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The following pages are excerpted from *The Songwriter's Toolkit: From Pen to Push Play*. This is a representation of the page's contents. You will notice that the pages leap past the normal sequence in order to offer a broader sample of the book's content. The actual book contains 174 contiguous pages.

THE SONGWRITER'S TOOLKIT

from pen to push **play**



STEVEN BLANTON

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SONGWRITER'S
TOOLKIT

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TATE PUBLISHING & *Enterprises*

The Songwriter's Toolkit

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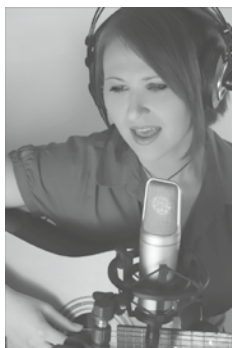
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The Songwriter

“Songwriters aren’t born ... they’re persistent.”

Out Of The Blue Clear Sky



The idea comes from almost anywhere, out of the blue. A car horn blows just as the wipers turn on, and you hear a melody. Then later, you are out for coffee, and someone says something that sounds like the first line of a verse, and you think, *This could work*. It’s *that* interesting phrase that triggers the creative synapses to fire in your brain. Even the way the words roll off your tongue has a rhythm. The melody and the phrase pair up in your head, and you sense there is something happening. You grab your pocket recorder and capture the idea that is erupting like magma from a volcano. You run home with your working idea and



pick up your guitar to see if it all still feels like a song, and it does!

You have the makings of a song built on inspiration, skill, and hard work. Now you have something to work with, and you run with it. The rest of the song may be birthed like a water buffalo or cocooned and born gradually. Either way, when it is mature, it is an amazing thing that takes on a life of its own.

Welcome To My Synthesized World

Such is the world of the songwriter. The basis for a great song is found in the simplest of things around you. Each of us is exposed to similar things every day. But you are the songwriter who can take it all in, synthesize it, and turn out a work of art for others to enjoy. The absorbing of life for the songwriter is both the burden and the blessing, because it allows for empathic views into the worlds of others. The pain someone feels will deliver hope to another through the power of a song. Hopes that are dashed are memorialized by the conscientious observation of you, the songwriter. You give voice to the voiceless but can shush the overbearing in the same song. Sometimes it is good to just commiserate with someone. The incredible power to deliver on social justice or make a declaration of decadence is limited only by the skill and creativity you bring as the writer.

But it is also in your power to delight the audience with laughter and warm the heart with hope. Your gift is to put melodic expression to the inspired and joyous voices and

lighten the load of the weary and burdened. The songwriter gives every singer something to sing about and brings limitless commentary on every aspect of life. And most amazingly, you can do it all in three and a half minutes!

In a Word

If you are a lyric writer, you have a great fondness for words and their meaning. You probably love to look up the definitions and search out the roots of their origin. You may also love how they sound in a sentence or in a conversation. You may love to look for a lot of alliterations, allowing for an allocation of linguistic latitude along the way, just for the experience of saying them in a row. You would be writing something even if you weren't a songwriter, because you are born to write. Maybe you are already a writer of other formats or genres, and the skill of songwriting could be an extension of your already creative brain. Whatever you bring to the writer's session by way of experience or lack, there is a place for you and the enthusiasm you bring to the timeless craft of putting words in the performer's mouth.

This manual comes from that same passion for great songs. It is designed with you in mind. Whether you have just begun to discover your talent or you have been writing for years, *The Songwriter's Toolkit* will be a potent resource. It is a supportive tool intended to inspire, excite, and reinvigorate any songwriter. It is written as a motivating tool with an insightful approach, making *The Songwriter's Toolkit* essential to carry with you in your songwriter's bag.

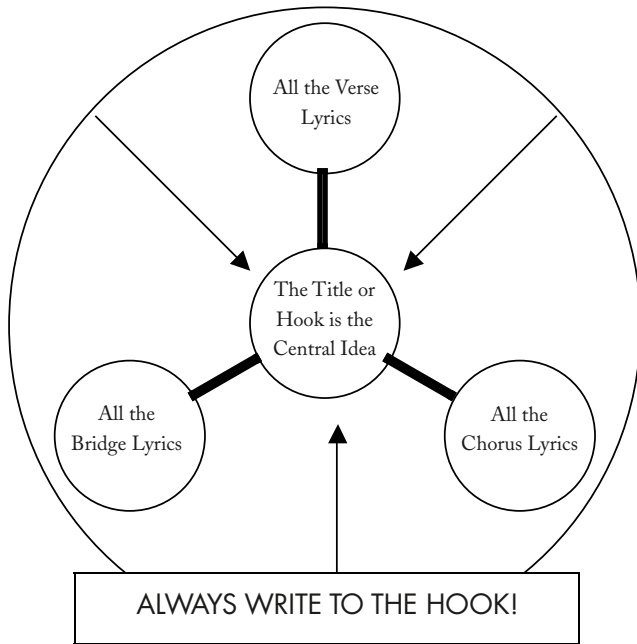


Write to the Hook

In most pop genres, the hook is the most attractive and coveted part of the song. The sooner you can arrive at it, the better off you are in terms of pleasing the audience. We will discuss the form of the song later, but we must at least mention that songs with short intros, four-line verses with eight bars, and a killer chorus is the driving force behind many successful careers. Pop, country, alternative, and all the AC venues want the chorus with its clever title/hook to hit hard and strong. This is the staple of heavy airplay rotation, a well-paying proposition.

A hook that is the first line of the chorus will be the payoff for the ready-radio crowd. This doesn't exclude placing the title in the middle or at the end of the chorus. It is just that the audience is trained to expect the chorus within the first several seconds of the song. This means that you must write the verse as a means to get to the chorus and deliver the hook line. In fact, every word of the song should be written as a means to set up the hook. The buzzword here is to *write to the hook*. And since in many songs the hook is found in the chorus, the chorus is the main event of the song. The chorus is the centerpiece of the song, because it is the most singable and usually rises melodically. The modern audience has learned when to expect the chorus and wants it to be there on time.





These are certainly generalities, and there is no hard and fast rule regarding the placement of the hook. For every example I give, you may be thinking of the exception to the rule. *There are always exceptions to the rule* in songwriting. Admittedly, the hook could be placed in several different locations within the song, which is discussed in the next few paragraphs. It will depend upon the genre and the outline of the song. But, if you are looking for commercial success, it will benefit you to work within the parameters of a successful cadre.

The Pseudo-Hook

Having a great title often brings out the best in you as a

writer. This could mean that you have written another line that rivals the title or hook for dominance somewhere in your song. It may be so strong it could actually serve as the hook itself. What a great problem to have! This could be called the *pseudo-hook*. Because you have already chosen your title, you will want to move the pseudo-hook into a subordinate position. It may even challenge the title for popularity, which means you have another line to create a memory for the audience. An example of use of a pseudo-hook can be found in the Diana Krall cover tune written by George and Ira Gershwin in 1927, “S Wonderful.” The title is found in the first line but is supported by the last line of the chorus, “... you should care for me,” which could easily be the title as well. The pseudo-hook is also found in the Fleetwood Mac hit “Don’t Stop.” The title again appears in the first and second line but is supported by the repeated line “Yesterday’s gone, yesterday’s gone.” There is a tag line that says, “Don’t you look back” that is repeated also. Either of those lines could actually serve as the title but take the subordinate position. The Foo Fighters song “The Pretender” has a line that repeats more than any other, “What if I say.” This could have been the title of this song, but it is simply a supporting line. If the pseudo-hook makes your strong hook even stronger, then it makes your song even more commercial in quality.

However, when you have completed your song and step back to read the lyrics, it should be clear that the *title* is the key component of the song. If it reads like you



have too many titles, you will weaken its strength and limit its appeal to the audience. You do have the option of saving the pseudo-hook (or hooks) for another song and another day. If it is truly that strong, it may be the right choice to use it as a full-on title of your next song. Reading student lyrics, I have seen some pretty extreme examples of too many titles showing up for the role call. You must write to the title, and you can't do that if you have several titles. Your song only becomes confusing to the audience, and it must be about clarity and singular focus. You have a point you are making, and it is best made by using every word to set up that title. This is the case for the song recorded by Lee Ann Womack and written by Jess Brown, Brett Jones, and Tony Lane. "A Little Past Little Rock" is a fabulous title. It is followed by a line that strengthens the song enormously: "But a long way from over you." If you look at this line, you will see that it has the strength to be a title on its own: "A Long Way From Over You." But the writers, intuitively aware of the strength of the subordinate position, placed the line accordingly. It doesn't clutter the song with extra titles but builds toward the title in every way. This song is a great example of using every word to point back to the hook. The artist, producer, and A&R director surely saw a radio single in this song.

From another genre is the Frank Sinatra 1953 classic "I've Got The World On A String." The title is prominently placed in the song, but the last line is "Look at me I'm in love." "I'm In Love" is actually a strong second, contenting for the main idea of the song. It is

The AAA form is the least used and is the most simplistic form after twelve-bar blues. In the AAA form, the song is unfolded in verse form only, and as you can see in the illustration below, there is no B or C section to the song. Each of these verses will most likely use your title on the first line or the last of the verse in each section. There isn't a chorus or a bridge, since the verses deliver the goods. Being the most simplistic in form doesn't mean it is the simplest to write. In fact, AAA is *the* most difficult in many ways because of its lack of a B section. Not having a chorus or a bridge to tidy up the missing details presents crippling challenges for many writers. This form also tests what mettle you are of from the melodic standpoint. Writing an interesting and memorable melody for three or four verses back to back can be a song buster.

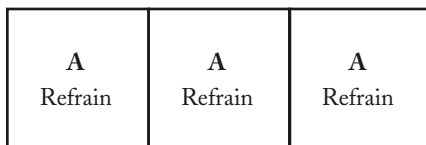
Title Here A Or Here	Title Here A Or Here	Title Here A Or Here
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The duo of Simon and Garfunkel adapted an English folk song known as “Scarborough Fair” in 1966, and it is sectioned in AAA form. It is bridgeless and chorus-less but was a major hit for them. The AAA form is widely used in folk ballads since the lyrics convey everything needed in the song without a chorus. Incidentally, besides the title, this song also possesses the *refrain* in



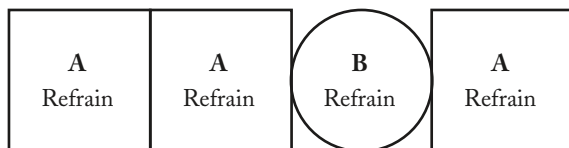
the first line of every pass of “parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme,” though it is not the title.

Another version of the AAA form doesn’t place the title in the first line but uses a *refrain* placed at the end of each verse.



An example of this use is another very well-known song by Simon and Garfunkel and penned by Paul Simon, “Bridge Over Troubled Water.” The use of a refrain is not just relegated to folk music. The Bon Jovi smash hit “Wanted Dead or Alive” uses the technique of building the title right into the refrain at the end of each verse. It is a form used by the artist Sting with excellence in “Fields of Gold.” There are many other examples you might notice with a little research.

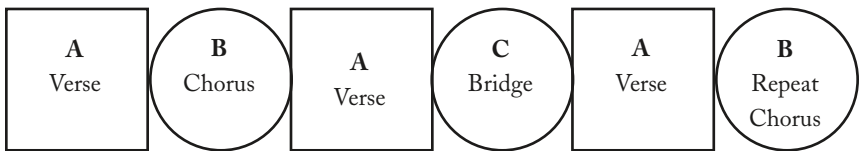
There is also the AABA form that incorporates a bridge or two into the mix.



The 80s hit from Tears for Fears, “Everybody Wants to Rule the World,” written by Chris Hughes, Roland Orzabal, and

Ian Stanley, is a good example of this use. Notice that the verses and the bridges all include the refrain.

The early pop hits of the 1950s and 1960s were often two and a half minutes or less in length. This time limitation did not leave much room for turn arounds or an unessential bridge. It was a “get it said and get out” kind of arrangement to leave them wanting more. Since then, the two minute song has evolved into a longer piece and allows for, and even requires, lengthening. Bridges, middle eight sections, and repeated choruses rule the day. I would write a usual form in sections like this: ABACAB. This is only one of many forms you may use.

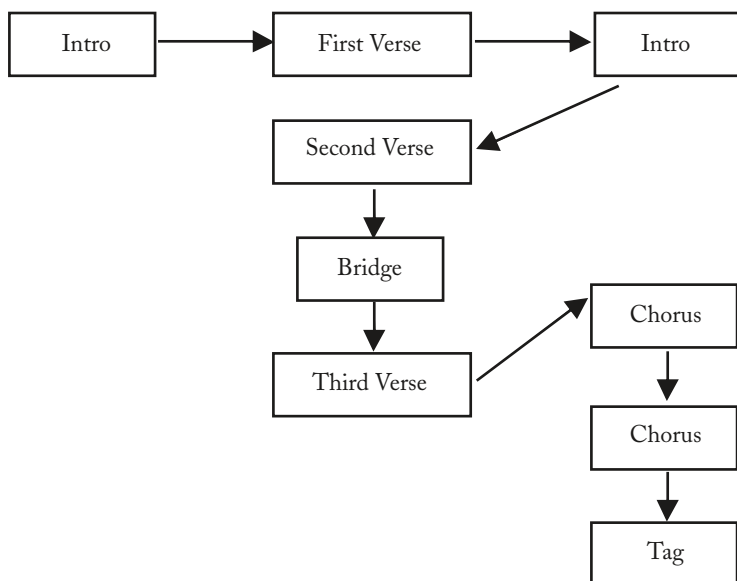


You may see forms such as ABABA, AABABA, or ABCA. Notice that B is sometimes the bridge and sometimes the chorus, depending on when it shows up in the song. There is no rule that says it must be this way or any certain way at all. When it comes to writing a song, you are the master. But as always, it is probably best to defer to the wisdom of success.

The use of form is a good time for pragmatism; if it works for others, then it might work for you as well. The strength of looking at your song through this lens is to help identify the most frequent use of a song form in order to empower you as a writer. This can then be



translated into a roadmap of your song: intro-V-C-V-B-V-C-C-tag. The diagram below helps you see the function and placement of each section when we apply the usual terms.



Throw Me a Line to Climb

One other piece you might want to be aware of when setting out your song's roadmap is the *climb*. The climb is also known as the *build*, or *pre-chorus*. As the name implies, it is a two or more line section. You may think of it as the end of the verse or the beginning of the chorus that sets up the true chorus. It is actually the B in the form of your song, if you have a verse as the A



You Have a Lovely Figurative

“Metaphors have a way of holding the most truth in the least space.”

—Orson Scott Card

Metaphorically Speaking



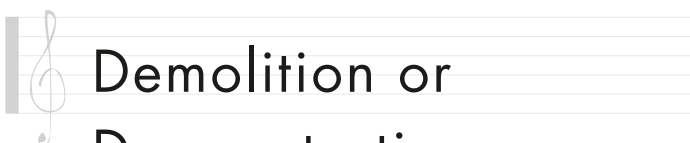
When we say something that isn't literal (being true and exact), it is *figurative*. A figurative statement is representative and emblematic of the actual or real but is not literal. To say “This brick is hard” is a literal statement, because it represents the fact of the matter. But when we say “This stale bread is a brick,” we know this isn't true and that it is said only as a figure of speech in order to make a point. It is used for emphasis and is intended to be an exaggeration with an expectation that others under-



stand it is not the actual truth. When we understand the term *literal*, its misuse makes us aware of some very funny faux pas. When we say something like, “I literally coughed my lungs out,” it isn’t literal at all—it’s figurative. To literally cough out your lungs would, of course, mean death, and you couldn’t tell the story of how you coughed out your lungs. You must cough them out figuratively.

For the sake of distinction, let me explain the difference between a *metaphor* and a *simile*, small though it is. A simile compares two disparate things by the use of three tying words: *as*, *than*, or *like*. A metaphor makes a direct comparison without the use of the tying words. It is often difficult to keep the two terms clear because of this very narrow differentiator. As mentioned above, “This stale bread is a brick” is the declarative statement that the bread *is* a brick, making it a metaphor. With a small adjustment, it will be a simile, as in this example, “This stale bread is hard *as* a brick.” A song title like the Paul Simon single “Loves Me *Like* A Rock” is by definition a simile, while The Verve’s song “Love *Is* Noise” is a metaphor. Be sure not to assume that every time you see the words *as*, *like*, or *than* that it is always being used as a connecting word for a simile. This is simply not the case.

Metaphors are an instrument of speakers and writers alike. There are several forms that metaphors take, and each form has its own specific application in the English vernacular. While there are many forms to explore, we will look at the main ones that are faithfully used by songwriters. One of the rules of English composition class was that we should never, under any circumstances,



Demolition or Demonstration

“So there’s the whole idea that whatever it is that you believe, it can never be valid unless you have some consensus reality demonstration.”

—Todd Rundgren

Demo Mode



Your song has been assembled using the tools you have learned. The segments and sentences that you have collected are no longer a vague unwritten concept but exist as an extension in space. What was just a raw idea has been honed, shaped, polished, and molded into an actual song! You have read and sung your new song to examine it for flaws and weaknesses and have rewritten and strengthened it for



content. You feel proud of your work and excited that it is completed. The lyrics are unique and the melody divine. You have written a great song and need some way to show it to anybody out there who is looking for their next hit. It is time to set it free to exist apart from its creator and begin the process of getting it heard by decision makers. It needs to be demoed in order to be pitched to the prospective artist or producer.

The question of demos is a difficult one because it is so subjective as to how they need to be produced. Should you try to make it sound like the intended artist? The jury is out on the proper way to demo. I have read about it, quizzed artists and writers about it, and produced demos myself to find the right or best way to display my song or the songs of my writers. Some people want a full-blown record so they can get the full substance of the song. Anything less would be too sparse for them. But some producers are hindered by the fact that someone else has predetermined the sound of the song by giving them a full demo arrangement. It is crazy making. I do know that most of the successful songwriters demo the song all the way out like a record would sound to them. If it calls for a full band with strings, then that is the way they do it. If it is a piano or guitar and vocal song, then that is all they do. This has been my philosophy as well.

Demos do get very expensive if you are not able to produce something of quality at home. Many demos are done by programmers who use MIDI modules to play all the parts. This is an excellent way to demo your

The Legal Stuff and the Publisher

“I hate politics, hate deals, and deal-making,
hate meeting with attorneys and agents.”

—Kathie Lee Gifford

What about My Copyright?



The United States Congress (www.copyright.gov) writes the laws of copyright and intellectual property rights for U.S. citizens. As it stands currently, songs

are protected by the mere fact that you have created them. In theory, you do not have to defend your copyright for it to be yours as a rule. The song is legally yours from its inception. You have every right to publish your own song at will. It is yours and can be performed, recorded, and distributed throughout the universe as you please.



There is some possibility of losing control of the song through copyright infringement. If you do need to go to court and defend your copyright, you may do so. Although you are not at fault, you must still be prepared to pay for the attorney's fees for your song's defense. You will also be required to register your copyright before going to court, as stated on their Web site, "Before an infringement suit may be filed in court, registration is necessary for works of U.S. origin." If you register the copyright ahead of the infringement date and the lawsuit is eventually won, the offending party has to cover your attorney's fee. This is a benefit of registering before the offense occurs. Still, the law allows that "registration may be made at any time within the life of the copyright." I am not an attorney and don't pretend to be one, so you should always seek legal counsel about this if you have concerns. But a little time spent on the copyright Web site will help explain a great deal. Be sure that when you are looking for copyright info that you are on the official government page. All U.S. pages end with .gov, so don't be duped by someone looking for your personal information or charging you for doing something that is free on the .gov site.

You know that you *can* register your song, *but should you?* The concern is that an unscrupulous person will hear the song, like it, and slap his name on it as the originator. I have been around the music business my entire life and have never personally met anyone who had a problem with song theft. That is not to say that it doesn't happen, because it certainly does. It does appear to be a rare thing, however.

Another reason not to register your song may be that the song will never see any commercial use. There isn't any reason to register a song that no one will ever record or even hear. If you write a song that you don't see will have use beyond you singing it on your front porch, it would be an exercise in futility to officially copyright it in my opinion.

Thirdly, the copyright process can be expensive (go to <http://www.copyright.gov/docs/fees.html> for current fees), and most writers don't have the extra money for that expense. If you add that to the cost of demos and multiply it by the number of songs you have, it becomes a burden. However, you may copyright a "body of works" under one registration. It requires that all the copyright information, in terms of writers' names (co-writers for example) for every song, be exactly the same, otherwise you must file separate copyright applications for each song where names are different. With that one caveat, you could copyright a number of songs together if you choose. There may or may not be legal issues later for pulling a single song out of the "body of works" for use on a project or if it becomes valuable and gets picked up by a publisher. The copyright is simply one big blanket on all your songs in the "body of works" approach.

My Co-writer's Keeper

In several sections of this book I have made reference to a *co-writer*. Co-writing is pretty standard and helps fill in the spaces that go lacking for some solo writers. It is

