

Songwriting Guidelines

1. **There are no rules:** As a songwriter, you have complete creative freedom. You can write a song with or without words, on any instrument or combination of instruments, however short or long or quiet or loud you want. These are not rules, only guidelines.
2. **Know your intentions:** Try to be aware of your goals when writing a song, and make decisions with those goals in mind. While you can and should write whatever you want, whatever it is, try to do it with intentionality.
3. **Write what you like:** It's hard to predict what people will like, and very few songs, if any, are universally well-liked. Instead of focusing on what other people might like, try to write something that *you* like. There are lots of books, videos, and articles about how to write "hit" songs, but fundamentally, it's a good general goal to try to write songs that *you* enjoy.
4. **Write what's best for the song:** During the songwriting process, songs can begin to take on a life of their own. Sometimes, in a way, they tell you how they want to develop, and when they do, it's usually best to listen. If a certain decision or direction just *feels* right for a song, it probably is.
5. **Nothing is set in stone:** If you record a song, you have to commit to playing it a certain way, but until that time, any and every aspect of it can be changed. If you decide you don't like the way part of it sounds, change it! The final draft of a song can sound dramatically different than the first draft, and that's totally fine. It's your song and you can play it any way you want.
6. **Always be recording:** Do *not* count on being able to remember what you've written unless you record it or write it down. A phone recording is fine, or even quick written notes, but you need to do this, or you *will* lose great ideas. Anytime you have an idea, musical or lyrical, record it in some way. You never know when inspiration will strike, so you should capture it when it does.
7. **Take feedback... with a grain of salt:** It can be very hard to listen to your own work critically and it can sometimes be helpful to hear how it sounds to someone else. Constructive criticism, especially from fellow songwriters, can be very useful. Remember though, it's your song, and nobody knows how *you* want it to sound but you. So take feedback, but more importantly, be true to yourself and your vision.
8. **Listen to music:** Before writing, or in between writing sessions, listen critically to songs that *you* think are great and analyze them. What makes them great? Is it the same thing in every song? Different things in different songs? Is there something there that you can apply to your own songwriting? It's good to develop your own songwriting style, but everyone is influenced by what they listen to, and it's better to embrace that and *use* it consciously than to ignore it.
9. **Learn about music:** While it is possible to write songs by instinct alone, with no knowledge of music theory, even without knowing how to play an instrument, it's incredibly helpful to know at least a little bit about music before you start writing. Just learning 3 chords on the guitar or piano can give you all the music knowledge you need to write a song. The more you learn, the more tools you have at your disposal, but even just learning a little bit can go a long way.
10. **Write as much as you can:** If there is one actual "rule" of songwriting, it would be this: You have to write songs. Generally, the more you write, the better you get and the easier it gets. Most songwriters, even great ones, don't start out being able to write great songs right away. It can take time to get good at it and the best way to improve is by doing it, and doing it a lot.