

TIPS FOR WRITING MUSIC

TIP

Sampling from existing records is also a good way to get started, but remember that if you want to release a recording commercially, any samples will have to be cleared by the original owners.

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– CHAPTER 2

When you get stuck: try experimenting with unusual features like odd chords, or odd length bars and phrases (most music is in 4/4, built in 4 bar phrases). Do something that goes against what you already have, such as melody notes that clash with the chords, or ideas from opposing styles.

Don't be frightened about 'pinching' ideas from existing music, as long as you don't simply copy and infringe copyright!

Focus on what you're trying to say.

Try playing your favourite chord sequence backwards; if this is too much, just reverse part of it. Also try converting a song you know into a minor key.

Build as much variation and contrast into the structure of your songs as possible. If your verse has lots of short words in a choppy rhythm, for instance, try using longer, sustained ones in the chorus. Also, vary the length of the sections, and add extra bars, bridges and so on.

Start your compositions from a range of different basic ideas – a chord sequence, a key, a different time signature, a riff, a melody, a groove, a lyric, a sample, a sound. If you always start from the same place all your compositions can end up sounding the same. Try different instruments.

Write or jam with someone else; their strengths might complement your weaknesses, and vice versa. Creating need not be a lonely experience.

Be inspired!
Go for a walk, be in a different environment. Take time out from writing, return to it in a different frame of mind or even different time of the day, this may change your mood or outlook.

Keep it simple!
'Less is more' – it's a cliché, but so often true. A simple idea honestly and convincingly presented, communicates very strongly. Quality, not quantity.

Use existing songs as a launch-pad for your own material. Write new words for an existing song, then put a new tune to these words.

Sing a tune over one constant chord, or bass note.

Listen to other types of music to learn new tricks and get ideas, for example, some country/roots type artists will throw in a chord which is totally out of the key used in rest of song. For example an E - A - B turn around followed by a "C" chord. Especially effective in bridges and middle 8.

Legal stuff

Song writing splits should be agreed at the time to save arguments later. The rights to the song are shared equally 50/50 between lyrics and music (although this rule is not strictly adhered to).

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Use technology – sequencers and drum tracks are good for setting up loops and other backing for you to play over.

Vary the dynamics so the song peaks and subsides, rather than staying on the same level. Altering the tempo can also work well to add drama or excitement.



"Singers are nothing without the songwriters because without the song, what would they sing?"

Albert Hammond



"One good thing about music, when it hits you feel no pain"

Bob Marley