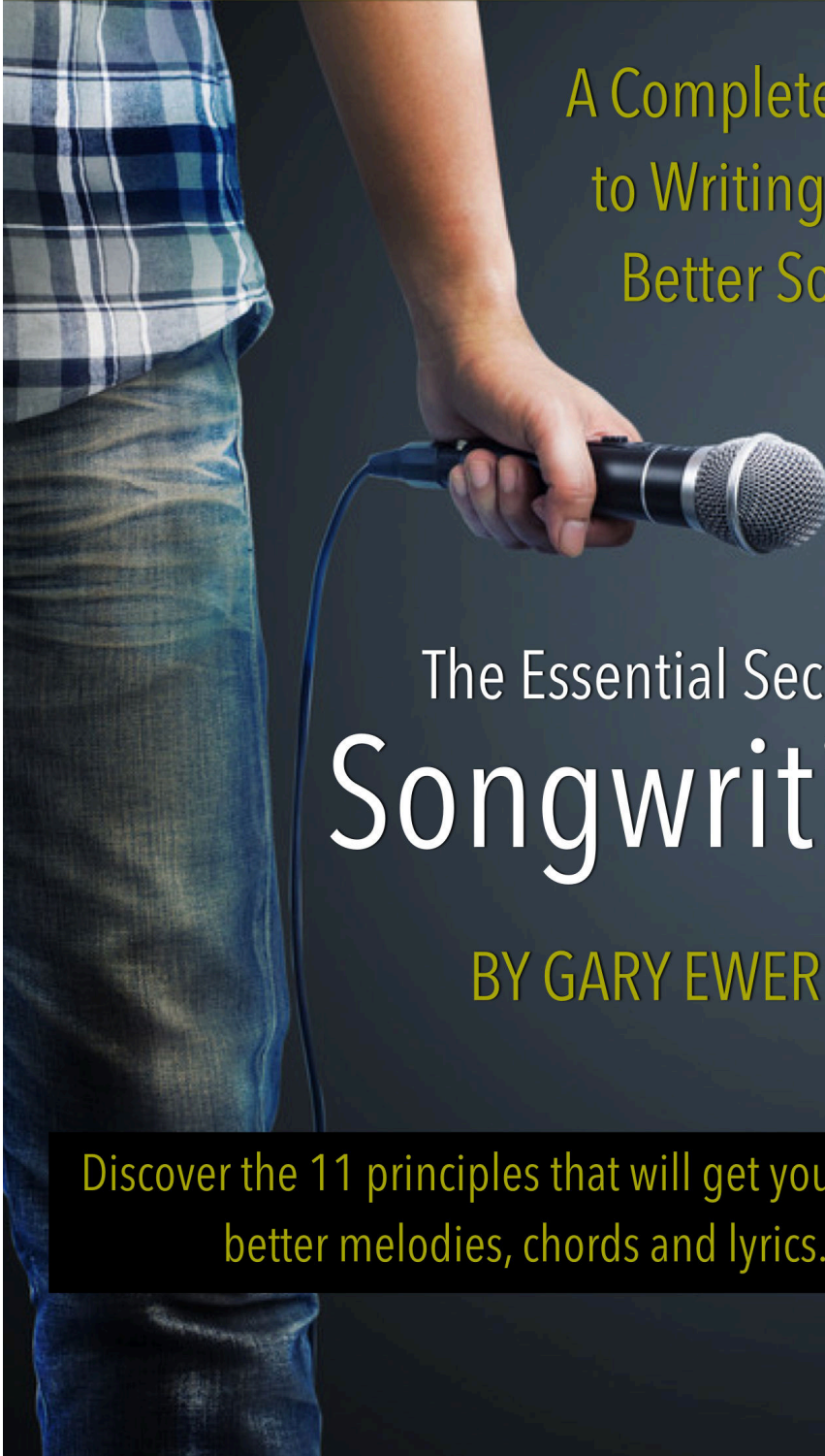


4th Edition - Updated and Expanded for 2017

A Complete Guide
to Writing
Better Songs

A person's arm and hand holding a black microphone with a silver grille. The person is wearing a blue and white plaid shirt and blue jeans. The background is a dark, solid color.

The Essential Secrets of Songwriting

BY GARY EWER

Discover the 11 principles that will get you writing
better melodies, chords and lyrics.

This is a PREVIEW of The Essential Secrets of Songwriting,
4th Edition.

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Introduction to the 4th Edition



The first edition of this eBook was released back in 2005. In some respects, that doesn't seem so long ago. But considering YouTube was merely 4 months old when I published the first edition, and the world had not yet heard of Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, it suddenly seems that ages have passed. In 2005, the world had only the barest inkling of what a smartphone might become. Today, you're not going to make it as a pop music songwriter/musician if you aren't streaming your songs online, but in 2005, streaming was in its infancy, with many or most online services straddling that perilous line of copyright infringement. CDs reigned, though their popularity had just started to decline. As we all know, the music world has transformed almost entirely since those days, so that at the time of this writing (2017), downloading has surpassed physical formats. And being a songwriter means, at least for many, being a

producer, creating a song while sitting at a computer, smartphone or tablet device.

Songwriting can still be done “old school”, of course, sitting on the edge of your bed with a guitar, a pencil, and a pad of paper, and I still work with many such songwriters. But whether you write with the aid of electronics or a piece of pointed graphite, *songwriting* itself hasn’t changed a whole lot, by which I mean that the basic structure of music – the form, and therefore the requirements of the songwriter – is still more or less the same. Whether you’re a fan of old time rock and roll or the newest hits that get rolled out online, songs still have verses and choruses, with all the extra bits such as pre-choruses, bridges and solos that can be optionally added. And believe it or not, the way verses and choruses worked in 1950s pop tunes bears striking similarities to the way they work in new music today.

That’s good news for those of you who want to learn more about songwriting, because it means it’s still relevant to study the old classics like “Tutti Frutti”, “Yesterday”, “Goodbye Yellow Brick Road” and “Billie Jean,” if you want to improve your songwriting abilities and write something that’s relevant for today’s audiences.

In fact, I would go as far to say that you are missing crucial opportunities to improve your songwriting skills if you aren't spending time with the oldies, listening intently, studying carefully, trying to understand why they connected so successfully with the audiences of their day.

It might make you wonder, if songwriting itself hasn't changed all that much, why it's necessary to come out with a new 4th edition of this eBook at all? The main reason has to do with the songwriting blog (<http://www.secretsofsongwriting.com>) that I've been maintaining since 2008. I've now written close to 2000 articles for that blog. For each post, I research and study songs to support the conclusions I assert. And for the past 9 years of that blog, I've found different – and I hope *better* – ways of explaining musical concepts to eager songwriters like you who want to learn. That in turn encourages me to return to this text many times, looking at the way I've explained concepts, and considering new ways to communicate those ideas. And because no book can ever be truly complete, I also add bits that haven't been in previous editions. Just for one example, you'll find a clear description of "payoff lines" in chapter 5 of this edition. The ideas regarding that concept existed in

previous editions, but I think I've made it clearer in this one.

There is no point in describing the principles of songwriting if we can't also look at songs that demonstrate those principles. So you'll find many songs listed within the text (as well as at the end) that show those principles in action. Keep in mind, however, that songwriting (particularly as it pertains to the popular genres of pop, rock, country, folk, and other sub-genres) involves improvisation and on-the-spot creation. That means that you'll often find songs that seem to defy the common principles of songwriting, but still become hits. Who knows why a song can violate what seems to be a principle, and still succeed. Well, that's songwriting for you, and I'm glad it's like that. If everything were predictable, we'd quickly lose interest. But learning the principles is important to improving as a songwriter. As I said in a previous edition, you will find that your own songwriting will improve, and you'll become a much more prolific writer, if you know what the principles are, and use them to guide (not dictate!) your style. You'll be able to look back on songs you've written, noticing places where knowledge of good songwriting structure has strengthened your music, as well as recognize the songs

that have deliciously abandoned the norms, resulting in something unique and creative. As in any artistic pursuit, it all starts with knowing the basics, and that's what "The Essential Secrets of Songwriting" is meant to do.

No one in the songwriting industry makes it without hard work, lots of songs, and *being consistently good* at what they do. The audience is allowed to believe that your music is magical. You, on the other hand, cannot afford the luxury of believing in magic. When music is good, there are, at least most of the time, identifiable, measurable reasons for that success. The purpose of this book is to show you how and why good music works. And then, of course, to show you how to apply that knowledge to your own music. To that end I wish you great success, and many years of enjoyable, and possibly even profitable, songwriting.

In addition to this ebook, I want to remind you about my daily songwriting blog, which you can find at <http://www.secretsofsongwriting.com>, and I encourage you to visit it as you seek to improve your songwriting craft. You'll find daily articles that explore the structure of pop music, and can serve as an important guide for you. Also, you may want to know that I've written a hardcopy

book entitled "Beating Songwriter's Block: Jump-Start Your Words and Music" (ISBN-13: 978-1-61713-102-8) for Backbeat Books, which can be bought at many bookstores, and of course through most online book retailers. That book will help you to understand the most common reasons for writer's block in the songwriting world, and will give you exercises and techniques for ensuring not only that you cure the block you're enduring, but make certain that it doesn't come back.

I do enjoy hearing from students of songwriting, and offering help whenever my time allows. If you have questions about music that you are working on and would like to contact me for opinions or assistance, I'm happy to help. I only ask that you consider the following guidelines:

1. Please do not send a sound file to my email address. Providing a link to an online streaming site that hosts your music is best.
2. Please have a specific question that relates to an improvement you are trying to make. In other words, "What do you think of my song?" is not a question I'm likely to respond to. "Why does my

chorus sound boring?” gives me something specific to help with.

3. Please don't ask me about sound recording techniques. That is not my specific area of expertise. I deal with the composition of music (melodies, lyrics, chords, etc.).

With that in mind, any music critiquing requests should be sent to me at: songs@secretsofsongwriting.com. I'll do my best to answer you and give you the best advice I can.

I sincerely hope that you enjoy this manual, and that you find that it takes your songwriting to a new level of excellence. Writing music can be a wonderfully creative outlet. It's not always easy, but the rewards make even the toughest songwriting problems worth the struggle. If you aspire to make songwriting a profession, never forget that you must write lots of music, do so with a consistent level of excellence, and work to build a fan base. It is particularly with that second part – the consistent level of excellence – that this eBook is meant to help. I wish you great success!

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