

Musical Futures

An approach to teaching and learning

Title: Resources to accompany 'A Guide to Songwriting'

MF Teacher Pack Link: A Guide to Songwriting

(www.musicalfutures.org.uk/songwriting)

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Explanation:

The following optional student prompt sheets provide further information for students writing their own songs in the classroom. It is designed to be used in conjunction with the Songwriting Guide, and for students to have access to should they need them.

Prompt Sheet 1: Adding to your song

If you have written a chorus and verse (or verses) of your song, consider some of the following ways of adding to and improving the structure:

- An **introduction (intro)** comes at the beginning of a song. It may be in a different tempo from the main song (usually slower) and can be quite short. It is also often rhythmically freer in performance than the rest of the song. The intro opens up the song and prepares the listener for what it is about
- The **coda** comes at the end of a song; it is sometimes called the **outro**. The coda can be the same as the intro, or the same music with new lyrics, or it could be something completely new. The coda finishes the song off and tidies up any loose ends. It can be helpful to have a coda if the main song doesn't sound complete. It is also possible for the coda to be repeated again and again and faded out. (You can do this with a chorus also, or even a verse, though that is less usual)
- If you want to add something new and another verse or chorus is not the answer, there are other sections which may be added to the basic structure. These new sections may be called **bridge**, **middle eight**, **link** or **coda**, and they may be placed anywhere helpful in a song
- Good places for new sections are between the third verse and the repeat of the chorus, to add a sense of anticipation before the chorus returns; or after the second chorus, where they can tell a different part of the story. In that case, the chorus is usually repeated for a third time to end the song
- Another useful addition to a song – because it changes the focus and keeps the listeners interested – is to have one of the sections played as an **instrumental** rather than sung. The instrumental can be based on any section of the song, but it often works best as a verse because it is really another way of telling the same story. (Also, it is usually stronger when the chorus itself is always sung; that fixes it in the listener's mind)
- The instrumental is often called a **solo**, especially when it gives an instrumentalist a chance to show some clever improvising or playing

Prompt Sheet 2: Finishing your song

These questions are designed to help you to finish your song and to check that you are completely happy with it. Ask your teacher or one of your friends if you need some help deciding the answers to the questions.

- Does your song build and get more interesting as it goes through?
- Could you add some riffs or other ideas which energise the song?
- A song can get your immediate attention by using a hook: a short phrase of music and words which sticks in your mind. Does your song have a 'hook'?
- Is there a phrase in your song – music or lyrics – which never sounds quite right? Or is there a rhyme which, however often you sing it, always sounds a bit off? Are you sure that nothing could be changed for the better?
- Many songs are spoilt by being over-written. Are there any words or phrases you can take out without losing something? Is every verse necessary?
- Is the tune too similar all the way through your song? Could you change one of the chords to give the harmony an unexpected lift?
- Could the accompaniment work better? Is the rhythm really tight?
- Does the overall texture of the song allow the main message to get through? Not all the different instrumental sounds need to be as loud as each other; is your backing well balanced? Is it the same all the way through? Do you ever have any glimpses of silence?
- How does your bass line work? Could you change some notes – without changing the chord progressions – to make it better?
- How about the drum pattern? What if you were to anticipate the off-beat slightly by playing it just before it is expected?
- Is there a need for some vocal harmonies? Just adding another voice singing the main tune every now and then can really lift a song
- Have you noted or recorded everything you need to remember the whole song? What if the group working on it changes? Would the ones remaining be able to take it forward without the ones who have left?

Prompt Sheet 3: If you just can't get started

Lyrics

- Discuss how you feel when you wake up on a Monday, a Friday and a Sunday. These could be the subjects for your three verses. For the chorus, discuss what is the same about 'me', who goes through all these changes.
- Try and remember the last time you were really happy. Describe where you were and why you were happy (Verse 1). Describe what you were doing and what you were thinking (Verse 2). Describe exactly how you were feeling (Verse 3). For the Chorus, say how you are feeling now.
- Think about the street/area where you live. In the first verse, think about the look of the street, the houses, shops etc. In the second verse, write about the people on the street, who they are, what they are thinking. In the chorus describe how you feel about your street/area. Then, write a third verse about what you would like to change about your street/area.

Music

- With a steady rock rhythm, a good heavy first beat and a strong offbeat, $\underline{1} - 2 - 3 - 4, \underline{1} - 2 - 3 - 4$, at a medium speed, try playing the following chord progression (one bar each chord):

A major, D minor, A major, E major
G major, E major, G major, E major

Clap a football chant rhythm and make an instrumental version of it with the drums. Split it into four equal bars or double bars (repeating if necessary). Add a bass note of E to the first bar, G to the second, A to the third, B to the fourth. Go round and round this, trying different chords on top. As an alternative, try C instead of A (third bar).

Riffs

Make a song based on the following riff:

Gotta go
Now, gotta
Go now
Gotta go
Now

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Here are some lines you may wish to use:

Time is running out and so am I
No time to stop, No time to stay
Here is where I mustn't be