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Songwriting Workshop: Hit Song Forms

Lesson 1: Writing a Chorus

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Lesson 1[Topic 1](#)[Activity 1](#)[Topic 2](#) [Page 1](#)[Topic 3](#)[Activity 2](#)[Topic 4](#)[Activity 3](#)[Topic 5](#)[Topic 6](#)[Activity 4](#)[Activity 5](#)[Activity 6](#)[Activity 7](#)[Topic 7](#)[Activity 8](#)[Activity 9](#)[Topic 8](#)**Course Contents** [Syllabus](#) [Bookmark](#)**Communication** [Announcements](#) [Class list](#) [Discussion](#) [Chat](#)

The Chorus



The **chorus** is the part of the song that keeps coming back. The same lyrics and music recur, usually after each verse. It usually includes the song title and summarizes the main idea of the lyric. The chorus is also usually the emotional high point—the most intense part of the lyric.

When you remember a song, you usually think first of its chorus. The ability to write a good chorus is one of the most important skills you need as a songwriter.

Why is it called a "chorus?" Because the audience is supposed to sing along. They are the "chorus." So, that's your goal: to get your audience—usually not musicians—to sing along with your song's chorus.

This week, you'll learn to write choruses that will make it easy for your audiences to sing along.

Creating a Memorable Chorus

When you are writing a chorus, verse, or other song section, you can construct the section to have two basic effects. Its structure can fulfill the audience's expectations or it can surprise them. Each type has its strengths and can be appropriate, depending on what emotion you want to express.

Writing song sections that satisfy the audience's expectations will be our focus. Notice how this chorus is solid and easy to remember.

It already may seem familiar to you, and it will be easy for anyone to sing along. You won't have any trouble remembering the song title, "Roller Coaster Ride." There are many reasons why the chorus has this effect, and there are standard songwriting tools that you can use to create this effect in your own choruses. We will discuss them throughout this week.

[Previous Activity Page](#)[Next Topic: Tools to Emphasize a Title](#) 

Lesson 1

- [Topic 1](#)
- [Activity 1](#)
- [Topic 2](#)
- Topic 3**
-  [Page 1](#)
- [Activity 2](#)
- [Topic 4](#)
- [Activity 3](#)
- [Topic 5](#)
- [Topic 6](#)
- [Activity 4](#)
- [Activity 5](#)
- [Activity 6](#)
- [Activity 7](#)
- [Topic 7](#)
- [Activity 8](#)
- [Activity 9](#)
- [Topic 8](#)

Course Contents

-  [Syllabus](#)
-  [Bookmark](#)

Communication

-  [Announcements](#)
-  [Class list](#)
-  [Discussion](#)
-  [Chat](#)

Tools to Emphasize a Title



The first step in writing a chorus is to consider the title line. In this case, it is "Roller Coaster Ride." Say it over and over. Which syllables are naturally stronger than others (Roll-, Coast-, Ride)? What natural rhythms does it suggest? Are there any melodies that occur to you as you say it? You want to set this line musically in a way that is natural and intuitive, easy to remember, where important lyrics are emphasized with support from the harmony and melody.

The following tools are ways to emphasize a title, and help you turn it into a solid, memorable chorus. Many similar tools are discussed in this week's reading assignment. Consider how each tool is used in "Roller Coaster Ride" and in the choruses of other songs that you know.

Tools to Emphasize a Title

Long Notes

Notes that sustain for a long time exaggerate a lyric and tell your audience "this is important."

Space

Absence of other lyrics around the title eliminates distractions from it. During this space, your audience can think about the words they just heard, and this will help them remember your important lyrics.

Downbeat Ending

The downbeat is the first beat of a measure. Ending the last strong syllable on (or near) the downbeat is a great way to emphasize your title.

[Previous Page](#)[Next Activity: Interaction 1.1. Setting the Title](#)

Lesson 1[Topic 1](#)[Activity 1](#)[Topic 2](#)[Topic 3](#)[Activity 2](#) [Page 1](#)[Topic 4](#)[Activity 3](#)[Topic 5](#)[Topic 6](#)[Activity 4](#)[Activity 5](#)[Activity 6](#)[Activity 7](#)[Topic 7](#)[Activity 8](#)[Activity 9](#)[Topic 8](#)**Course Contents** [Syllabus](#) [Bookmark](#)**Communication** [Announcements](#) [Class list](#) [Discussion](#) [Chat](#)**Interaction 1.1. Setting the Title**

Listen again to "Roller Coaster Ride." For each of the three questions, click the correct syllable or word.

[Previous Page](#)[Next Topic: Building the Section](#)

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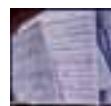
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