

# Songwriting — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into finished songs you can play this week. Work through it in order: map a song structure, generate vivid lyric material and shape it, write a melody with a real hook, then build chord progressions and run a revision pass that gets the song done. Use the templates to plan your section map, run object-writing sprints, choose progressions by number, and check every draft against a craft checklist so you finish songs instead of abandoning them.

## Song Structure: The Architecture of a Song

Choose a form, map your sections before writing, and start the song from a strong center so every part points back to the title and hook.

### Worksheet: Map Your Song Before You Write It

Pick one of the three forms (verse-chorus, AABA, or verse-refrain), then write the section labels down the page and one line about what each section must accomplish. Protect your best idea by keeping the rest lean. Working title (write it at the top and keep it in view)

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Form chosen (verse-chorus / AABA / verse-refrain) and why it fits this idea

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Section map in order (e.g. Intro, V1, PC, CH, V2, PC, CH, BR, CH, Outro)

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One-line job for each section (what it must accomplish)

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Which section is the high point, and how you will keep it the high point

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Target total length and where the first chorus should land (seconds)

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### Exercise: Find Your Starting Center

Decide whether you are starting title-first, hook-first, or concept-first, then find a fresh angle on a universal feeling instead of stating the emotion outright.

- What is the universal feeling at the core (love, loss, longing, freedom, home)?

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- What is the smallest, truest, most specific image that proves that feeling (e.g. two coffee cups by the sink)?

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- Are you starting title-first, hook-first, or concept-first, and what is that center?

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- Could you write the song from an unexpected vantage (an object, a place, the other person)? Sketch the angle.

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## Checklist: Title and Hook Pressure-Test

- [ ] The title is short and sounds like something a real person would say
- [ ] The hook is singable out loud, away from any instrument
- [ ] It is memorable enough to repeat back after one or two hearings
- [ ] The title carries the emotion of the whole song in one line
- [ ] The title earns repetition (it rewards being sung many times)
- [ ] The section map shows the chorus or title as the clear payoff

## Lyric Writing: Saying Something That Lands

Generate concrete sensory material, choose a consistent point of view, set up the title as a payoff, and shape rhyme and meter so the words sing naturally.

### Exercise: Object-Writing Sprint (Seven Senses)

Set a timer for 10 minutes and write about a single object or memory tied to your song, diving in through all seven senses. Do not write a lyric yet, just generate rich, specific detail you can mine later.

- Sight, sound, smell: name the exact things in the scene, not generic ones (a screen door, cheap coffee, his chair pushed back).

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- Taste and touch: tie the image to the body (salt, a cold doorknob, a damp collar).

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- Body sense and organic sense: what is the physical motion and inner state (leaning, heart pounding, throat tight)?

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- Now circle the one or two details that carry the most emotional weight, those become your lines.

### Worksheet: Point of View and Title Payoff

Lock the perspective before drafting, then design the title so the verses set it up and it gains weight by the final chorus.

Point of view (1st person I / 2nd person you / 3rd person he-she-they) and why

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Vantage / angle (participant, observer, unexpected narrator, letter/address, shifting reveal)

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Title placement in the chorus (first line / last line / both / refrain position / withheld to the end)

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What tension or question the verses raise that the title resolves

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How the title means something new by the final chorus (the reveal or shift)

### Exercise: Fix Rhyme and Meter

Say each line out loud in natural speech, mark the stressed syllables, and make them land on strong beats. Replace any forced perfect rhyme with a near rhyme rather than twisting the line.

- Choose a rhyme scheme (AABB, ABAB, ABCB, or near-rhyme/free) and apply it consistently.

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- Read each line aloud, do any words get the wrong emphasis (be-CAUSE, quit-AR)? Rewrite so stress falls on strong beats.

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- List 3 to 5 near rhymes / family rhymes / assonance options for your key end-words so you are not forced into a cliché.

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- Do matching verses (V1 and V2) share the same syllable count and stress pattern so one melody carries

both?

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### Checklist: Lyric Quality Pass

- Abstract emotion lines are replaced with specific sensory images (show, do not tell)
- No unintended clichés survive in the final lyric
- Point of view is consistent and any shift is deliberate
- The title is set up as a payoff and lands at the planned spot
- No forced rhymes, near rhymes used where they keep the right word
- Stressed syllables fall on strong beats, matching verses share a stress pattern

### Melody: Making It Memorable

Shape melodic contour and range to create lift, use rhythm and repetition to build a hook, and fit words to notes so stress, vowels, and emotion all agree.

### Worksheet: Design Your Melodic Contour and Range

Before fixing exact pitches, draw the shape of each section as a rising/falling line and plan the range so the chorus has room to lift above the verse. Save the song high note for one key moment.

Verse contour and range (lower and narrower, leaving headroom) sketched as a shape

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Chorus contour and range (higher and wider for release) sketched as a shape

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Where the song high note (climax) lands and why (usually chorus or bridge)

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Mostly stepwise motion with how many deliberate leaps, and where they fall

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Which phrase endings stay unresolved (momentum) and where the chorus resolves to the home note

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### Exercise: Build the Hook Step by Step

Start from the title line and follow the five steps to turn its speech rhythm into a short, repeatable, signature hook. Test it from memory an hour later.

- Say the title out loud, what is its natural speech rhythm (the seed of the hook)?  

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- What pitch shape matches the emotion (rising for hope/question, falling for resolution/sorrow)?  

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- What one signature feature makes it memorable (a leap, a syncopation, a held note, a distinctive interval)?  

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- Sing it back from memory an hour later, did it stick? If not, simplify until it does.  

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### Exercise: Marry Melody and Lyric

Align the words and notes so the music spotlights what matters: key word on the best note, open vowels on the big notes, and room to breathe.

- What is the most important word in each line, and does it land on a strong beat and a high or long note?  

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- Does the climactic note of the chorus sit on an open vowel (ah, oh, ay)? If not, move the word or pick an opener synonym.  

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- Where are the breaths, are there gaps between phrases so a singer can breathe and the meaning phrases naturally?  

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- Which working order suits you (lyric-first, melody-first/top-line, or both together), and what did the back-and-  

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forth reveal?

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### Checklist: Melody and Hook Check

- Each section has a clear contour rising to one peak
- Verse sits lower and narrower so the chorus genuinely lifts
- The song high note is saved for one key moment
- There is one short, repeatable hook with a signature feature
- Big notes land on open vowels and on the important words
- Stressed syllables fall on strong beats and there is room to breathe

### Harmony and Finishing: Chords That Carry Emotion

Build the diatonic chords of your key, choose progressions by number to match the mood, add color chords, then finish and revise the song against a full craft checklist.

### Worksheet: Set Your Key and Number the Chords

Pick a key, write out its seven diatonic chords with their numbers, and choose a progression by number so you can transpose later to fit your singer. Note the function of each chord you use.

Key chosen (and the singer comfortable range it serves)

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The seven diatonic chords by number (1 maj, 2 min, 3 min, 4 maj, 5 maj, 6 min, 7 dim) in this key

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Verse progression by number (e.g. 1, 5, 6, 4) and in letters

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Chorus progression by number and in letters

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Major or minor overall feel, and any 6-minor moments where the harmony tracks a sad lyric

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### Exercise: Choose a Progression by Mood and Add Color

Match a proven progression to the feeling you need, then enrich it with color chords without leaving the key.

- Which proven progression fits your mood (1-5-6-4 uplift, 1-4-5 backbone, 6-4-1-5 yearning, 1-6-4-5 nostalgic, 2-5-1 jazzy)?

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- Do verse and chorus have different harmonic character to support the lift (e.g. minor-leaning verse into bright major chorus)?

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- Which color will you add: a seventh, a sus2/sus4, an add9, a slash-chord bass walk, or the borrowed 4 minor?

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- Where does the borrowed 4 minor (or another bittersweet move) best support an emotional lyric line?

### Exercise: Finish the Draft, Then Revise With Distance

Write the song end to end with placeholders if needed, set it aside for a few days, then return and revise systematically, fixing the biggest (usually structural) problem first.

- Is the song complete end to end (all sections drafted, even with placeholders)?

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- After a few days away, what is the single biggest problem (structure first, then lyric, melody, harmony)?

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- Run the revision checklist, which items fail, and what is your fix for each?

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- What did you cut to keep the chorus the high point (trimmed intro, leaner verse, removed filler line)?

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## Checklist: Final Revision Checklist

- [ ] Every section does one clear job and the chorus is the high point in range, energy, and arrangement
- [ ] There is one memorable hook, the title pays off, and it earns its repetition
- [ ] Lyrics are concrete and consistent in point of view, no unintended cliches
- [ ] No forced rhymes, stressed syllables on strong beats, matching verses share a stress pattern
- [ ] Melody has clear contour, a singable range, and big notes on open vowels
- [ ] Chords serve the emotion and prosody holds (music agrees with meaning)
- [ ] The song is a finished, revised draft, archived, and you are ready to start the next

## Your Action Plan

1. Choose a form and write a section map, then fix a working title and keep it at the top of the page.
2. Run a 10-minute object-writing sprint on the core image and circle the two details that carry the most emotion.
3. Lock your point of view and design the title as a payoff that gains meaning by the final chorus.
4. Draft the lyric, then read every line aloud to fix forced rhymes and misstressed syllables.
5. Design melodic contour and range so the chorus lifts above the verse, and save the high note for one moment.
6. Build the hook from the title speech rhythm, add one signature feature, and test it from memory an hour later.
7. Align words and notes so key words and open vowels land on the big notes, with room to breathe.
8. Pick a key, number the diatonic chords, choose a progression by number, and add one or two color chords.
9. Write the whole song end to end with placeholders rather than perfecting one section.
10. Set it aside for a few days, run the full revision checklist, fix the biggest problem first, finish, and start the next song.









