

# SONGWRITING BASICS

## STRUCTURE

### VERSE

Most songs begin with a verse. Verses give opportunity for establishing the theme of the song. The story of the song unfolds in the verses.

If you write multiple verses:

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Example 1: "How Great is Our God" by Chris Tomlin

Example 2: "Beautiful One" by Tim Hughes

### CHORUS

Your verses should lead you to the chorus, which is the \_\_\_\_\_ of the song. It contains the \_\_\_\_\_...the part of the melody that gets stuck in your head.

People may not remember your verses, but they should remember the chorus.

### CHANNEL or PRE-CHORUS

Not all songs have a channel, but it can be an effective means to move from verse to chorus. A channel creates \_\_\_\_\_ that builds up into the chorus.

Example: "Blessed Be Your Name" by Matt Redman

*Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise  
When the darkness closes in, Lord, still I will say*

### BRIDGE

A bridge generally flows out of a chorus, and then back into the chorus again.

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Example 1: "Beautiful One" by Tim Hughes

*You've opened my eyes to Your wonders new  
You've captured my heart with this love  
'Cause nothing on earth is as beautiful as You...*

## MELODY

What makes a good melody?

A strong melody is \_\_\_\_\_ (For a worship song, it also helps if the melody is \_\_\_\_\_.)

What makes a melody memorable? \_\_\_\_\_ *and* \_\_\_\_\_

1. Use a mixture of step motion (up and down the scale by step) and interval jumps.
2. Don't ramble on and on in the melody...it needs to have some repetition
3. A good melody should reach a "high point" just before the end. This can be a higher note in the range of the melody, a different chord or a rhythmic change.
4. Try making up a melody without using your instrument. Practice writing melodies (8 bars) in different keys (major and minor) and time signatures.

## LYRICS

Inspiration for a song comes in different ways for different people. Before beginning to write a song, THINK!

1. Do I have \_\_\_\_\_?
2. If yes, then what is the \_\_\_\_\_ of my song? Your theme needs to be strongly stated in the chorus.
3. How can I explore and express this theme in a fresh way?

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## FUN POETIC TRICKS

1. Approximate rhyme
2. Internal Rhyme
3. NOT RHYMING
4. Parallelism
5. Adjectives, adjectives!
6. Metaphors and Similes

## A FEW MORE TIPS...

1. Be mindful of lyrical density! (The number of syllables per measure of music)
2. Consider prosody – does the melody appropriately express the lyrical theme?
3. Avoid highly predictable rhymes.
4. Make sure each line contributes to the message of the song.
5. Beware of "fyllables" – syllables that take up space but contribute nothing.
6. Listen to good songs and find out what makes them work!

# SONGWRITING FOR CORPORATE WORSHIP

Kelanie Gloeckler

## TYPES OF CORPORATE WORSHIP SONGS

1. Joyful thanksgiving and praise
2. High praise
3. Songs of intimacy
4. Beauty realm / holiness songs
5. Pure scripture (Psalms, Apostolic prayers, etc)
6. Prayers and supplications
7. Repentance / Intercession
8. Songs that teach (promises of God, teachings of Jesus, etc.)
9. Prophetic declaration

## CONTENT

**“Songs are miniature injections into people; desire your injections to honor God.”**  
(Matt Redman, *The Heart of Worship*)

1. Every worship song has a theology
  - a. Songs teach
    - i. “You sing me your songs and I’ll tell you your theology.”
    - ii. Corporate worship songs effect and develop what people believe and understand about God.
  - b. Consider writing about scriptural principles that are underemphasized in contemporary worship songs, such as...
    - i. \_\_\_\_\_
    - ii. \_\_\_\_\_
    - iii. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Find creative and fresh ways to express timeless Biblical truth
  
2. The message of the song must relate appropriately to the corporate Body of Christ
  - a. Can the people relate to the message, make it their own, and encounter Jesus through it?
  - b. Not every worship song is a corporate worship song
  - c. Ask the Holy Spirit what is on the Father’s heart for the Body of Christ and for your local church
    - i. He will give you songs for the season!
    - ii. Songs are the best way to help everyone come into agreement, saying the same thing at the same time for the same reason

## SINGABILITY

**“Never honor the music above the people. Make every effort to write singable songs.”**  
(Matt Redman, *The Heart of Worship*)

***Remember: Writing for corporate worship means being a poet...but also being a Pastor!***

1. Consider the lyrical density of your song
  - a. Avoid trying to cram too many syllables into a 4-bar phrase
  - b. Remember that the congregation will need time to breath between phrases and sections of the song
  - c. If your verses are longer, or if you write multiple verses, then try to keep your chorus lyrically repetitive or uncomplicated
  
2. Consider the range of your song
  - a. If it is too limited, it will not be memorable or dynamic
    - i. Moving into a higher melodic range in the chorus helps to build the song dynamically out of the verse or channel
  - b. If it is too wide, it will not be user-friendly in a congregational setting
    - i. You want the song to be a vehicle to help the people engage in worship.
    - ii. The song needs to help take the people to a Jesus encounter...to help them touch God’s heart, and to be touched by God...not hinder them from that experience.
    - iii. Remember: The average member of the congregation is not as good a singer as you!
  - c. Get familiar with the ranges of the average male and female voice
  
3. The song must contain strong melodic lines that are simple yet memorable
  - a. Strong melodies contain within themselves both repetition and contrast
  - b. Large or difficult interval leaps in your melody line will make it harder for the average congregational worshiper to follow along. Use them sparingly!
  
4. The chorus should be the most memorable section of the song, which is accomplished through employing at least some of the following:
  - a. Keeping the lyrics simple (not too wordy)
  - b. Using repetition in the lyrics
  - c. Using repetition in the melody line itself
  - d. Making sure your chorus contains the “hook”

## **KELANIE'S DO NOT LIST**

1. Do not use too much 1st person writing, unless it ultimately is pointing to Jesus Christ
  - a. "I need / I want" versus "I believe / I love / I am (in Christ)"
2. Do not use clichés, obvious rhymes, or overused phrases
3. Do not be afraid to write simple, AB songs (verse and chorus)
4. Do not be afraid to write complex songs with arrangements (intro w/hook, 2 verses, chorus and bridge)
5. Do not be afraid to write with emotion, conviction, and passion
6. Do not ramble lyrically or try to cover too much ground in a song
7. Do not be discouraged if you write a bad song, as this does happen sometimes
8. Do not write from chords (develop the melody first and then experiment with chords)

## **KELANIE'S DO LIST**

1. Do use metaphors, similes, adjectives, and lots of imagery
2. Do find fresh ways to express timeless truth
3. Do read to develop your vocabulary
4. Do listen and pay attention to the way others write and arrange songs
5. Do hone your craft
  - a. Spend time writing regularly
  - b. Creative writing / journaling
  - c. Writing exercises
  - d. Taking guitar, piano or voice lessons
6. Do write with uncompromising excellence and creativity
7. Do make sure your high point melodically is your high point lyrically
8. Do try developing melody without your instrument
9. Do write lyrics that are easy for the congregation to relate to and make their own
10. Do write songs that are thematically supportive and appropriate for the season your church is in