Song Lyrics 101

OR, HOW TO TURN SCRAMBLED EGGS INTO A SONG

Presented by
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Student learning outcomes

After attending this workshop, students should be able to do the following:

- Recognize the basic structure of song lyrics
  - including rhyming patterns and meter
- Practice strategies to create lyrics
Scrambled eggs
Scrambled eggs, oh my baby how I love your legs
Not as much as I love scrambled eggs,
Oh we should eat some scrambled eggs

Waffle fries, oh my darling how I love your thighs
Not as much as I love waffle fries
Oh have you tried your waffle fries?

They are so damn good that they should be illegal
They’re like regular fries, but they’re shaped like a waffle

Tofu wings, oh my baby when I hear you sing
All I think about is tofu wings
Oh did you bring the tofu wings?

etc…

Do you recognize this song?
Listen and try to guess the song

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOSL2VDZAag
"Yesterday" by the Beatles (Lennon/McCartney)

Yesterday love was such an easy game to play.  
Now I need a place to hide away.  
Oh, I believe in yesterday.

Suddenly, I'm not half the man I used to be.  
There's a shadow hanging over me.  
Oh, yesterday came suddenly.

Why she had to go, I don't know, she wouldn't say.  
I said something wrong, now I long for yesterday.  

Yesterday love was such an easy game to play.  
Now I need a place to hide away.  
Oh, I believe in yesterday.

Why she had to go, I don't know, she wouldn't say.  
I said something wrong, now I long for yesterday.  

Yesterday love was such an easy game to play.  
Now I need a place to hide away.  
Oh, I believe in yesterday.

Mm mm mm mm mm mm mm mm
"Yesterday" by the Beatles (Lennon/McCartney)

Yesterday love was such an easy game to play. A
Now I need a place to hide away. A
Oh, I believe in yesterday. A

Suddenly I'm not half the man I used to be. B
There's a shadow hanging over me. B
Oh, yesterday came suddenly. B

Why she had to go (C), I don't know (C), she wouldn't say. A
I said something wrong (D), now I long (D) for yesterday. A

Why she had to go (C), I don't know (C), she wouldn't say. A
I said something wrong (D), now I long (D) for yesterday. A

Yesterday love was such an easy game to play. A
Now I need a place to hide away. A
Oh, I believe in yesterday. A

Oh, I believe in yesterday. A
Mm mm mm mm mm mm mm mm
Some song lyric basics

● They rhyme: work out the verse and chorus pattern of your favourite song/s (use A, B, C etc.)

I heard that you’re settled down A
That you found a girl and you’re married now A
I heard that your dreams came true B
Guess she gave you things I didn’t give to you B
• The words have rhythm: count out the syllables, keep syllables (meter) the same

**With the lights out (4)** A

**It’s less dangerous (4)** B

**Here we are now (4)** (A - Slant rhyme)

**Entertain us (4)** B

• Too many syllables makes a verse or chorus sound rushed (BUT, it depends on your genre)
SONG STRUCTURE

What are the basics of song structure? Let’s review “Yesterday”

Basic Song Structure (videos):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXifpcE7ewU

Verse, Chorus, Bridge Explanation (video - contemporary egs):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hE_qOY5GkH0
Basic Song Structures

1.
Verse
Chorus
Verse
Chorus

2.
Verse
Pre-chorus
Verse
Chorus
Bridge
Chorus

3.
Intro
Verse
Pre-chorus
Chorus
Verse
Pre-chorus
Bridge
Chorus
Song structure

- *Song structure differs between music genres*
- *Research your genre and break down the structure you want to follow - or change!*
- *Listen widely - incorporate ideas from different music styles*
- *A you a traditionalist or an innovator?*
SOME Elements of song lyrics

- Words have a rhyme and rhythm (meter)
- Appeal to your emotions
- Address contemporary topics; social, political and personal
- Use strong visual and sensory imagery
- Contain relatable, universal human themes
- Tell a story
- Often use the second person “you”

Alicia Keys says the magic of music is that “we can relate to each other” through song.
Grammy award winner, Lucinda Williams’ lyric and music notebook
(center, above)
Topics

- Love love love love love love love: heartbreak, jealousy, unrequited love, lost love, bad love, good love.....Give it a twist!
- Personal life: triumphs, failures, life lessons, first love, hometown
- Seasonal songs: New Year, Christmas, seasons (Summer, Winter etc.)
- A character eg. Michael Jackson’s “Billie Jean”
- Friendship
- Family
- The weekend

Choose a UNIVERSAL TOPIC then make it RELATABLE with SPECIFIC information and CONCRETE details.
Where to begin?

- A song title
- Brainstorm ideas in a mind map
- Freestyle - sing out loud into a mic, computer or phone voice recorder [http://www.avid.com/pro-tools-first](http://www.avid.com/pro-tools-first) (Free App)
- Deconstruct the verse and chorus of your favorite song and replace it with your own lyrics
- Collaborate with a musician - they play, you sing, rap or freestyle
- Use a rhyming dictionary or [www.rhymezone.com](http://www.rhymezone.com)

Write down or record everything!
Songs are “a natural, honest, true expression of your own experience, or another person’s.”

-Alicia Keys

“Songwriters write songs, but they really belong to the listener.”

-Jimmy Buffett, *A Pirate Looks at Fifty*
Exercise - PICK ONE

1. Re-write the lyrics to “Yesterday” - be funny or serious
2. Deconstruct the structure and lyrics of your favorite song, or a popular song, and replace them with your own
3. Pick a topic, brainstorm ideas for a lyric, outline the song structure, choose a rhyming pattern
4. Start with a title. Freewrite everything you can on that topic for 10 minutes. Write without stopping.
For a songwriter, you don't really go to songwriting school; you learn by listening to tunes. And you try to understand them and take them apart and see what they're made of, and wonder if you can make one, too.

— Tom Waits —
Further reading & viewing

Reading


Videos


Upcoming workshops: Wednesday or Thursday 1-2pm

Writing Skills Workshops
YOUR Writing Process—Thursday, February 16th
Revising Strategies— Thursday, March 2nd
Exploring Poetry - Thursday, March 16th
Essentials of Research—Wednesday, April 5th
Introduction to Citation—Thursday, April 6th
MLA Citation—Wednesday, April 19th
APA Citation— Thursday, April 20th

Learning Skills Workshops
http://www.sbcc.edu/clrc/workshops.php
Thank you

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