

About the Author

William Brooks was born and raised in southern Oklahoma between the cool shade of the Arbuckle Mountains and the endless turns of the promiscuous Red River. While friends honed their rodeo and football skills, young William diligently nailed down his television viewing and music listening abilities.

After earning a business degree from The University of Oklahoma, he chose to ignore the siren's call of corporate life and exited north to the folk music garden of Greenwich Village.

Since landing in New York City, William has released six full length CDs, which have sold in more than a dozen countries. He is also featured on a number of compilation CDs.

His music has been heard on **"The Late Show with David Letterman"** and CBS's primetime comedy **"how i met your mother."** His film music credits include *The Dinner Party*, *Out of the Garden*, *Underground New York* and *American Jed*.

As a performer, William has played many of Gotham's most notable digs from CBGB's to **Cafe Siné, The Bitter End, The Public Theater, The Continental Divide, Arlene Grocery, Wetlands, The Stephen Talkhouse, Webster Hall, Tramps, Fez**, and about every club on NYC's famous Bleecker Street. He has also appeared on several daytime dramas, including **"Another World," "One Life to Live"** and **"Search for Tomorrow,"** as well as on the **"Gordon Elliot Show."**

William has been honored as a **New Folk Finalist** at America's most respected folk music festival, **The Kerrville Folk Festival**. He is also a recipient of the **Meet the Composer Grant** from **New York State Council on the Arts**.

Under the banner of collaborator, his works have been performed at **The Songwriter's Hall of Fame, Songwriter's Guild of America Pro Shop** and the prestigious **New York Songwriter's Circle**.

Married to actress Lisa Masters, he continues to teach, write and record in New York City...he married for love.

How to Write a Love Song

Clearing The Blocks Between Heart and Pen

by

William Brooks

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Chapter I

Clearing Away the Debris

This is your writing

By purchasing this book, you have already taken the first step in your artistic adventure.

Buying this book is a confirmation that somewhere in your head you believe you can actually create something that previously wasn't there.

Congratulations on believing in yourself!

Tooling around in the creative world isn't black and white. Very few things are concrete. Everything is open to debate and taste. It isn't enough to insert tab "A" into slot "B," balance the books or close the case. There are no finish lines or bottom lines.

In songwriting, mistakes may lead to new even greater ideas, your most painful memory may provide your funniest line, anything is possible and—guess what?—every line you write does not have to be brilliant. You are off the hook.

The world you create in **your writing** has no limitations. The answer to every question is "Yes!"

Can you write your own version of "Blackbird"? Yes!

Can you write ten songs about your dog? Yes!

Would it be okay to write a song that doesn't rhyme? Yes!

Elsewhere you'd probably hear "No" to these questions, but in the world of **your writing**, the only answer is "Yes!"

Before pulling out pens, paper or software, I recommend you read through this book once quickly to get an idea how it is laid out and let a few seeds get planted. Then come back, reread it and let these concepts and assignments soak in. Then keep this book handy as a reference during your songwriting.

Now you need to meet someone. You.

Rebirthing the creative mind

You have already expressed your creativity, you have already been an artist, you have fought entire battles in empty fields, and you have built castles out of nothing more than sand and water. You have "filled in the words" to songs when you couldn't understand the singer. You have already been creative; you are already an artist.

Whether your creative self has gotten a little rusty or you are here to deepen your insight, in this book you will find some very powerful tools to crack open your mind and free you to write a great love song. Here are a few of those tools.

You are the authority on you

You already know what music *you* like. You know what sounds good to *you*. You already know what is a great song to *you*.

Your opinion about what you create *here* is the only one that counts. Don't let your friends and family try to wiggle into your creative world. Protect your borders. I've seen some great potential brought to its knees by well-meaning trespassers.

Your first step in writing your first love song is to list your 25 favorite things. They can be any thing, any person or any notion. This is very important. Don't skip this at-first-glance cheesy exercise. Be specific in what you list. Details are your allies in writing. Don't worry about the sequence in which you list them or if you leave one out. This is not a test.

Let the items on your list be as dark, silly or weird as they want to be when they come to mind. This list will be useless if you only write down what you think your favorite things should be. This is called "taking a should on yourself."

Keep this list and your other exercises to yourself. If you don't, you will start editing what you put down because of what others might think. I'd even go so far as to hide it.

This list will be invaluable later in your songwriting sessions. Here are a few of mine:

- 1) The Am chord on an acoustic guitar
- 2) The Beatles "White Album"
- 3) My wife's voice in the morning
- 4) Old Mustangs... etc....

Now list yours:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)
- 11)
- 12)
- 13)
- 14)
- 15)
- 16)
- 17)
- 18)
- 19)
- 20)
- 21)
- 22)
- 23)
- 24)
- 25)

Learn how you really feel about things

Artists are salesmen of emotions. You are either expressing what you feel or inspiring others to feel. So the better access you have to your feelings, the better you get at your craft.

An early artistic mentor/teacher/guru-type person taught me to have an emotional opinion about everything. He demanded a practice of rigorous honesty about how you feel about everything.

His first lesson was to always answer truthfully when asked the social question “How are you doing?” Most folks give the brain-dead answer “Fine, and you?”

Well, the truth usually is a little more complicated than that. Sorry, but nobody is “Fine.” How can we live in the 21st century with all the dangers, distractions, demanding schedules, scientific breakthroughs and the bombardment of 24-hour news and information constantly thrown at us and ever be “Fine”? It’s not possible.

I’m not suggesting you start going off about your endless pain regarding the way things are or the results of your Aunt Mary Claude’s medical tests. Just don’t be a robot.

Trick yourself into the truth

In songwriting, you want your artistic, whimsical, unconscious mind to be a little faster than your critically editing, pragmatic, conscious mind.

You may not be able to differentiate between the two minds at this point, but as you progress the differences will become glaring.

One way to free the creative mind by allowing it to cut loose, roam around and stretch its legs. Unfortunately, the critical mind is always on the lookout to attack. It waits patiently for its chance to jump in and criticize. The best we can do is learn to outrun it. Think of the gazelle outrunning the cheetah.

You can do this by writing what Julia Cameron calls the morning pages. In her incredible book *The Artist's Way*, Julia introduces her readers to what I think of as stream of consciousness speed journaling, or streamofconsciousnessspeedjournaling.

Write continuously for three solid pages. Write in this journal every morning. You do not put the pencil down. You keep it moving until you have filled the pages. Even if you have to write “blah, blah this sucks I blah blah hate this crap I’m watching my hand move this pencil on paper and all i can put down is my hand is moving, did I really use a small i instead of a big I...”

Julia calls the morning pages “nonnegotiable.” And she is right. Doing them now and then is a waste of time. You must get in the groove of doing them daily. Every day. Don’t fall into the trap of confusing “knowing about a tool” with “using a tool.” Unused tools get rusty and dull.

Eventually things will start to pop out from your mind: long forgotten memories, new opinions, song images, clever lyrics or nagging reminders to settle up old unresolved aggravations.

You will get your greatest song ideas from here. But, like all these exercises, you have to *do* them. Just knowing about them but not doing them is like going to a great restaurant, looking at the menu, but never ordering. You won't get fed.

Be here now

This is probably going to sound a little weird. I challenge you to spend as much time as you can in the here and now.

It can be quite a battle to stay present. Many people often wander off into the past or future. Some enjoy playing out all the possible worst-case scenarios regarding their lives. Others practice acceptance speeches for the Great Guy Award. The variations are endless.

Yes, you want your imagination to be free to explore and discover new ideas for your next love song. You can go nuts with your ideas when you are in a writing session. And of course you can let your imagination go when planning a vacation with a loved one. But take back those moments that get lost when you're doing mundane tasks, while waiting in lines and on train or bus rides. You might glimpse some real life.

I believe reality is happening now. It is not ten years from now, not even five minutes from now.

Creativity happens in the moment; ideas come now. When we mentally time travel and replay old hurts, practicing our revenge tactics, we are just playing the same old tapes over and over. There is nothing new there. No new ideas. No fresh spins. No surprises.

Inspirational insights, the constant barrage of things happening around us, phrases overheard (great song material), seeing something differently because of the time of day or shade of light are *only* happening in this moment. If you are mentally someplace else, you will miss some really cool stuff.

As silly as they sound, these three suggestions will help you stay present:

1) Breathe. Fully breathe from your deepest belly. Anytime you discover yourself someplace other than the here and now, gently come back by taking a deep, deliberate, belly breath. It works every time. It's also important not to beat yourself up for having to do it so many times. Be benevolent with yourself.

2) When you walk down the street, thrive in your senses. Take one block and be an ear. Listen to everything. Hear your shoes hitting the ground, your breath, car noises, construction sounds, dogs barking, cell phones...

Next block, be an eyeball. Then be your skin for a while. Try being a nose (a tough one). I suggest that being a tongue should be reserved for the privacy of your own home.

3) Agree not to talk to people who aren't physically present to defend themselves. You will be amazed how much time this will free up. This may even save you from getting hit by a bus.

Chapter 2

The 7 Biggest Mistakes Beginning Songwriters Make

Ultimately there are no mistakes in songwriting, rather chances to learn and improve your craft. The list below contains the most common pitfalls that trip up early writers. The more work you do in the previous chapter, the less these will appear in your work.

1) Being too poetic

is covering up a perceived lack of uniqueness.

When you doubt your ability to say what is on your mind, you'll never get to **your writing**. You'll be stuck writing what you think is "the right thing to say." How boring. Flowering your words is a sign of doubt and inexperience.

2) Complicating the music

is covering up a perceived lack of musical ability.

Some beginners try making music changes very complex to cover up what they think are either weak lyrics or weak

music, thinking if the music is good enough the lyrics won't matter.

3) Being too clever

is covering up a perceived lack of lyrical ability.

New writers believe they have to be clever frequently to be good. Being clever once is plenty in a song. They fear the possibility that this tune will become a permanent record of their collected wisdom, so every line must be perfect, clever or tricky. Wow, what pressure.

4) Covering too much ground

is covering up a perceived lack of interesting material.

Many beginning writers try to tell too many stories in one song. They fear one is not enough. Keep it simple. One story is fine.

5) Repeating the same information

is underestimating the listener.

Adding new information in each verse is essential to progressing a story, as long as it's relevant and "new" information. The listener gets it that the girl has pretty eyes when she hears it the first time. They really are listening, painting their own picture.

6) Going on too long is covering up a perceived lack of talent.

Some writers think they aren't very interesting. They will give you more song if they can't give you better song. This is quite similar to the previous pitfall. What you have to say really can be said in fewer than three or four minutes. More does not make anything better.

7) Judging themselves too harshly before somebody else does.

You cannot judge, criticize or beat yourself into writing a good song. Be nice to yourself. No one is judging you anywhere nearly as harshly as you are.

✠ BONUS MISTAKE ✠

8) If it ain't backed up it ain't written

The only mistake you cannot fix is lost work. Back everything up on your computer and notebooks. It will kill you to have seven or eight hours of work just disappear in the back of a cab, left at a Starbucks or disappear from your laptop.

Chapter 3

What Comes First?

The eternal question

This has got to be the number one question about writing songs: “Which comes first, the music or the words?”

The answer is “Yes.”

You see, whatever comes first, comes first. Maybe a music riff stumbled across accidentally, a phrase you hear someone say or maybe something that poured out of your pen during a stream of consciousness speed journaling. Maybe two separate “ideas” that came months apart suddenly fit together. Maybe a Freudian slip sounds like a great title.

Anything can happen. Half a song might flow out in one quick rush. Maybe a great idea or “concept” for a song might come.

Maybe a little tiny bit of music comes, which then inspires a lyric, which calls for more music. Rarely do all the lyrics or music come at the same time. Unless you’re doing it as an improvisation exercise. You guessed it...more on that later.

Sometimes inspiration doesn’t come at all. But if you keep showing up at the piano, computer or journal, you will improve your chances of catching it when it comes. You may even spark it yourself. It comes when it comes.

And why is the next chapter on music, not lyrics? Yes.

Chapter 4

If You Know Nothing About Music

The blue pill or the red pill?

You don't have to know everything about music to write the music for your love song. All you need is to be able to count to twelve and know your alphabet. This section contains only the information you need right now. Dig in.

Music theory is a very deep rabbit hole that you may wish to crawl down at a later time. Every technical term has another term in its definition that you have to look up to understand the previous definition of a term you don't need yet.

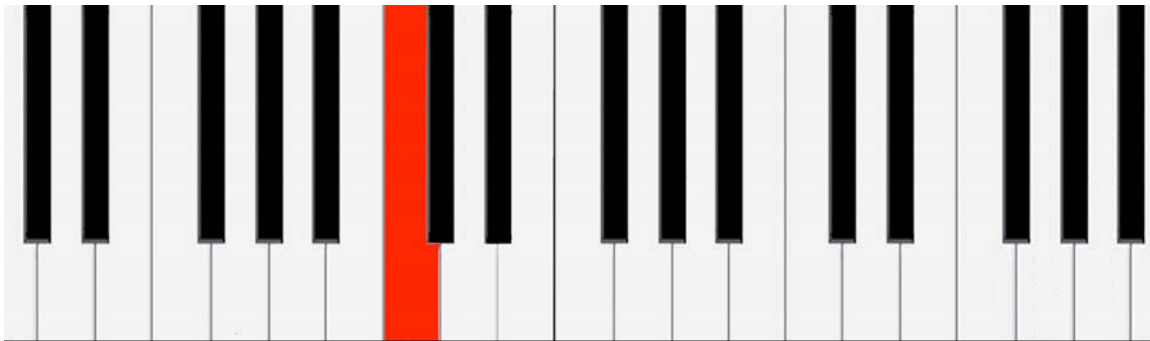
The last chapter of this book is entitled “**If You Must Know.**” It takes a slightly deeper look into music and some of its parts. You don't need it now, but it will help you in later writings.

You will have the rest of your life to complicate your music.

The bare bones of music

The smallest unit of music is the **note**. A note can be brief or sustained for a long duration. Think of a single key on a

piano being struck or an open string being plucked on a guitar.



In Western music, we have 12 notes that repeat over and over. On the piano, some notes are on the white keys and some are on the black keys.

This 12-note group that repeats over and over is called an **octave**.

An octave has 12 notes
8 are white keys
5 are black keys



The notes on the white keys are what we will be working with in this first section. Here they are below:



These notes on the white keys are also the old “Do Re Me Fa So La Ti Do” scale.

The notes on the black keys are below. We will only be working with one of them later, the **B flat** or **Bb**. But for now, it’s good to see them all.



These black keys are called **flats** and **sharps**, indicated by adding “**b**” or “**#**” to the letter name. What the note is called depends on if it is referring to the note above or below it. A **Db** is the very same note as a **C#**. Most notes and chords are referred to in their flat name.

A **chord** is when several notes are played at the same time. It takes at least three notes to build a chord. A three-note chord is called a **triad**.

- 2) Some of these chords are called **minor** chords. They often have a darker, sadder sound.
- 3) One chord stands out poorly, called a **diminished** chord. To me, it has an incomplete, unstable sound.

Chord sequence can change these general descriptions. You will get a substitute chord for the diminished chord later.

These chords gotta have shorter names

For simplicity, these triads are assigned Roman numerals as they move up the scale. Use the same three fingers all the way up the keyboard.

The “**I**” chord is **major**. It is full and bright.

The “**II**” chord is **minor**. It is sad and dark.

The “**III**” chord is **minor**. It is sad and dark.

The “**IV**” chord is **major**. It is full and bright.

The “**V**” chord is **major**. It is full and bright.

The “**VI**” chord is **minor**. It is sad and dark.

The “**VII**” chord is **diminished**. You tell me.

When talking to other musicians, once the key is established you can go back and refer to the other chords as “**the IV**” or “**the V**” or “**the VI**.”

But these chords also have formal names, their “letter names.” In the key of C, here are the formal names with their abbreviated letter names. Again, just the same old three-finger cookie-cutter pattern up and down the keyboard.

The “**I**” is called **C major** or **Cma** or just **C**.

The “**II**” is called **D minor** or **Dm**.

The “**III**” is called **E minor** or **Em**.

The “**IV**” is called **F major** or **Fma** or just **F**.

The “**V**” is called **G major** or **GMAJ** or just **G**.

The “**VI**” is called **A minor** or **Am**.

The “**VII**” is called **B diminished** or **Dim**.

The substitute chord for the **Dim** (or **VII** chord) is created by moving the lowest note in the chord *down* (or flat) by one note and calling the new chord a **major**. In this case, the new chord is called **Bb major**.



Music must be mapped or we'd be lost

Music is mapped out, measured and played in a universal language called **beats** and **measures**.

The **beat** is the count that marks the rhythm of a piece of music. You know when you tap your foot along with a song? That's the beat. Tap, tap, tap.

Most tunes have four beats per measure, also called **4/4 time**. **4/4** is so common it is referred to as **common time**.

A **measure (or bar)** of music may have one or many notes, one or several chords or simply contain a rest. A **bar** is the music contained between two bar lines. In written music, bars (or measures) are separated by **vertical bar lines**.

Twelve bar blues have twelve bars.

Charts

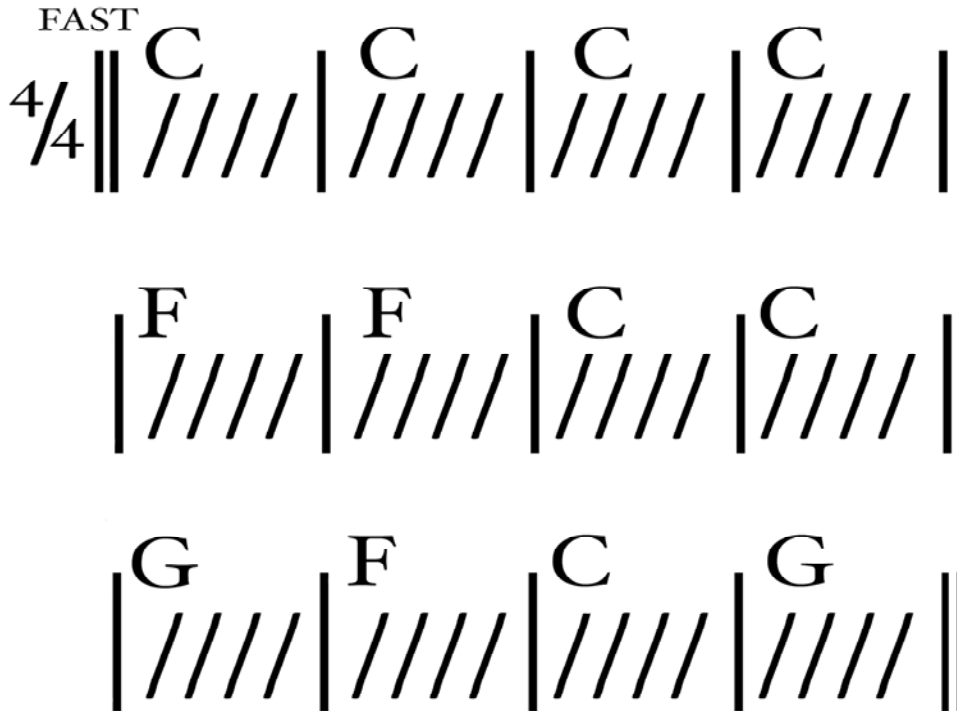
Musicians have a shorthand method for writing down their music and chord changes, called a "chart." It is the simplest and easiest way to read music. It contains only the broad strokes of a piece of music.

A chart gives the chord names, how long each chord is played and the key of the song, as well as the beats. It may mention the feel of the song (slow or moderate or fast). It also will tell you which sections to repeat and, finally, it tells you when to stop playing.

The slanted marks or hash marks are the beats. The big letters are the chords. The tall single vertical lines separate

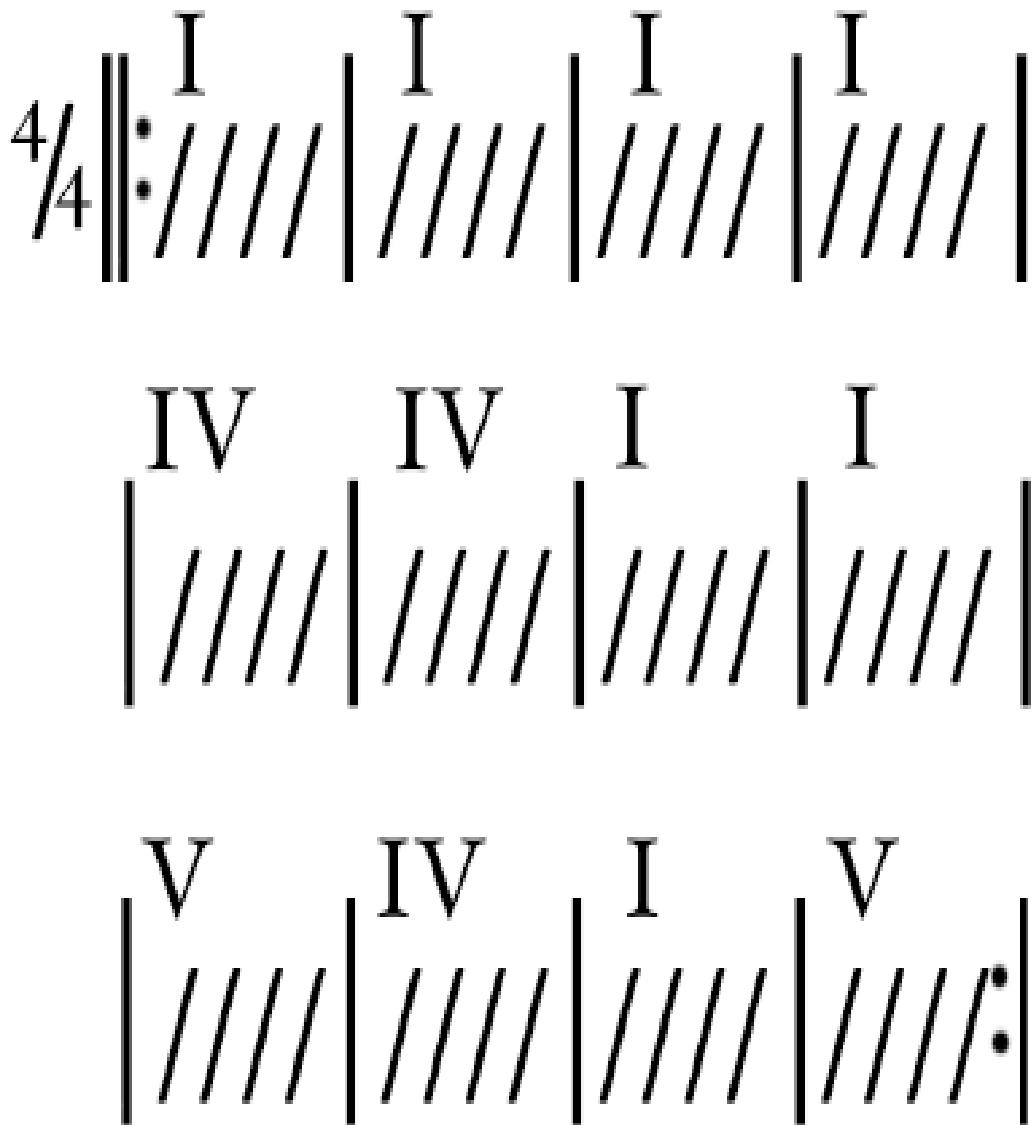
the bars. A double vertical line indicates both the start and ending of a song.

Let's look at a piece of music that has 12 bars, is in 4/4 time (four beats per bar) and some simple chord changes, which you'll recognize as **I-IV-V**.



To repeat a section, you simply add a pair of vertical dots at the two places where the music starts and finishes repeating. Here are the same 12 bars in Roman numerals with one repeat.

FAST in C



What works best and easiest

Most American popular music is in the three-chord song form, just as in the previous chart where we used the **I-IV-V** chords. As a matter of fact, the three most common chords used in music are the **I, IV and V**.

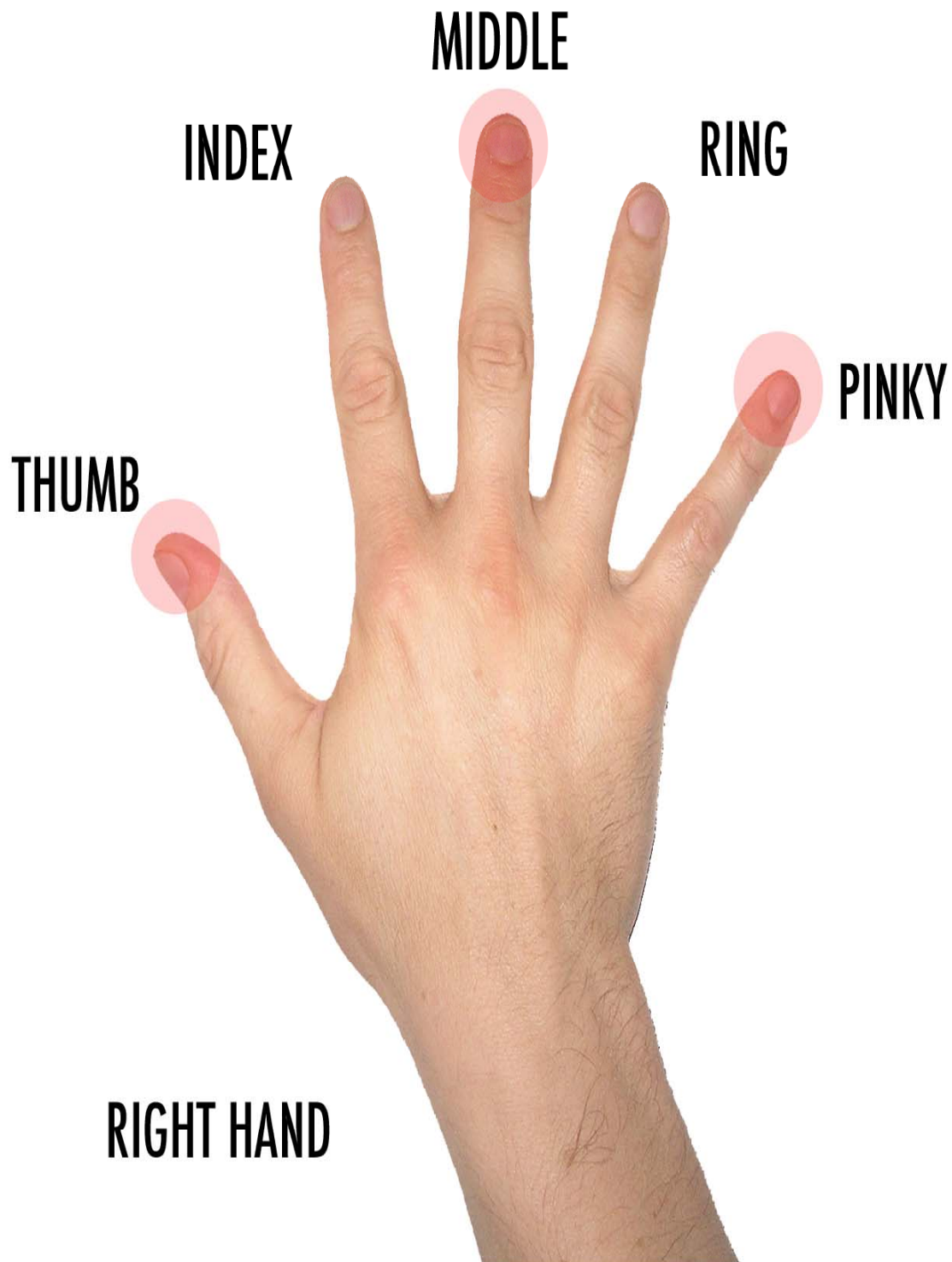
If you want to jazz things up a bit, try **II-V-I**. That would be **Dm-G-C**.

You'll get other progressions, keys and chords later in the book. But in the spirit of keeping it simple and getting you to creating the music as soon as possible, stick with the well-established **I-IV-V** in the key of C.

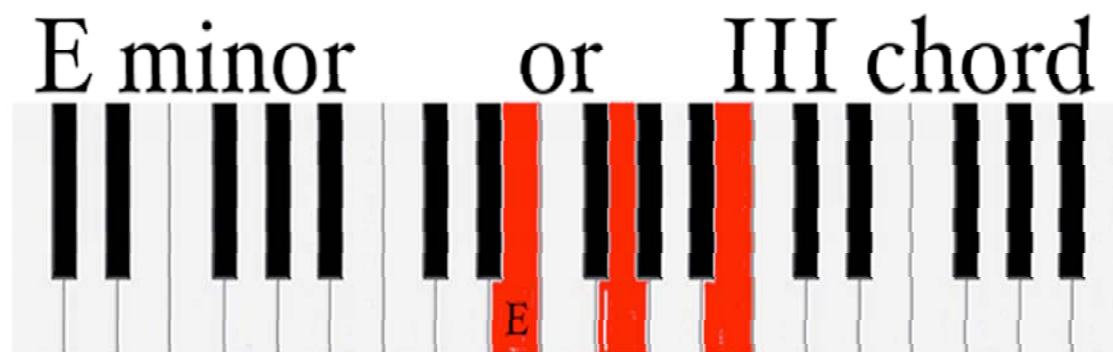
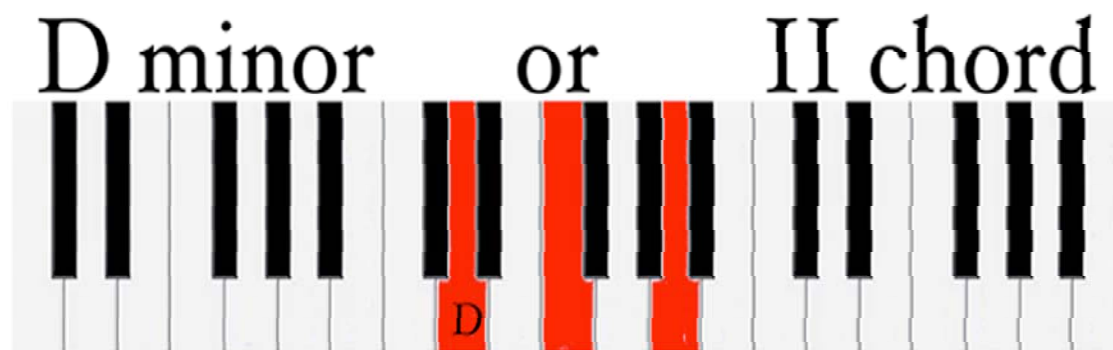
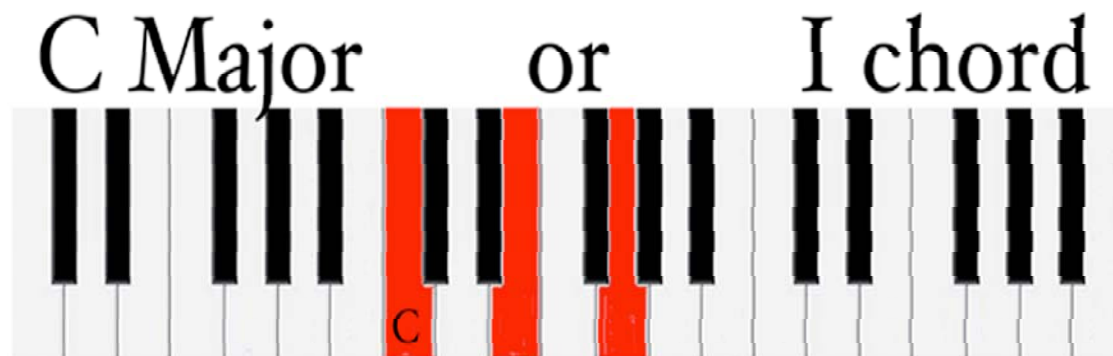
The cookie-cutter piano chords

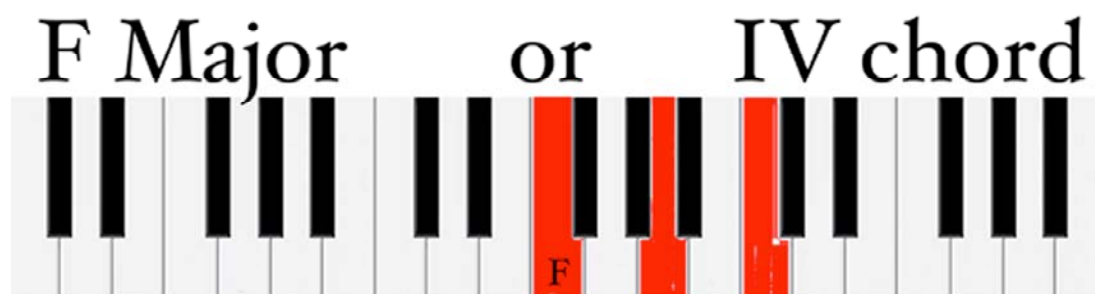
On the next pages, you will notice all seven chords look alike, except the **VII** substitute. All seven chords have you placing your fingers in the same position up and down the keyboard.

Use your thumb, middle finger and pinky. This is better than the thumb, index and middle finger because later you will want to have the ring and the index free to add a few accents or drop your thumb over for that Bb major.



Okay, lock in that hand position.





And here's the substitute for B dim.

Bb Major or VII chord



Get comfortable hammering out that old **I-IV-V**. (Or any other combination you like.)

The old I-IV-V

It deserves repeating that most American popular music is formed by following the sequence of **I-IV-V**. There are plenty of other progressions, but we're gonna stick with the **I-IV-V**.

All Blues and most Rock and Roll and lots of Folk music follow the old **I-IV-V**. Every songwriter from Hank Williams to Bob Dylan has used the **I-IV-V** over and over again.

Since it's good enough for them, it's good enough for us.

Here are some quick **I-IV-V** progressions pulled from the Roman numeral scale chart:

I-IV-V

C, F, G (C major, F major, and G major)

E, A, B (E major, A major, and B major)

A, D, E (A major, D major, and E major)

G, C, D (G major, C major, and D major)

Play and repeat any of these lines. Listen to the rise and fall, feel the suspense build as you anticipate the return to the beginning chord. It just feels right.

That resolve you hear in returning to the **I** chord is sometimes called “going home.” Musicians may call out “bring it home” as a command to close out the tune.

Experiment with stretching out a chord progression. Play the **I** twice as long as you have been, then play a quick **IV-V** change. Have fun and stretch it out.

This should give us enough info to get started writing the tune.

Just start from the verse, ma'am

Let's start with the verse music. The old **I-IV-V** will do nicely, thank you.

Let's say we've chosen to write in the key of C. (This is the easiest key for most musicians.) Honoring the time tested **I-IV-V**, this will make our verse chords **C, F, and G**.

Of course, you are free to play in any key or use any chords you are comfortable with.

Let's say the verse has come around a few times—maybe twice, **C, F, G / C, F, G**—and you think your ear is ready for a change. If you think it's time, it's time. Trust your ears.

The ear quickly gets acquainted to music patterns and will notice immediately when that pattern has been changed. So we really want to contrast the chorus music from the verse music.

We can achieve that contrast by starting the chorus section with a different chord than what we started the verse section with. Don't wait till the second or third chord to change things; it will be too late and everything will get real weird.

In most American popular music, the chorus starts with the **IV** chord. In the key of C, that would be the **F** chord.

Four things about the chorus

- 1) The first chord of the chorus needs to differ from the last chord of the verse. The ear really likes surprises.
- 2) The last chord of the chorus needs to differ from the first chord of the returning verse.
- 3) To add contrast between sections, vary the number of chords in the chorus from the number in the verses.
- 4) You can contrast sections when writing with length, rhythm and beat.

Let's say you've chosen **F, G, C, G** as the chorus music. So now you have two verses and one chorus. Written out like a chart (more on charts later), it would look something like this:

C, F, G / C, F, G / F, G, C, G

When returning to the verse music, I like to cut it in half and get back to the chorus as soon as possible, giving us:

C, F, G / C, F, G / F, G, C, G / C, F, G

Most songs are loved for the chorus rather than the verse, even though the verses are often more interesting lyrically. So we add another verse and another chorus, and it looks like this:

C, F, G / C, F, G / F, G, C, G / C, F, G / F, G, C, G

You are looking at the most popular music arrangement:

verse / verse / chorus / verse / chorus

Intro / Outro

The **introduction** or **intro** is the section that opens the song. It can set up or give a hint about the rest of the tune. A good intro can establish the whole vibe and groove of a tune. It can be a section from a more developed idea that comes later in the song. It can be a great place for a guitar hook or important phrase in the tune.

Some folks use a verse without vocals as an intro; some use half the chorus. I love it when someone vamps on the **IV** chord before going into the tune.

The **outro**, sometimes called the “**coda**,” is where we say goodbye in the tune. This is a great place to have fun as a performer. As a writer, you have fewer options. The outro is often a repeat of a section. I think of that choice as a bookend.

If a poignant lyric or phrase deserves another chance, this is a great place to do it. Some even repeat the intro. Some songs will go out on the **I**, leaving room for a long open-ended jam.

Live performers know audiences remember intros and outros more than any other part of the performance.

More inexperienced singer/songwriters have a tendency to blow off the importance of intros and outros. I encourage you not to.

A bridge too close

A **bridge**, also known as a **release**, is a tiny song within a song. It's used when a tune has reached a point where it's too soon to repeat a chorus and too soon to go back to a verse.

It will have a contrasting feel to the rest of the song. It usually springs from the **IV** chord and works its way to the **V** chord so it can slink back into the chorus.

A bridge is usually eight bars long, earning it the coolest name in music, “The Middle Eight.”

Bridges will get more coverage later in the lyric/storytelling section of the book.

It's all together now

Listen to your favorite songs. Soon you'll be able to tell when sections change. Study how many times the verse repeats before going to the chorus. Listen to hear if the chorus chords play twice each time. Is the intro also the outro? Was a theme hinted at in the intro and developed more fully later?

Let's say you want to write a verse with a total of four chords. You can throw in some minor chords—that's great, too.

In my next book, I will go more into chord substitutes. They are many and they are cool, but I'm staying with these seven chords for this book.

That pesky VII chord

If you must have another chord, you can always take the **VII** chord, lower it one half step and make it a major chord. This chord is in just about every great guitar rock progression.

So if you are playing in C and you wanna go to the **VII**, just substitute the **B dim** with a **Bb major**.

That sad, sad minor chord

These are the sad chords or the dark chords. They add dramatic depth to music.

Where do the minor chords come from and where do you find them? They are called relative minors because they are relative to the key you are in. Look back at the chart with the Roman numerals. Notice that the **II**, the **III** and the **VI** are all minor chords.

Here is the **major** chord chart with their **minor** chord buddies:

I, IV, V		II		III		VI
C, F, G	try	Dm	or	Em	or	Am
E, A, B	try	Fm	or	Gm	or	Cm
A, D, E	try	Bm	or	Cm	or	Fm
G, C, D	try	Am	or	Bm	or	Em

Throw these babies into the mix, see what works for your ear. Try using a minor as the second chord in a progression. It will act as a nuance without making the whole song dark.

However, limit the number of minor chords you put in a song. Two is about the maximum. I can usually only get two in a song if I start the tune with a minor chord.

Here are a few other progressions to repeat:

- 1) **I - IV / V - IV / ...**
- 2) **I - IV / VII - IV / ...**
- 3) **I - VII - IV / ...**
- 4) **I - VI - IV - V / ...**
- 5) **I - IV - VI - V / ...**

Any of these progressions can be a verse or a chorus or the entire song. It's up to your ear.

The melody line

It's never too soon to start knocking around melody lines for your tune. Some folks just hear/create melody lines when they hear chords played. It's easier than you think, if you don't psych yourself out.

These exercises will get you ready:

- 1) Practice singing along with songs you've never heard.
- 2) Make up melody lines over parts of songs that don't have any voices singing.
- 3) Pick out notes on your piano that stay in the key of C.
- 4) Practice memorizing your favorite melody lines.
- 5) Pull out your songbooks and play the melody lines backward.
- 6) Keep making things up. (There are only eight notes.)
- 7) Sing nursery rhymes, but change the notes.
- 8) Whistle over the chord changes you have.
- 9) Make up new melodies over your favorite songs.

But I don't have a piano

That's okay. I'm assuming you have a computer or you wouldn't be reading this e-book.

Every kind of music is already recorded and available to you through the Web. These samples or snippets of music are called "loops." These are tiny little musical performances available in every size, depth, length, speed, arrangement or instrumentation you can imagine.

You can place them end to end, stack them on top of each other or let one play endlessly as it loops around and starts over. With some you can even change the tempo (beat) and pitch (key).

Besides providing interesting music you otherwise might not come up with, these also work great as intros or outros, breaks or bridges, solos or back beats—whatever pleases your ear. They are addictive and inspiring.

If you aren't a musician but have recording software already pre-installed in your computer, get familiar with that program. Most are as simple as a tape recorder.

I use GarageBand on my Mac. It is the easiest for me.

All kinds of "real people" information is available on the Web. If you have no program on your computer and want to start with computer recording and loops, get this information together:

- 1) What brand of computer you have.
- 2) What model you have.
- 3) What year.

4) What format you are running on, i.e., OSX.

If you are still lost and still don't know, e-mail or call any online music software store. I recommend BIGFISHAUDIO.com. They have been around for 20 years. They seem pretty nice.

How about a guitar?

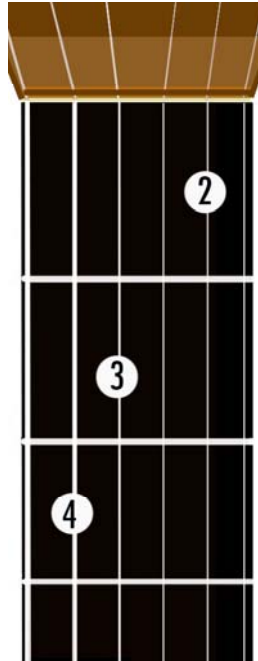
Do you have an old guitar lying around? Luckily, these guitar chords in the key of C have some of the easiest fingerings possible. Sorry, but no cookie-cutter here. The hand on the next page shows the finger numbers that correspond to the numbers marked on the strings.



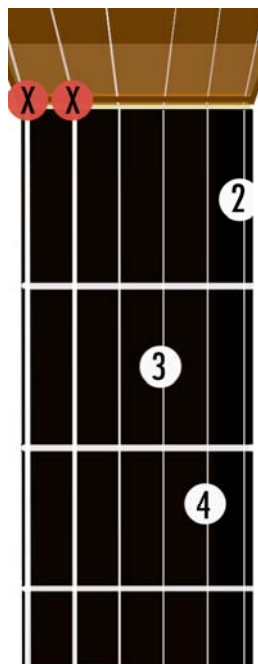
You will strum all six strings on the guitar unless indicated by a big red X:



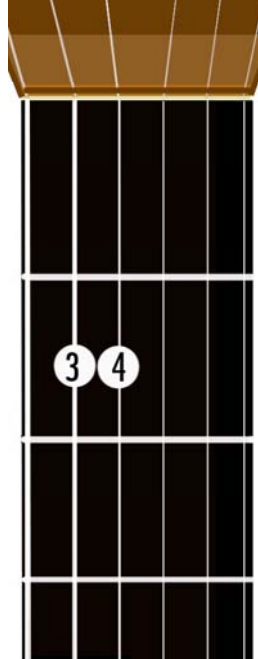
C Major or the **I chord**



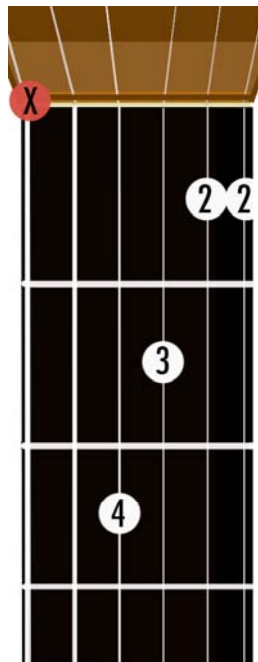
D Minor or the **II chord**



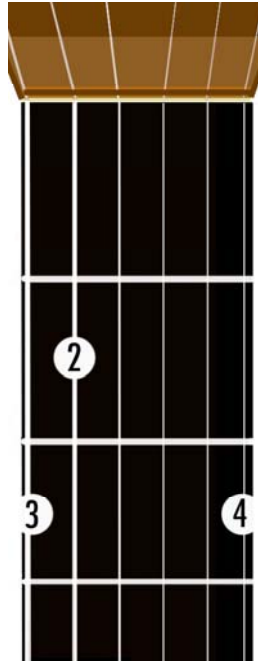
E minor or the **III** chord



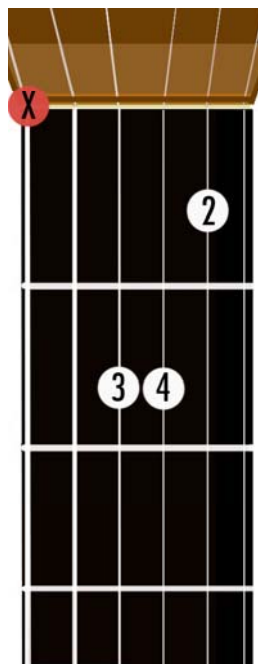
F Major or the **IV** chord



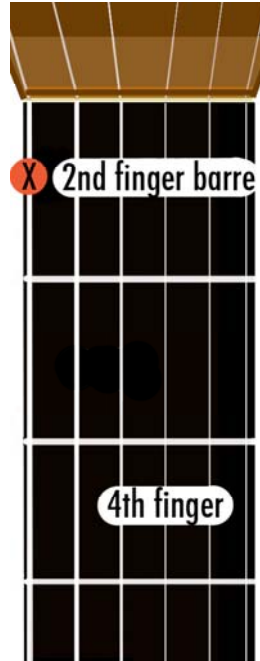
G Major or the **V** chord



A Minor or the **VI** chord



Bb Major subbing for VII



Q: What's a barre?

A: One finger pressing more than one string.

But I can't play an instrument or figure out my computer recording gizmo thing

You still have loads of options. There are other instruments and options you may not have thought of.

OPTION A

Every town in America has some guitar player or pianist who will—for very little money—sit and help you find the music you are “hearing.” Kind of like a criminal sketch artist, only with music. Here are some tips:

- 1) Paying someone to do this allows you to keep all the songwriting credit for yourself.
- 2) If someone doesn't ask for money, they will assume they are getting a writing credit.
- 3) Leave the session with a good recording, as well as a back-up copy.
- 4) Have the chord changes and any significant music lines written down. Know what key it is in.
- 5) Make sure you know what b.p.m. (beats per minute) it is. This also known as "the count."

OPTION B

You can post on Craigslist.com that you are seeking a collaborator and/or collaborators. Maybe you "hear" the song in your head but need lyrics or vice versa. Collaborating is a blast with the right person. They will think of things you missed and can bring extra insight to the tune. I always learn something useful from almost every exchange.

OPTION C

Sing a different melody line over a karaoke CD. Okay, maybe that's a little lame.

OPTION D

Go to singer/songwriter nights and ask around. Any one looking for a lyricist? Or a collaborator? Did one of the performers "sparkle" to you? Could you relate to what they were expressing? Did they remind you of someone you already enjoy?

OPTION E

Entertain the idea of studying an instrument. You do not have to master it. I am a singer/songwriter who plays some passable guitar, some really embarrassingly awful piano and my inability to “take a solo” in rehearsals got so hilariously excruciating, drummer Tom O’Brien nicknamed me “Nubbins.”

It doesn’t take long at all to get passable on any instrument. Some people find instant satisfaction after just a couple of lessons. You can get great later if you like. Remember we are talking about getting good enough to *write* music.

OPTION F

There are two very old-time instruments that are always available on eBay. It seems like someone is always selling one or the other. They are the Auto Harp and the Toy Key Organ. They are soooooo old-time that they are now considered hip and retro. And there are many, many styles of each still around.

The organ has tiny chord buttons you play with your left hand. Each button creates an entire chord while you diddle around with your right hand hitting the notes. Usually the names of the chords as well as the notes are written clearly on the instrument. Make sure you get one with as many different chord buttons as possible.

When you first look at an Auto Harp, you see dozens of strings in increasing lengths along the instrument. It can look pretty intimidating at first, but it is exactly the opposite. The Auto Harp has lots and lots of chord buttons that do the work for you. Press a chord button and strum. It couldn’t be simpler. It’s a lot easier than a ukulele.



Or would you rather have a fish?

It's has been said many times “It is better to teach someone to fish than to just give them a fish.” But let's say you can't even play the radio.

Well then, you get five fish. You can do with them as you wish. (Did you catch that totally accidental rhyme? Oh, no... what about the word “catch”? All accidents... I swear!!! Sometimes the work gets done for you.)

Okay, you can do anything with these fish/songs:

- 1) You can use them to practice working on your lyrics.
- 2) You can add more instruments to fatten them up.
- 3) You can use them as final tracks to sing over.

4) Call them your own. (Unless you get an award or something.)

I wrote each of these on GarageBand with the loops they provide with their software. They vary in style, tempo and accompaniment. These five songs are on MP3 files and can be dumped into almost any recording software if you wish to record your lyrics over them.

Here they are:

[Fish 1](#)
[Fish 2](#)
[Fish 3](#)
[Fish 4](#)
[Fish 5](#)

This is the end of Chapter 4. To write a love song, you now have enough tools and options to cover your tail musically. This is still just basic stuff needed to simply just *write* a song. I've written Chapter 15 for those who may want a little more information.

Chapter 5

Looking for an Idea

The shoulders we stand on

It's helpful to know exactly who you like to listen to. These artists have had the largest impact on your writing, much more than any teacher or muse.

Since this is who you've spent the most time listening to, it stands to reason that this is who you'll model most of your songwriting on, too.

My heroes are Bob Dylan, Neil Young, Van Morrison, Cat Stevens and The Beatles.

Pick your 10 favorite albums and your 10 favorite love songs. Here are mine as of this writing. Tomorrow the list could be different. So don't worry about leaving anything out. It's all cool.

TOP 10 FAVORITE ALBUMS

Rickie Lee Jones
Hats
Hour of the Bewilderbeast
Tea for the Tillerman
Court and Spark
Sgt. Pepper
Harvest

Rickie Lee Jones
The Blue Nile
Badly Drawn Boy
Cat Stevens
Joni Mitchell
The Beatles
Neil Young

Moondance
Closing Time
Tracy Chapman

Van Morrison
Tom Waits
Tracy Chapman

TOP 10 FAVORITE LOVE SONGS

Maybe I'm Amazed
Company
Moondance
Maggie Mae
Visions of Joanna
How Can I Tell You
Wonderful Tonight
Every Breath You Take
I Will
You Are The Sunshine of My Life

Paul McCartney
Rickie Lee Jones
Van Morrison
Rod Stewart
Bob Dylan
Cat Stevens
Eric Clapton
The Police
The Beatles
Stevie Wonder

Now jot down yours down without thinking too much. What comes to mind first is what we want. Nobody else gets to see this list. Oldies are great, even silly songs that aren't cool anymore to like anymore. Okay, GO.

TOP 10 FAVORITE ALBUMS

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)

TOP 10 FAVORITE LOVE SONGS

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)

Now that you have your list, study these songs. Study their arrangements, intros and outros, number of verses. Do the choruses change when they come around a second time? Do they even have a chorus? Do any of these songs kinda sound alike? Are they sung in first person? Is the singer singing to the world or himself? Are these songs happy, sad, satirical, humorous, ironic? Do these have obvious changes between the sections? Is there any **I-IV-V**?

Come up with your own questions. You want you to stretch your powers of observation as well as expression.

The good borrow; the great steal

Yes, I'm serious. Ever since I heard Paul McCartney say in an interview that early on he'd take other musicians' bass lines and turn them around backward, it was open season out there for ideas and inspiration.

Taking someone's melody line or exact lyric isn't cool, but it's cool to move things around, change perspectives, lift chord progressions, paraphrase, turn progressions around backward, snatch some ideas from books or movies.

I have gotten some really great ideas from Steven King novels—not gory lyrics, but keen observations of people.

Many movie scores sound a lot like some classical pieces I've heard.

Old hymnals have some great chord progressions.

You can “tip your hat” to another artist and call it a tribute; just don't blatantly rip anyone off. If you want to “model” after another artist and not draw too many comparisons, try going cross gender. I can think of one really popular female who appears to be doing old Rolling Stones these days. New York City is packed with sensitive guy singers doing a great Tracy Chapman. Hell, I wish I could do Rickie Lee Jones.

Chapter 6

Sitting Down and Doing It

Tools on your desk

You may have already begun jotting down notes on scraps of paper and old utility bills, or you may have a musical phrase bouncing around in your head. Maybe you picked a riff from a computer sound file loop or chose one of the tunes from this book. If so, now is the time to bring it all together and put it in front of you.

If you have nothing—no ideas, no thoughts, one big blank—then welcome to a frequent state of any writer. Some call it writer's block. I call it the "Big Empty." Everything is still cool. Are you asking "how can I just make up words?" Well, you already do it all day long. It's called talking.

We want to get all our tools together in one place. In addition to the obvious pencil, paper, computer and/or instrument, you will need:

1) A rhyming dictionary. Yes, there is a book with all the words that rhyme together. My favorite is the *Capricorn Rhyming Dictionary*. It has a helpful little poetry glossary up front. What I like about the book is that it clearly breaks down all the vowel possibilities. Besides giving the *exact* rhyme matches, it also gives many *almost* rhyme matches. I often prefer almost matches because they are less expected.

2) Roget's Thesaurus. A thesaurus is a book of **synonyms**. Synonyms are words with similar meanings. This gives you more options when expressing a feeling or describing a place. Its greatest gift is that it will keep you from being repetitious. Be careful you don't fall into the flowery overuse potential of this book. A few spices are always best. I love this book. If you don't have anything to write about, you can look through its opening section, "Synopsis of Categories." Everything is in this list.

3) A tiny tape recorder. It's great to just turn it on and forget about it being there. If you have the bucks, some brands make voice activated ones, but I've never gotten use to them turning on and off.

4) Bartlett's Familiar Quotations. Get inspired; find a new phrase or thought, which could turn you in another completely different direction.

5) A few songbooks of your heroes. Lost? You might be able to find what they did. Maybe find a different chord than you had planned. These books can also help you find the right key for your tune.

Tools in your head

The first thing I do when writing any song is write down every word that can be associated with what I have.

And if all I have is "Love," then I write down every word I can that relates to that—every adjective, opposite, adverb, substitute, crazy left-brain association—everything. I prefer pen and paper during this step.

List your words making one long column going down the left-hand side of the paper, leaving several lines blank between each word. This will be your column 1.

You can open your thesaurus to “love” or “romantic” and find more words. You can check *Bartlett’s* or go online to some e-quotes site and find even more. The more, the better. List those words.

Now take this list and make four more columns with new headings right next to it. Use **opposite**, **adj./adv.**, **left-brain** and **sub** for **substitute**.

Look at the first word in your first column, “love” and go across writing what words come to mind, as they relate to each of those headings.

Focus on columns 2, 3, 4 and 5. Fill in all those spaces under columns 2, 3, 4 and 5, allowing each word to affect the next word.

1 original	2 opposite	3 adj./adv.	4 left-brain	5 sub
love	hate	squeaky	mush	fond
love nest	disarray	complete	<i>away</i>	maze
desire	loneliness	emptier	stare	long
wife	ghost	desperate	stretched	wander
sex	plan	novel	skull	hump
revolt	map	old	treasure	plan
anniversary	miss	hungry	<i>touch</i>	lesson

Etc., etc., etc.

Start putting these images together. Notice some words have nothing to do with the headings. We want what comes up from your mind first, not what makes complete sense.

I find:

A desperate ghost
A novel plan
An emptier stare
A touch away
Complete disarray
An old treasure map
A hermit stares
A complete maze
A squeaky plan

These are some creative ideas to include or springboard from. Maybe a title is in there somewhere? You can always dig deeper, though.

As an example, “A Touch Away” seems the best title. But before we go further with that, here are some ideas to spark your imagination.

Some ideas on love to list

1) Firsts are a great source for song ideas:

First kiss
First smile
First glimpse
First date
First hand holding
First parting
First dance

First moment you knew they were The One
First thought of losing them

- 2) A specific wish for your future:
Always be together
Follow your dreams together
A family
- 3) An acknowledgment of the moment:
Never been happier
Never been sadder
At peace
Scared to write this song
At a loss for the right words
- 4) An abstract or silly image:
Walking around in her head with a flashlight
Building a bridge to her heart
Running naked at the mall
- 5) A spin on a cliché:
Don't just do something, stand there
Take me drunk, I'm home
Penny wise, love foolish
- 6) The absence of someone:
Feeling empty when they are gone
What do you miss doing together?
Was it a breakup?
- 7) Your history:
Shared places of importance
The honeymoon cabin
Your bedroom
Some quiet little church
A favorite garden

- 8) How the other person has changed you:
 - Are you braver now?
 - Are you more self-assured?
 - Feel safer?
- 9) Some quirky nuance:
 - That thing her mouth does
 - The sparkle in her eye
 - The way they say a word
- 10) Something you need to change about yourself:
 - Your view of the world?
 - Your view of love?
- 11) What keeps you around this person:
 - Their voice when they say your name?
 - Their wit?
 - Their skin?
 - Their eyes?
 - The way they make you feel?
- 12) What they have taught you:
 - How to listen
 - Patience

Lyrics are the story

Songs are like little movies. They have scenes, players and story development. Some folks write songs knowing full well where the story is headed, who the characters are and what the big message is.

Others approach the process like slowly driving in a thick fog, only able to see a few feet ahead, discovering the parts of the story only as it develops. Both are sound and rewarding.

Hopefully you'll slip back and forth between the two, staying on track, yet allowing one thought to inspire another.

You only have to write the verse music once, same with the chorus and bridge music. You can always make tiny changes later if you wish. Once a lyric and its music come together, you can start plugging in the rest.

The grand picture

The story line of your mini-movie is played out in three places:

- 1) The **verses**, telling the main story.
- 2) The **chorus**, where we observe or comment on the story.
- 3) The **bridge**, where new perspectives are introduced.

Here's another way to look at it. Do you know ancient Greek theater? No? Well, let me tell you, every old Greek theater play has three types of players in its cast.

First you have the mortals running around talking funny, killing each other and generally moving the story along.

Think of the mortals as the verses in a song.

Then you have this group of masked guys in robes standing together. They stand there on stage during the entire play,

watching and occasionally reciting something in unison about what the gods are thinking. **Think of this group of masked guys as the chorus of a song.**

And finally...

There's this old dude, the narrator, who comes out and wraps things up. He tells you what the moral of the play was, what eventually happened to the hero, and then announces that the play is over.* Everybody claps politely and goes home. **Think of the narrator as the bridge in a song.**

* Maybe audiences weren't too bright back then. Perhaps no one had invented "The End" signs yet?

Sneaking up on a verse

After you have made your lists, combined some phrases and picked a title, you probably have some general idea where things are going. You have enough to set the stage for your first verse.

In one paragraph, write out in plain talk what you'd like to say in this verse. What pieces of information need to be conveyed at this starting point? Realize the listener is relying on you to set the stage. Who do you want to introduce? Where is the location of the song? Are you there?

Implying a location can fill the listener's mind with images and save you space to tell your story. Close your eyes and look around the setting, what do you see? Hear? Feel? Do any phrases come to mind? Done? Good.

After you have finished this paragraph, distill the ideas down to four sentences. These are not your lyrics. Don't even think about rhyming anything yet (unless something wonderful jumped out and got on paper). Just put down the four sentences in plain English. Plain old talk. Done? Great!

You now have the *beginning* of your story. You'll need a middle and an end. Repeat this process with all the verses. I'll wait here... Done? Super!

Joining the chorus

Do have you a chorus idea? It will probably be your title, but it doesn't have to be. This is one place where it is cool to be too poetic.

I want you to repeat the outlining process again for the chorus while remembering these points:

- 1) A chorus is usually simpler than a verse.
- 2) It doesn't bear the same burden as the verse to propel the story along.
- 3) It will probably have fewer words and less information.
- 4) It is often the "big message" section.
- 5) It must relate to all the verses in some way.
- 6) Keep it a different length than the verses.

Crossing that bridge

You may or may not need a bridge. Not every song needs one. You'll know if you need one when:

- 1) Your ear tells you it's too soon musically for another verse or chorus.
- 2) You have some part of the story that cannot be presented in a verse or chorus.
- 3) You have an instrument solo that doesn't work over a verse or chorus.
- 4) You really really want one.

Think of the bridge as the voice of the great observer pointing out a revelation or new perspective. Everything is fair game in the bridge; you can even contradict yourself. But remember the bridge is the shortest section in the tune. It is usually only eight bars, so don't cram in too much.

You are always free to:

- start with a chorus idea
- start with your last verse
- use any progression you hear
- explore a music idea with gibberish
- change a bridge to a chorus
- build a song around a bridge
- work your way backward
- have only verses
- write a verse, then a chorus, then a verse
- go to another song and come back

Everything is cool.

At this point, you have rough sketches for the verses and chorus only. Don't pressure yourself with a bridge in this song. Just stick with the verses and choruses. Look... you are sneaking up on your song...

You are now working toward an arrangement of your love song. I'm giving you the heads up on this so you can begin narrowing down your story to three verses and two choruses. The arrangement will look like this:

Verse / Verse / Chorus / Verse / Chorus

Chapter 7

Songwriter's Secrets Revealed

Headlines

The next step is writing a headline for your song, just as if it were the lead story in your daily newspaper. However, this is not the title. It is a lighthouse to help you stay on course.

Here are a few for the example tune “**A Touch Away**”:

- 1) Man craves lover's touch
- 2) Woman demands contact
- 3) Man to do anything for touch
- 4) Woman near death for touch

I like the first one best: **Man craves lover's touch**. Using whatever headline you devise from your lists can work as a lighthouse to check where you're going. Let's go a little further.

Furniture

Ever wonder why one songwriter could hold your attention longer than others? Some had cool stories and intriguing words, while some kinda blathered all over you with “blah,

blah, I feel, you make me feel, I remember feeling, remember when we felt? blah, blah.”

Here is the straight story. Chances are these tedious songs you’ve suffered lacked solid objects. Every line was either about feelings, quotes, spiritual axioms, promises, resolutions or resentments—all ethereal concepts. They were gaseous puffs with nothing to grab onto.

Give us an old truck, a three-legged dog or a front porch, what songwriters call **furniture**. Items that can be touched, thrown or tripped over. Something noun-like.

Our ancestors drew their first stories on the walls of caves. They drew the hunter and the bear, battles for victory and rivers. They didn’t draw love, happy or wishes. We still gotta have the pictures in our stories. We’ve come so far. Even light can be furniture, or a rainbow, or a certain smell.

Instead of “Remember when we said goodbye,” try “I remember saying goodbye at the train.”

Rather than “That morning with you was so beautiful,” use “The morning light made a rainbow behind your hair.”

“I walked downstairs this morning” could be “The smell of coffee brought me down the stairs.”

Look where you can include furniture in your distilled lyrics to help anchor things down.

This cannot be overlooked—it’s too important. Furniture and the next two words could be the most important tools in your box.

Imply and infer

To **infer** is to derive by reasoning; conclude or judge from premises or evidence.

To **imply** is to indicate or suggest without being explicitly stated.

These two words make it possible for the listener to work a little. Listeners come to listen and figure things out. That's what people like to do. They like to work things out. Why do you think puzzles are so popular?

Just give the listener some images, facts to reason and a good back beat, and they'll be happy.

Our minds are quick; they can process images lightning fast. But you don't want to stack on too many, because you may lose a few folks. Just as long as you let the listener breathe a little, they'll think you are the smart one.

Instead of:

“She likes me.”

“I am very tired.”

“His clothes were old.”

try using:

“She smiles when I come around.”

“All I can think of is sleep.”

“The rags on his back were ripped.”

As mentioned earlier, implying location will fill the listener's head with images, saving you valuable space for the story line.

For example, where do you think these lyrics take place?

“The cash register was louder than the bartender”
“Crickets singing outside our tent”
“stuck there, bumper to bumper”

Where can you imply or infer your images in your lyrics?

Metaphors

A metaphor is a figure of speech. It’s a phrase that is applied to something to which it is not exactly applicable but close enough to suggest a resemblance. “She’s a Brick House” is one of my favorites.

Metaphors are powerful in songwriting. My only suggestion is don’t mix them. If you’ve already used a few car metaphors in your tune, don’t use a nautical or animal one in the same song.

If you have it in you to make another list for your song, why not list what related metaphors might work in your song? For example, “a songwriter’s toolbox” is a metaphor. And, as in all things, moderation.

Metaphors make great titles and choruses!

A little improv, please

Improvisation games are of great use to a writer. They stretch your mind a little, trip you up a bit. They can loosen up that left brain mojo.

Adding new information

With each new line, add more information to the song. It could include something new like:

- 1) Who you are
- 2) What you are doing
- 3) About the other person
- 4) Where you are

The five senses

Include one or more of your five senses in your tune. They can act as furniture. Check out the senses used in just the first verse of *Hotel California*.

Changing characters

Change the person who is singing the song. What if you were 65 years old and writing this song? What would you say then? What if you were 12? What if you were a dog? A book? What if you had never seen daylight or stars?

Get any new insights?

Remember what the ear likes

Keep in mind the three things the ear loves above all else. It loves, seeks out and craves:

- 1) Resolution: Music progressions coming back to the **I** chord.
- 2) Repetition: A great music riff reminding us of itself.

3) Dynamics: Building and falling musical peaks and valleys.

To arrange these components in a pleasing, simple piece is one of the most challenging goals in music. You want the music interesting enough to hold your attention without being too complex to follow, yet still simple enough to remember without being boring or repetitious. It will come if you don't try too hard. The whole Zen thing.

Musical dynamics

Tucked away in this lyrically laden section is the most important point in marrying the words and music of a song: the **dynamics**. Music builds emotion, and lyrics build emotion. Lyrically it's when the story reaches its highest suspense or drama, and musically, when the song is at its highest note. You want these to occur at the same time.

Verses and choruses both have their high points. Both tend to happen at the end of their sections. But it is the chorus that has the biggest climax in the song. It is the big daddy. Keep this in mind when writing your music and hammering out the melody line.

The power of three

This tool has been used all through this book. Almost every example given (in sentence form) has been given in threes. Three always works, four is usually too many and two not enough. I can't tell you any more than that: it works.

Did you make any lists in your song lyrics? Your eyes, your ears, your noses...

Chapter 8

Counting Syllables

Grab your rattle

Most American popular music has the same structure as nursery rhymes, usually two or four lines forming a thought. These rhyming paired lines are called a **couplet**. Any number of couplets can form a verse, but usually it's two couplets.

Look at the poetry of some of your favorite songs and see if they can be recited like a nursery rhyme.

Good. See, I told you so. You checked one of your favorite songs, didn't you? Welcome back! Now let's change gears and look at a nursery rhyme we all know, "Mary Had a Little Lamb." It has two couplets.

couplet 1

**Mary had a little lamb
Its fleece was white as snow.**

couplet 2

**And everywhere that Mary went,
The lamb was sure to go.**

Yes, it rhymes (more on that later), but for now you want to focus on the number of syllables in each line. Words have

“beats” just like music has. These word beats are called **syllables**.

In songwriting and poetry, the number of syllables per line is more important than the number of words. And remember that one thought is often two lines long.

It's these syllables that line up with the notes of the music, not the words. You must keep the syllable count of each line consistent in the song so they will “sing” with the music.

Tap out this first rhyme with your finger, hitting the syllables, *not* the words. For example, the words “Mary” and “little” each have two syllables.

Mary had a little lamb	7 taps
Its fleece was white as snow;	6 taps
And everywhere that Mary went,	8 taps
The lamb was sure to go.	6 taps

It followed her to school one day,	8 taps
Which was against the rule;	6 taps
It made the children laugh and play,	8 taps
To see a lamb at school.	6 taps

And so the teacher turned it out	8 taps
But still it lingered near	6 taps
And waited patiently about	8 taps
Till Mary did appear.	6 taps

“Why does the lamb love Mary so?”	8 taps
The eager children cry;	6 taps
“Why, Mary loves the lamb, you know”	8 taps
The teacher did reply.	6 taps

Notice the **first** and **third** lines of a verse have the same number of syllables and the **second** and **fourth** have the same number. However, as in the first verse here, they do not always have the same count, but it is a good parameter for us to follow at this point. What matters most is that each verse has the same pattern as the verses unfold.

You will establish the number of syllables per line for the entire song with the first two lines. The rest of the verses will need to match that first verse in syllable count.

Since you usually you only write one chorus and then repeat it, you don't have to keep track there.

To further enhance the contrast between a verse and a chorus, you can create different line totals for the choruses than you did for the verses.

If you speak your lines in a nursery rhyme pattern, they will eventually fall into place. Again, remember that one thought usually takes two lines.

Now take your distilled lines and rewrite them with similar syllable counts.

Feel free to take from any nursery rhyme you know. Remember to match the count in the first and third lines as well as second and fourth lines.

Allow any rhyming to happen if it appears. Don't force it.

Try to work toward three verses and two choruses. Remember, you only need to write one chorus, since they most often repeat themselves.

We are ready to put this tune into a rough draft outline. The form you are sneaking up on is:

Verse / Verse / Chorus / Verse / Chorus

This will be your first draft outline for your love song. It is not the final draft. Don't worry, just put in the lyrics you have. Use the new verses with the corrected syllable count. Just write them down. Shoot for one thought to be taken up by two lines. Again, rhyming is great, but not necessary yet.

Each **verse** has four lines with one pair of *eventual* rhymes on the second and forth lines.

Each **chorus** also has four lines with one pair of *eventual* rhymes on the second and forth lines.

On the next page, just fill in the blanks:

My Love Song

Verse One

Verse Two

Chorus One

Verse Three

Chorus Two

Great. You now have a non-rhyming first draft.

Chapter 9

It's Rhyming Time

The ohs and ahs

Remember that vowels rhyme, not consonants. And nothing rhymes with orange.

Here is where we make our first rhyming rough draft. Check to see if you have any little voices putting any pressure on you. Ignore them. You can have as many chances as you need to finish this section, and you can take as much time as you want. This could be the most fun part of the book for you.

This probably will also be the most rewarding section in the book. This is where a lot of magic happens...if you treat it like fun and don't force it.

Let's say you have a line you really like, but you don't have a rhyming line to go with it. Let's also say it's the second of the four lines in the verse. Let's say this second line is:

“I knew you'd always be there.”

A **quatrain** is formed by two rhyming couplets. In a quatrain, as in “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” sometimes the first and third lines rhyme as well as the second and fourth. Another possible rhyming pattern is where the first and second lines rhyme and then the third and fourth rhyme. For this exercise, you'll want to establish and stick with a pattern.

If the first and third lines rhyme in the first verse, keep it going. If they don't rhyme in the first verse, don't start rhyming them later in the song. It will confuse the listener.

In fact, I have a real problem with Mary and her lamb. In the first verse, the first and third lines don't rhyme, but then they do rhyme in the second and third verses, but then don't rhyme in the fourth verse. Drives me nuts.

If you only rhyme the second and fourth lines, then you are free to end the first and third lines with anything you like. In reality, if you only have to find a rhyme for the fourth line, you only have to find as many rhymes as you have verses.

Okay, write down your first, second and third lines from your last rough draft. Leave an empty space for the fourth line. You want to be sure you have the syllable count nailed down in your head.

Let's say the first three lines are:

I don't know how I ever knew it but	(10)
I knew that you'd always be there	(8)
And when I couldn't see your smiling face	(10)
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	(8)

Go to your rhyming dictionary and find a few words that might work, for example, care, where, dare, flare, swear, hair...

Now go back to the nursery rhyme test. Recite the lines you have in your best nursery rhyme fashion. Each time the fourth line comes around, say **Ya Da Da Da Da** (in the correct cadence/count) up until you hit the place where the rhyme takes place. Then throw in one of the possible rhymes.

In this verse, you will need seven counts of **Ya Da** until you throw in the new one-syllable word. You could also do six counts of **Ya Da**, working up to a two-syllable blank.

Just keep doing it over and over. Your mind has been so immersed in this song, this process, this rhyme that it will eventually appear.

Just like all the other lines have appeared, so will the rhyme. If you let it. You may have to fiddle around with what comes to mind, but you will have the rhyme. It is always there. Remember to stay with the nursery rhyme trick while you recite your work. Repeat it over and over and over.

I don't know how I ever knew it but	(10)
I knew that you'd always be there	(8)
And when I couldn't see your smiling face	(10)
Ya Da Da Da Da Da Da <i>scare</i>	(8)

I don't know how I ever knew it but	(10)
I knew that you'd always be there	(8)
And when I couldn't see your smiling face	(10)
Ya Da Da Da Da Da Da <i>where</i>	(8)

I don't know how I ever knew it but	(10)
I knew that you'd always be there	(8)
And when I couldn't see your smiling face	(10)
Ya Da Da Da Da Da Da <i>share</i>	(8)

I don't know how I ever knew it but	(10)
I knew that you'd always be there	(8)
And when I couldn't see your smiling face	(10)
Ya Da Da Da Da Da Da <i>spare</i>	(8)

I don't know how I ever knew it but	(10)
I knew that you'd always be there	(8)

And when I couldn't see your smiling face (10)
I had to pull out some spare (7)

Okay, it rhymes, but it doesn't completely make sense. What can I tweak in the song to make it work? Can I fix it with changing some other line? Even the holiest of holy "favorite line"?

You can change anything, anywhere, anytime. I've had to let go of some great *lines* to allow a great *song* to get finished.

Realize you already have the rhyming word. It's the rest of the line you are looking for. The hard part has already been done.

Okay, try this. Change the last line.

I don't know how I ever knew it but (10)
I knew that you'd always be there (8)
And when I couldn't see your smiling face (10)
I'd find some love to spare (6)

Still not great. Try changing the first three lines.

I remember the night that you told me (10)
That you might not always be there (8)
And if I'd just picture your smiling face (10)
I'd find some love to spare (6)

Almost there...

I remember the night that you told me (10)
That you might not always be there (8)
And if I'd just picture your smiling face (10)
I would feel your love anywhere (8)

Almost...

I remember the night that you told me	(10)
That you might not always be there	(8)
But if I could picture your smiling face	(10)
I could feel your love anywhere	(8)

Whew. So now it's your turn with your tune. You have all the time in the world. Remember how folks love puzzles? This is your puzzle. Have a blast!!! Oh, and this isn't the final version or draft either. Still no pressure.

My love song

Verse One

_____rhyme 1

_____rhyme 1

Verse Two

_____rhyme 2

_____rhyme 2

Chorus One

_____rhyme 3

_____rhyme 3

Verse Three

_____rhyme 4

_____rhyme 4

Chorus Two

_____rhyme 5

_____rhyme 5

Congrats!!!! You have completed your first full draft.

Chapter 10

Take a Break

But you have to come back.

Chapter II

Take a Peek

Working notes on actual songs

Still staying in break mode, follow along with these writing notes on other tunes. What would you do differently? (This is not a test...)

song I: “Grace” © brooks/yules

I met Michele Yules at a songwriters’ workshop on New York’s Upper West Side, proving that it’s good to get out and meet other artists.

We met and discussed ideas that each of us had bouncing around in our heads (also backed up in paper notebooks). We traded ideas for about an hour until one idea stood out as exciting to both of us. Notice that we waited until something “sparkled.” We didn’t just start with the first thing laid out on the table.

Not every idea is going to move the next person. That isn’t an insult; it’s just usually a timing/universe kinda thing. Somewhere down the road, you’ll find someone who is also excited by your idea. Or you’ll be moved to work on it yourself.

When you collaborate, it's important to select an idea that is interesting to both parties. You just can't—and don't want to—fake enthusiasm.

Okay, back to **“Grace.”** When we agreed to work on it, it wasn't a lyric or a phrase. It was only an idea. The idea was that there was a girl who felt trapped in her small-town life, couldn't find the love she craved and was looking for an exit. We wanted it to be upbeat and have a motivating message. Why not have the girl be protected by the “gift” of having the magical name “Grace”?

Great. Here was some conflict, a little mystical magic and a story that *could* have a clear beginning, middle and end. We also agreed the music would need to be upbeat and very simple.

Beginning: Girl feels lost.

Middle: Girl looks to get out.

End: Girl gets out.

I had a music riff screaming in my head for a while that was the reverse of chords of something I had just finished with another songwriter.

In the first verse, we set the stage for **“Grace”**:

**She waited for so *long*
For some message from God.
It was feeling like the Planet of Apes
When the tarot said move *along*.
She knew she would find love
If she could find the patience to wait.
She knew it would be easy**

**'Cause her mama named her Grace.
Her mama named her Grace.**

You'll see I've italicized the rhymes. You will also notice we didn't use exact rhymes.

Did you notice we dropped the word "the" in the movie title? This had to be done to fit the syllable count to the beat.

We *imply* she is "spiritual" by mentioning tarot cards. We also *imply* she needed to leave without saying the words "she needed to leave."

We held off on the "magic of her name" until the last line. It worked so well that we later decided to make it a repeating last-line chorus. This often happens in Dylan tunes.

Since we already set the stage for her longing to get out of town (a common theme in songwriting) in the first verse, now it was time to get her started on the move. In the second verse, saying that she "packed her...bag" and "put out her thumb" tells us she's leaving town without spelling it out that she's leaving. *Implied, Inferred, Implied, Inferred...*

We wanted to add some furniture to the song (Ray Bans and little pink bag) and give a little more information about her. We didn't want her to be a goody-goody, so we had her dress sexy, pierce her nose (piercing of the body or cutting of the hair is seen as a defiant gesture in many cultures) and commit a small forgivable crime.

Heading toward the sun is reminiscent of the Phoenix, which symbolizes rebirth.

The repeating "theme line" relating to her name fit just perfectly after the second verse. This was when we decided

to make it a one-line chorus. So we went back and added it to the first verse. Notice it doesn't rhyme with anything in the verse. It stands alone as a one-line chorus.

**So she packed her little pink bag
With all her hot pink *clothes*.
She stole a pair of black Ray Bans
And pierced her *nose*.
She put out her thumb,
Started heading toward the sun.
She knew it'd be easy
For what her mama done.
Her mama named her Grace.**

The story continues and we find her in Tulsa, standing in line waiting for her change. We had a double meaning for "change," for money as well as good fortune.

Humor is also the greatest thing to hide in a song. An Optometrist who "caught her eye" says it all.

Again we see her courage (birthright of her name) when she approaches the doctor with the faith she'll be all right.

And by the time the last verse line comes around, we need to set up that one-line chorus by mentioning again how she got her name.

**She was waiting for her change
At the Tulsa Five and *Dime*.
When the handsome young Optometrist
Walked in and caught her *eye*.
She walked right up to him
Without knowing what to say.
She knew it would be easy 'cause
Her mama paved the way.**

Her mama named her Grace.

The song could have ended there, and it did for a couple of years, until **Tommy James** (“Crimson and Clover,” “Mony Mony,” “I Think We’re Alone Now” and “Crystal Blue Persuasion”) heard the tune and asked us to write another verse. Talk about cool—one of my childhood heroes wanted to hear more. The last verse came out in about four minutes.

Infer/Imply time... We find her with a baby, a new front porch and the doctor working in the yard. I guess they got married. And I guess we split the ending into 2 verses.

And the big finish is we find out the baby must have just been born because she just received her name that day...and her mother passed the gift on to her. Not a dry eye in the house, not even mine.

**Now she sits on her new front porch
With her baby in her *arms*.
The doctor is pulling weeds.
His back is so wide and *strong*.
She knows her daughter
Will always find her way,
Can always lean on
The gift she got today.
Her mama named her Grace.
Her mama named her Grace.
Her mama named her Grace.**

song 2: “She’s Right Over There”

© brooks

I was obsessed with this girl, and I wanted a song to impress her. Impress her? More like I wanted her to drop to her knees, marvel at my passion and swear her eternal undying love for me.

Playing it out in my mind, I would perform it live at TRAMPS in NYC. She would be in the audience and I’d be singing the song, and I’d point to her whenever the title came around. (It would be something about her, but I didn’t know what yet.)

It was clear to whom I was writing and singing the song. It would be to the audience, the universe. This song would be a secret between the listener and myself.

I first stumbled across the music while practicing a jazz progression. Most of my guitar riffs are glorious accidents that I trip over. I only really compose/write the rest of the song, making the song build on the accident. Some call this inspiration. I call it stumbling.

All I had was this idea of pointing to this girl across the room and telling my buddies how it was love at first sight.

Of course, I’m not going to write “love at first sight.” It would just be too cheesy. So I made a long list of all the ways to *imply* love at first sight, a list saying how important someone could be, a list of what is cool to me.

I acted out the scene as an improv on what I would say to my best buddy about this girl. Immediately I came up with the title “She’s Right Over There.”

Super. I had a title and was pretty sure I had a chorus I could sing as I pointed to her.

Soooo... I had this riff for the chorus music. It pretty much demanded I start and finish each chorus with the same line. This left me very little wiggle room between the start and finish of the chorus. So I went back through my lists and picked out all the ones that rhymed with “there.”

I didn’t have enough lines, so I pulled out the old rhyming dictionary and looked for all the possible rhymes I could find. Close rhymes, exact rhymes, distant rhymes, anything to do with love, beauty, coolness, being at a party, best friends, chance, anything to do with what I already had. Lists, lists, lists...

I didn’t know where the story would go except I needed to connect with the girl across the room. Notice I never come right out and say, “Here I go, I’m walking over there...”

I also wanted to give some information about the place, like how it was crowded without saying the word “crowded.” This gets handled by answering my buddy’s question about which girl I am talking about. And you can assume the distance between me and the girl is just beyond earshot.

Wanting more dialogue between my buddy and me, I avoided getting into “he said, then I said, then he said” by questioning his questions. This is a great tool for saving valuable lyric space.

The conflict is the question of whether I'm going over to her. I could question the stars and fate (great romantic themes) by wondering about the chances of me seeing her on this night in this room.

Admittedly, this tune has very little furniture. I make up for it with the specificity of how she makes me feel.

Notice the simple rhyming pattern and how it goes straight into a chorus after only one verse.

She's Right Over There

**I love that girl and I want you to know
If you catch my eye you'll see where it shows
You ask me where's my life, where's my love,
Where's my soul?
Just turn around now, but turn around slow
because she's right over there**

**She's right over there
Twirling her hair, so twisted and fair
So unaware of my every stare
Shes so so so right over there**

**How'd I end up here on the very same night
In the very same room, with such a wicked sight?
How can you ask which one I'm talking about
Can't you see the light just pouring out
from right over there**

**She's right over there
I swear she just sweetens the air,
Like a shadow she'd fit anywhere
She's so so so right over there**

**I've never felt like... no never... not like this...
I know that I want her... I know that I need her
more than my next breath**

**I'm floating my head is spinning me too
I pray that my feet will carry me through
Don't dare ask me if this will take long
Cause you know what I want
And you know where I've gone
right over there**

**She's right over there
So tempting, she's a lover's dare
The only answer to my only prayer
She's so so so right over there**

Oh... She went to the bathroom as I started the song. She never heard a note. I swear.

song 3: “Hideaway”

© brooks/yules/peterson

**Put a smile on my face
And erase every trace of this world
Settle in, cuddle up
And we’ll watch the night unfurl
Open up those bedroom eyes,
Bring your lust and your lullabies
Pull the shade on another day
I’ll do anything you say**

**Ohhh... Say you will
Ohhh... Lead the way
Keep me in your hideaway**

**Put your hand on my heart
And promise not to part when we dream
Of that place I don’t race
With everyone and everything I see
I ain’t getting out of bed,
Till those monsters leave my head
You can make them go away
They’ll do anything you say**

**Ohhh... Say you will
Ohhh... Lead the way
Keep me in your hideaway**

**And when I am here
I’m safe
And when I am here
I’m complete
And when I am here**

**God I have everything that I need
That I need**

**Ohhh... Say you will
Ohhh... Lead the way
Keep me in your hideaway
Hideaway
Hideaway**

Ray Peterson gave me this guitar riff; it sounded like a Joe Jackson song, but twice as fast. I won't say which one.

We had some lyrics lying around from some previous sessions that never got worked into any other songs. One was **"pull the shade on another day,"** another was **"put your hand on my heart"** and **"lust and lullabies"** was the third.

The sessions began with asking ourselves what was important to lovers, what do they romantically long for? Each other? Escape? The idea of finding a place to hide from the world seemed pretty universal for couples.

The title came pretty quick after we picked the theme. This would be a busy little tune.

The bridge lyrics were inspired by a movie scene. I won't say which one.

This song is rhyming all over the place. It's got internal rhymes:

**face, erase and trace
heart, not and part**

Basic rhymes:

world and **unfurl**
eyes and **lullabies**
day and **say**
head and **bed**

It also has some alliteration with:

lust and **lullabies**
put, promise and **part**

The verses came fast and easy because we made all our lists of relative words up front. Lists about love, lovers, bed, sex, and so on. Having some nice clever anchoring phrases sure helps, too.

The verses were coming out very involved with thick imagery, lots of constants and few vowels. They were also longer than our average verse lyric. We knew we would need a much shorter chorus. So we ended up sending the chorus off as an extension of the last line of each verse. Notice, however, that the chorus would stand on its own.

The bridge music starts on the **IV** and leads so sweetly into the last chorus.

This is not a story song. It is a snapshot-of-a-moment tune. We learn more about the subject's inner landscape than the outer events. Yes, one is asking to be taken somewhere, but in reality they are already there. That place is alone.

Chapter 12

An Early Checklist

Do you have all the lyrics rhyming? Do the syllables count out right? Is there a strong melody line? Does it come together over the chord changes? Do you have a song? Almost? Great. Time to marry the two parts of words and music. This is where even more magic happens.

Play it over and over. Sing it the nursery rhyme way and start changing the notes around; stretch some out some of the notes. Take someone else's melody line and change a few of the notes. Start with a different note as you sing. Most songs start with the root/first note. Try starting on the third note in the scale, or the fifth. Does anything click? Does anything stumble? Fiddle with it. Record it on a simple cassette player and listen over and over. Walk away and rest your ears.

Come back to it. Does the story make sense? Do you have a collaborator? What do they think? Is there a nice contrast between the verses and the choruses? How are the dynamics? Is anything missing? If you are working alone on this song and are craving feedback—and you have someone whose opinion you trust—now is a good time to bounce your song off somebody else. Of course, that should be someone other than your intended love song recipient.

Did you meet any singer/songwriters on your trips to the local coffee shop? You might wish to visit www.copyright.gov and copyright your song before venturing out.

Chapter 13

Great Songs Aren't Written, They're Rewritten

Q: How do I know if it's any good?

A: It doesn't matter.

It doesn't matter for two reasons:

- 1) When the object of your affection sees/hears what you've done, it won't matter what it sounds like.
- 2) This isn't your last song. This doesn't even have to be the final version of this song. Your next song will probably be even better. You will improve.

Check your tune against these points before letting it out for review.

A checklist

- 1) Are my pronouns clear?
- 2) Did I vary my vowel sounds?
- 3) Are the changes dynamic in the tune?
- 4) Are the verses and choruses varied enough?
- 5) Are my time and place consistent?

- 6) Have I overused any unnecessary words?
- 7) Am I assuming anything that needs to be clearer?
- 8) Is my furniture consistent?
- 9) Does the tune maintain a consistent level of intelligence?
- 10) Have I moved the story forward?
- 11) Have I stayed in character?

Chapter 14

Works of Art Are Never Finished, They Just Stop in Interesting Places

If you look around your work area, you will find lots of notes and ideas that maybe didn't work this time. Let them be your next inspiration. Let them be the seeds of your next idea next time you're stuck. Save them for collaborations. They are all song—songs that haven't come very far...yet.

You are free to come back and revisit your finished songs; you may think of a better phrase or an extra verse. Anything is possible, anything is allowed in **your writing**.

Section 15

If You Must Know

More on music (with some repetition)

The smallest unit of music is the **note**. A note can be brief or sustained for a long duration. Think of a single key on a piano being struck or an open string being plucked on a guitar.



The *absence* of sound in a song is called a **rest**. A rest can also be brief or long. Think of a piano or guitar and don't do anything, just stare at it. See below:



Nice and quiet, huh?

The distance between two adjacent notes is called a **semitone** or a **half step**.

Or you could say...

Each note is separated from its upper and lower neighbors by the interval of **one half step**, or **semitone**.

You could also say...

Whenever you move *up* the piano, hitting *every* note (one at a time) you are moving *up* one **semitone** or **half step** at a time.

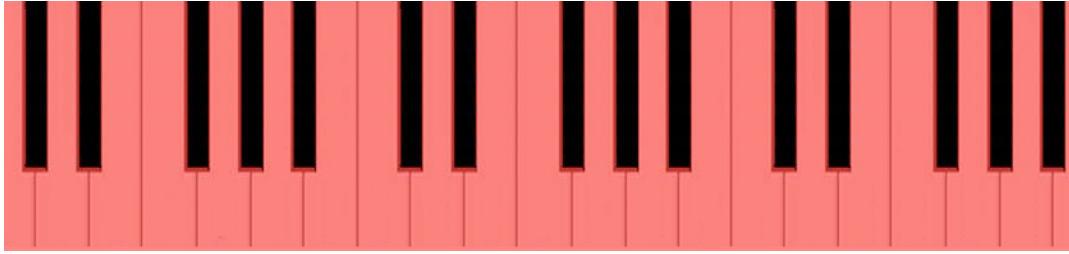
Scales of a feather

Notes are grouped together in sets called **scales**. Or look at it this way: a **scale** is a set of notes that provide the raw material for musical.

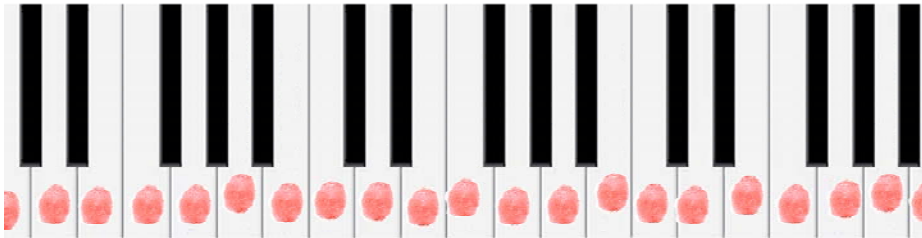
Scales are typically ordered in pitch. They sound higher as they go up the scale.

When musicians or singers are practicing these notes, they are “doing their scales.”

There are just two scales we need to know about right now. The first is the **Chromatic** scale. It is the mother of all the scales. It contains all the notes. Think of every note or key on the piano, both black and white:



The second scale is the **Diatonic** scale. You probably know it as the “do re me fa so la ti do” scale. It is the scale we will mostly be working with. It has seven notes. In the key of C, they are A, B, C, D, E, F and G. Think of only the white keys on a piano when playing in “C”:

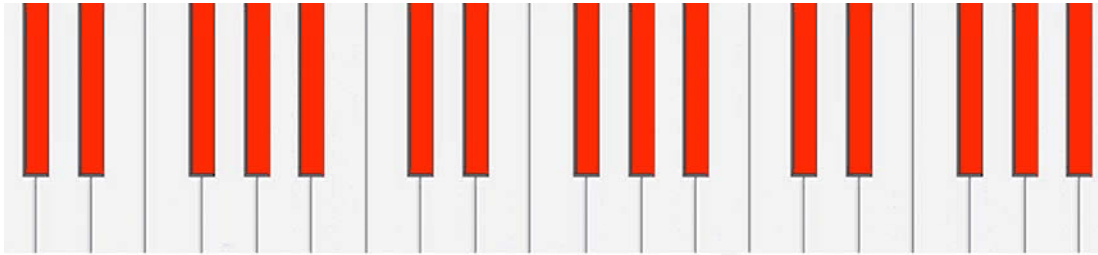


Do remember the **Diatonic** scale will be “our” scale.



In between some of the notes of the **Diatonic** scale, you will find what we call **flats** and **sharps**.

In the key of C, these are the black keys on the piano. See below:



A black key is called **flat** when it is below the note it refers to and **sharp** when it is above the note.

Most musicians refer to the flats when naming notes, rather than the sharps. For example, it is better to say G^b than F[#]. Below are the names of the notes on the black keys.



The word “**key**” has another meaning, other than the keys you pound out your notes on.

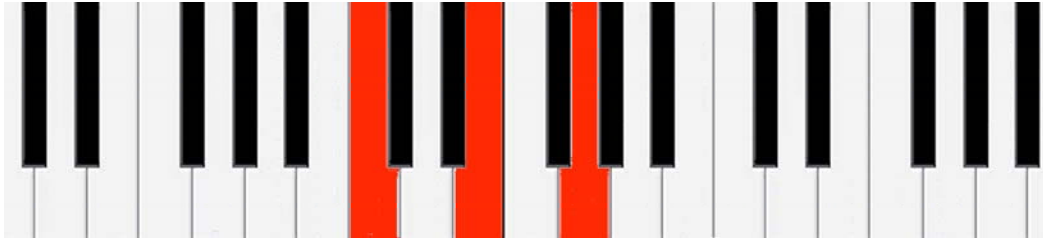
A **key signature**, or **key** for short, indicates a group of notes that belong together in a piece of music.

When you hear a musician ask “Hey, what **key** is this in?” he’s asking which group of notes he can play and not clash with everybody else.

There will be NO test later...

Nice chords

Several notes played at the same time are called a **chord**.

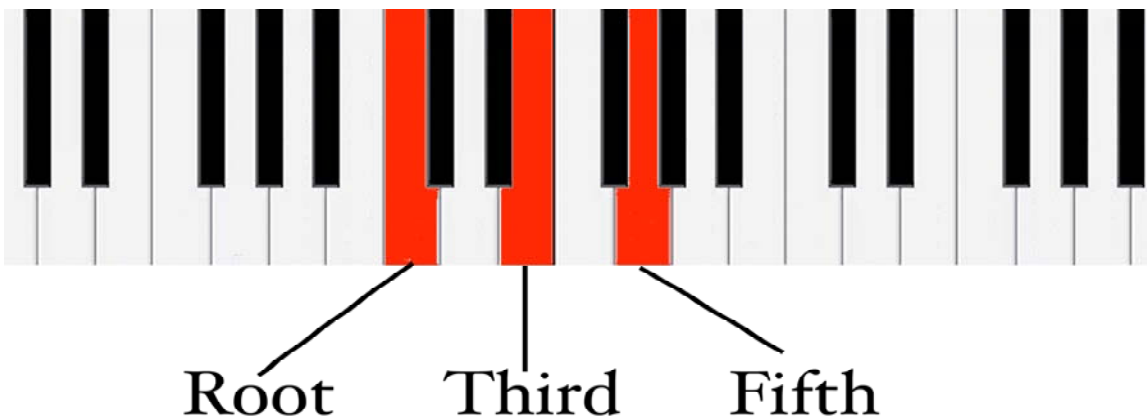


It takes at least three notes to make a **chord**.

The three-note chords we will be working with are called **triads**.

The names of the three notes in a major **triad** are:

- 1) The “**root**,” which is the lowest note in the chord.
- 2) The “**third**,” which is the middle note.
- 3) The “**fifth**,” which is the highest of the three notes.



I apologize in advance for the next few paragraphs...

Triads can be major triads or minor triads. As the name indicates, the “root” note is the heart of the chord. It also determines the name of the chord. This makes great sense to me. In any type of triad, this is always the same.

With major triads, the third note is four semitones above the root. This is called a “**third**.” It’s called a third because it’s two whole tones above the root. Remember do, re, me, fa, so, la, ti, do? Well, the third is the “me” to the root’s “do.”

The fifth note is seven semitones above the root. This is called the “**fifth**” of the chord, because it is four whole tones above the root. The fifth is the “so” to the root’s “do.”

The only difference between a major and a minor triad is the middle note. The root is always the beginning, and the fifth is always seven semitones above the root. But that middle note drops down one semitone to create a minor chord. This note is called a “**flatted third**.” Every minor chord has a flatted third.

Since this is such a hodgepodge of black and white keys, not all chord types look the same on the keyboard. This is why the cookie-cutter technique is so great. It creates majors and minors while you keep your finger position constant. The key of C is the only key this cookie-cutter works in.

My way of keeping it straight is:

- 1) The **root** uses my thumb.
- 2) The **third** uses my third finger.
- 3) The **fifth** uses my fifth finger.

Naming the triads

These seven triad chords need some names. Just like when you are naming the key, naming the triad starts with taking the lowest note in the chord.

Q: Tell me again why seven?

A: Because we are working with the seven-note **Diatonic** scale: C, D, E, F, G, A and B.

We build our seven chords from the seven root notes of that scale.

These triads we are working with are gonna have two names:

- 1) A **letter** name referring to what notes they contain.
- 2) A **number** name referring to where they are in relation to the other chords.

The letter name comes from whatever note the root is. If the root note is “C,” the chord will be a “C” something, like C major or C minor.

The number name comes from where the chord rests in the Roman numeral scale degree.

The what? I swear it’s easier than it sounds... I swear!!!!!!

We’re gonna number these triads with the Roman numerals **I** through **VII**. They are called the “**I**” chord, the “**II**” chord, the “**III**” chord... all the way to the “**VII**” chord.

Each of these chord numbers corresponds to a type of chord:

The **I** chord is a **major** chord.
The **II** chord is a **minor** chord.
The **III** chord is a **minor** chord.
The **IV** chord is a **major** chord.
The **V** chord is a **major** chord.
The **VI** chord is a **minor** chord.
The **VII** chord is a **diminished** chord (more on this later).

As you can see, the three types of triads are **major**, **minor** and **diminished**. Each type of chord has a very specific vibe:

- 1) A “major” chord usually has a happy, resolved sound.
- 2) A “minor” chord is a more dramatic, sad sound.
- 3) A “diminished” chord has an unstable “no man’s land” sound.

You can use this chart by plugging in the first chord in the first position, and the others will fall into place.

Plug in the key of C and here are your chords:

I	the “C” chord is major	called C major
II	the “D” chord is minor	called D minor
III	the “E” chord is minor	called E minor
IV	the “F” chord is major	called F major
V	the “G” chord is major	called G major
VI	the “A” chord is minor	called A minor
VII	the “B” chord is diminished	called B diminished

or

Plug in the key of G and here are your chords:

I	the “G” chord is major	called G major
II	the “A” chord is minor	called A minor
III	the “B” chord is minor	called B minor
IV	the “C” chord is major	called C major
V	the “D” chord is major	called D major
VI	the “E” chord is minor	called E minor
VII	the “F” chord is diminished	called F diminished

It is okay to count these out on your fingers.

Let’s say we want to write our tune in the key of C. Look at your “scale degree” chart and plug in “C”. Since it is the first degree of the scale, it will be the **I** chord.

Continuing using this chart or counting on your fingers, you can easily determine the **IV** chord is “F” and the **V** chord is “G.”

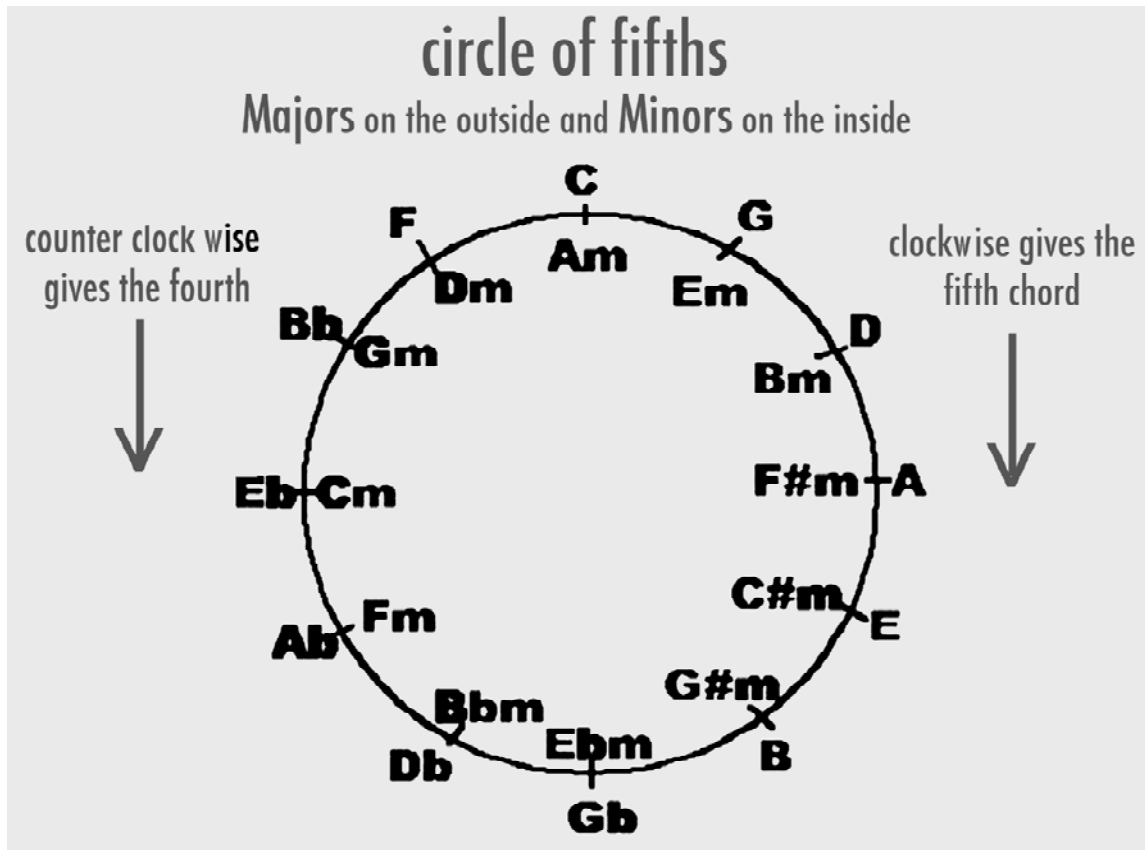
You don’t have to remember if the **I**, **IV** and **V** are major or not because they are always major, just like the **II**, **III** and **VI** are always minor.

The **VII** is trouble unless you flatten the chord and make it a major instead of a diminished. I’ve written hundreds of songs, and I hardly ever use it as a diminished chord.

There are a gazillion other chords and variations, but let’s keep things simple.

The circle of fifths

I friend of mine met Ringo Starr, and Ringo told him the most important thing in music was to know your circle of fifths.



At the top of the circle is the key of "C." If you move clockwise, you will find the fifth of "C," which is "G." Thus the name "circle of fifths." You can pick any chord on the chart and go clockwise, and you'll always find the fifth.

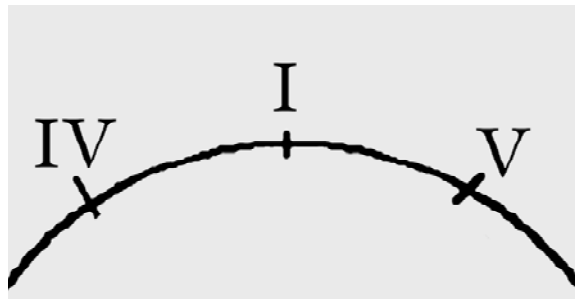
That *first* chord you pick on the chart, the one you use to find the "fifth," is also called the "**I**" chord. Sound familiar?

So any chord you start with is the “**I**,” and the chord clockwise to it is then the “**V**.”

And that’s not all! If you look now, you will also receive, absolutely free, the **IV** chord!

Yep, If you move counterclockwise from the “**I**,” you will find the “**IV**.”

Sooo... In the circle of fifths, you will always have the three **primary chords** next to each other:



The “**I**” in the middle

The “**IV**” to the left

The “**V**” to the right

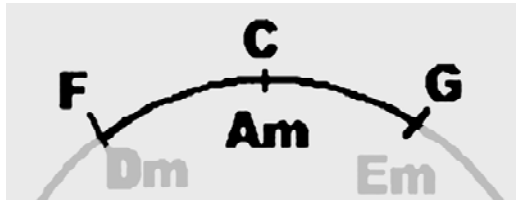
This works with any chord on the chart.

AND... as an extra bonus...

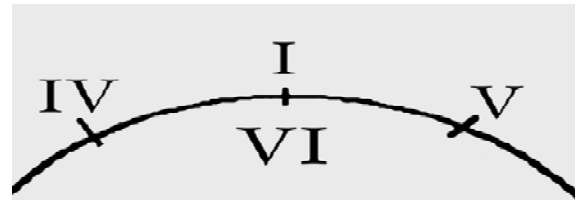
Inside the circle are all the relative minor chords that relate to the major chords closest to them on the outer circle.

If we look at the top of the circle, we see the **C** outside the circle is corresponding to the **Am** inside the circle.

If you look back to the major/minor chart that gave the Roman numeral names to chords, you'll notice **Am** is the **VI** chord to **C**. So this circle of fifths also shows us the **VI** chords in the same cluster.



or



Since we are only working in the key of C, this is more than you need for now! There is a lot more to learn, but this really is plenty to get you started on your first love song.

Chapter 16

Closing Time

Congratulations! You made it to the end of the book. I didn't want to just drop you off without saying thank you and goodbye. Some great teachers and generous collaborators passed everything I've presented in this book down to me. Now, I pass it all on to you, hoping you continue these disciplines and make use of and modify these tools.

There are just as many ways to write songs as there are songs to write. Please keep looking for new ways to deepen your connection to your art. Take risks, speak the scary truth in your music, break some rules and think out of the box as much as you can.

Above all, I hope you had fun. Songwriting can be an infinite playground on which to express yourself. There, you can become whoever you want to be and say whatever is on your mind. So, play on!

Thanks,



William Brooks

THE END

More to come.

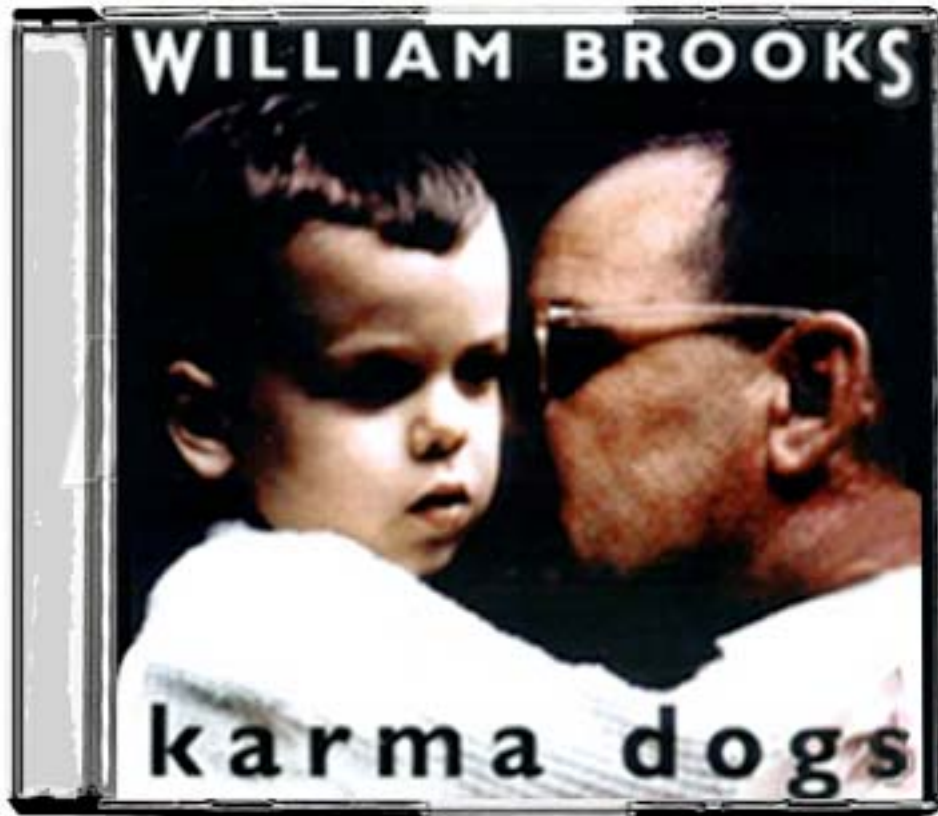
Look for my new book...

coming soon!

Acknowledgments

I've had some great teachers, collaborators and guides along the way. I must thank them all for their inspiration, instruction and insight. I list them in ascending height, Eric Morris ("Leave your art for a day and it will leave you for three"), Rusty King ("What is really being said here?"), Julia Cameron ("Keep the pen moving"), Rick Beresford ("the answer to every question is yes"), Walter Marks ("do something every day"), Mark Lonergan ("It's easier than you think"), Rich Winter ("Make lots of lists"), Rick Moody ("Write like you are driving in the fog") and Robin Hackett ("It doesn't matter what people think"). A big thanks to Mesan at actors-web.com also Margaret for the editing and Linh at Tunenami.com for all the help and encouragement.

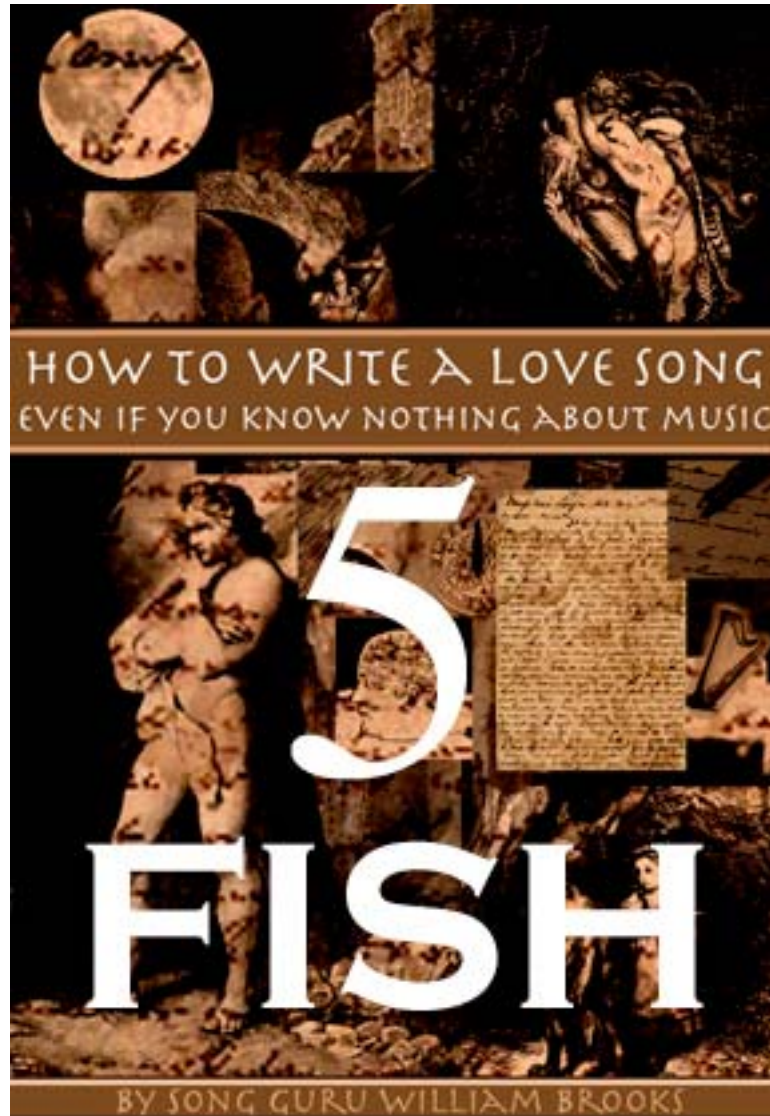
BONUS NUMBER ONE



SONGS in MP3 format

1. Karma Dogs
2. I Didn't Think
3. After The Flood
4. Between Two Rivers
5. Alright
6. Miracle
7. Isabel
8. Scream Fill The Silence
9. I Do Not Know
10. Slacker Blues
11. Convertible Girls
12. Still Around

BONUS NUMBER TWO



Your second bonus is back on page 49.

BONUS NUMBER THREE



Here are several Songwriting contests for folks just like you. It's even possible to win money from your songwriting or even just lyrics. I've weeded out the nonsense contests and found the best and fairest. Oops, actually I've listed 15

Please check for deadlines, fees and requirements for entry.

AMERICAN SONGWRITER MAGAZINE'S LYRIC WRITING CONTEST

Established 1984. 6 contests per year.

Requirements: Send lyrics only. Lyrics must be typed and a check for \$10 (per entry) must be enclosed. 3 entries maximum per contest. Include an entry form with each lyric sheet submitted. Call for required official form (615-321-6096) or print it from their website. <http://www.americansongwriter.com>

NSAI SONGWRITING CONTEST

Everyone who enters will receive a scoring report for every song entered. The judging system will tell how each song performed, with tips on structure and commercial appeal. For more information on the NSAI and the NSAI Song Contest, visit www.cmt.com/asm/contests/nsai/2006/

BILLBOARD SONG CONTEST

For information, visit www.billboardsongcontest.com

BROADJAM 6-Pack Competition

The 6-Pack Competition is Broadjam's biggest contest combining six separate songwriting challenges and awarding over \$50,000 in prizes. Thirty-eight total winners will be announced as awards will be given to the top three artists in each individual challenge. <http://www.broadjam.com/6pack/>

JUST PLAIN FOLKS MUSIC AWARDS

Only active members of Just Plain Folks are eligible to enter this contest. But It is really worth joining!!!!The winners are chosen by industry professional, artists and fans. <http://www.jpfolks.com/MusicAwards/index.html>

DALLAS SONGWRITERS CONTEST

Annual song, and on-going lyric contests, with winners receiving cash and other prizes. Site also includes resources for professionals. <http://www.dallasongwriters.org/>

INTERNATIONAL MUSIC AWARDS - BEST SONGWRITER

An opportunity to represent your country and win an international songwriting award... Yeah Baby..... Visit: www.musicaidawards.com

USA SONGWRITING COMPETITION

Promoting contests in six languages and fifteen genres, judged by industry professionals; information and media on past winners, testimonials, links to winning songs. Rules and entry form for current competition. <http://www.songwriting.net/>

GREAT AMERICAN SONG CONTEST

For details, visit: www.GreatAmericanSong.com or e-mail info@GreatAmericanSong.com

THE INTERNATIONAL SONGWRITING COMPETITION.

For more info please visit <http://www.songwritingcompetition.com>

COOCH MUSIC'S 10TH AMATEUR SONGWRITING CONTEST

The Cooch Music amateur Songwriting Contest is for anyone who writes music and is not with a major label. <http://www.coochmusic.com>

THE 3rd ANNUAL IAMA

(International Acoustic Music Awards) <http://www.inacoustic.com>

THE JOHN LENNON SONGWRITING CONTEST

This is the big daddy of contests!!!!
Enter online at: www.JLSC.com

SONGDOOR 2006 INTERNATIONAL SONGWRITING COMPETITION

Everyone who enters this competition wins a free songwriting course from SongU.com. The course is totally free, meaning there's no obligation on your part whatsoever. go to: www.songdoor.com.

THE BOSAs SONGWRITING AWARDS:

The BOSAs Songwriting Awards is a twice yearly global competition where the best songs and artists are showcased to Music Publishers and other Industry Professionals for review in addition to category prizes Site

URL: <http://www.thebosas.com>

Current Deadline to Enter: October and April of each year Contact: info@thebosas.com

BONUS NUMBER FOUR



Check Your E-mail and make sure
SongGuru.com is not in your spam file.

BONUS NUMBER FIVE

<http://www.jaydemusica.com>

Bonus Gift #5. The Jayde Musica Music Theory Game. This is without a doubt, the easiest and funnest way to learn to read music. It's like an arcade shooting gallery and it's fun. I wish I'd thought of it.



Do you wish you knew how to read music, like you know how to read english? Tired of trying to memorize the notes off the staff using boring memorization drills? Jayde Musica has taken the bore out of learning how to read music. It is an exciting and challenging new game, and best of all, it's FREE!

