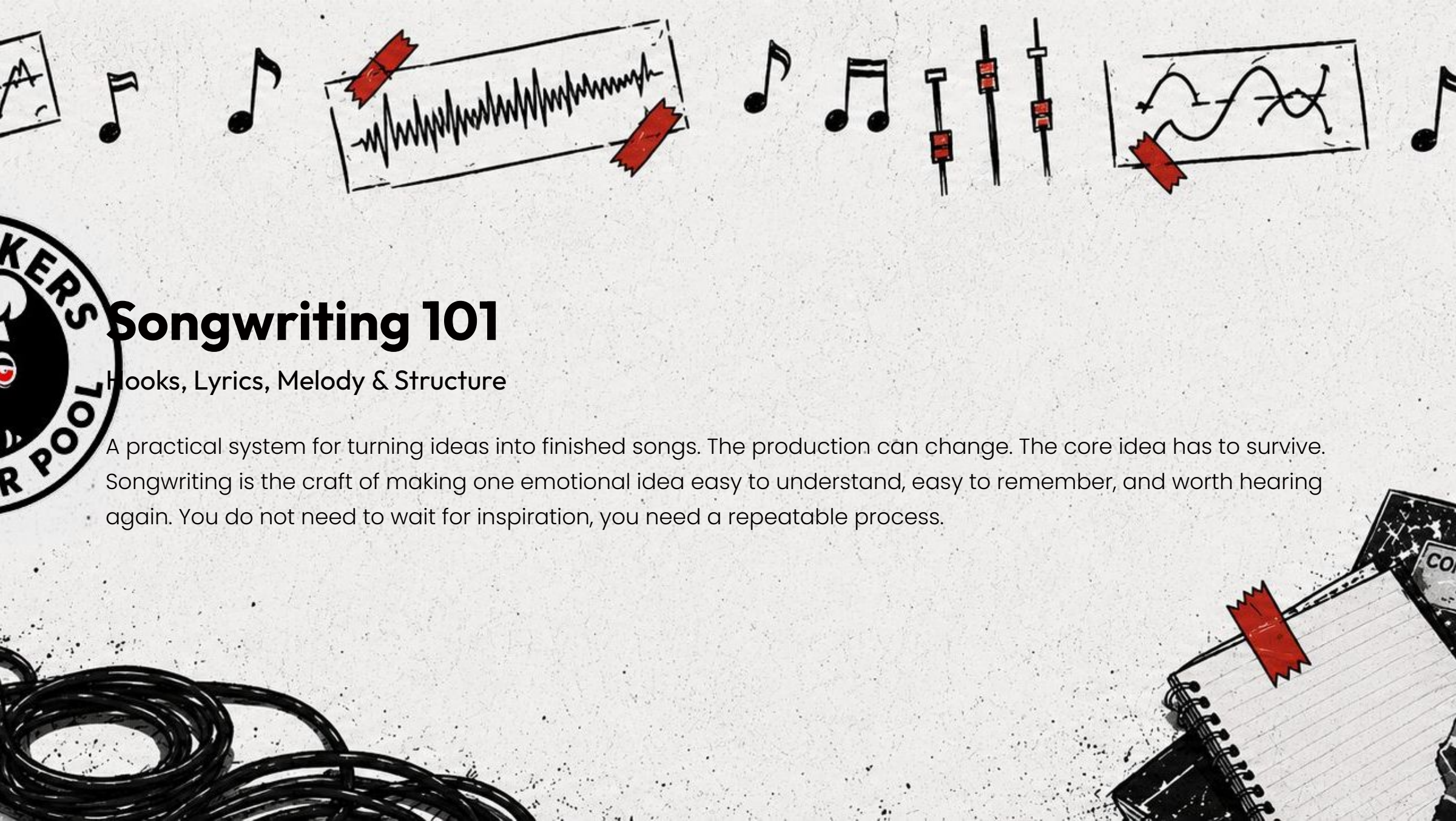




20. SONGWRITING 101



Songwriting 101

Hooks, Lyrics, Melody & Structure

A practical system for turning ideas into finished songs. The production can change. The core idea has to survive. Songwriting is the craft of making one emotional idea easy to understand, easy to remember, and worth hearing again. You do not need to wait for inspiration, you need a repeatable process.

A Song Is More Than a Beat With Words

The lyric, melody, rhythm, harmony, and structure all serve one thing: a single emotional idea. When each of those elements is aligned behind that idea, the song becomes easy to understand, easy to remember, and worth hearing again. When they're pulling in different directions, even the most expensive mix can't save it.

You do not need to wait for inspiration. You need a repeatable process: find the core, build the hook, give every section a job, create contrast, then edit until nothing important is buried. Every great songwriter you admire has some version of this system, even if they can't name it. This guide will help you name yours.

If the song only works because the mix is huge, the sound design is expensive, or the drop is loud, strip it back. A strong song still has identity when played on one instrument or sung into a phone.

The First Test

Before you finalize anything, perform the strip-back test. Take the song down to one chord instrument and a raw vocal. No effects. No layers.

- Does the hook still land?
- Is the structure still clear?
- Can you feel what the song is about?
- Would you listen to the end?

If the answer to any of these is no, go back to the writing, not the mix.

Find the Core Before You Write the Song

A clear song begins with a clear sentence. Most writers start writing lines before they know what the song is actually about, and that's why so many songs feel unfocused. The verse says one thing, the chorus says something slightly different, and the bridge introduces a third idea. The solution is to do the thinking before the writing.

The Song Sentence

Finish this before you chase rhymes or melodies:

"This is a song about _____, told by _____, who wants _____, but _____."

Then reduce it again: **What changed?** What is the one feeling or realization the listener should leave with? If you can't answer that question in one breath, the idea is still too wide.

Examples of Useful Cores

- Missing someone but refusing to call
- Realizing success did not fix loneliness
- Wanting one more night even though you know it is over
- Blaming someone until you realize you made the same mistake

Exercise 1 · 10 Min

10 Song Seeds. Write ten one-sentence song ideas. No rhymes. No melodies. One emotional conflict per sentence.

Exercise 2 · 5 Min

Make It Specific. Replace every vague word with a person, place, object, action, time, or consequence.

Exercise 3 · 2 Min

Say It Out Loud. Explain the song to someone in one breath. If the explanation needs a paragraph, the idea is still too wide.



Titles, Hooks, and Point of View

The Four Types of Hook

A hook can be lyrical, melodic, rhythmic, or sonic, and the strongest songs often combine several. Every great song has at least one of these working hard, and the best ones have all four reinforcing each other.

Lyric Hook

A short phrase the listener wants to repeat. Usually tied to the title or central idea.

Melody Hook

A recognizable pitch shape. Works even before the words are finished.

Rhythm Hook

A memorable cadence, pause, pickup, or repeated pattern that makes the phrase identifiable.

Sonic Hook

A riff, chop, synth phrase, vocal texture, or production moment that becomes part of the song's identity.

📌 **Memory Test:** After five minutes away from the session, can you still sing or say the hook without reopening the project? If you cannot, the listener probably won't either.

Choosing a Point of View

The same idea becomes a completely different song depending on who is speaking and who is being addressed. Choose perspective intentionally, an accidental switch from "you" to "she" can make the listener lose track of who the song is about.



I / Me

Confessional and internal. Direct access to the narrator's thoughts, mistakes, and memories.



You

Immediate and confrontational. Feels like a message sent directly to someone.



They / We

Distance or a wider world. Useful for storytelling, social observation, or group identity.

Exercise: The Three-Camera Rewrite · 12 Min

Take one idea. Write four lines as **I**, four lines speaking to **you**, four lines as an outside observer. Keep the event identical. Choose the perspective that creates the most tension.

Structure Is the Journey of the Idea

Every section of a song should change what the listener knows, feels, or expects. Structure is not decoration, it is function. Do not add a section because songs "are supposed to" have it. If a pre-chorus does not increase anticipation, remove it. If a bridge says nothing new, skip it entirely.



- Verse 1**
Set the scene. Give enough detail that the chorus feels earned.
- Pre-Chorus**
Raise tension. Make the chorus feel inevitable.
- Chorus**
Main truth / hook. The clearest emotional statement.
- Verse 2**
Escalate. Add consequence, contradiction, or a new detail.
- Bridge**
New angle. Reveal what the previous sections could not say.

V – C – V – C – B – C

Direct and efficient. Works when the verse/chorus contrast is already strong enough to carry the song.

V – Pre – C

Adds a pre-chorus when the chorus needs a lift in tension, melody, harmony, or lyric perspective.

Electronic / Pop Hybrid

Intro → Verse → Build → Drop → Verse → Build → Drop → Bridge/Break → Final Drop.

The Chorus Answers "What Is This Song?" Verses Move the Camera

Five Rules for a Great Chorus

The chorus should deliver the clearest emotional statement and the most memorable musical idea. Every choice in the chorus, word count, rhythm, range, repetition, should serve memorability and emotional impact.

1 Center the Title

Put it where it matters: the first line, last line, or melodic peak. Do not hide the song's strongest phrase.

2 Reduce Information

Verses can explain. Choruses simplify. Fewer details, bigger meaning, cleaner language.

3 Create Lift

Higher melody, longer notes, wider range, stronger rhythm, harmony change, or fewer words.

4 Repeat the Best Thing

Repetition tells the listener what to remember. Repeat what's strong, not what you wrote because you ran out of ideas.

5 Use Singable Vowels

Long sustained notes feel better on open, resonant vowels. If the key word is physically awkward, rewrite or reshape the melody.

Verses: Give the Listener Evidence

Do not spend the verse repeating the chorus in smaller words. Give the listener proof, specific scenes, objects, and actions that make the chorus feel earned and true.

Verse 1: Orientation

Who is here? Where are we? What just happened? Enough detail that the chorus feels earned.

Verse 2: Escalation

Add consequence, contradiction, a new memory, a worse detail, or information that changes the chorus's meaning.

Verse 3: Only If Needed

If the story is already complete, another verse can weaken it. More words do not automatically create more depth.

Vague vs. Specific

Vague: "I miss you every night / everything feels wrong."

Specific: "Your mug is still beside the sink / I move it when I clean / then put it back exactly where / you left it Tuesday evening."

Use objects, weather, clothing, rooms, screens, receipts, street names, sounds, smells, or actions. Let the details carry the emotion, don't explain what they mean.

Section Jobs and Better Lyrics

Every Section Has One Specific Job

Pre-choruses, post-choruses, and bridges exist to change energy or meaning. not to make the arrangement longer. Before writing any of these sections, ask: what does this section accomplish that nothing else in the song already does?

Pre-Chorus

Make the chorus feel inevitable. Increase tension, compress the lyric, climb melodically, or suspend the harmony.

Post-Chorus

Extend the hook after the main statement. Often simpler: a repeated phrase, chant, riff, or melodic tag.

Bridge

Reveal something the previous sections could not. New perspective, new harmony, new rhythm, or a line that changes the story.

- ❏ The final chorus should feel different even if the words are identical. The bridge and Verse 2 should change the context. That new context is what makes repetition emotional instead of repetitive.

Better Lyrics Come From Better Observation

Abstract emotion tells the listener what to feel. Specific images let them feel it themselves. This is the single most important shift a developing writer can make: stop reporting emotion and start building scenes.



Use Verbs

People remember actions. "I was sad" is information. "I deleted your number and typed it back" is a scene.



Use Contrast

Put two truths against each other: "I wanted you gone / I still left the light on." Contradiction creates humanity.



Use Objects

Objects create proof: keys, smoke, shoes, cups, receipts, a cracked screen, a jacket still on the chair.



Cut Explanation

If the image already communicates the emotion, do not explain it again on the next line. Trust the image.

Image + Action example: "I still take the long way home / so I don't pass your street / every red light gives me time / to practice what I'd say."

Rhyme, Meter, Flow, and Writing Melody

Rhyme Must Serve Natural Speech

A clever rhyme is useless if the singer has to twist the sentence into something nobody would say. The goal is a lyric that sounds inevitable, like the only possible way those words could have been arranged. Prioritize meaning over a perfect rhyme every single time.

Perfect Rhyme

night / light – Same ending sound. Strong and clear, but easy to overuse and predict.

Slant Rhyme

home / gone, face / fade – Related sound. Useful when meaning matters more than a perfect match.

Internal Rhyme

Rhymes inside the line create flow without forcing every line ending into the same sound pattern.

The Speech Test · 10 Min

Speak the lyric with no melody. Circle any sentence you would never naturally say. Rewrite before forcing the melody around an awkward line.

Writing Melody With Rhythm, Shape & Repetition

Do not hunt random notes until something works. Give the melody a recognizable behavior from the start. The best melodies have a logic to them, a shape that feels like it could only go one way.



01

Topline A: Rhythm Only · 8 Min

Speak nonsense syllables over the loop. Find a cadence before choosing notes or lyrics.

02

Topline B: One Small Range · 8 Min

Use only 3–4 nearby notes. Force the hook to come from rhythm and phrasing alone.

03

Topline C: One Big Leap · 8 Min

Keep most of the melody compact, then use one larger interval on the title or emotional keyword.

Harmony, Producer Workflow, and the Edit

Harmony Is the Emotional Floor

Chords support the song. They do not need to be complicated to make the song feel sophisticated. A basic progression with a great melody is a song. A complicated progression with no memorable melody is still a chord exercise.

Home

A settled place. Returning home creates resolution and emotional landing.

Tension

Move away from home. Suspended feeling, unstable bass, or a chord that wants to continue.

Color

Inversions, extensions, borrowed tones. Change emotion without replacing the whole progression.

Space

Sometimes the best chord change is no chord change. Let melody, bass, or rhythm carry the section.

Producer Workflow: Write Before You Overproduce

A perfect snare will not fix a chorus that has no hook. Build the song's identity before you build the record. Give yourself a 30-minute sound limit to construct the writing loop — after that, stop changing synths and write the vocal.



The Edit: Where the Song Becomes Clear

The first draft discovers the song. The edit decides what deserves to stay. Do not polish a line that should be deleted, writers lose hours perfecting rhyme and imagery inside a section the song never needed. Structure first, line editing second.

Edit Pass 1 · 10 Min

Cut 20%. Remove words, fills, lines, or entire sections without adding anything new.

Edit Pass 2 · 10 Min

Best Line Test. Find the best line. Is the rest of the writing at that level? Rewrite the weakest three lines.

Edit Pass 3 · 10 Min

Last Chorus Test. If the final chorus does not feel bigger in meaning, change the bridge, Verse 2, or arrangement.

Beat Writer's Block, Write a Song in 60 Minutes, and Train for 7 Days

Writer's Block Is Usually Too Many Options

Constraints create decisions. Decisions create songs. When you feel stuck, don't open up the options close them down. Pick one object, one room, one time window, or one contradiction and write only inside those walls. The limitation will force specificity, and specificity will unlock the song.



One Object

Write the entire verse around one object that represents the relationship, place, or problem.



One Location

Keep the song inside one room, car ride, street corner, airport, party, kitchen, or phone call.



One Time Window

Write only what happens in five minutes, one night, one morning, or the ten seconds before someone leaves.



One Contradiction

Build around two truths that don't fit: love + resentment, success + emptiness, freedom + regret.



Do not wait until you know the whole song. Write the next useful line.

Write a Complete Song in 60 Minutes

The goal is not a masterpiece. The goal is to practice the complete decision chain without getting trapped in details. At the end of the hour you should have a title, a complete structure, a chorus you can remember, two verses that do different jobs, and one rough full-length demo.

0–5 Min: Core + Title

Write one song sentence and 10 titles.
Choose one immediately.

15–25 Min: Verse 1

Set a specific scene.
Use at least three physical details and one action.

35–42 Min: Pre / Bridge

Add only the section the song actually needs. If neither adds value, skip it.

56–60 Min: One-Take Demo

Record the complete song without stopping. Save it. Do not reopen the sound-design menu.

1

2

5–15 Min: Hook / Chorus

Find the cadence with nonsense syllables, then write a 4–8 line chorus around the title.

3

4

25–35 Min: Verse 2

Add new information. Escalate the conflict or reveal a contradiction.

6

42–56 Min: Melody + Edit

Record three hook versions. Cut unnecessary words. Replace the weakest three lines.

7

7-Day Songwriting Bootcamp

01

Day 1: 20 Titles

Choose 3. Write a one-sentence song core for each.

02

Day 2: 3 Choruses

Write three different hooks for one title.

03

Day 3: Details

Write a verse using five physical details and zero abstract emotion words.

04

Day 4: Topline

Create three melodies over one unchanged chord loop.

05

Day 5: Structure

Map three songs you love by section length and function.

06

Day 6: Full Draft

Use the 60-minute exercise. Finish one complete rough song.

07

Day 7: Edit + Demo

Cut 20%, rewrite weak lines, record one clean demo, and stop.



Core Check

Can I explain the song in one sentence? If not, narrow the core.



Hook Check

Can I remember the hook without the project open? If not, simplify or strengthen it.



Verse 2 Check

Does Verse 2 add new information? If not, escalate or cut it.



Section Check

Does every section have a job? If not, remove or redesign it.