

Songwriter's Checklist

Gary Ewer, from "The Essential Secrets of Songwriting" blog
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The Songwriter's Checklist is meant to help you when you feel that your songs are failing in some way. **Don't** use it if your songs are working! Some songs work really well, but violate conventional wisdom (e.g., they might have a chorus melody that's lower than the verse). In those cases, you might inadvertently damage an otherwise great song.

But if you're feeling that the song you're working on just seems to be missing the mark, see which items on the Checklist are present.

It's important to remember that no song ever written includes everything on the Checklist. So what you're looking for is a majority of items, not all of them. The Songwriter's Checklist is meant to focus your attention, and give you something to think about.

To learn everything you need to know about good songwriting, check out
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MELODY

- My melody shows good contour, with a distinctive shape.
- I can identify a moment in the verse that would serve as a climactic point for that melody.
- I can identify a moment in the chorus that would serve as a climactic point for the song.
- My verse melody works its way upward, and connects somewhat seamlessly to the chorus. (If it doesn't, it uses a pre-chorus do make the connection)
- My chorus melody resides a bit higher than the verse melody, and features the tonic (key) note more than in the verse.
- My bridge brings in a 3rd melody, accompanied by chords that include altered chords, or explores the opposite mode (e.g., major key songs move into the minor).

CHORDS/HARMONY

- I use more "strong" progressions in the chorus, with more interesting "fragile" progressions in the verse (see p. 90 of "The Essential Secrets of Songwriting", 2nd ed.)
- I use more vocal harmonies in the chorus than I do in the verse.
- I start the bridge, or any other "miscellaneous" section of my song on a chord other than the tonic chord.
- The majority of progressions throughout the song feel like a complete musical journey, and any complex progressions eventually feel resolved by progressions in the chorus.

LYRICS

- I use relatively plain, everyday language that connects with average people.
- Despite my use of plain language, I find opportunities to say or describe things, events, people, etc., with an occasionally clever turn of phrase.
- I ensure that my verse lyrics primarily describe events, people and situations, while my chorus lyrics primarily describe reactions and emotions.
- I try to find concise ways to say things, and avoid being unnecessarily wordy.

MISCELLANEOUS:

- My song shows, even in a small degree, something innovative that sets it apart from other songs I've written, and other songs of the same genre that listeners would know.
- I've tried to incorporate something unique regarding instrumentation (fiddle, acoustic guitar, acoustic orchestral instrument, etc.).
- The song's intro is, even in just some small measure, interesting, and is likely to pull a listener into the rest of the song.
- I've varied the overall loudness of the song so that the basic dynamic level shows an interesting and compelling contour.