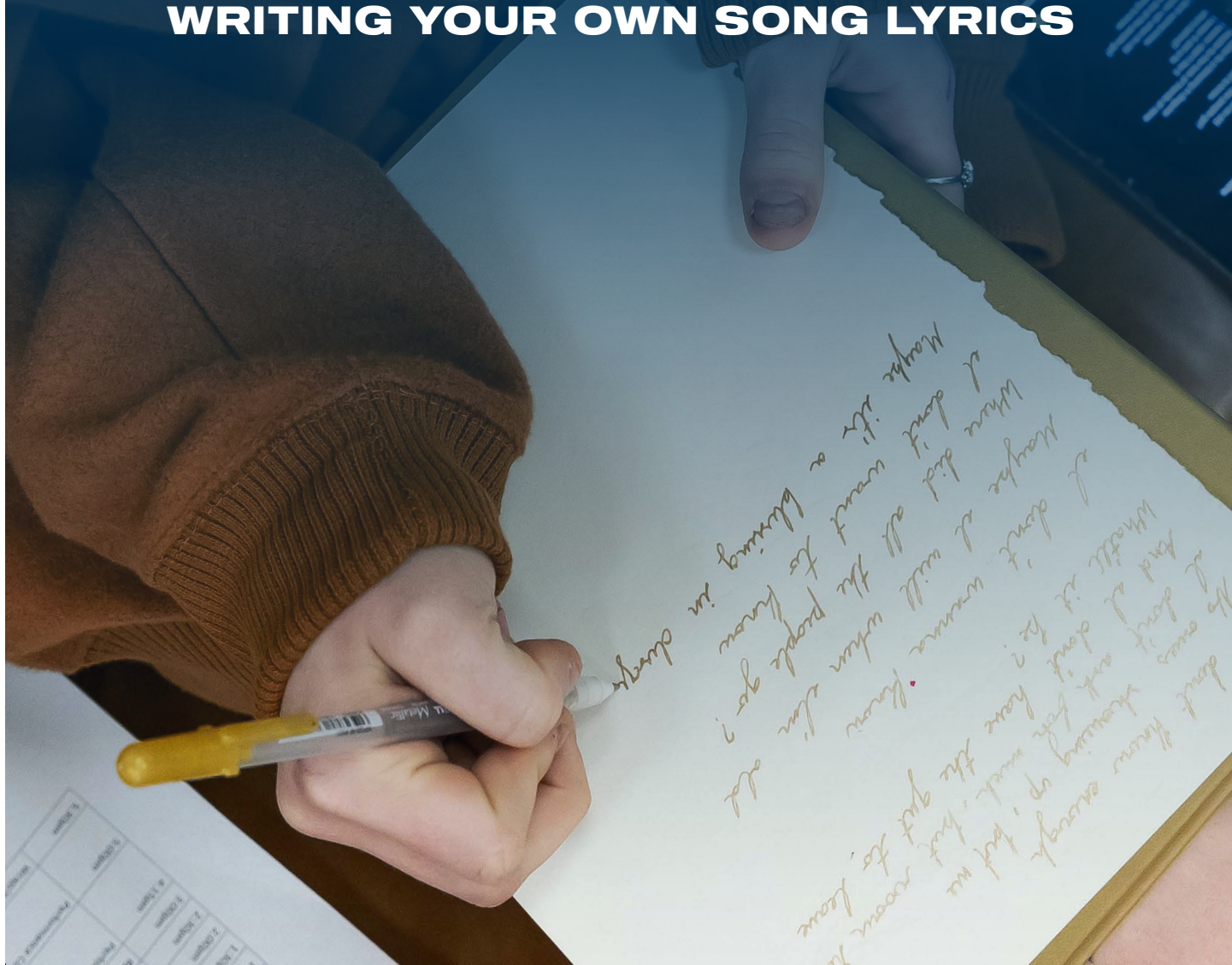




# WORDS & MUSIC®

JOURNEY OF A SONG

**A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO  
WRITING YOUR OWN SONG LYRICS**



## About This Guide

Have you ever wanted to write a song but didn't know where to start? The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum is here to help, providing this step-by-step guide to craft your song lyrics.

**Who should use this guide?** This songwriting guide is for everyone. You can work independently or collaborate with a friend or your family.

**How long will this process take?** 45–60 minutes (or any amount of time you want to commit).

**What materials do I need?** Your creativity, a timer (such as the one on your cell phone), paper, pencil/pen, and a device that can play music videos.

## Where Do Songs Come From?

Originally, songs were written by storytellers as a way to help people remember a story and pass it along to others. Today, the songs we hear on the radio, streaming services, etc., are often written by professional songwriters and then recorded by recording artists. There are also many artists who write and record their own songs, such as, Taylor Swift and Loretta Lynn.

### SONGS CAN BE INSPIRED BY ANYTHING. EXAMPLES MAY BE:

- A real-life experience
- A dream or made-up experience
- A phrase you heard in conversation
- A person, place, or thing that moves you

### SONGS CAN COMMUNICATE ANYTHING. EXAMPLES MAY BE:

- Expressing an emotion
- Telling a story
- Remembering a person, object, or historical event
- Sharing a point of view



*Words & Music: Journey of a Song participant Jazmine Croom shares an original song idea with her peers.*

## What Are the Parts of a Song?



### TITLE

The **title** is the name of the song.



### SUBJECT

The **subject** is the topic of the song.



### THEME

The **theme** is the message or what the song is about.



### CHORUS

The **chorus** is the part of the song that repeats and conveys the theme. The chorus often contains the title and hook.



### VERSE

The **verse** is the part of a song that usually describes the song's subject, such as who, what, when, where, why, and how. Songs have multiple verses that support the title, theme, and hook.



### HOOK

The **hook** is the part of the song that catches, or “hooks,” a listener's attention and makes the song easy to remember. The title and hook are often the same, and the hook is usually repeated throughout the song.



### BRIDGE

The **bridge** is the part of a song that introduces a twist or new idea. It usually occurs toward the end of the song and has a different melody than the verses and chorus.



### PRE-CHORUS

A **pre-chorus** is a short section that serves as a transition from the verse to the chorus.



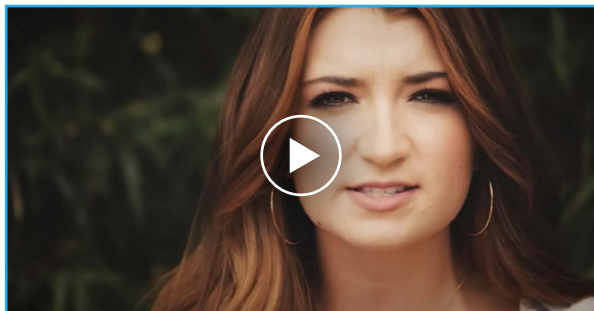
**LISTEN TO STUDENT SONGWRITER ABBY WHITMAN DESCRIBE THE PARTS OF A SONG.**



## Identify the Parts of a Song

**“The more that you listen to things that inspire you . . . the more that you write from an inspired place.”**

**—Tenille Townes, Songwriting Mentor**



**LISTEN TO “SOMEBODY’S DAUGHTER”  
BY TENILLE TOWNES.**

Can you identify the parts of this song?



*Words & Music: Journey of a Song participant Abby Whitman prepares to record an original song.*

## Somebody's Daughter

*Barry Dean / Luke Laird / Tenille Townes*

I drive home the same way, two left turns off the interstate  
And she's always standing at the stoplight  
On 18th Street  
She could be a Sarah, she could be an Emily, an Olivia, maybe a Cassidy  
With the shaky hands on the cardboard sign  
And she's looking at me

Bet she was somebody's best friend, laughing  
Back when she was somebody's sister  
Counting change at the lemonade stand  
Probably somebody's high school first kiss  
Dancing in a gym where the kids all talk about someday plans  
Now this light'll turn green and I'll hand her a couple dollars  
And I'll wonder if she got lost or they forgot her  
She's somebody's daughter  
Somebody's daughter  
Somebody's daughter

Did she give up wondering where the cars all go  
Can she even tell that I don't know what to say  
So I just nod my head and wave  
Well, no one's going to ask what she wants to be  
Or why we're both stuck here at the mercy of geography  
And whether it shines or rains

Bet she was somebody's best friend, laughing  
Back when she was somebody's sister  
Counting change at the lemonade stand  
Probably somebody's high school first kiss  
Dancing in a gym where the kids all talk about someday plans  
Now this light'll turn green and I'll hand her a couple dollars  
And I'll wonder if she got lost or they forgot her  
She's somebody's daughter  
Somebody's daughter  
Somebody's daughter  
Somebody's daughter

I don't know the reasons why  
I'm the one who's driving by  
And she's the one on the corner of 18th Street

Bet she was somebody's best friend  
Back when she was somebody's sister  
Bet she was somebody's first kiss  
Dancing in a gym where the kids all talk about someday, someday  
Now this light'll turn green and I'll hand her a couple dollars  
And I'll wonder if she got lost or they forgot her  
She's somebody daughter  
She's somebody's daughter

TITLE

VERSE

CHORUS

VERSE

CHORUS

BRIDGE

CHORUS

## What Should Your Song Be About?

**“If I had one piece of advice for up-and-coming songwriters, it would be: BE REAL. That’s it. Write what’s real . . . write your truth.”—Shannon Sanders, Songwriting Mentor**



**LISTEN TO SHANNON SANDERS'S  
ADVICE FOR SONGWRITERS.**

## Start Generating Ideas For Your Song

Songwriters are constantly thinking creatively about life experiences and capturing their ideas in words. We encourage you to get some thoughts on paper through a "free write." The purpose of free writing is to open your mind, enter into a creative spirit, and to create a bank of ideas to draw from as you begin writing lyrics.

Using a pen and paper or a note-taking device, set a timer and write for five minutes.

- Write about anything on your mind
- Try to include as many specific details as you can
- Focus on capturing your thoughts
- Don't worry about spelling or punctuation



**LISTEN TO STUDENT SONGWRITER AVALON  
SIMPSON DESCRIBE HOW FREE WRITING HELPS  
HER COME UP WITH SONG IDEAS.**

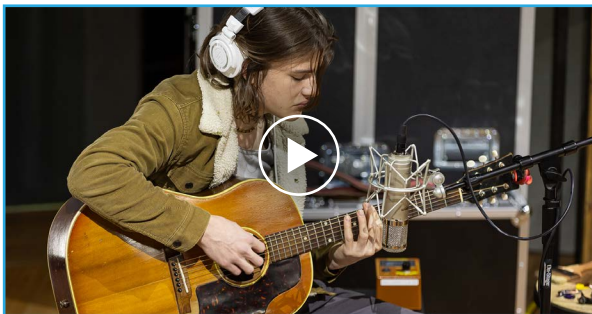
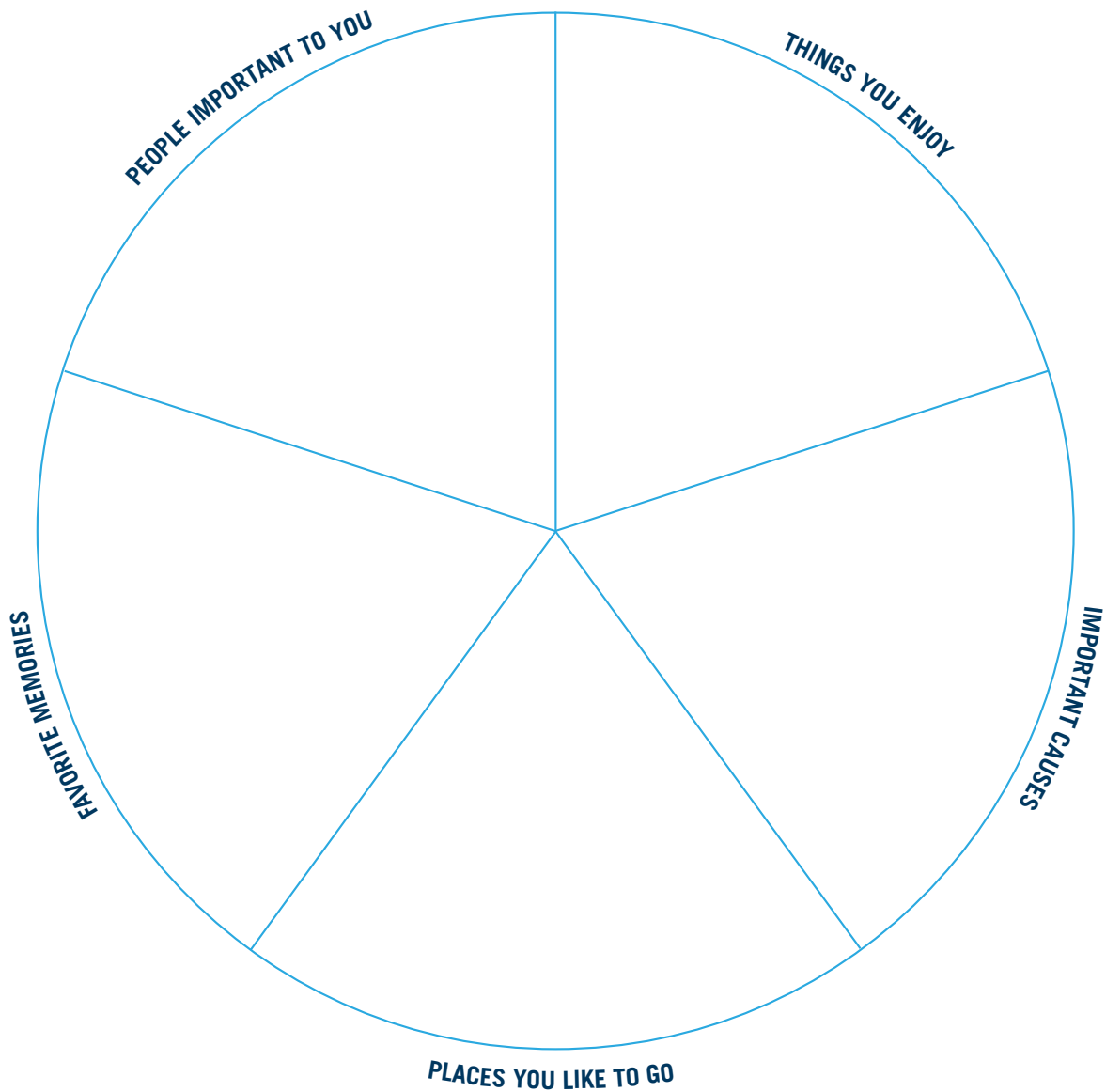
## Free Write

Instructions: Write about anything on your mind. Try to include as many specific details as you can.

[illegible]

## Brainstorm Wheel

Do you see a song idea in your free write? If not, try a brainstorm wheel. Fill in the wedges of the pie chart to help generate ideas for your song.



**LISTEN TO STUDENT SONGWRITER MAX REES DESCRIBE WHERE HE FINDS INSPIRATION FOR SONG TOPICS.**



## Pick Your Theme

Read your free write and brainstorm wheel ideas. Write a sentence that best describes the **theme** of the song you want to write:

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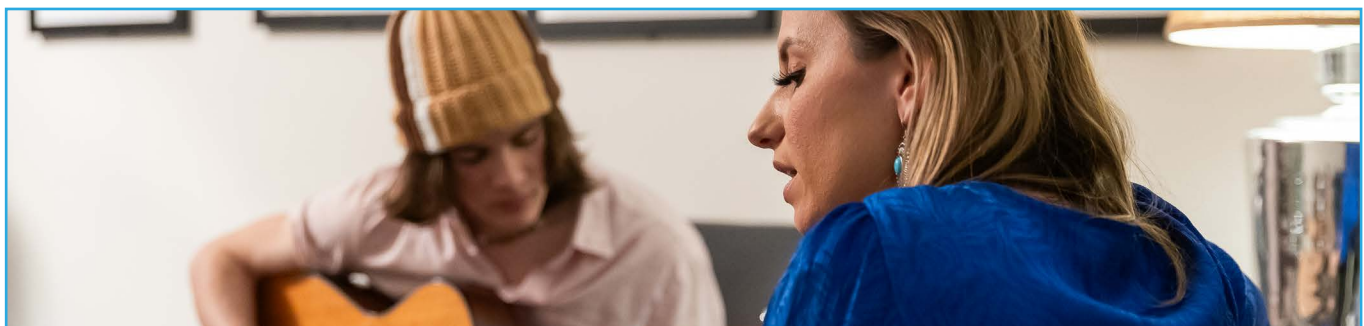
Reminder: The **theme** is the message of the song. The theme is found in the song's **chorus**.



LISTEN TO CAITLYN SMITH'S ADVICE  
FOR SONGWRITERS.

**“There’s already one Shania Twain, there’s already one Faith Hill, there’s already one Trisha Yearwood. Don’t try and be exactly like that. Really work hard to find what it is that you want to say, what you want to sound like, and how that can be different than anyone else.”**

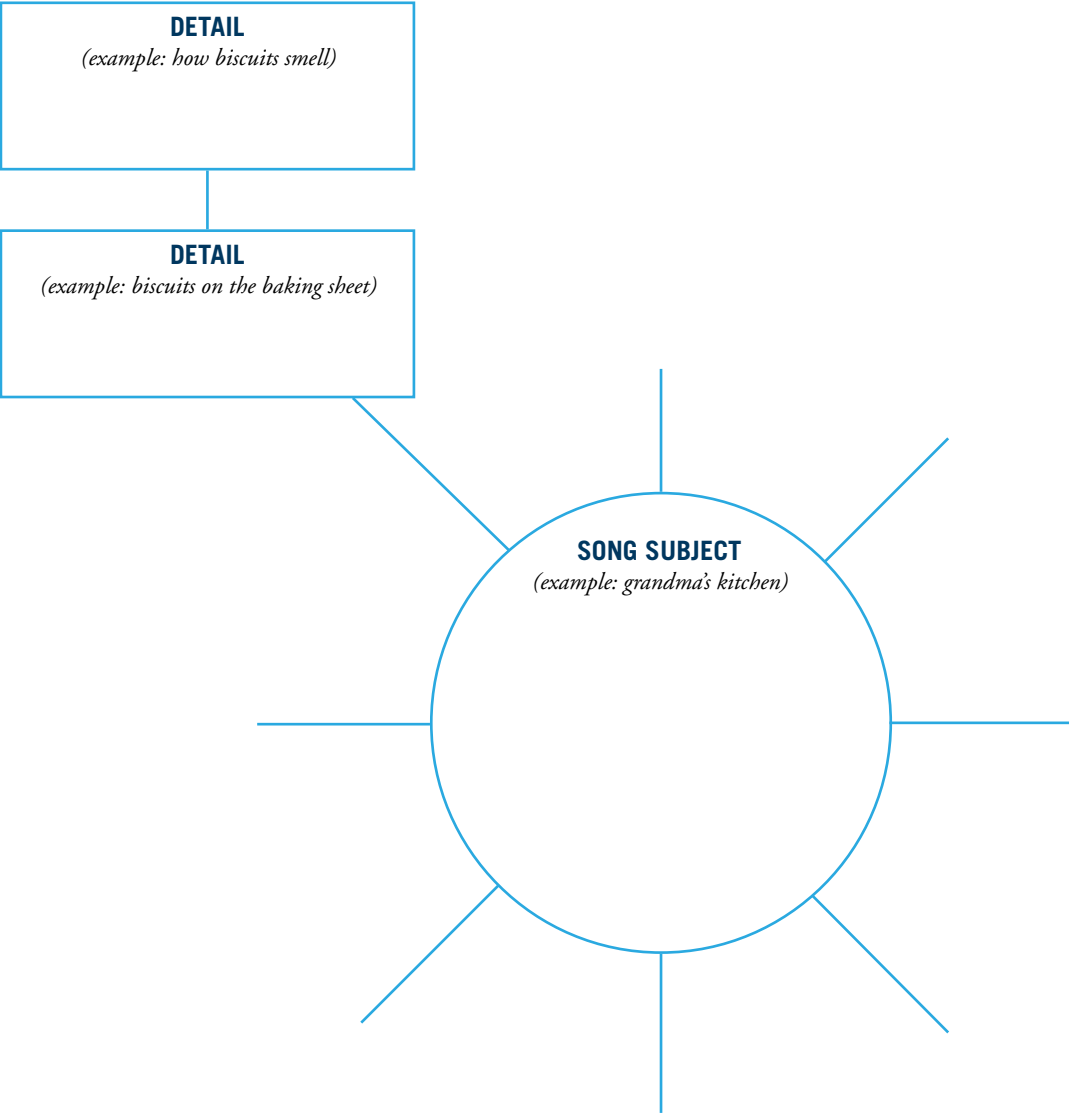
**—Caitlyn Smith, Songwriter Mentor**



*Words & Music: Journey of a Song participant Max Rees co-writes with Caitlyn Smith.*

Spider Map

Now that you picked a **theme**, let’s expand on the details using the spider map method. Write your theme in the circle and add branches for every detail that comes to mind. You can create branches off the details too. Details can include images, senses, and feelings/emotions.



## Song Outline

Now that you have a **theme** and details, create a song outline.

**TITLE** \_\_\_\_\_

**VERSE 1 TOPIC** \_\_\_\_\_

**CHORUS THEME** \_\_\_\_\_

**VERSE 2 TOPIC** \_\_\_\_\_

**CHORUS THEME (repeated)** \_\_\_\_\_

**BRIDGE TOPIC (optional)** \_\_\_\_\_

**CHORUS THEME (repeated)** \_\_\_\_\_

## How Do I Make My Lyrics Sound Like a Song?

In a song, a **rhyme** occurs when words at the end of two or more lines share the same or a similar sound.

Rhymes can be exact or near:

- An **exact rhyme** has the same ending sound (like “last” and “past”).
- A **near rhyme** sounds like a rhyme, depending on how the artist sings the words, though the words do not exactly have the same ending sounds (like “age” and “fade”).

A **rhyme scheme** describes the pattern of rhyming words at the end of lines in a song. Use the first two letters of the alphabet – A and B – to show lines that rhyme.



**LISTEN TO THE SONG "COUNTRY GIRL" BY RISSI PALMER (WRITTEN BY SARAH MAJORS, CORY ROONEY, SHANNON SANDERS, AND DAN SHAE).**

What is the rhyme scheme in the first verse?  
Are the rhymes exact or near?

It's the way I think not how I **talk**  
It's a pride you feel that makes you walk the **walk**  
Some Sunday morning palms up in **praise**  
It's all about my mama 'n them and how I was **raised**

**A**  
**A**  
**B**  
**B**

## Time to Write Your Song!

Using your song outline as a guide, begin by writing a **verse** and **chorus**.

Write four lines for each section. Attempt to rhyme the last words in a pattern (like AABB or ABAB).

The **chorus** should include the **hook** and/or the **title** in at least one line.

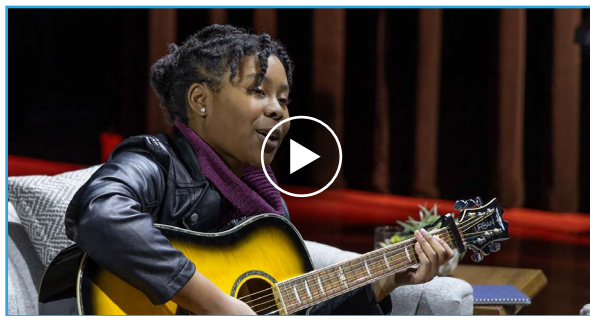
Continue by writing another **verse** (and repeat the **chorus**). If your song needs a twist or a new idea, add a **bridge**.



LISTEN TO CAMERON BEDELL'S  
ADVICE FOR SONGWRITERS.

**“Remember that there’s only one of you . . .  
It’s so important that you are being the most  
true self you can be. You gotta dare to suck  
. . . Write past the suck.”**

**—Cameron Bedell, Songwriting Mentor**



LISTEN TO STUDENT SONGWRITER JAZMINE  
CROOM'S ADVICE ABOUT STARTING A SONG.



Songwriting Template

SONG TITLE \_\_\_\_\_

VERSE 1

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

CHORUS

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

VERSE 2

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

BRIDGE (optional)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

VERSE 3 (optional)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Are You Interested in Adding Music to Your Lyrics?

We encourage you to add music to your lyrics so they are in final song form. Pick up an instrument if you play one, or collaborate with a friend or a family member.

BandLab is a platform to create music for all skill levels. Use the free song maker and beat-making app to add music to your lyrics.



LEARN HOW TO USE BANDLAB TO ADD  
MUSIC TO YOUR LYRICS.

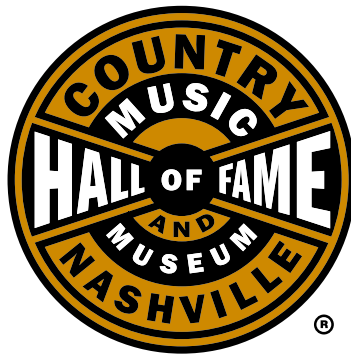
## Share Your Song

When you are finished with your song, we encourage you to share it with a friend, family member, or perform it live! If you share it on social media, please tag the Museum @CountryMusicHOF with #JourneyofaSong.

**“Music and songwriting is just another way to share. It’s no different than sharing a meal and saying, ‘Just try this.’ Instead, it’s a three-minute version of our emotions in a bite and we’re just saying: ‘Try this little piece of humanity out. Maybe you can feel this. This is who I am.’” —Mike Molinar, Songwriting Coach**



LISTEN TO MIKE MOLINAR'S  
ADVICE FOR SONGWRITERS.



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*Words & Music: Journey of a Song* is a branch of the Museum's flagship educational program, *Words & Music*. Thanks to the following supporters who ensure the sustainability of this important work.

***Words & Music Funders***



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