

A woman with voluminous, wavy red hair and green eyes is looking directly at the camera. She is holding a white rectangular sign in front of her face, which has a black border at the top. The sign contains the text 'Songwriting Lab's Lyric Writing Checklist'. She is also holding a black pen in her right hand, which is visible at the bottom left of the sign.

**Songwriting
Lab's
Lyric Writing
Checklist**

Songwriting Lab's Lyrics Writing Checklist



Use this checklist to review a lyric that you have written in order to find ways of improving it. You can also use it as a way of analysing lyrics from established artists to find out what tools & techniques they have used.

For any one song lyric, don't try and make changes based on every point on the checklist – just look for a few things that you could use to make improvements. Remember that these aren't rules, just guidelines. Some things may not be appropriate for your specific song – so if you make a change, you should still use your own judgement as to whether the new version is better than the original.

Title

- Is your song title memorable and interesting? Is it the best that it can be?
- Is the title used at least once in the chorus (and preferably more than once)?

Chorus

- Are you taking too long to get to the chorus? Two long verses before the chorus is risking your listeners losing interest.
- Does your chorus summarise the main idea / purpose of the song? Is it clear what you are trying to say?
- Is the chorus mostly using the language of thoughts and feelings?
- Is your chorus easily singable by anyone? Generally people listen to the verses and sing along to the chorus.
- Is the chorus easy to remember? The chorus is the heart of the song – you want people to be able to remember it. Are there too many lines, complex language or not enough repetition?

Verses

- Does the first verse clearly and quickly set the scene for the song? Who is the song about? Where are they? When is this happening?
- Are the verses mostly using sense bound descriptive language?
- Does each verse move the song forward or is it just repeating the same or very similar idea?
- Does each verse recolour the chorus in some way (give it a slightly different meaning/feeling when it is repeated)?
- Are the verses in the best order? Try rearranging them and see which order works the best.
- Does each verse fit the same rhythmic pattern as verse 1? Does each line match the corresponding line in the first verse? If not, you will have trouble fitting it to the same melody.

Bridge & Pre-chorus

- Does the bridge introduce a completely new idea/thought that takes the song in a different direction?
- If you are using a pre-chorus, does it build up energy into the chorus?

Song Structure

- Have you made a conscious decision about song structure? Does your chosen structure suit this particular song (e.g. V1 CH V2 CH BR CH)? Try some different structures and see which one you prefer.

Section Contrast

- Do all your song sections (e.g. verses, pre-chorus, chorus, bridge) consist of an even number of lines (giving a balanced/resolved feeling)? Would the song benefit from one of the sections being an odd number of lines (and hence giving an unbalanced/unresolved feeling to that section – perhaps matching the meaning of that section)?
- Are all of your song sections using the same rhyme scheme (e.g. AAAA, ABAB etc)? If so, try changing the rhyme scheme in one or more sections.
- Are each of your song sections built of the same number of lines (e.g. 4 lines)? If so, try something different on one or more of the sections.
- Are each of your song sections using the similar line lengths (e.g. short, medium, long). Try counting the number of syllables (even better count the number of stressed syllables if you know how to). If so, try changing things up a bit.
- Is your chorus now significantly different from your verses so that it is easy to spot the transitions and your song has some movement in it – it doesn't all sound the same?
- Is your bridge now significantly different from both the verse and the chorus so as to really stand out and reignite the listener's interest in the song. Is it a surprise to the listener?

Rhyme

- Are you using clichéd rhymes (love/above, me/see/be/free) that feel stale and unoriginal?
- Are you having to introduce irrelevant words/phrases to the song just to get a rhyme?
- Are you using rhyme to spotlight the important words in the song? If you just look at the rhyming words, can you still work out what the song is about?
- Are you only using perfect rhyme and not making use of the other 4 rhyme types?
- Does the order of the words seem strange or forced? This is often caused by attempts to rhyme. For example: *"The first day that I saw your face / I found in my heart a lonely place"*. The second line would more naturally be *"I found a lonely place in my heart"* but the order has been changed to force a rhyme – not good.

Tense & Point of View

- Is your use of tense consistent throughout the song? The song doesn't all need to be in the same tense throughout but it needs to be consistent and the reason for changing tense needs to be clear. E.g. V1: This is what I'm like now. V2: In the past, this happened, which explains why I became like this. BR: In the future maybe things will be different.
- If your song is in a single tense (e.g. present), try rewriting the song twice - in both of the other two tenses (e.g. past & future). Choose the version that you like the best.
- Is your point of view consistent (e.g. I, he/she, you)? For example, make sure that you are not referring to the same person as "he" in one place and "you" in another.
- If your song is written with a single point of view (e.g. I), trying rewriting the song twice in the other two points of view (he/she & you). Choose the version that you like the best.

Specificity

- How specific and detailed are your verbs, nouns and adjectives? The more specific/detailed the better. E.g. instead of “I saw her face”, try “I gazed across the hallway at Cathy’s freckled features” (“gazed” instead of “saw”, “Cathy” instead of “her”, “freckled features” instead of “face” and added more detail “across the hallway”). Go through your lyric and try and replace general/generic words with more specific/detailed equivalents. This will help your listeners to connect much more with what you are trying to say.

Moving Away From Your ‘Default’ Behaviour

- Do your verses have the same number of lines that you usually use for verses? If so, try changing things.
- Is your chorus the same number of lines that you usually use for choruses?
- Are you using the same rhyme scheme(s) that you usually use?
- Are your line lengths roughly the same as you usually use?
- Are you using the same song structure that you usually use?
- Is your song about the same type of subject that you usually write about? If so, try something different next time.

General

- Are your lyrics using a conversational tone i.e. how you would talk to others?
- Have you sufficiently used the tool of repetition in your song (it isn’t cheating and it IS necessary to make the song memorable)

Show Us that You’re Out There!

Did you love or hate this checklist? What points did you like, dislike, agree with or disagree with? Have you used some of these points and it made an improvement to your lyric? Let us know using one of the contact methods below. We’d love to hear from you.

Twitter: @RavenousRaven <http://twitter.com/RavenousRaven>

Website Contact Us Form: <http://SongwritingLab.com/contact-us/>

RavenousRaven is a Songwriting author, Songwriting teacher and mentor and runs The Social Media Songwriting Community - Songwriting Lab.

@RavenousRaven & SongwritingLab.com. Please do not copy, share or reproduce all or part of this document in any medium without the express written permission of the author. If you wish to do so, please contact the author as above. Anyone can download this document from the homepage of <http://SongwritingLab.com>