Inverted chord.

In an inverted chord, the root is not in the bass. For instance, a G-major triad contains the notes G, B, and D. The G note is always the root of a G chord, but you can create an inversion by placing either a B note or a D note under the G note in the chord.

6. Seventh chord.

A seventh chord is created by taking an existing triad and adding a note one-seventh above the chord's root. Many different types of seventh chords can be created, depending upon the type of triad and the relation of the seventh note to the root.

7. Extended chord.

Like seventh chords, extended chords typically begin with existing triads but add notes beyond the seventh above the root (i.e., ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth notes).

8. Major, Minor, Seventh, and Extended Chords

You can expand the possibilities in your song by using chords beyond the traditional I, IV, and V chords. The next table is an example of the seven basic chords (major and minor) available to you in the key of C major. Try using this table while playing something in the key of C major. As you move through the traditional I, IV, V progression, add the II chord (2 minor chord) or the VI chord (6 minor chord) and see how it colors the mood.

EXAMPLE IN C MAJOR

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii
Major	minor	minor	Major	Major	minor	dim
C Major	D minor	E minor	F Major	G Major	A minor	B dim
C E G	D F A	E G B	F A C	G B D	A C E	B D F

Now try that same idea, but in the key of A minor and use the next table as a guide.

EXAMPLE IN A MINOR

i	ii	III	iv	v	VI	VII
minor	dim	Major	minor	minor	Major	Major
A minor	B dim	C Major	D minor	E minor	F Major	G Major
A C E	B D F	C E G	D F A	E G B	F A C	G B D

You can further enhance the emotional element of your song—as well as support the mood, theme, and lyrical content—by adding seventh and extended chords to your progression. Using the same idea as above, try replacing some of your chords with sevenths and extended chords and see how it inspires your progression. Simply choose the chord from the corresponding column (e.g., if you are playing in C major, replace the V chord G major with G major 7).

BASIC OVERVIEW OF MAJOR KEYS (WITH SEVENTH AND EXTENDED CHORDS)

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii
Major	minor	minor	Major	Major	minor	dim
Maj7	min7	min7	Maj7	Dom7	min7	dim7
Maj9	min9	min9	Maj9	Dom9	min9	Min7b5

BASIC OVERVIEW OF MINOR KEYS (WITH SEVENTH AND EXTENDED CHORDS)

i	ii	III	iv	v	VI	VII
minor	dim	Major	minor	minor	Major	Major
min7	dim7	Maj7	min7	min7	Maj7	Dom7
min9	Min7b5	Maj9	min9	min9	Maj9	Dom9

Introduction/Song Length

1. Your average pop song is around three-and-a-half- to four-and-a-half-minutes.
This has been tested for some time. It can be hard to keep people's attention even while saying something worthwhile and memorable in this short span of time. Don't challenge yourself by making your song longer! Having said this, make sure that your song is at least three minutes long.
2. Make sure that your introduction sets the mood for your song.
If your song is sad, you might want to start your song off with a minor chord.
3. Make sure your introduction isn't too long.
A great introduction sets the mood while a long introduction becomes distracting. Think of your song being in a playlist on shuffle. You don't want listeners to skip your song; you want them leaning in to listen.
4. Does your song have a slow tempo or chill feel?
If your song is slow to begin with, it might be a good idea to have a shorter intro and get to the verse sooner rather than later.
5. Is your song upbeat?
Often writers will start an upbeat song off with the chord changes of the chorus. When done properly, this can create a lot of expectation. Give it a try.
6. Get to the chorus.
People's attention span is shorter than ever. Provide a short intro to set the mood, a verse to set up your story, and bam, give us the chorus!

Memorable Tune

Think about the way you remember songs from your past based simply on the melody. How often do you hear a melody and instantly know the song? That melody often leads you to recall the lyrics as well. When you're writing a song, seek to create a melody that will help listeners not only remember it, but also recall the message of the song.

1. Your objective: lasting impression.

You want to make an emotional impact on your listener. You also want the listener to be able to walk away remembering at least some portion of the song.

2. Your dilemma: limited time.

Your dilemma is that you have time constraints. You have about three-and-a-half- to four-and-a-half-minutes to make an emotional impact and leave a lasting impression.

3. Your secret weapon: simply beautiful.

Let's see if we can make our point with a question. What do the lines below have in common?

- ⚙ "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound . . ."
- ⚙ "Mary had a little lamb, little lamb . . ."
- ⚙ "This is my story, this is my song . . ."

All the song lyrics above are set to beautiful but simple melodies. More often than not, you'll find that simplicity is the key to a lasting melody.

4. Revolution: repetition.

A revolution is a cycle of events in time or a recurring period of time. This revolution (or better yet, repetition) is key to your objective and is another reason to value simplicity. Limited time + simply beautiful + repetition = lasting impression.

Phrasing

1. Make sure that melodically you are in keeping with your theme, hook, and title.
For example, if your song is about loss of someone or something, then you will want the melody to support that sense of grief. You would not want a light, feel-good melody.
2. Chord, voicing choices, and melody.
Whatever you come up with first (chords or melody) will dictate where the other goes. Keep this in mind especially if you start with chords. Staying with the above-mentioned theme example of loss, you will probably want to include some minor chords and/or inversions that lend to a sense of grief.
3. Tempo and melody.
Using the same theme of loss, unless your song is an angry expression of grief you'll want to avoid a tempo that is too fast or upbeat. Reinforce your theme, mood, and concept with a tempo that fits the melody.
4. It wasn't what you said, it was how you said it!
The way you say something can be as important as what you are saying. Many great singers are known as much for how they sing as well as what they sing. You have words in front of you that you've taken the time to thoughtfully compose. It's your blood, sweat, and tears. Now take the time to thoughtfully sing it. Sometimes a simple word or two with the appropriate exhilaration, celebration, or pathos can say it all!
5. Continuity.
The bottom line here is continuity. You want everything to support, point to, and reinforce your original theme and concept. This means everything—your chord choice, the melody you are singing over it, the way you sing the melody, and the words you attach to the melody—should support your theme.

Song Form: Section Definitions

The structures or musical forms of songs in popular music are typically sectional, or repeating forms. The most popular form is: ABABCB (A=verse, B=chorus, and C=bridge). Other forms include AABA and the twelve-bar blues. Verses and chorus are considered the primary elements of today's popular songs. The verses typically differ lyrically but stay the same melodically, while the chorus is either partially or completely repeated lyrically and melodically. A bridge is most often used to tie, connect, or conclude the thought or theme of the song. An intro can be used to set the mood of the song while the outro can extend the mood of the song. At times a pre-chorus (a new musical and often new lyrical theme) is introduced to connect a verse and chorus.

1. Intro.

The introduction is a section that comes at the beginning of the piece. This section sets the mood for what's coming. It's an opportunity to draw the listener in and set up the lyric. The intro is sometimes a chorus or a verse progression, while other times it might simply be one or two bars of the root chord, or I chord (which is the key the song is in). For example if a song is in the key of G, the root chord, or I chord, would be G.

2. Verse.

In popular music, there are usually two or more verse sections. The verses usually contain the same basic structure (chords and melody) but with different lyrics. The lyrics typically build on one another as the song progresses.

3. Pre-chorus.

An optional section that may occur after the verse and before the chorus is the pre-chorus. The pre-chorus can help a song transition or build into the chorus. Also, adding a pre-chorus is a great option if you have repetitive chords in the verse and chorus, or if the melody of the verse and chorus begin with the same note and you need a change.

4. Chorus.

The chorus typically provides contrast to the verse in both melody and chords. The intensity and dynamics usually increase during the chorus as well. Also, the chorus is often either referred to as the hook or contains the hook lyrically and/or musically.

5. Bridge.

In songwriting, a bridge typically differs from the verse and chorus both musically and lyrically. Lyrically, the bridge might provide resolve or resolution, answer a question, or sometimes even ask a question, while musically it tends to heighten in tension and grow dynamically. It should be noted that the bridge section doesn't always contain lyrics.

6. Outro.

An outro is a short musical ending to a song. This is often a chorus chord progression repeated several times as the music fades, but it can be a verse section, solo section, etc.

Song Form: Structure

The structures, or musical forms, of songs in popular music are typically sectional or repeating forms. Basically, there are three forms:

1. ABABCB.

The typical pop song you hear today follows this form, and is most likely the form you will be following.

A=Verse 1 B=Chorus A=Verse 2 B=Chorus C=Bridge B=Chorus

2. AABA.

Many popular songs have been written in this format. One classic example is “Somewhere over the Rainbow.”

A=Verse 1 A=Verse 2 B=Bridge or contrasting section A=Verse

In “Somewhere over the Rainbow,” the hook (also the title) is stated in the first line of each verse. Other than this line, the verses are completely different, and the B section gives a lift out of the verse sections.

3. Twelve-bar blues.

Arguably the origin of our modern gospel, pop, rock, and jazz music.

Time Frame/Development

1. Song time frame.

The average pop song typically falls somewhere in between three-and-a-half- to four-and-a-half-minutes. Within this time frame you need regularity and balance in the related sections.

2. Regularity.

The main thing you want to focus on here is consistency and regularity. You might have a verse that is either four or eight bars, or a four-bar verse with a two-bar pre-chorus. Whatever you choose, stay consistent and try to repeat this pattern throughout the rest of your verses.

3. Exception to the rule.

Occasionally a song will start with a double verse. This is a form we call AABA (A=verse and B=chorus). Here the story might require two verses back-to-back before getting to the chorus. Note: You need a strong theme both lyrically and melodically to pull this off and there is the risk of losing your listener. It should be noted that many great songs have been written in this form (including classics such as “I Got Rhythm” by George Gershwin). However, we suggest trying to avoid this form unless your song requires it.

4. Always have something to say.

Include a sense of balance in your song. Don't include a really long verse followed by a short chorus. In other words, don't say too much in your verse to where you have nothing to say in your chorus. Your chorus might only be a few words, but those few words must say it all. This way, the drama of the chorus (whether it's whispered or shouted) balances out what you've stated in the verses. If that's the case, then you are in good shape.

5. Is the song for you or your listener?

This is a great question to ask yourself, and the answer should probably be both. The song definitely is not just for you; otherwise, why would you bother singing it to anyone else? You want listeners to feel what you feel, so keep in mind their point of view as you write. This plays itself out in the timing and pace of how the song unfolds. How patient or impatient are you when hearing a new song? Apply that same attitude to your song and see if it gives you a new perspective.

Use of Figurative Language

You have about three-and-a-half- to four-and-a-half-minutes (including intro and outro) to communicate your thought. On top of that, you need to use your words sparingly, so the words you choose must count. Paint a picture with your words. Use words that will take listeners to a place or an emotional state—descriptive words are key! However, descriptive language doesn't need to be overcomplicated. Remember the golden rule and keep it simple, but still go for it!

Examples of addressing themes with descriptive lyrics:

1. Worth and value:

“You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing/You say I am strong when I think I am weak”
—From “You Say” by Lauren Daigle

2. Desperation and guilt:

“My world is a flood”
—From “Flood” by Jars of Clay

3. Surrender and trust:

“So I'll stand/With arms high and heart abandoned/In awe of the One who gave it all/So I'll stand/My soul Lord to You surrendered/All I am is Yours”
—From “The Stand” by Hillsong UNITED

4. Consecration and sanctification:

“Separated, I cut myself clean/From a past that comes back in my darkest of dreams”
—From “Jesus Freak” by DC Talk

5. Desperation:

“I'm hanging by a moment here with you”
—From “Hanging by a Moment” by Lifehouse

6. Exhilaration and anticipation:

“Even when I don't see it, You're working/Even when I don't feel it, You're working/You never stop, You never stop working/You never stop, You never stop working”
—From “Way Maker” by Leeland

Presentation/Technique Notes

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EFFECTIVENESS

INTRODUCTION

As a songwriter, you are painting a picture and telling a story, but where you differ from the painter, the author, and the director is that you are limited to words and music and have roughly three-and-a-half- to four-and-a-half-minutes to tell a whole story. This takes skill, determination, and discipline. It is paramount that you learn to be an effective communicator.

With such a short time frame, you have to strip away everything that isn't necessary and make every word count. Your goal, subject matter, and presentation must remain in focus throughout your song. Your lyric has to support the story and the music must support the lyric. Don't forget the power of simplicity, and never confuse simplicity with sloppy, elementary, or lazy writing. Great songwriters take great pains to make a lyric sing and sound effortless.

Finally, pray over everything you do and ask God for help. Let Him know you want your songs to be effective and have a lasting impact on the listener!

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

Remember, your best shot at writing a “spiritual” song is being presently connected to God. Chances are if you don't feel connected, you are probably not going to be effective. Take the time to shut out all the distractions. Do whatever it takes to get there: shut the doors, turn out the lights, light a candle, take a walk. All of our senses—sight, sound, smell, touch, taste—play into connecting with God, so find out what helps you draw near to Him and do that.

Communion with God in and of itself is the greatest reward, but it is also a great place to get creative. Invite God into your process and into your song. He wants to help you write the very best song you can.

01. KEEP YOUR BIBLE WITH YOU AS YOU ENTER THE SONGWRITING PROCESS. THE SCRIPTURES CAN ACT AS A SPRINGBOARD TO GREAT THOUGHTS AND OFFER A HOST OF GREAT PHRASES FOR WRITING SONGS.

02. PRACTICE BY FACING A MIRROR AND SPEAKING THE LYRICS OF YOUR SONG OUT LOUD. HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL? DOES EVALUATING YOUR FEELINGS CHANGE THE WAY YOU MIGHT WANT TO PRESENT THE SONG?

03. PLAY YOUR SONG AS IF YOU ARE PLAYING IT FOR REAL. IS IT TOO LONG? TOO SHORT?

04. FINALLY, AS YOU WORK THROUGH THE FOLLOWING CHAPTER, DON'T BE AFRAID TO REALLY EXAMINE YOUR SONG AND PUT IT UNDER THE MICROSCOPE. FORCE YOUR SONG TO SAY WHAT YOU REALLY WANT IT TO SAY.

Overall Effectiveness

As you prepare to present your song to the listeners you've had in mind with the message you want them to hear, keep in mind how these four important characteristics will make your song and the presentation most effective.

1. Evident ministry: evidence of spiritual motivation/demonstration with sincerity and passion.

⚙️ You want your song to have a spiritual impact.

Being a songwriter is all about finding and writing the truth. You are a soul miner doing spiritual exploits. View the spiritual impact of your song as a thread that runs through every part of your life and into the craft of songwriting itself.

⚙️ Have a little talk with God.

The song "begins" with your relationship to God (the time you set aside for talking and listening to Him) and what you choose to think about. This will lead to your themes and concepts, which will be refined through the writing process. Imagine your song as a vehicle on which the love and healing of God can ride. Combine your prayers and faith with the writing process. Visualize the impact and pray it in. Your song can be just the vehicle through which God can lift up, encourage, help, and heal people.

⚙️ Listening.

Finding God is what life is all about. Take the time to talk and listen to God every day, even in your writing process. Just as in other areas of life, sometimes God is easy to find in the moment, and sometimes it takes time to hear Him. But all of these moments together create a relationship that is a priceless treasure. The more you invite God into your songwriting discipline and make it a time of relationship with Him, the richer you will be in all areas of your life—and more sensitive to His leadings, regardless of the situation.

⚙️ Reference the Scriptures while writing.

Make sure you are taking the time to be biblically accurate. Whether you think you've got the story or not, take the time to look over a theme or story line you are using from Scripture. Not only will this further inspire you with new ideas, possible word pictures, etc., but it will ensure that you are accurate in your account and reference in your song.

⚙️ You want your song to have a spiritual impact.

You want your song to stir the heart. Turn the music off and set the instrument down. Are you really inspired by what you've written? Do the written words stand alone, or is the music propping them up? Think of the psalms. These songs were so well crafted lyrically, they have stood the test of time and translation as poetry (with no music). Make that your goal. Chances are if you are truly inspired, others will be too.

⚙️ Stick to storytelling.

Think about Jesus and how He would answer questions with a question, or how He would answer a need through the telling of a story. Stories are powerful; the truths from a well-told story tend to stay with us long after a sermon does.

⚙️ It's how you say it.

Remember, how you say something is as important as what you are saying. Practice emoting and saying or singing your words in different ways.

☀ You're ready!

Once this is completed, your song is ready for the final state—the actual delivery of the song itself. By God's grace, your song will find the ears and hearts that it is intended to reach.

2. Interpretation of clear thought: consistent interpretation of the musical style and lyrical line throughout the song.

When you pick your mode or genre, stay consistent to the theme you've chosen both musically and lyrically. Sometimes, without even realizing it, you can take off on a tangent while writing; if you think you might have run into something like this with your song, just put it down and come back in a day or so and check it out. Your song won't always take you right to the same place, but it should still move you the next day.

3. Relevance: music and lyrics are in a style and form that connects with the listener.

Throughout the process from original theme and concept to the performance of your song, never lose your goal: to impact the listener. Don't think that just because it moves you, it's going to move others. After you look inward and find the song within, you have to get outside yourself and objectively listen to the song. Know your audience. Who will you present your song to? You wouldn't learn Spanish if you were planning to travel to France. Like languages, music and its forms function on many different levels. Different people relate to it in different ways. Make sure you are taking the right song to the right people. Finally, practice makes perfect. Practice the song in front of friends and strangers. Play the song for as many people as you can. Local open mic nights can be helpful to see if your song connects with strangers or not. If they don't connect with it on some level, you probably need to do some more work.

4. Understandable concept: the combination of Music Selection, Communication, Presentation/Technique, and Effectiveness attain the desired response.

Again, you want to reach the listeners. You want them to feel the music and lyrics of your song in their hearts and souls. You want to move their minds, to create action—you want a response! This goal plays itself out in what you choose to write about, how clearly you express your idea, the instrumentation you choose to further enhance the message of the song, the way you walk to the microphone, how you introduce yourself, and especially how you carry and release the burden or joy of your song.

TIP

WHEN YOU SING YOUR SONG, SING IT LIKE IT NEEDS TO BE HEARD (EVEN IF IT IS FOR THE AUDIENCE OF ONE). YOU ARE THE SONG'S MESSENGER! WHEN YOU PLAY IT, THINK OF DAVID AND HIS HARP. HIS SONGS AND PLAYING WERE POWERFUL ENOUGH TO CALM THE HEART OF A KING—WHY NOT BELIEVE GOD FOR THIS LEVEL OF ANOINTING ON YOU AS WELL? GOD GAVE THIS GIFT TO YOU! RESPECT YOUR GIFT ENOUGH TO TREAT YOURSELF AND YOUR SONGS WITH VALUE. IT IS NOT UP TO YOU TO KNOW THE LEVEL OF IMPACT OF YOUR SONGS AND CRAFT, BUT IT IS UP TO YOU TO BE OBEDIENT WITH THE GIFT YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN AND AGREE WITH WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT YOU. BEING OBEDIENT THROUGH THE PROCESS IS A WAY TO WORSHIP GOD AND LOVE HIM. IF YOU TREAT YOURSELF AND YOUR GIFT LIKE A TREASURE, CHANCES ARE OTHERS WILL TOO. GO FOR IT!

Must-Have Tools

For the most effective songwriting—both music and lyrics—resulting in great presentations, make use of the following crucial songwriting tools.

1. Recording device.

Be ready when inspiration strikes. It's easier today than it has ever been. Don't trust your memory; use your phone, a handheld recorder, your computer, etc., to capture the inspiration.

2. Paper.

It helps to not only hear something but to see it written down. Write it and rewrite it. Something happens when a pencil is in your hand. Even if you are primarily working on your computer or another device, pick up a pencil and paper and see if inspiration strikes.

3. Computer.

Write it, record it, save it, categorize it, and then back it up! A computer is a powerful tool in so many ways. If you can get your ideas down in an organized fashion, then you'll have a well to draw from when you lack inspiration.

4. Instrument.

A guitar, a piano, a voice—even if you don't play anything yet, but you've got a song in your heart, go for it! There are many great hit songwriters who never played an instrument. That's what co-writing is all about.

5. [Thesaurus.com](https://www.thesaurus.com)

You need options for how to convey your message lyrically. Use a thesaurus to not only learn new words but to bring variety and greater description to your song.

6. [Dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com)

Make sure you know what you are talking about by taking the time to check out a definition or two.

7. [Writeexpress.com](https://www.writeexpress.com)

This site is one of the most valuable tools you'll ever use. Looking for a rhyme? Go here!

8. [Webmetronome.com](https://www.webmetronome.com).

This is perfect for helping determine and keep tempos.

Effectiveness Notes

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