



NEW ZEALAND
MUSIC COMMISSION
TE REO REKA O AOTEAROA

★ *Jeremy Redmore's Songwriting Basics* ★

SONGS

Where do they come from?
Lots of places!



Melodies

If you are writing by yourself:

- 🎵 Finding somewhere quiet, with no distractions, loud noises or other music playing will help your creativity flow.
- 🎵 If you'd prefer to start creating with an instrument, like a piano or guitar, then choose a chord progression you're comfortable with and loop it. Play it over and over again and experiment with different vocal melodies that feel good over the chords. Don't worry too much about the words you're singing, any old sound will do at this point.



- 🎵 Listen back to the recording and take the melody you like the most and try to play the song to yourself once again. If they fit, then you have successfully built a firm foundation for your song.
- 🎵 Don't be afraid to come up with vocal melodies without the help of an instrument. Once you have that melody, pick up an instrument, or ask a friend to, and work out what key and chords will suit the melody you have created. Sometimes it's easiest to match an instrument with the vocal melody from a recording that you can play again.

Record yourself on your phone the whole time so you can remember what you came up with.

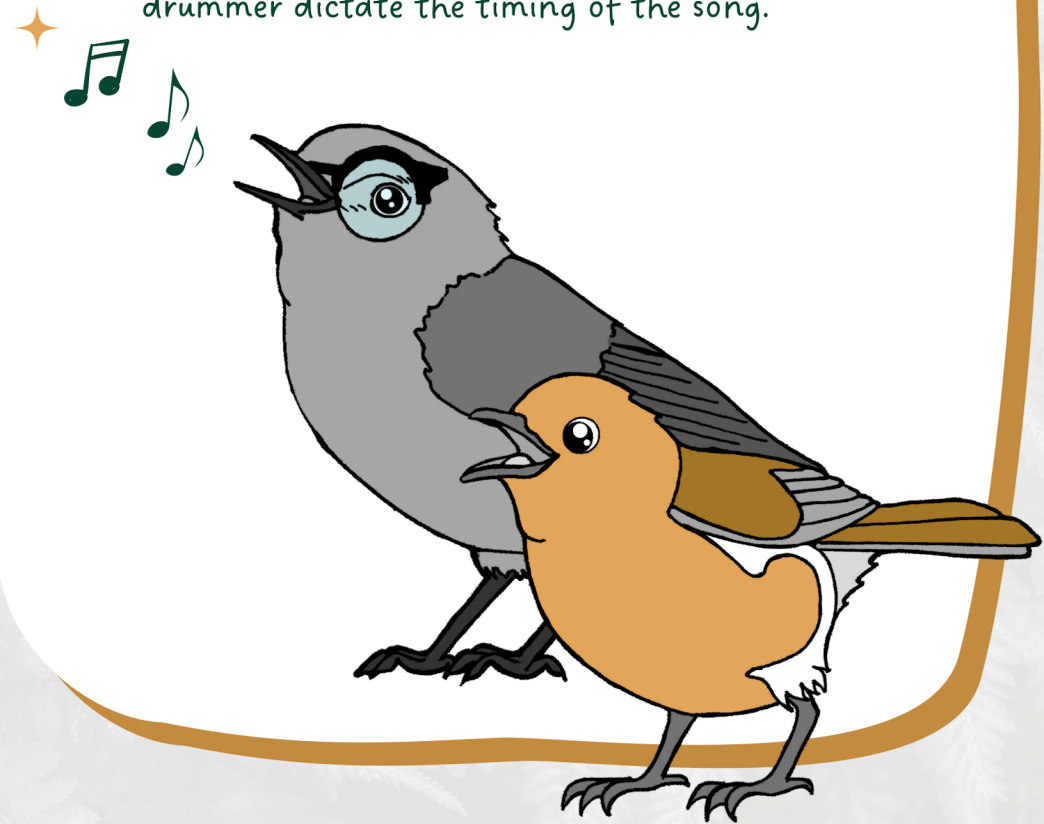
Melodies

If you are writing in a group or band:

- 1 Agree on a chord progression for a verse, or chorus, and play it over and over again as a band.
- 2 While that's happening, whoever is most confident (it doesn't have to be a designated "singer") can try to sing melodies that fit over the music that's playing. Again, don't worry about the specific words you're singing at this stage.
- 3 If you're stuck for melodies, try using your voice as a trumpet, or guitar, and imagine you're doing a solo over those chords, only you're actually using your voice.



- 4 The same process as above can be used for writing each group member's instrumental parts: start with your root chords on guitar or piano and build ideas on top of them.
- 5 Always give someone the job of keeping a beat while you write. It can be as simple as claps. If it's a group with a drummer, then always let the drummer dictate the timing of the song.



Lyrics

You may want to write your song lyrics first
– that's 100% fine.

- 🎵 One great way to be inspired to write lyrics is to pick a title for your song first. It could feel like the same vibe as the music and melodies you may have already written or could be completely random. Some great songs of the past have been written after being inspired by book, movie, tv and poetry titles, as well as newspaper headlines - so feel free to look to those for inspiration.
- 🎵 Another is to pick a general topic or theme you'd like to write about. Eg, friends, summer, climate change, travel, family, love
- 🎵 Whether it's a title, topic or theme, brainstorm your thoughts either by yourself or in a group, highlighting the most interesting ideas.



- 🎵 Try to write two lyrical lines that have rhythm to them. Eg, "So Johnny was a good man,
Armed with the power of his homeland"
- 🎵 Next, using exactly the same rhyme scheme and rhythm, write another two lines. If those aren't enough lines to get your story or meaning across, just continue the pattern or choose another pattern to grow the four lines into a longer section. You can do this for each section of your song.

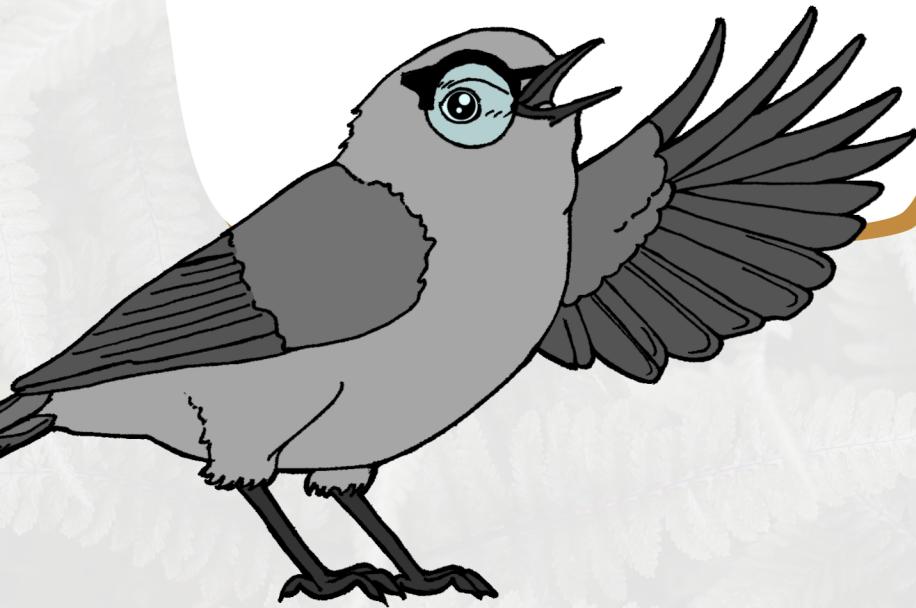
Flow

Once you feel like you've written a nice line, try speaking them out loud. Always tap your thigh or clap while you speak the words you've written and they should flow like a rap! If they don't, just chop or add words so that they do.

Lyrics

Imagery

Try to get the listener thinking of a picture in their mind from your opening lines.



Show, Don't Tell

The difference between:

"I am tired and sad and want
McDonalds for dinner"

and

"My eyelids are heavy but I can't find
peace, there's a hole left behind by
grief, fill the space with a feast."

Avoid Cliches

Avoid cliches as much as possible so that
your lyrics and song sounds
fresh and unique.

Cliches are phrases that are very
common in speech and in song.
eg. "good as gold", "love hurts",
"as bright as a diamond"



Structure

- 🎵 After you have some melodies and lyrics, you probably have a verse or a chorus shaped out. So how do we build a whole song around that, or figure out what comes next?
- 🎵 One way to get UN-stuck and map out your songwriting plan is to think of a song that you feel has a similar musical vibe or sound to the idea you've just written.
- 🎵 Find that song on YouTube, play it and listen carefully. Play it again and take notes on the order that each section of the song appears. Eg, Intro, Verse, Pre-Chorus, Chorus, Verse, etc..

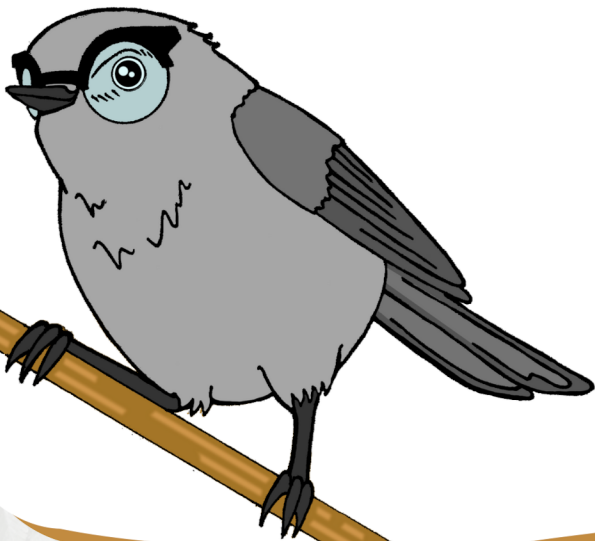
The great songs that already exist in the world can be your guide.

- 🎵 Look back at your own song idea and see if you think it would suit having the same structure.
- 🎵 If it does, then use that structure as a map to guide you to finishing it.
- If it doesn't, try the above again until you land on a structure you think best fits your idea.



Remember

- 🎵 Song writing is just one of several parts of a process that eventually ends with a song that is recorded and released to the world - the song writing phase can be as simple as one voice and one instrument.
- 🎵 The songwriter is often not the person who records or performs the song they write - so they don't have to be an incredible singer or instrumentalist; it's all about good melodic, lyrical and structural ideas.



Zoom Out

Think about why your song needs to exist. What can your listeners learn or feel from your song?

- 🎵 Try to write lyrics based on your own experiences as these will come across as more genuine than those that don't have a connection to your life. However, that doesn't mean you can't write a song about a great movie you've watched or book you've read and how it made you feel or what it made you think about.
- 🎵 You are what you eat: great songs come from people who listen to great songs, read great lyrics, stories and poetry and jam with all kinds of other musicians.
- 🎵 Song writing is not a talent you are born with, instead it is like learning an instrument. You must practise, make mistakes, closely observe the best in the business, and practise again.

