

SONGWRITING LYRICAL CONSIDERATIONS

What follows are not lyric-writing rules. They are merely considerations, presented with love as an invitation for you to elevate your writing in terms which are meaningful to you. These come from observing great writers and countless failures in my own writing. If you never write a perfect song, you are in excellent and plentiful company. None of the following has anything to do with writing hits, recognizing that the craft of writing good lyrics and the business of successfully marketing music are distinctly different endeavors. Be true and committed to your craft, and only then look through a business lens at what you have created. Here we go . . .

Simplicity is elegant and to be highly valued. Less is more. Lyrical white space is often the most brilliant color on your palette.

Use proper English. Have your subjects match your predicates in number. Know the difference between a subject and an object and where and how each is properly used.

Write what you believe and about which you are passionate. If you do not do so, it will surely show.

Perfect rhyme is important. *Life* does not rhyme with *light*, and *time* does not rhyme with *fine*. Close-but-no-cigar rhymes will at some point haunt you and are likely to annoy those of us who care about such things.

Perfect meter is crucial. Simplicity helps the words comfortably fit the rhythmic groove. Try speaking the words to the beat to ensure they comfortably and snugly fit the beat.

Do not rhyme a word with itself.

Try to avoid using contractions, particularly when preceded by the word *that*. For example, replace *that I've* or *that she's* with *I have* and *she is*. Doing so guarantees more graceful and clean work.

Be wary of the word *that*, for most often it amounts to nothing more than unnecessary clutter, and it is not an attractive word to sing or to speak.

Share a valuable story or insight, preferably one which is new and positive. Lyrics casting the singer in a positive light are likely to be more appealing to recording artists, who generally do not want to celebrate their being failures, depressed or weak. A notable exception here is when your song is about constructive wisdom or success issuing from the seeds of failure, depression or weakness.

What is the story, in its essence? What is the line, in its essence? What is the word, in its essence? Express these well and you have something going.

The more you describe something, the more you diminish it. The simple phrase *a rose* conveys more than the more complex phrase *a fragrant yellow rose with dew drops glistening in the morning*

sun, for it leaves the listener free to conger in his or her mind the image in terms meaningful to him or her.

Be willing to invent your own words or to modify the words of others.

As in all art, each element must be essential, or it has no place in the art. This is another manifestation of the concept that less is more.

There is always another way to express your lyrical idea, likely not in your desired time frame.

Consider replacing *used to* with *once*.

Consider replacing *because* (in all its variations) with *for*.

Cute is typically not cute.

Extra points for internal rhyme when coupled with end-of-line rhyme. Here is an example:

Now it sags and it drags and it shakes and it aches (internal rhyme of *drags, sags* and *shakes, aches*)
Oh, what a toll gravity takes (end-of-line rhyme of *aches* and *takes*)

If stuck, work rhyming words backward. That is, identify the word to be rhymed, find the right word to rhyme with it, then look at what words would be needed to end the difficult phrase in the rhyming word you selected.

Write one line, then tab/indent each succeeding line, so as to facilitate easy eye-following on your drafts.

When the song is over, do you immediately remember it and its title?

Songwriting has been described as a cruel mistress and one of the most difficult of all human endeavors. It can also be one of the most satisfying of all human endeavors.

Be humble and remember that most or perhaps all of what you create has been in one way or another cultivated by others long before it occurred to you.

Go Easy,

Martin Hall
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