

Book VII

Writing Songs and Music

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"You told me to write the B flat section a whole step lower than the C section you're writing."

In this book . . .

We help you gratify your urge to share your musical vision with the world. Lots of great songs have been written on the guitar because it's such a great accompaniment for voice. Writing music and songs may sound easy, but once you try, you may find that it's not. Luckily, others who have gone before you have come back with lots of hard-earned advice on ways of doing it with increased success. This book can be your ticket to unleashing your creativity while pointing out typical beginner errors, saving you time and grief and giving you a leg up on others.

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Chapter 1

Everything You Need to Write a Song

In This Chapter

- ▶ Looking at what motivates people to write songs
 - ▶ Examining the role of music in your life
 - ▶ Finding out what it takes to write a song
 - ▶ Taking your first six steps in songwriting
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Songs — the combination of music and words (or *lyrics*) — have the power to make people laugh, cry, or even scream out in protest. They cause people to pound on their steering wheels as they're driving down the road — buttoned-down businesspeople are transformed into their favorite rockers during morning commutes. And thousands become pop divas in the privacy of their own showers. Songs can transport you to a moment 30 years in the past, and some of the songs you enjoy today will stay with you for years to come.

Given the way songs can move and inspire people, you're not alone if you're interested in writing a few songs of your own after playing a lot of guitar. Maybe you've even come up with some lyrics, or thought of a melody, but you're just not sure where to take it from there. In this chapter, you become familiar with all the facets of songwriting that you need to be aware of. Whether you're just starting out or you already have a few songs (or portions of songs) under your belt, you're at this book's beginning, and as Julie Andrews sang, that's "a very good place to start."

Understanding Why People Write Songs

People write songs for many reasons: to express their feelings, spark debate, inform their audience, push others to act. . . . There are probably as many reasons for writing songs as there are people who write them. Songs are often written by people who have a hard time verbalizing what's in their hearts — sometimes, pairing their feelings with music helps people say what they really feel. Others may write songs because they have a message to get across — a message that much of the world may not be quite ready to hear — and putting that message to music can help penetrate even the most shielded of ears.

You may want to write a song to

- ✓ Express your true self.
- ✓ Release the music inside of you that's just waiting to get out.
- ✓ Give back to your songwriting heroes some of the joy and inspiration they've given you.
- ✓ Develop the gift of expression you may have been born with.
- ✓ Gain acceptance and make new friends.
- ✓ Earn a living at something you truly love!



Whatever your motive, the goal is the same:

- ✓ To come up with words and music from the inner reaches of your imagination
- ✓ To connect with others through a song
- ✓ To create something of lasting value

Finding the Songwriter in You

Fortunately, the main requirements for writing a song are exactly the same, whether it's strictly for yourself and for your loved ones or for the music-buying public. The main ingredients are a passion for music, a need to express yourself in song, a mind receptive to the ideas that come floating your way, and a willingness to find and network with other talented individuals who can help you realize your musical vision. Ironically, many songwriters say that some of their biggest hits were never intended for mass exposure or written

with success in mind. They were a personal expression of something in their hearts as a gift to themselves or for family, friends, and loved ones.

This chapter is for everyone who shares the dream of harnessing the songwriting power we all have within. You've come to the right place if your heart keeps tugging at you to write a song — but you're uncertain as to the process of the craft or what's required to create a really good one. If you know the elements that make up a great song and how the pros go about writing one, you can get on the right path to creating one of your own. Writing a song isn't rocket science, no matter what the music theory books would have you believe. Not that a little book learning isn't a great thing; it's just that complicated notions can stop you before you get started.

Songwriting is about 80 percent inspiration, 10 percent perspiration, and 10 percent implementation. So let's not get it backwards. Hopefully we can take down some of the roadblocks to writing a song and get to the heart of the matter — because that's where a song is born.

Being aware of your personal connection to songs

If you are compelled to be a songwriter, you've probably gotten a great deal of enjoyment from listening to songs over the years. When you think back on your life (whether you've lived 18 years or 80), how many songs come to mind when you think of important moments? Do certain songs bring to mind sights, sounds, smells, and emotions from the places you were when you first heard them? Have certain songs become your favorites because they express exactly what you hadn't been able to put into words yourself?

If you can easily compile a soundtrack to your life, full of all the songs you've loved over the years, you're off to a good start. If you would have trouble fitting that soundtrack onto one tape or CD, that's even better! Why? Because if your life has been greatly affected by the power of music, you're in the right position to affect others through the songs *you* write.

Taking a look at your instincts

If you feel a deep connection with certain special songs throughout your life, you can be pretty sure that you have the emotional capacity to express yourself in the context of a song. Besides having that appreciation for other

people's songs, check out the following list to roughly determine your S.Q. (yeah, you guessed it, your "song quotient").

You just may be a songwriter if:

- ✓ You've ever sung a melody in your shower and started gyrating wildly when you realized it was a song that didn't yet exist.
- ✓ You often find yourself lost in the industrial section of an unfamiliar town when you realize that the great lyric ideas you've been jotting down have totally obscured that little road map your friend had scribbled down for you to get to her house.
- ✓ You create a gaper's block in the freezer section of the supermarket when you take your microcassette recorder, iPhone, or digital voice recorder out of your bag and start chanting the hook of the new rap song you've created that documents the multiplicity of brands of frozen vegetables.
- ✓ You create a new angry lyric and shouted melody over the chord changes of "Muskrat Love" while performing karaoke at the local club.
- ✓ You visit friends and rudely spend most of the time in their 8-year-old son's bedroom, strumming some new chord changes on his toy guitar.
- ✓ You start haunting every club for musicians to put your latest poem to music.
- ✓ On the street, you stop everyone in a black turtleneck sweater to see if they're a poet who could supply words for your music.
- ✓ Your hands are rubbed raw from pounding out rhythms on your desktop, laptop, dashboard, dog, or garbage can.

If you can identify any aspect of yourself in this inventory list, you may be on your way to writing a song. If you haven't already done any of these things, don't despair. You can still develop your instincts and try your hand at songwriting. Who knows? You just may unlock a part of you that you never even knew existed.

Starting at the Beginning — Before You Write a Song

After you figure out why you want to write songs, and after you discover that you have what it takes to give it a shot, you're ready to dive in. But writing a song can be an intimidating process. After all, where do you begin?

Is formal music training a must?

Music training isn't a prerequisite for songwriting. However, if you don't at least have some ability on the guitar or piano to help put the ideas in your head into some tangible form, you *may* be at a disadvantage. (Notice we said "may." Funnyman Mel Brooks composed the musical score to his hit Broadway show *The Producers* by humming the melodies into a tape recorder and having someone translate that into musical notes on a page.) Musical ability, especially guitar playing, helps you with the rhythm of your words and the structure of your songs. All of this musical expertise is advantageous, but not required.

Jim Peterik, Grammy Award-winning songwriter, on songwriting

Most of what I know about songwriting, I learned by being a fan of music. Truly the best teacher is listening. I emulated the styles of songs that inspired me, and gradually, over the course of many years, integrated these influences into a style of my own. The Beatles' songwriting, to cite a notable example, was heavily influenced by the American rock 'n' roll of Chuck Berry, Carl Perkins, the Everly Brothers, and Little Richard. The Beatles created songs by absorbing those influences and adding their own unique personalities. The fact that they could barely read music hardly mattered. They had ears. Studying music theory, history, and arrangement can only enhance your abilities as a writer, but it would be a mistake to infer that formal training is a necessity to write a great song. Music appreciation classes can open your eyes and ears to what you should be listening for in songs, but you really don't need anyone to tell your foot when to start tapping or your lips to break out into a big smile when the chorus hits — that's just the power of great music. Start with your love for the songs you hear and then tap into all you have to express in your soul.

If you're still not convinced that you don't need training, consider the fact that some of the greatest songs ever written were composed by people with virtually no formal music training. Folk music, chants, Delta blues, country, and rock 'n' roll all got their start with people who had the raw talent to create songs. On the other hand, many legendary composers have extensive musical training in all forms of music, including classical composition. Just don't let the so-called "rules" hold you back or keep you frozen.

In college, my harmony teacher told me at the end of the semester, "You know all that stuff I taught you about avoiding parallel 5ths? Forget about it! If it sounds good, just do it!" By the way, that was the only formal music training I ever got, other than two years of piano and a few years of saxophone lessons. I earned a C+ in that class. It's my belief that life is the best teacher, and listening to and enjoying a good song are perhaps the best ways to learn to write songs yourself.

Book VII

Writing Songs and Music

Although songwriting is more than just an assembly line of components to be bolted together, it doesn't hurt to know what's available in the "parts bin." A song is made up of *chords* (a combination of two or more tones sounded together in harmony), *melody* (the arrangement of single tones in sequence — the part you sing), *rhythm* (the beat or pulse of the song), and words (often called *lyrics* in the context of a song). Many successful songwriters excel in one area or another. Rare individuals can do it all. Even the ones who are a songwriting "one stop" often choose to collaborate with others to create that magical song that comes from a blend of styles and personalities. It's your task at hand, if you are challenged in a given area, to find writers to complete your vision and supply the expertise you lack.



Although some songwriters do well with the trial-and-error method, the more you know about music, the better your chances are to write a great song. The more adept you can become at an instrument, the easier it will be to create and demonstrate the ideas in your head. You don't need to enroll in a college course to study music. Instructions in music theory, composition, instrument performance, and voice are available at a per-session rate. Qualified, reasonably priced private teachers can be located through your local music shop or in the back pages of the local "freebie" entertainment newspaper. Finding someone who inspires you will make songwriting a lot easier.

Being prepared when inspiration strikes

Ideas will come into your brain while you're in the strangest of places, at any time of the day or night. You've probably heard stories about how some of the greatest hits were born. Paul McCartney has said some of his best songs came to him in his dreams. Billy Joel got the song "River of Dreams" from — you guessed it — a dream. And Sting, former lead singer of the group The Police, awakened in the middle of the night, wrote a song in ten minutes, and went back to sleep. The song? "Every Breath You Take." (Makes you want to get plenty of shut-eye, doesn't it?)



When a melody or a lyrical idea pops into your head, make sure you have a way of freezing it in time. Try to carry with you, at all times, a notebook to jot down ideas and a recording device to capture your musical phrases. Never fool yourself into thinking you'll remember the ideas when you get home. And don't think that "If it's really so great of an idea, I won't forget it." Some great songs will never be heard because the songwriter couldn't reconstruct some once-in-a-lifetime moment of inspiration.



A flash of inspiration may hit you when you least expect it. Be ready to catch it — then be prepared to work hard at turning the initial idea into a finished song.

Capturing that loving feeling

In a survey based on performances, sheet music, and record sales, *Variety*, the entertainment trade paper, once named the 100 most popular songs of all time. An analysis of the

themes of those 100 titles showed that about 85 percent of them were love songs. Many of those blockbuster golden oldies are still generating new recordings after 50 years.

Finding inspiration within yourself

So you aren't being awakened in the middle of the night by divine inspiration? Not to worry. You can find inspiration even if it doesn't seem to find you. The unique way you look at the world and feel about things, the mood you project in life, and all of your emotions are unmistakably projected in your song. In other words, write about what you know and feel, and you're sure to come up with something unique (because even though you thought your mother was lame when she said it, there's only one you).

Some writers, through their melodies, chord progressions, and lyrics, project a powerful optimism. Others project wonder, a bittersweet sadness, or pure anger. But few songwriters can project all emotions within a single song or even on one CD — so don't pressure yourself to cram in every possible emotion all at once.



Whatever the mood, all great songs have the ability to move people, to make them *feel* something.

Psychologists say that songs can put us in touch with our feelings. We all know what it feels like to be happy, sad, afraid, or in love. Often, a song is what puts us in touch with emotions.



Expressing your authentic feelings in a song is not only therapeutic to you as a person, but it can also be the clay from which a lasting song can be sculpted. If your audience can see a little bit of themselves in your song, if they can identify directly with what you're saying, your song just may stay in their hearts and minds (and MP3 players) long after it has dropped off the *Billboard* charts. When you feel passionate about an issue, when you are swept away by some new fad or idea, whether you are moved to tears by a movie or the passing of a loved one, or when you've recently fallen in or out of love — these are the subjects and feelings that will resonate in your song. Your own experience is perhaps more universal than you think.

Words of wisdom from Johnny Van Zant, lead singer of Lynyrd Skynyrd

Whatever moves me to write a song is usually a pretty good reason. I can really only write about what I feel in my heart. On September 11, 2001, I received a call from a good friend of mine who works on the rooftops in Manhattan. He had just been witness to one of the great tragedies of our or any time, as he heard a huge explosion and watched helplessly as the first of two jet aircrafts crashed into the World Trade Center. He called me and said that when he looked around, all of his co-workers had tears streaming down their faces. I said to him, "This has got to be the day America cried."

As I watched the images of destruction all that day, I started to sing a melody that seemed to

mirror my emotions at the time. The next day I called up my good buddy Jim Peterik and told him that there was a song to be written here that could possibly do some good. I sang him a piece of the melody I had in my head. The first words out of Jim's mouth were, "In the shadow of the Statue of Liberty" to which I added, "In the torchlight of the land of the free." From there, with the help of Ma Bell, digital recording, and the grace of God, a song was born.

We are proud to say that the fruits from our labor of love became the title song to *The Day America Cried* album, helped raised some money, and hopefully expressed a few emotions locked in so many hearts. That's the power of a song.

Creating the mood

It all starts with you — who you are and what feeling or mood you're able to project. The number of people who will be able to connect with and relate to the mood you're creating will determine just how successful your song will be.

In some great songs, the mood of the music matches perfectly to the lyric. For example:

- ✓ Minor chords often become the basis for sadder, deeper, and more introspective songs. Listen to "New York State of Mind" (written and sung by Billy Joel), "New York Minute" (written by Don Henley, Daniel Kortchmar, and Jai Winding; sung by Don Henley), or "Paint It Black" (written by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards; performed by the Rolling Stones).
- ✓ Major chords generally result in happier and more optimistic songs like "You Are the Sunshine of My Life" (written and sung by Stevie Wonder) or Survivor's "High on You" (written by Jim Peterik and Frankie Sullivan).

In other songs, the mood of the lyric is in direct contrast to the vibe of the music, such as in Elton John's deceptively happy ditty "I Think I'm Going to

Kill Myself” (written by Elton John and Bernie Taupin) and “I’ll Never Fall In Love Again” (written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David; sung by Dionne Warwick). That bittersweet contrast between the words and the music is often what gives a song its potency.



The greatest intimacy you share with your audience as a songwriter (and your greatest responsibility) is the transference of the mood you have created in a song. Taking that idea a bit further, you’re also sharing with your audience the mood you happened to be in as you were creating the song. It’s a thought-provoking notion that when you respond emotionally to one of the great classics, you’re actually feeling a little bit of what the composer was feeling at the moment of creation, even if it was many years ago. Such is the transcendent, timeless nature of songwriting.

Six Steps to Writing Your First Song



You have your notebook at your side, a gross of freshly sharpened pencils, your recorder in your bag, and you’re just waiting for the next drip of inspiration to hit you on the head. First off, don’t expect miracles right off the bat. Your first ideas may not be ready for prime time. But there’s really no such thing as a bad idea, only ones that need to be refined, clarified, or made more unique and clever — and real. You’ve got to start somewhere. Try to find some time each day to write. Before long, those moments you set aside will become an oasis in the often dry climate of a typical day. The more you practice your craft, the better your odds of coming up with that one special song that the world wants to hear.

Songwriting takes an enormous amount of patience and hard work. Fortunately, there’s a lot of fun to be had along the way. In that spirit, here are the six steps to writing your first song:

- 1. Find a message you feel passionate about.** Choose a cause that resonates with you. Write about the girl you’ve been too insecure to ask out or that guy who you wish would take notice of you. Write about what interests you. Write about what you know. Keep it simple. If a subject is vital to you, it just might be vital to others as well. Similarly, if you don’t care about a subject, don’t expect others to either.
- 2. Find a simple melody.** So many new songwriters get in over their heads trying to be complex to win friends and influence publishers. Songwriters are not paid by the note — you’re rewarded by the connections you make in the synapses of your audiences’ brains. Often the easiest melodies are the longest lasting.

3. **Find a simple set of chord changes.** Search your guitar or a piano keyboard for this needed element of your song, or search the Internet or local clubs for the musicians who can furnish your words and melodies with a comfortable music bed. (Chapter 1 in Book II gets you started playing chords.)
4. **Find a place to write.** Find a quiet, pastoral setting to clear your mind, light some incense, and let the melodies and emotions flow. If this isn't possible, any chaotic subway station will do. Other key areas to write: supermarkets, flea markets, soccer matches, PTA meetings, in the car, and anywhere else where the distractions merge to zero.
5. **Be inspired by your guitar or other instrument.** Pick up any old instrument that's lying around the house and see if you can coax some sound out of it. It's really all about what you're hearing *in your head*. If you can imagine what the finished song will sound like, you can write it on your late Uncle Louie's banjo.
6. **Find the confidence within yourself to put your heart and soul on the line and share your song with others.** It's through this loop of constant feedback that you discover how to improve your songs. Resist the urge to discount everything but positive reaction. Resist the urge to devalue the positive reactions. Breathe in the accolades and weigh the brickbats. Take it all in, but before making any changes, always check it against your heart for the truth.

Chapter 2

Whipping Your Song into Shape: Song Forms

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding songwriters' terminology
 - ▶ Knowing the fundamentals of the verse form
 - ▶ Getting a handle on AABA forms
 - ▶ Expanding into the verse-chorus forms of songwriting
 - ▶ Picking apart your favorite songs
-

When the average listener hears a new song on the radio, she probably doesn't turn to her friend and say, "Wow, awesome pre-chorus — I love how it sets up the hook!" Nonetheless, every song is built upon a structure. The framework can follow any of several tried-and-true patterns, or it can break the mold and go where no song has gone before.

Knowing basic song *forms* (or *formats*) helps guide you as you're constructing a song. It also helps identify what you're doing instinctively. It's important to understand the basics of song structure even if you choose to stray from it in certain instances. There is, however, something reassuring to the ear about the use of familiar song organization that can help a songwriter sound immediately more professional and commercial.

In this chapter you take a look at many of the most commonly used and successful song forms. You see how a song is broken down to its basic modular components and how the various sections can be organized to create a synergy that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Talking the Talk



Before you look at song forms, it's important to understand the terminology songwriters use when they're talking shop. Here are the main terms for the various sections of a song:

- ✓ **Intro:** This section, which starts out the song, is typically an abbreviated instrumental form of the chorus or sometimes the verse. Its purpose is to get the ear ready and introduce all that is to come. Listen to any radio station. The majority of the songs you hear will have some form of intro, and your “tune-out factor” will be directly affected by how effective the writers and arrangers are at catching your attention right off the bat.
- ✓ **Verse:** The purpose of the verse is to reveal the storyline of the tune. It helps propel the listener to the chorus while conveying the song's basic mood and message. The words, or lyrics, of the verse, tend to expand from verse to verse with new information added to move the story along. The melody and chord pattern of the verse is usually the same from verse to verse, except for minor variations in melody usually to make a lyric fit.
- ✓ **Pre-chorus:** This section, also known as the “B” section and the set-up, among other nicknames, is the optional section preceding the chorus that provides a little fresh terrain both lyrically and chordally before pressing on to the chorus. It's usually no more than eight bars in length and sometimes contains the identical lyric each time it comes around. The decision to use a pre-chorus is strictly on a “need-to-use” basis. If a song is propelled sufficiently to the chorus without it, then you don't really need the extra baggage.
- ✓ **Chorus:** The chorus is the “money section” of a song — which is to say that if you've done your job well, this is the part that people will go around singing as they plunk down their hard-earned money to own a copy for themselves. This section usually contains the title or *hook* of the song either at the beginning or end of the chorus. The chorus features a signature phrase or musical figure that's repeated throughout the song and serves as the main identifying portion of the song. Musically and lyrically, choruses tend to be identical except for minor variations. (One exception to this generality is the song, often a country song, that saves the surprise lyrical payoff for the last chorus and is therefore very different.) In most cases, songwriters like to keep their choruses identical so it's harder for the audience to miff a line in the big sing-along.
- ✓ **Bridge:** The bridge, sometimes called the *release*, *channel*, *special*, or *middle 8* (referring to the eight musical measures that the bridge tends to occupy), comes after the second chorus in the majority of pop songs.

It's not a necessity in all songs. It can either contain lyrics or be instrumental in nature. Whether the bridge contains words or not, its main function is to give the ear some fresh real estate to land on.

- ✓ **Coda:** A special ending section, also called an *outro* or a *tag*, that can be added to the end of a song. It's typically a kind of grand finale.

Now that you see the various components that make up a song, take a look at the various ways of organizing them in the following sections. Again, there's no right or wrong way, only what *sounds* right or wrong to the ear. The sections of the song are each designated by a letter, the first melodic section you hear (generally the verse) is "A." The second melodic section you hear is designated "B," and the third section is called "C." The fourth section (usually the bridge) is then called "D." If you repeat a melodic section, even if the words are different, it's still assigned the same letter.

Dealing with Verses

The basic fundamental section for any song is the verse. Some songs consist of nothing *but* verses.

The verse form: AAA

The *verse form* is often referred to as the *AAA form*. This is when different lyrics are placed over the same music and are repeated in close succession. Because the chorus and bridge are often eliminated in this form, the title will often appear in the first or last line of the verse. This form is often used when a story is being told, using each verse to propel the action forward. Church hymns usually fall into the AAA category, as do many folk songs. Many of the songs of Joni Mitchell, Joan Baez, and Judy Collins use the AAA form as well.



It's especially important for your melody to be interesting in this form so it can withstand the repetition of identical sections. Often a musical section can come between verse sections to add interest. Sometimes a writer can throw in a sort of *faux chorus* (that's a section that is chorus-like, but doesn't contain the title hook of the song). Songs like this are generally considered a variation of the AAA in form.

The number of verses in a song written in the AAA form varies widely. Jimmy Webb's song "By the Time I Get to Phoenix" (Glen Campbell's breakthrough hit) only takes three verses to tell the story. There are three well-crafted verses, and each presents a location that the singer is thinking about as he

embarks upon his journey away from his former girlfriend in California. The song is about what she'll be doing when the singer arrives at each of three destinations: Phoenix, Albuquerque, and Oklahoma.

The title of the song is only mentioned once, in the first line of the first verse. That's because each verse describes a different location, which Webb has cleverly shown in his first lines. Webb also has a clever use of lyric elsewhere in the song — for example, "She'll just hear that phone keep on ringin' off the wall" is followed by a simple "That's all." True to the verse form, the song tells a story that progresses from verse to verse.

For another example, check out "All Along the Watchtower" by Bob Dylan and made famous by Jimi Hendrix. It consists of three verses and is a good example of the style of lyric writing that Bob Dylan introduced during the 1960s. If you listen carefully to these well-crafted words, you'll hear that there's no hook in the song at all: The title, "All Along the Watchtower," is introduced in one place only, as the first line of Verse 3. Notice, however, that it's probably the best candidate in the song for a title. Dylan could have called the song "Two Riders Were Approaching" or "There Must Be Some Way Out of Here," but neither of these phrases comes close to "All Along the Watchtower" as a great title. Look up some (or all) of the songs in Table 2-1 for more help with this form.

Table 2-1

AAA Song Examples

<i>Song title</i>	<i>Songwriter(s)</i>	<i>Singers/Performers</i>
"Amazing Grace"	John Newton	Judy Collins and many others
"Born in the U.S.A."	Bruce Springsteen	Bruce Springsteen
"On Broadway"	Barry Mann, Cynthia Weil, Mike Stoller, Jerry Leiber	The Drifters
"Subterranean Homesick Blues"	Bob Dylan	Bob Dylan, Red Hot Chili Peppers
"Turn, Turn, Turn"	Pete Seeger	The Byrds, Pete Seeger

The two-verse form: AA

In the classic songs that were written by American composers for film and Broadway, a type of form called the *two-verse form*, or *AA form*, arose and

became very popular. This form was very common from the 1940s through the 1960s and is the form of choice for many standards. Because of its lack of chorus, it hasn't been used much in the pop music of the 1970s and beyond, but songwriter Lionel Richie did use an extended two-verse form for his hit 1980s song "Hello."

This form consists of, as its name implies, only two verses, but in these two verses, a complete and tidy story is told. Each verse is traditionally 16 measures, or *bars*, long. The second verse is usually a musical repeat of the first, but in some songs the second verse resembles the first, beginning the same way, but wraps up differently musically.

If you want to study the AA form in more detail, take a look at the list of other songs to pick from in Table 2-2.

Table 2-2		AA Song Examples
<i>Song title</i>	<i>Songwriter(s)</i>	<i>Singers/Performers</i>
"In My Life"	John Lennon, Paul McCartney	The Beatles
"Moon River"	Johnny Mercer, Henry Mancini	Henry Mancini, Stevie Wonder, more than 1,000 recordings by various artists
"Stardust"	Hoagy Carmichael, Mitchell Parish	Willie Nelson and many others
"Walk On By"	Burt Bacharach, Hal David	Dionne Warwick
"White Christmas"	Irving Berlin	Many, made popular by Bing Crosby

The AABA Form

The form known as AABA was *the* form of choice in the first half of the 20th century. It's still used today in songwriting, but has fallen off in popularity. However, it's good to know this form because you never know when it'll be the perfect fit for the song you're writing.

The basics of the AABA form

In the *AABA form*, the A sections are the verse sections, and the B section is a *bridge*. In other forms, B represents whatever section comes second in the song. The title is usually placed either in the first or the last line of each verse and is in the same place each time it comes around.



The *bridge* is a section that provides a contrast to the verse sections by using different chords, a different melody, and sometimes a shift in the focus in the lyrics. It provides an interlude between verses, which can be very effective if it's done well.

In the classic AABA song, the A sections are usually eight bars in length and constitute the main melody of the song. Each of the three A sections has a different set of words, although the last verse section can be a repeat of the first, as is the case in the song “Monday, Monday” performed by The Mamas and The Papas (written by John Phillips). In fact, all three verses can be the same, as in John Lennon and Paul McCartney’s “Do You Want to Know a Secret?” But these are exceptions to the rule and you won’t find many songs that repeat verses like that. Songwriters usually compose three separate sets of lyrics for the verse sections of the AABA form.

The AABA form continues to be used today in many styles of music — country, gospel, Christian, pop, jazz, theatre, and film — but not as often as it once was. The form can be used to provide a very effective emotional satisfaction: The first two verses establish the main melody of the song, and then when the bridge is sung, it provides a different feeling because of its contrasting quality. Thus, the return to the last verse provides an emotionally satisfying return to what was presented before.

There are always exceptions to every rule — that’s what makes life (and songs) interesting. Some AABA songs don’t introduce the title in the first or last line of each verse. “The Christmas Song” (written by Mel Tormé and Robert Wells) is an example of this. Everyone knows this song (“Chestnuts roasting on an open fire . . .”), but the title, “The Christmas Song,” doesn’t appear in the lyrics at all because the title describes what the song is about and it’s not a phrase that would sound good in the song itself.



Another example of a different placement for the title is George and Ira Gershwin’s famous song “I Got Rhythm.” The title appears at the beginning of the first verse, and then gets transformed in the next two verses. In the second verse it becomes “I got daisies,” and in the third verse, it’s “I got starlight.” This is a great trick, the same one used by songwriter Jimmy Webb in “By the Time I Get to Phoenix.” Take note of it — you may want to do the same thing in a song of your own someday.

A real classic, “Over the Rainbow,” was sung by Judy Garland in the film *The Wizard of Oz*. This is a great example of an AABA song with an added section at the end called a *coda*. The verses have a flowing feeling to them with the expansive quality of the words (“Somewhere over the rainbow, bluebirds fly”). This is perfectly contrasted by the quick movement of words in the bridge (“Where troubles melt like lemon drops away above the chimney tops”). The bridge provides a perfect interlude between the second and third verses.

Table 2-3 shows some great AABA songs for you to explore in order to discover more about the form.

Table 2-3 AABA Song Examples		
<i>Song title</i>	<i>Songwriter(s)</i>	<i>Singers/Performers</i>
“Blue Moon”	Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart	Chris Issak, Willie Nelson, and many others
“Just the Way You Are”	Billy Joel	Billy Joel
“Save the Last Dance for Me”	Doc Pomus, Mort Shuman	The Drifters
“Something”	George Harrison	The Beatles
“Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?”	Carole King, Gerry Goffin	The Shirelles

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The extended AABA form: AABABA

Beginning in the 1960s, some songwriters began using an extended version of the AABA form, called the *AABABA*. This is merely the AABA form with an additional bridge and a final verse. This final verse may be a repeat of a previous verse or even just a part of one of the previous verses.

John Lennon and Paul McCartney’s song “Yesterday” uses an extended AABA form. The title appears as the first line in each verse except for Verse 2, where the word *suddenly* is used instead. The title also appears in the last line of each verse, and in the last line of the bridge, and the final verse is just a repeat of Verse 3.

This AABABA form is also used in other Beatles songs (written by John Lennon and Paul McCartney), including the following:

- ✓ “I’ll Follow the Sun”
- ✓ “I Want to Hold Your Hand”

- ✓ “Hey Jude”
- ✓ “Hard Day’s Night”
- ✓ “Long and Winding Road”
- ✓ “I Call Your Name”



Things get a little more complicated in a few of McCartney’s songs. “Michelle,” for example, has a form of AABABABA. The fourth verse is not sung but is instead played as an instrumental. The words in the second verse are repeated in the third and fifth verses, so all of these verses are the same. All three bridges have different words, however. This is a very unusual and innovative formal structure. Because the formal structures in *many* of the songs written by McCartney and Lennon are very advanced, you can get a lot out of studying them. (Don’t you wish your studies in school were this much fun?)

The Verse-Chorus Form: ABAB

The verse-chorus form is the most common in today’s pop, rock, gospel, R&B, and country music. In the *verse-chorus form*, or *ABAB form*, verses alternate with a chorus section. The chorus is always the same except, perhaps, at the end, where you can extend it to make a really great ending for the song.

The story that the song unfolds is contained within the verses. When the chorus is sung, it usually proclaims the title as the hook. Pop or rock songs that work well usually start out right away with a line that people relate to; then the words of the verse pull the listeners in, get them hooked. But the power comes when the chorus is sung. A good chorus is something that listeners really take notice of; and because it’s repeated over and over, if it’s a great chorus, the song will imprint itself in listeners’ minds.

The basic version

Here’s an example of a basic ABAB song: “Goodbye Yellow Brick Road” by Elton John and Bernie Taupin has two verses that tell the story about a person who is tired of the high life and wants to return to his life on the farm. The chorus emphasizes his feelings, bidding farewell to the “yellow brick road” and stating that he’s going back to his former life on the farm. No matter how many verses there are in the song, the chorus will always apply because it describes the main topic of the song. Notice that it starts and ends with the title, which helps it stick in the listener’s mind as the song’s hook.



The best place to put a title in a verse-chorus song is in the first line of the chorus. Some songwriters place the title in both the first line and the last line (as in “Goodbye Yellow Brick Road”).

Another great verse-chorus song comes from Alicia Keys, the first artist to be released on legendary producer and Arista Records founder Clive Davis’s new label, J Records. Her song “Fallin’” is a great example of a very simple verse-chorus song elevated to high art by a smoldering vocal and a brilliant arrangement. Two chords make up the entire song — the basic blues progression that you’ve heard in the classic song “I Put a Spell on You” by Screamin’ Jay Hawkins (covered by The Animals in the ’60s — and note the Hawkins song does eventually resolve to a third chord, unlike Ms. Keys’s). The progression in “Fallin’” that toggles between E minor and B minor has never sounded more elegant. The structure is the verse-chorus form with a very simple chorus. The song gains its momentum through repetition and the swelling of strings and background vocals in the arrangement. The song begins with a gospel-drenched *a cappella* (group or solo singing without musical accompaniment) opening line: “I keep on falling in and out of love with you” and then continues with the verse supported by piano:

“Fallin’” written and sung by Alicia Keys

Verse 1 (A)

I keep on falling in and out with you
Sometimes I love ya, sometimes you make me blue
Sometimes I feel good, at times I feel used
Lovin’ you, darlin’, makes me so confused

Chorus (B)

I keep on falling in and out of love with you
I never loved someone the way that I love you

Verse 2 (A)

Oh I never felt this way
How do you give me so much pleasure
Cause me so much pain
Just when I think I’m takin’ more than would a fool
I start fallin’ back in love with you

Chorus (B)

I keep on falling in and out of love with you
I never loved someone the way that I love you

Coda

I’m, I’m, I’m, I’m fallin’
I, I, I, I’m fallin’

Fallin', Fallin'
 I keep on fallin' in and out of love with you
 I never loved someone the way that I love you
 I'm fallin' in and out of love with you
 I never loved someone the way that I love you
 I'm fallin' in and out of love with you
 I never loved someone the way that I love you

Words and Music by Alicia Keys ©2000 EMI April Music, Inc., and Lellow Productions (ASCAP)

“Goodbye Yellow Brick Road” and “Fallin’” stick to the verse-chorus form exactly. Sometimes, however, a verse-chorus song will present two verses before the first chorus is sung. This form variation would be described as AABAB, and you can look up the lyrics to some (or all) of the songs listed in Table 2-4 to learn about two verses before the chorus. This approach is sometimes an effective way to get into the feel of the song before the chorus arrives.

Table 2-4 AABAB Song Examples

<i>Song title</i>	<i>Songwriter(s)</i>	<i>Singers/Performers</i>
“Daniel”	Elton John, Bernie Taupin	Elton John
“Did You Ever Have to Make Up Your Mind”	John Sebastian	The Loving Spoonful
“Helpless”	Neil Young	Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young

If you want more examples of verse-chorus songs in ABAB form, you may want to study songs listed in Table 2-5. As you’re reading the lyrics and/or listening to these songs, pay close attention to the placement of the titles and ask yourself what title placement accomplishes.

Table 2-5 ABAB Song Examples

<i>Song title</i>	<i>Songwriter(s)</i>	<i>Singers/Performers</i>
“Amazed”	Marv Green, Aimee Mayo, Chris Lindsey	Lonestar
“American Pie”	Don McLean	Don McLean, Madonna
“Foolish Games”	Jewel	Jewel
“I’ll Never Break Your Heart”	Albert Manno, Ronnie Broomfield	Backstreet Boys

<i>Song title</i>	<i>Songwriter(s)</i>	<i>Singers/Performers</i>
"If You Ever Have Forever in Mind"	Vince Gill	Vince Gill
"The Wind Beneath My Wings"	Larry Henley, Jeff Silbar	Bette Midler

The verse-chorus form with a pre-chorus: ABC

A *pre-chorus* — a short section that leads up to the chorus — is a great device that you can use when writing a verse-chorus song. The Beatles' "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" is an excellent example of a song that uses a pre-chorus with great success. If you don't know the song well, listen to it while reading the words so you can get a good idea of what the pre-chorus sounds like and what it accomplishes. You'll notice that Lennon and McCartney create a pre-chorus (each with different words) before the first two times that the chorus is sung, but not before the last time it's sung.

Grammy Award winner Jim Peterik on your vehicle to success

My first number one song, "Vehicle," performed by the Ides of March, is probably the simplest song I've ever written. The verse just kind of merges seamlessly with the chorus as opposed to being set up by a pre-chorus:

Verse

I'm the friendly stranger in the black sedan
Won't you hop inside my car
I got picture, got candy, I'm a lovable man
And I can take you to the nearest star

Chorus

I'm your vehicle, baby
I'll take you anywhere you wanna go
I'm your vehicle, baby
By now I'm sure you'll know

That I love you (love you),
need you (need you)
Want you, got to have you, child
Great God in heaven you know I love you

*Words and music by Jim Peterik
© 1970/1999, Bald Medusa Music (ASCAP)*

I have to write another one like that! As a songwriter, I tend to devalue the simple songs I write, but those seem to always be the ones that turn out to be the biggest hits. In this example, every section has a hook, climaxing with "Great God in heaven you know I love you." It took me years to figure out what I was doing right in my more successful songs, but it usually boils down to simplicity, relatability, and a great beat.



Think of the pre-chorus as a mini bridge, because like the actual bridge of a song, it's taking your listeners' ears and minds into some new territory. It also allows the lyricist to build the story before hitting the chorus.

The next time you're writing a song, ask yourself whether your chorus would have more impact if it were set up by a pre-chorus. Often a good pre-chorus will have some fresh chord changes that haven't been used in the verse, especially if the chorus is in the same key as the verse.

Songwriter Chad Kroeger and the band Nickelback created a very powerful hit song, using the verse-chorus with pre-chorus. What's innovative about the song "How You Remind Me" is the placement of the title in the pre-chorus instead of the chorus. The pre-chorus leads to a powerful sing-along chorus that's very effective.

In the second verse, the singer tells how he has failed in the past. The pre-chorus is restated with the title and thesis of the song, then the chorus.

The final verse is simply the first verse, but this time a completely stripped-down version using only the vocal and electric guitar, using just the first two lines. The pre-chorus is then repeated, and it leads into a full-stride version of the final chorus accentuated by dramatic breaks from the entire band. In this song, the pre-chorus, like the chorus, uses the same words each time.

The verse-chorus form with a bridge: ABABC

The purpose of a bridge is to provide an interlude between other sections. Verse-chorus songs with bridges are very much a part of today's world.

Vertical Horizon is one of those bands that took many years and multiple albums to become an overnight sensation. Released in 2000, "Everything You Want" became their big breakthrough. In a mere 4 minutes and 17 seconds, it defined what modern rock would sound like — intelligent, concise, catchy, cryptic, and extremely well crafted. The song is basically written in a verse-chorus form with the writer using two verses before hitting the chorus. Starting with a telegraphic electric guitar figure and soon joined by acoustic guitar and bass, the very "in-your-face" vocal starts the verse and immediately pulls you in.

After the first two verses, the song hits the very catchy and repetitive chorus. This is really the part you remember most when you first hear the song. Next comes the third verse, which treads some of the same emotional ground

already covered but in a slightly different way. The chorus is now repeated. Following is the bridge — and it's everything a bridge should be: It blazes new ground chordally and thematically, and it raises the stakes as the singer strains for higher notes. Finally, the song enters the fourth verse — the kind of nostalgic looking back that's a perfect wrap-up for this song. Following this is a double chorus — the first a clone of the other two choruses. The repeat chorus changes into the first person, however. Weaving in and out of the song is a magical, moody guitar motif. It's probably as important an element as anything else in the song.

If you like bridges and want to know them better, check out the songs in Table 2-6 and see how they were used to create some pretty big hits.

Table 2-6 ABABC Song Examples		
<i>Song Title</i>	<i>Songwriter(s)</i>	<i>Singers/Performers</i>
"Hands"	Jewel	Jewel
"Here Comes the Sun"	George Harrison	The Beatles
"I Turn to You"	Diane Warren	Christina Aguilera
"I Want It That Way"	Max Martin, Andreas Carlsson	Backstreet Boys
"Un-break My Heart"	Diane Warren	Toni Braxton

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The verse-chorus form with a pre-chorus and a bridge: ABCABCD

This very popular song form, sometimes referred to as *ABCABCD*, pulls out all the stops to convince the listener a song means business. The form includes not only a pre-chorus before every chorus, but also a formal bridge at the center of the song, usually after the second chorus, before the *out chorus* (as the final chorus is sometimes called). The truly daring can further test the audiences' attention span by adding a third verse after the bridge, before the out chorus.



This form expands your chances of getting your lyrical point across, gives you the opportunity to make additional musical statements, and challenges the programming directors at radio stations across the country with songs longer than their formats allow. When using this form, make sure that it doesn't collapse under the weight of too many sections.

A prime example

“Hold on Loosely,” the top-ten hit by 38 Special (written by Jim Peterik, Don Barnes, and Jeff Carlisi), is an example of a song that just flat out works in this form, as validated by its continued airplay. Take a look at how the song builds as you sing along and you’ll see why it has become a staple at classic rock radio:

“Hold on Loosely” written by Jim Peterik, Don Barnes, and Jeff Carlisi

Verse 1 (A)

You see it all around you
Good lovin’ gone bad
And usually it’s too late when you
Realize what you had

Pre-chorus (B)

My mind goes back to the girl I met
Long years ago, who told me

Chorus (C)

Just hold on loosely
But don’t let go
If you cling too tightly
You’re gonna lose control
Your baby needs someone to believe in
And a whole lotta space to breathe in

Verse 2 (A)

It’s so damn easy
When your feelings are such
That you overprotect her
That you love her too much

Pre-chorus (B)

My mind goes back to the girl I met
Long years ago, who told me

Chorus (C)

Just hold on loosely
But don’t let go
If you cling too tightly
You’re gonna lose control
Your baby needs someone to believe in
And a whole lotta space to breathe in

Bridge (D)

Don't let her slip away
Sentimental fool

Don't let your heart get in the way
Yeah, yeah, yeah

Verse (A)

You see it all around you
Good lovin' gone bad
And usually it's too late when you
Realize what you had

Chorus (C)

So hold on loosely
But don't let go
If you cling too tightly
You're gonna lose control
Your baby needs someone to believe in
And a whole lot of space to breathe in

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As you may have noticed, the last verse bypasses the pre-chorus and heads right to the final chorus. By this time in the song, the writers felt it was no longer necessary and more important to get to the main hook.

Some variations of the form

One of Jim's favorite songs that he's ever co-written is "I Can't Hold Back," a hit for his band, Survivor, in 1985. It starts with an intricately picked guitar intro figure, then hits the first verse, "There's a story in my eyes . . .", then into the pre-chorus, "I can feel you tremble when we touch . . .", and into the chorus, "I can't hold back — I'm on the edge . . .". From there it goes unexpectedly into an instrumental version of the pre-chorus and then slides into a spacey bridge, "Another shooting star goes by . . .", and then glides straight into the pre-chorus. Next, instead of going into a chorus, the song returns to a reprise of the verse, "There's a story in my eyes. . . .", and then it skips the pre-chorus and goes directly to the out chorus. Whew-boy! When Jim and his writing partner, Frankie Sullivan, were sitting at the piano at the Record Plant recording studio in Los Angeles with the producer, Ron Nevison, throwing around ideas, Jim wasn't sure this unorthodox structure was going to work,

but the next day when they recorded it, it was magic. The experience taught Jim to not be afraid to play around with song structure. Take a look:

“I Can’t Hold Back” written by Jim Peterik and Frankie Sullivan

Verse 1 (A)

There’s a story in my eyes
Turn the pages of desire
Now it’s time to trade those dreams
For the rush of passion’s fire

Pre-chorus 1 (B)

I can feel you tremble when we touch
And I feel the hand of fate
Reaching out to both of us

Verse 2 (A)

I’ve been holding back the night
I’ve been searching for a clue from you
I’m gonna try with all my might
To make this story line come true

Pre-chorus 2 (B)

Can ya feel me tremble when we touch
Can you feel the hand of fate
Reaching out to both of us
This love affair can’t wait

Chorus (C)

I can’t hold back, I’m on the edge (I can’t hold back)
Your voice explodes inside my head
I can’t hold back, I won’t back down
Girl it’s too late to turn back now

Bridge (D)

Another shooting star goes by
And in the night the silence speaks to you and I
And now the time has come at last
Don’t let the moment come too fast

Pre-chorus 3 (B)

I can feel you tremble when we touch
And I feel the hand of fate
Reaching out to both of us

Verse 3 (A)

There's a story in my eyes
 Turn the pages of desire
 Now it's time to trade those dreams
 For the rush of passion's fire

Chorus (C)

I can't hold back, I'm on the edge (I can't hold back)
 Your voice explodes inside my head
 I can't hold back, I won't back down
 Girl it's too late to turn back now

Pre-Chorus 4 (B)

I can see you tremble when we touch
 Oooh, and I feel the hand of fate
 Reaching out to both of us
 This love affair can't wait

I can't hold back, I can't hold back
 I can't hold back, I can't hold back

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Listen to the songs of John Lennon and Paul McCartney and the various Motown writers. It's a great way to learn about the variations of song structure.

Even though the songs in Table 2-7 are older, they set the template for much of the new music you currently hear every day and demonstrate some non-standard song forms.

Table 2-7 **Structure Variations**

<i>Song Title</i>	<i>Songwriter(s)</i>	<i>Singers/Performers</i>
"I'm Looking Through You"	John Lennon, Paul McCartney	The Beatles
"My Girl"	Smokey Robinson, Ronald White	The Temptations
"Standing in the Shadows of Love"	Holland/Dozier/Holland	The Four Tops
"We Can Work It Out"	John Lennon, Paul McCartney	The Beatles

“Drops of Jupiter” (written and performed by Train) is one of those songs that makes an immediate impression. Usually with brilliant songs like this, you remember where you were and what you were feeling when it first hit your ears. It’s an example of a song that takes a standard tried-and-true song form and twists it here and there to make it sound unusual and fresh — a pop/rock masterpiece. The song starts with the piano figure of the verse. The first verse contains the only reference to the song’s title. So much for the traditional wisdom of driving the hook into the ground — but that didn’t seem to hurt sales.

By the way, the music charts, such as *Billboard*, *Radio and Records*, and so on, have taken to putting the words (“Tell Me”) after the song’s title for those of us who can’t identify it by its cryptic title, “Drops of Jupiter.”

The chorus comes next, although it’s not a traditional type of chorus in that the title is never stated. After the chorus, a significant instrumental signature is created by a string section. We now hit the second verse. It follows the same structure of the first verse, except that the last line before the second chorus is extended for extra impact. The song cleverly uses modern-day references such as “tae-bo” and later on, “soy latte.” What’s unusual in the second chorus is that although the rhythm of the words and melody stay the same, practically all the words are different. The hook “Tell me” is about all that stays the same. Moving the action along in a chorus as opposed to marking time is unique.

A bridge follows the second chorus, although not in the traditional sense in changing keys and mood. It’s more chant-like and modifies the action by changing up the rhythm of the words. The arrangement then breaks down to just piano and voice again, and the song enters the final chorus. Again, the writers break form by combining elements of both earlier choruses into one. The song ends with the infectious “Na, na, na” refrain with alternating vocal ad libs lifted from various sections of the song. The last line is a brand-new variation on an earlier passage. The lyrics in this song are very open to interpretation. The majestic tone of the music matches perfectly the broad scope of the lyrics.



There are some great songs out there that don’t play by the rules. The writers have ignored the standard forms to create something truly unique. “Drops of Jupiter” by Train can be corralled, kicking and screaming, into some kind of traditional form but it’s really a maverick. As an experiment, try challenging the listener by shifting your sections around to make your song stand out from the pack of cookie-cutter tracks. If your song becomes confusing and unfocused when playing it for others, it’s time to go back to the drawing board.

Practice Makes Perfect

Often the best way of learning a craft is taking the best examples you can find and start tearing them apart to see what makes them tick. Pick five of your favorite songs, which could be anything from a 1940s standard to the latest by Radiohead. Listen to the song and analyze its structure by writing out the lyrics (you can find accurate transcripts of lyrics on many music sites on the Internet or printed on the CD label). It should then be easy to note the song's various sections by verse, pre-chorus, chorus, bridge, out chorus, and whatever other spare parts you may encounter. See if the songs you like the most follow any particular pattern — if so, you may want to pattern your song after that form.



When analyzing the structure of your favorite songs, notice the various ways in which the great ones push the boundaries of song craft to the max. As you listen and make notes, take an especially close look at the following areas:

- ✓ **What is it about each section that sets it apart from the rest of the song?** For instance, notice how the story builds verse to verse as the song unfolds, how the chorus lifts the song to new heights, how the bridge does its job by giving the listener some fresh chord changes and some new emotional ammunition.
- ✓ **What is truly unusual or original in the songs you love the most?** Most songs you encounter that have survived to make a difference in this world have one or more elements that elevate it above the pack. “We Built This City” (written by Bernie Taupin, Peter Wolf, Martin Page, and Dennis Lambert), the ’80s hit for Jefferson Starship, starts right out with the sing-along chorus. Certain songs defy logic by shifting their key signature down on the last chorus instead of up. Find those special elements in the songs that really get your attention.
- ✓ **Where do the titles appear in your favorite songs?** The traditional practice of placing the title at the beginning of the chorus is often disregarded by daring writers. Notice songs that position their title at the end of the chorus, in the verse or pre-chorus, or that dispense with it altogether.

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Chapter 3

Scales and Modes, Moods and Melodies

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding major and minor scales
- ▶ Freshening up on the Circle of Fifths
- ▶ Touring the different modes
- ▶ Checking out the pentatonic scale
- ▶ Exercising your scales and modes

Sometimes you have more of an idea about the direction you want your melody to move in than which notes you're going to use to create your melody. You probably have an idea of the mood you want to convey with your music, without thinking about whether the melody should rise, fall, or take on any specific shape. If you're writing with a sense of directional movement — that is, up and down the staff — there are times you can benefit from limiting yourself to notes within a *scale* or *mode*.

There are 12 different pitches in the Western *chromatic scale*. That's the total number of notes that are available in any one octave. But there are many other combinations of those notes — other scales — and if you don't know at least several of them frontward and backward, you should work on that, because it can benefit your composing tremendously. The other scales have fewer than 12 notes, boiling them down to as few as five or as many as seven.

- ✓ Diatonic scales have seven different pitches in them.
- ✓ Pentatonic scales have five different pitches in them.



In this chapter, the words *scale* and *mode* mean pretty much the same thing: a particular selection of successive notes within an octave. You will encounter both terms, so both appear here, too.

Major and Minor Modes and the Circle of Fifths



Different modes and scales can evoke different moods. Major scales are good for happy, lively, calming moods. The minor ones are great communicators of sadness, seriousness, and introspection.

Figures 3-1 and 3-2 show two examples of nearly identical melodies in terms of directional movement. Figure 3-1 is in a major mode, and Figure 3-2 is in a minor mode.

Figure 3-1:

This simple melody is in major mode.

**Figure 3-2:**

Here's the same melody in minor mode.



Play those pieces on a guitar, and you can easily hear the difference in mood between these two examples without even knowing what written key they're in (we deliberately left out the key signature). The melody in Figure 3-1 is actually in the key of F major, and the one in Figure 3-2 is in F minor. Note that even though the directional shape of the notes on the staves is identical, the pieces sound different because the first example is in a major mode and the second example is in a minor mode.

Figures 3-3 and 3-4 show the melodies with their proper key signatures.

Getting moody

It's no big secret that playing a good song is an easy way to set the mood of a room. For some reason, that's doubly true in film. How many times have you watched a film with a wall-to-wall soundtrack of busy, unconnected pop songs and had it spoil the picture for you? But how long does it take to get the creepy but incredibly simple soundtracks of films like *Halloween* or *Friday the 13th* out of your head after watching them?

The connection between music and mood isn't even confined to the human realm, either: Birds, bees, and four-legged animals of all sizes modulate their vocal utterances to try to attract mates or scare away competition. And if you think dogs barking isn't musical, take one more listen to the Jingle Dogs' *Christmas Unleashed*.

The ancient Greeks believed that not only did music itself invoke mood and even provoke certain behaviors, but that the *modes* the songs were written in were just as responsible. The original name for the Greeks' set of seven musical scales was *échos*, later renamed *modus* by the Romans who adopted the system.

Plato himself recommended that soldiers preparing for war should listen to music written in Dorian and Phrygian modes (more on these modes later in this chapter). In a modern context, that would mean that before heading off for any great confrontation, one should listen to songs like The Doors' "Light My Fire," Steppenwolf's "Born to Be Wild," Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit," and Yngwie Malmsteen's "Heavy E Phrygian." On the other hand, Plato discouraged these same soldiers from listening to songs in the Lydian or Ionian modes because it would interfere with their bloodlust. Therefore, putting on R.E.M.'s "Man on the Moon" is not a good idea before going off to war.

Plato and Aristotle also believed that an affinity toward certain musical modes were insights into a person's character, and that people who were fond of music in the Ionian, Aeolian, and Locrian modes were too relaxed and easygoing to do well in high-power political or military positions. After reading this chapter, you may want to take a look at the sort of music you prefer listening to and see what musical modes most often pop up in your personal CD collection.

Book VII

Writing Songs and Music

Figure 3-3:

The melody in major mode is shown with the F major key signature.



Figure 3-4:

The same melody in minor mode is shown with the F minor key signature.



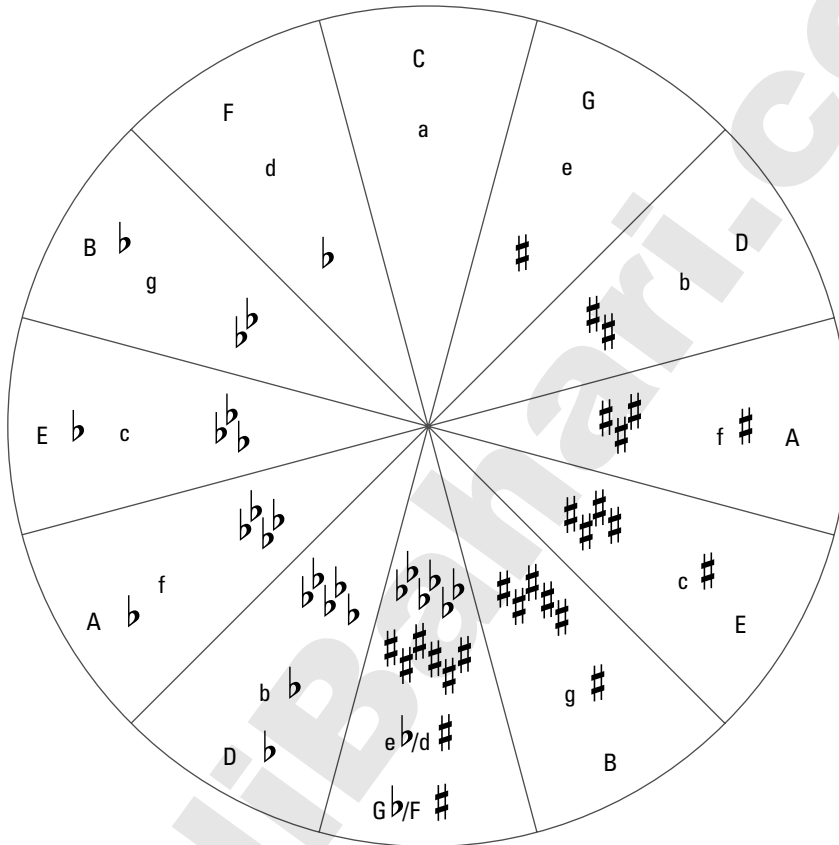
The Circle of Fifths (Figure 3-5) is a handy tool when thinking about scales, moods, and keys. Each position on the circle contains two keys: the major key and its relative minor, which share the same key signature. The major keys are given capitalized letters here, and the minor keys are in lowercase. In the Circle of Fifths, every time you move one letter clockwise from the C major/A minor position at the top, you add a sharp to the key signature. And at every point counterclockwise from C major/A minor, you add a flat. The number of sharps or flats in a key corresponds to the number of fifths away from C that key is located. For example, the key of D is located two fifths above C and, interestingly enough, has two sharps.



Here are a couple of tips for using the Circle of Fifths when you're composing:

- ✓ When you're writing something in a particular major key and you want to change the mood a little (maybe make it a little sadder or darker), you can use the relative minor scale of the key. For example, if your original melody was in G major, you could change to E minor for the sad parts. Doing this makes it unnecessary to change the key signature, though you may have to use a few *accidentals* (sharpening or flattening individual notes) here and there. Figure 3-5 shows you at a glance which major keys coordinate with which minor keys.
- ✓ Another common practice in composition is to write the darker, sadder bits in the minor key of the original major. For example, go from a G major scale to a G minor. As you can see from the Circle of Fifths chart in Figure 3-5, the parts written in G major would be written with the key signature for G, which has a single sharp (F[♯]). The parts in G minor, then, would require the signature from *its* relative major, which is B[♭]. The key signature for B[♭] has two flats: a B[♭] and an E[♭].

Figure 3-5:
The Circle of Fifths shows
the relation
between
major keys
and their
relative
minors.



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Writing
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Music

Moods à la Modes

Just playing a mode or scale without any particular melody in mind can inspire you to come up with a melody. An easy way to start experiencing a few different modes is to play scales on all white piano keys, but starting on the different notes within the C scale. There are seven modes (often called *church modes*, although they're really ancient Greek) that you can make this way because there are seven unique white piano keys in an octave.

For example: Play a scale from F to F using only the white keys. Note that you will play the B natural instead of the B flat that is found in the key of F major. It turns out, you just played a scale in the *Lydian* mode, and it sounds a little different from the old *do re mi* that you learned as a kid.



There are seven modes, just as there are seven white keys on a piano. You can try all seven modes by starting and finishing on other notes using only the white keys. Can you hear the interesting mood possibilities lurking in these modes? You can gain a lot of ideas by sampling the different modes and deciding which mode evokes which moods.

We look at all seven modes a little more closely in the following sections. It's true that for simplicity's sake we're illustrating the modes using only the white keys on the piano keyboard. But of course, each mode can be based on any note, and the notes work the same on guitar. It's the different pattern of the intervals between the notes that defines each mode.



A half step is the musical interval equivalent to a fret on a guitar. One fret is one half step. A whole step is two frets.



Quite a few other scales and modes aren't used much at all in Western music — and by *Western* we don't mean cowboy campfire songs, we mean European music and its descendants. Some non-Western scales have pitches between half steps called *quarter tones*. Some use intervals that sound odd or even out of tune to the Western ear. The subject of modes and scales is a huge one, but if you intend to compose music where a keyboard of some kind is involved, you probably won't have any way of conveying pitches in some of the more exotic modes.

Ionian (the major scale)

When you play seven ascending white keys starting with C, you get the Ionian mode (Figure 3-6). To build an Ionian scale on another note besides C, you use the whole-step (W), half-step (H) pattern: WWHWWWH.

Figure 3-6:

The Ionian mode should sound familiar, because it's the major scale.



Notice something familiar about this? You're right — this is the same pattern used to build major scales today.

Dorian

Figure 3-7 shows the D Dorian mode. To build a Dorian mode on another note besides D, you would use the pattern WHWWWHW.

Figure 3-7:

The Dorian mode sounds melancholy and full of bittersweet longing.



The Dorian mode is most commonly heard in Celtic music and early American folk songs derived from Irish melodies. Songs written in Dorian mode sound melancholy and soulful because the final note of the scale doesn't quite resolve itself, so it feels almost like a question left unanswered. One of the most famous pieces based on the Dorian mode is "So What" by Miles Davis, from his famous 1959 recording, *Kind of Blue*.

Phrygian

Figure 3-8 shows the E Phrygian mode. To build a Phrygian mode on another note besides E, you would use the pattern HWWWHWW.

Figure 3-8:

The Phrygian mode can give your music a bit of exotic spice.



Most flamenco music is written in the Phrygian mode, which has a bright, Middle Eastern sound to it that works well with folk and traditional dance music. Many modern composers and guitarists commonly use Phrygian

modes with major scales (instead of minor scales) because it sounds brighter and less melancholic than the minor scale.

Lydian

Figure 3-9 shows the F Lydian mode. To build a Lydian mode on another note besides F, you would use the pattern WWHWWH.

Figure 3-9:
The Lydian mode has something of a surprising, jazzy feel to it.



The Lydian mode is the complete opposite of the Ionian mode/major scale, so it feels as solid and bright as a major scale but the intervals are surprising and unexpected. This is a popular mode among jazz musicians who enjoy using a mixture of major and minor chord progression in inventive ways.

Mixolydian

Figure 3-10 shows the G Mixolydian mode. To build a Mixolydian mode on another note besides G, you would use the pattern WWHWWH.

Figure 3-10:
The Mixolydian mode is often used for blues and bluesy rock music.



Mixolydian is similar to Lydian in the sense of having a major-scale feel with minor intervals, and it's a great mode to work within to give a bluesy feel to your compositions. Mixolydian mode is another popular scale for solo musicians looking for a counterpoint to the Ionian key of the song.

Aeolian (the natural minor scale)

Figure 3-11 shows the A Aeolian mode. To build an Aeolian scale on another note, the pattern you'd use is WHWWHWW. This should also look familiar to you — it is the whole-step, half-step pattern used to build minor scales today.

Figure 3-11:
The Aeolian mode can convey great sorrow, regret, and despair.



The intervals of Aeolian mode create the same feel as many modern blues songs. Songs composed in Aeolian mode have a strong sense of sadness. The final note of an Aeolian scale feels resolved in a completely different sense than the final note of the Ionian. If the Dorian mode reflects melancholy, the Aeolian reflects despair. Check out Neil Young's "Cowgirl in the Sand" for a great example.

Locrian

Figure 3-12 shows the B Locrian mode. To build a Locrian scale on any other note, you would use the pattern HWWHWWH.

Figure 3-12:
The Locrian mode sounds a bit twisted and wrong.



Locrian mode is considered to be so unstable that most composers declare it unworkable. Few songs are written in the Locrian mode, which has led some music theorists to label it a "theoretical" mode. You find it occasionally used in heavy metal. This mode exists because all seven notes of the Ionian scale could form it in a mathematical sense, but the relationship between intervals in the Locrian mode is difficult for many composers to work with. Music that

is composed within this mode sounds unsettling, disturbing, and just a little bit off. Listen to the synthesizer melody at the beginning of Rush's "YYZ" for an example, or try playing "Three Blind Mice" in a Locrian mode — it sounds like incidental music from a Tod Browning film.

These modes are good tools for writing *tonal* music (music that conforms to a scale or mode and adheres to a tonal center or key). By limiting yourself to notes within a particular mode — that is, notes that make some harmonic sense together — you may find it easier to write something engaging for most listeners. Your composition style is partly a product of your limitations, and modes are limitations. Working within limitations can help you define your style. It's like tennis: It wouldn't be as fun without the net and the lines that define the court.

The Pentatonic Scale

There is one kind of scale that is fairly common throughout the world — despite all the other musical differences among various cultures. That would be the *pentatonic scale*, also called the *five-toned scale*. As you find out in Books III and IV, the pentatonic scale is the guitar soloist's best friend. One can refer to a major pentatonic scale or a minor pentatonic scale, but the notes of the major scale are shared with the relative minor key.

For example, Figure 3-13 shows a G major pentatonic scale, and Figure 3-14 shows the pentatonic scale of its relative minor, E minor.

Figure 3-13:
The pentatonic scale is found all over the world.



Figure 3-14:
The E minor pentatonic scale, G's relative minor.





Notice that although these two scales have a different *tonic* note, they share the same five notes: G, A, B, D, and E (which are the first, second, third, fifth, and sixth tones of the major scale). Many of the other scales and modes around the world seem to revolve around this simple scale formula. Every rock 'n' roll guitar soloist on the planet should be able to play a pentatonic scale without even thinking about it.

The Harmonic Minor and Melodic Minor Scales

Two commonly used scales that aren't listed with the preceding modes and scales are the *harmonic minor* and the *melodic minor* scales. These scales differ from the *natural minor* scale (Aeolian mode) — which is basically a scale taken directly from a relative major — in small, but important ways.

- ✓ Harmonic minor sharpens the 7th note in the scale (Figure 3-15). This note brings the scale a little closer to the A major scale, but other notes in the scale prevent it from sounding too happy.
- ✓ The melodic minor scale has different notes when the scale ascends than it does when the scale descends (Figure 3-16). It's like a major scale with a flatted 3rd on the way up, and it's a natural minor on the way down.

Figure 3-15:

The A harmonic minor scale contains a G sharp, unlike the A natural minor scale.

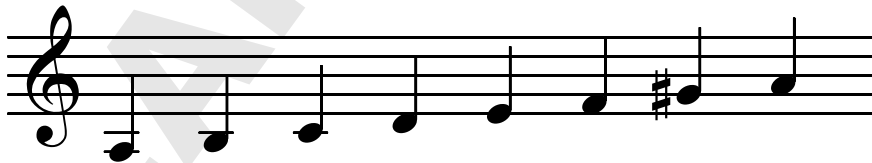
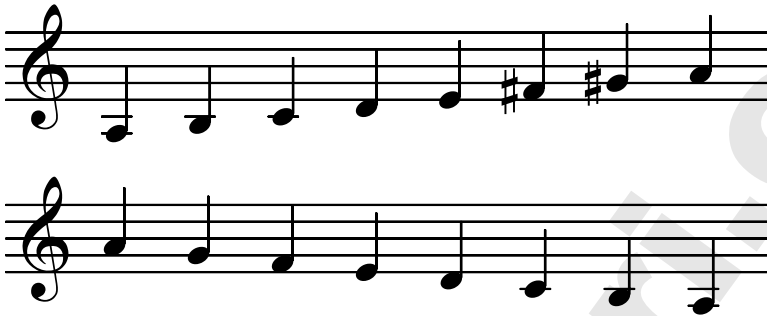


Figure 3-16:

The A melodic minor scale is different going up than it is coming down.



Melody Writing Exercises



Here are some suggestions of exercises to do while waiting to be inspired to write your song. And who knows? These exercises could well lead to songs.

1. Try to write a melody using notes from the C major scale while playing a G major chord underneath.

The scale from G to G is G Mixolydian mode now. If you want, you could add a flat 7th (F natural) to the chord you're playing for a more playful-sounding combination.

2. Write a short melody in a major mode (it could be your own or someone else's).
3. Rewrite Step 2's melody in a minor mode.
4. Write a short melody in a minor mode.
5. Rewrite Step 4's melody in a major mode.
6. Improvise using notes in the C major scale while playing an F major chord.

Sound mysterious? You're in the Lydian mode.

7. Pick a different mode among the ones discussed in this chapter, one that sounds interesting to you, and try to write a melody that fits its mood.
8. Find the pentatonic scales for all major and minor keys.

Hint: After you find the major, you can apply it to the relative minor.

Chapter 4

Composing with Chords

In This Chapter

- ▶ Getting moody with chords
- ▶ Making progress with chord progressions
- ▶ Ending up with cadences
- ▶ Getting harmony from melody
- ▶ Exercising your chord harmonization

The *key signature* of a piece of music governs the main notes within that piece. When you want to escape the key signature within that piece of music, you have to use *accidentals* (sharps, flats, and naturals) to indicate notes outside the key.

You have several octaves' worth of notes on a guitar, but only the notes allowed by the key signature can be used without accidentals in that piece of music. The *scale* of the piece governs the music's tonality — which means breaking free from the original key is a good way to add spice.

Therefore, if you have a song written in C major, the main eight notes that will appear in the song are C natural, D natural, E natural, F natural, G natural, A natural, and B natural. If your song is written in A major, the only notes appearing in that song will be A natural, B natural, C sharp, D natural, E natural, F sharp, and G sharp. In either of these keys, the chords are also made of some combination of the seven notes in each key.

In this chapter, you discover the basics of composing with chords: the moods of various chords, combining chords, creating rhythmic movement, using chord progressions and cadences, and putting together chords and melodies.

Chords and Their Moods



There are two types of major chords:

- ✓ **Diatonic chords** are built from the seven notes of a major key signature. The letter name of a diatonic chord (such as A major, A minor, or A augmented) comes from the major scale the chord is built on.
- ✓ **Chromatic chords** are built from notes *outside* the major key signature, such as chords built on minor scales. Chords found within minor keys are a little trickier, because nine notes potentially can fit under a single minor key signature when you take the melodic and harmonic minor scales into consideration. (See Chapter 3 in Book VII for more information about the melodic and harmonic minor scales.)

Because the natural, melodic, and harmonic scales are taught as separate scales for musicians to practice, there's a misconception that you have to stick to *one* of these types of minor scales when composing music. But really, you can draw from all three types of minor scales within the same piece of music.

You can let your melodic ideas suggest different chords, for example. This can be a very good way to open up possibilities — by suggesting departures from your key center and adding color to your work. But you could just as easily start with a chord progression and build a melody from there. Thousands of compositions began with a sense of harmonic movement first, followed by melody.

Here's an opportunity for your Muse to step in. Or maybe you could just put your hands on your guitar and listen for the possibilities. To excel at chordal composition you should have a strong knowledge of chords. You should, at the very least, have a working familiarity with following chord qualities in every key, which you get to explore in the following sections:

- ✓ Major and minor
- ✓ Major and minor 7th
- ✓ Dominant 7th
- ✓ Major and minor 6th
- ✓ Suspended 4th
- ✓ 9th and minor 9th
- ✓ Diminished
- ✓ Augmented
- ✓ Minor 7th, flat 5th (also known as half-diminished)

No matter which key you're in, each of those specific chords comes with its particular sonic character, called its *mood*, or quality. Therefore, if you know how minor chords are constructed, and you pick up the guitar and play some minor chords, chances are the sound that comes from that set of chords is closer to what you're looking for than if you just started playing random chords.

Certain chords express certain moods. It's really up to you what sort of mood is to be implied by each chord, but in the following sections we include a short list of our own observations, based on asking students to describe the feelings conveyed by these chords. There are many, many more chord configurations than just these, but the ones that follow are a good start. You have to decide for yourself how each of these chords makes you feel.



A *root* is the main note of the chord and gives the chord its name. In a C chord, for example, C is the root. A *half step* is the smallest interval in Western music — conveniently, and not coincidentally, each fret on a guitar represents change in pitch of a half step. A whole step is two half steps, or two frets. And when we say *flat* we mean the note one half step lower in pitch; likewise, *sharp* means the next higher half step.

Major

Major chords are happy, simple, honest, bold. They're made from the 1, 3, and 5 tones of the major scale. To build a major chord using half and whole steps, remember: root + 4 half steps + 3 half steps (check out Figure 4-1).



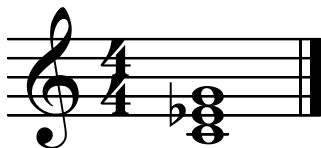
Figure 4-1:
C major.

Minor

Minor chords are sad or serious. They're made from the 1, flat 3, and 5 tones of the major scale. To build a minor chord using half and whole steps, remember: root + 3 half steps + 4 half steps (see Figure 4-2).

Cm

Figure 4-2:
C minor.

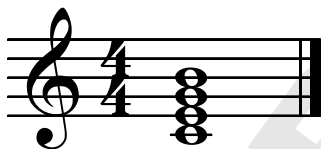


Major 7th

Major 7th chords are pretty, delicate, sensitive, thoughtful. They're made from the 1, 3, 5, and 7 tones of the major scale. To build a major 7th chord using half and whole steps, remember: root + 4 half steps + 3 half steps + 4 half steps (see Figure 4-3).

Cma7

Figure 4-3:
C major 7th.



Minor 7th

Minor 7th chords are pensive, moody, introspective. They're made from the 1, flat 3, 5, and flat 7 tones of the major scale. To build a minor 7th chord using half and whole steps, remember: root + 3 half steps + 4 half steps + 3 half steps (take a look at Figure 4-4).

Cm7

Figure 4-4:
C minor 7th.



Dominant 7th

Dominant 7th chords are sassy, outgoing, strong. They're made from the 1, 3, 5, and flat 7 tones of the major scale. To build a dominant 7th chord using half and whole steps, remember: root + 4 half steps + 3 half steps + 3 half steps (see Figure 4-5).



Major 6th

Major 6th chords are playful. They're made from the 1, 3, 5, and 6 tones of the major scale. To build a major 6th chord using half and whole steps, remember: root + 4 half steps + 3 half steps + 2 half steps (see Figure 4-6).

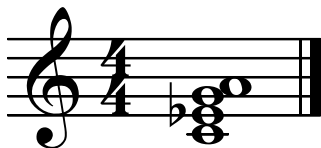


Minor 6th

Minor 6th chords are dark, sensuous, troubled. They're made from the 1, flat 3, 5, and 6 tones of the major scale. To build a minor 6th chord using half and whole steps, remember: root + 3 half steps + 4 half steps + 2 half steps (see Figure 4-7).

Cm6

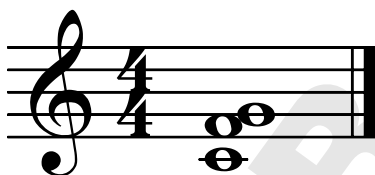
Figure 4-7:
C minor 6th.

*Suspended 4th*

Suspended 4th chords are regal or martial. They're made from the 1, 4, and 5 notes of the major scale. To build a suspended 4th chord using half and whole steps, remember: root + 5 half steps + 2 half steps (check out Figure 4-8).

Csus4

Figure 4-8:
C sus-
pended 4th.

*9th*

Ninth chords are energetic and lively. They're made from the 1, 3, 5, and 9 tones of the major scale. To build a 9th chord using half and whole steps, remember: root + 4 half steps + 3 half steps + 3 half steps + 3 half steps (see Figure 4-9).

C9

Figure 4-9:
C 9th.



Minor 9th

Minor 9th chords are sad, tender, complex. They're made from the 1, flat 3, 5, and 9 tones of the major scale. To build a minor 9th chord using half and whole steps, remember: root position + 3 half steps + 4 half steps + 3 half steps + 4 half steps (take a look at Figure 4-10).



Diminished

Diminished chords are dark, strained, complex. They're made from the 1, flat 3, and flat 5 tones of the major scale. To build a diminished chord using half and whole steps, remember: root + 3 half steps + 3 half steps (see Figure 4-11).



Augmented

Augmented chords are anticipatory and full of movement. They're made from the 1, 3, and sharp 5 tones of the major scale. To build an augmented chord using half and whole steps, remember: root position + 4 half steps + 4 half steps (see Figure 4-12).

Caug

Figure 4-12:
C augmented.

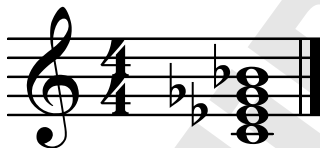


Minor 7th, flat 5th (also known as half-diminished)

The minor 7th, flat 5th chord is also called the half-diminished chord. No matter what you call them, these chords are despairing, sorrowful, difficult, and deep. They're made from the 1, flat 3, flat 5, and flat 7 tones of the major scale. To build a minor 7th, flat 5th chord using half and whole steps, remember: root + 3 half steps + 3 half steps + 4 steps (see Figure 4-13).

Cm7/b5

Figure 4-13:
C minor 7th,
flat 5th.



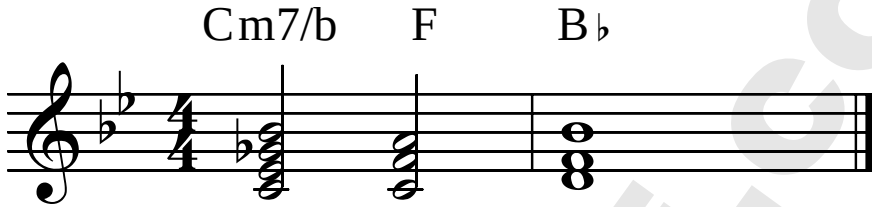
It's important to note that the character of a chord is strongly dependent upon its surroundings. For example, a dark and dissonant chord like a minor 7th, flat 5th sounds dark and dissonant when out there on its own (see Figure 4-14), but if used to pass from one chord to another, it doesn't have the same feeling (see Figure 4-15).

Cm7/b5

Figure 4-14:
A dissonant
chord all on
its own.



Figure 4-15:
A dissonant
chord mov-
ing into a
major chord.



Putting Chords Together

After you've decided on a chord progression for a section of your piece, you may find it useful to experiment with different chord *voicings*, or all the different ways the same chord can be put together. A simple *triad* (a chord with three different pitches in it) has three different arrangements of its notes within an octave.

A chord's voicing can be arranged in the following ways:

- ✓ Root voicing has the root as the lowest note: C (root), E, G
- ✓ First inversion has the 3 tone as the lowest note: E, G, C
- ✓ Second inversion has the 5 tone as the lowest note: G, C, E

The examples in Figures 4-16 through 4-18 use the C major chord to illustrate.

Figure 4-16:
Root voic-
ing for a C
major chord.

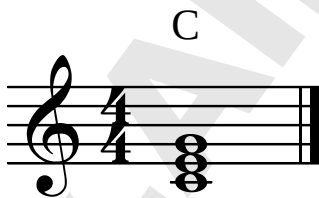


Figure 4-17:
First inver-
sion for a C
major chord.

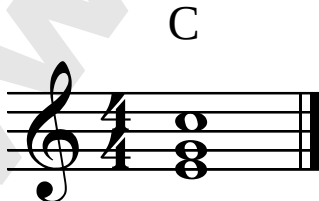
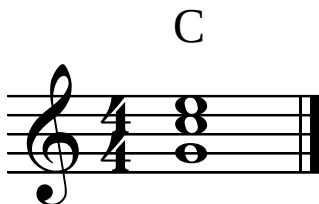


Figure 4-18:

Second inversion for a C major chord.



If you already have a melody, you'll find it useful in determining your chord voicings (the arrangement of the notes in the chord). Most often you'll want the melody to represent the top notes in your chords. This will dictate which voicings sound best. If you don't have a melody yet, choosing your chord voicings can help you write one. Try a few chord voicing changes and have your melody grab the top notes. If you don't like the results, invert some chords and try again.

Creating Rhythmic Movement



When composing with chords, determining a rhythmic movement for your chord changes may help. What this means is that you'll decide how often, and on which beats or accents, your chords will generally change. You could have a chord change every measure, every four measures, every two beats, or even every beat within a measure. The choice is yours, but remember that fast-moving melodies can sound awkward if the chords change too quickly. A general rule is that more frequent chord changes work better with slower melodies, but this, like most rules, can be broken from time to time.

Of course, the rhythmic movement of your chord changes can vary as your composition moves along (as shown in Figure 4-19). You don't need to keep the chords changing at the same rate throughout the section of your piece.

Figure 4-19:

Different melodic rhythms in the same piece of music.





Writing chord changes out first is just one way to create some underlying structure for your composition. You may want to find some locations in the rhythmic structure of your composition that lend themselves to pivoting your chords out of the key center. It's not difficult to hear in your head where a surprise or a change harmonically would be good. Just don't overdo the surprises and departures. If you're driving down a bumpy road and you hit another bump, it doesn't mean much. Lead the listener into your changes. Build drama, tension, and release.

"Rules" for Major and Minor Chord Progressions

One way to easily build tension and release in your music is to follow some of the simple rules already laid out for you hundreds of years ago by people like Christiaan Huygens and Nicola Vicentino. According to them — and the thousands of musicians who followed — certain sequences of chords, called *chord progressions*, sound nicer than others. Over time, a consensus about the "rules" of chord progressions has come about.

In the following lists, capital Roman numerals indicate major chords, and lowercase Roman numerals stand for minor chords. The numeral itself stands for the note on the major scale the chord is built on. For example, in C major, the I is the C major chord, the ii is D minor, the iii is E minor, the IV is F major, and so on. The ° symbol indicates a diminished chord, and the + symbol is used for augmented chords. (You can find out more about diminished and augmented chords earlier in this chapter.)



"Rules" for major chord progressions include the following:

- ✓ I chords can appear anywhere in a progression.
- ✓ ii chords lead to I, V, or vii° chords.
- ✓ iii chords lead to I, ii, IV, or vi chords.
- ✓ IV chords lead to I, ii, iii, V, or vii° chords.
- ✓ V chords lead to I or vi chords.
- ✓ vi chords lead to I, ii, iii, IV, or V chords.
- ✓ vii° chords lead to I or iii chords.



“Rules” for minor chord progressions include the following:

- ✓ i chords can appear anywhere in a progression.
- ✓ ii° or ii chords lead to i, iii, V, v, vii°, or VII chords.
- ✓ III or III+ chords lead to i, iv, IV, VI, #vi°, vii°, or VI chords.
- ✓ iv or IV chords lead to i, V, v, vii°, or VII chords.
- ✓ V or v chords lead to i, VI, or #vi° chords.
- ✓ VI or #vi° chords lead to i, III, III+, iv, IV, V, v, vii°, or VII chords.
- ✓ vii° or VII chords lead to the i chord.

As far as these rules go, they just mean (in the case of major chord progressions) that a ii chord (such as D minor if you’re playing in the key of C major) sounds most natural when it leads to I (C major), V (G major), or vii° (B diminished). However, there’s absolutely no reason why you can’t go from a ii chord to a IV chord, for example — but bear in mind that it won’t be what listeners are expecting.



When it comes to departing from the rules, a little goes a long way. You may have to back off after using a couple of unconventional chord changes and play more conventional ones to satisfy your audience. Pop music especially adheres to the rules regarding chord progressions, and is even more didactic than classical music about what sounds “good” and what sounds “strange.”



Try the chord progressions with an added 7th to the triads to see if they sound acceptable to you. You’ll probably find that some sound good — and some, not so good.

Coming Home with Cadences

An important part of making your music (and audience) breathe is through the use of *cadence*, or a return to the I/i chord from a iv or a V chord. The longer you take to reach this point of cadence, the more tension you can build in your music.

This section covers the four main types of cadences:

- ✓ Authentic
- ✓ Plagal
- ✓ Deceptive or interrupted
- ✓ Half-cadence

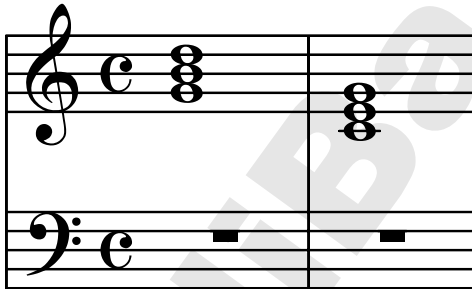


A musical phrase can come to an end by simply stopping, of course, but if that stopping position doesn't make "sense" to the listeners, they may not be very happy with you. Ending your song on the wrong note or notes is like ending a conversation with a non sequitur, and you may leave your listeners a little uncomfortable. Some audiences are absolutely delighted to hear music that confounds their expectations, however, and this may be exactly the audience you're trying to reach.

Authentic cadences

Authentic cadences are the most obvious-sounding cadences and are therefore considered the strongest. In an authentic cadence, the harmonic goal of the phrase is the 1 chord via the 5 chord (V or v, depending on whether the piece is in a major or minor key). The cadence occurs when you move from that V/v chord to a I/i chord, as shown in Figure 4-20.

Figure 4-20:
Authentic
cadences
are the most
common,
obvious-
sounding
ones.



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Plagal cadences

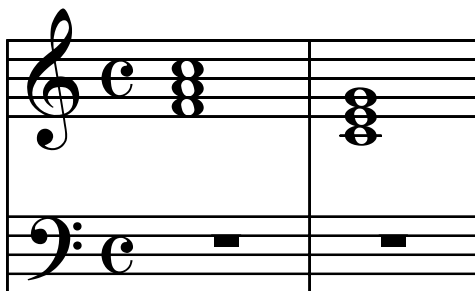
The harmonic goal of a *plagal cadence* is ultimately the 1 chord via the 4 (IV or iv) chord, with cadence occurring when the 4 chord moves to the 1 chord. The progressions IV-I, iv-i, iv-I, and IV-i are all possibilities.



The plagal structure originated with Medieval Church music, which was mostly vocal, and is therefore often referred to as the *Amen cadence*. If you're familiar with Gregorian chants at all, or even many modern hymns, then you've heard the Amen cadence in action. It usually happens (no surprise here) at the point where the chanters sing the two-chord "A-men."

Plagal cadences are usually used within a song to end a phrase, and not at the very end of a song, because they're not as decisive-sounding as a perfect cadence (Figure 4-21).

Figure 4-21:
Plagal
cadences
are not as
conclusive
as authentic
cadences.



Deceptive or interrupted cadences

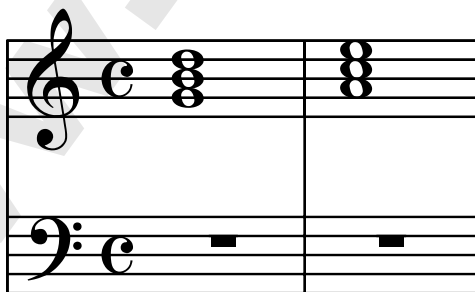
A *deceptive cadence*, or *interrupted cadence*, essentially reaches an ultimate point of tension on a V/v chord, just like the authentic cadence, but it resolves to something *other* than the tonic (I/i) chord — hence, the name *deceptive*. The most common deceptive cadence out there, used 99 times out of 100, is the V/v chord that moves up to a VI/vi chord. The phrase looks and feels like it's about to end and close with the I chord, but instead it moves up to the VI instead, as shown in Figure 4-22.

Other deceptive/interrupted cadences include moving from the V chord to the IV chord, the V chord to the ii chord, and the V chord to the V7.



Deceptive cadences are considered one of the weakest cadences because they invoke a feeling of incompleteness.

Figure 4-22:
Deceptive
cadences
are nice to
use when
you want
to fake the
audience
out.



Half-cadences

Half-cadences are a little more confusing than other cadences. The authentic, plagal, and deceptive cadences all occur in musical phrases that resolve before the phrase is complete. In other words, with the other cadences the phrase starts at a point of rest (I/i) and moves through a series of chords to reach either a iv/IV or a v/V chord. It could be as easy as the I/i chord going straight to the V/v chord and back to the I/i, or it could spend 20 hours circling like a plane in a holding pattern between those points, but authentic, plagal, and deceptive will all musically release to the point of rest: the I/i chord.

Half-cadences are the only ones that don't end this way. With a half-cadence, the musical phrase ends at the point of tension — the V/v chord itself. It basically plays to a chord that's not the I/i and stops, resulting in a musical phrase that feels unfinished. Examples would be a V-IV progression, a V-vi progression, a V-ii progression, and a V-V7 progression. It's called a half-cadence simply because it just doesn't feel like it's done yet.

Fitting Chords and Melodies Together

Often, when you're working with just a melody, the basic accompanying harmony is already there in your subconscious. The melody lends itself to the harmony so obviously that accompanying the melodic line is the easiest part of writing the music. You may be aware of which note in your melody represents the tonic note right away, and you may even be aware of very specific chord movements that are screaming out at you from your melody.

Likewise, that cool chord progression you came up with last night is eager to provide you with *structural tones* (also sometimes called *chord tones*) from which a melody can magically emerge.

In the following sections, you find out how to pull harmonies out of melodies and discover the power of chord changes.

Extracting harmony from melody

If you take a simple major scale and consider only the I chord (also called the *tonic*), the IV chord (the *subdominant*), and the V chord (the *dominant*), you can hear fairly simple and obvious suggestions of relationship between notes

in the given key that might be used to accompany them. There are, of course, many other possibilities and substitutions, but here we stick with the I, IV, and V chords in the example shown in Figure 4-23.

Figure 4-23: Seeing the scale in I, IV, and V chords.

You can use tones from within the chords (called, as we mentioned, chord tones) and string these tones together in various ways using *non-chord tones*.

First, Figure 4-24 is an example of a simple chord progression that you can use to extract some structural tones from.

Figure 4-24: Seeing structural tones in a simple chord progression.

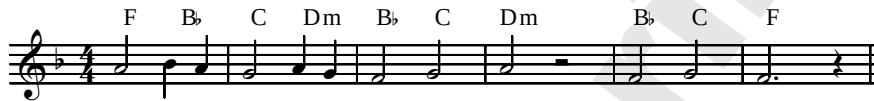
Now you can extract a melody from these chords using only notes from within each chord — the chord tones (check out Figure 4-25).

Figure 4-25: Extracting chord tones from a chord progression.

Now you can add some passing tones. *Passing tones* close the gaps between structural tones. They make *disjunct* melodies more *conjunct*. Passing tones go in steps and end up stepping into the next structural tone (take a look at Figure 4-26).

Figure 4-26:

Adding passing tones to fill in the structural tones.



If you step away from the tone before stepping back to it, it's called a *neighboring tone* (see Figure 4-27).

Figure 4-27:

Having a little visit with neighboring tones.



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Using chord changes

A chord change is a powerful thing. It's hard to take a chord change lightly. That's why you need to be picky about the choices you make regarding where in the rhythm of your music the chords change.



If your chords change every measure on beat one, that beat will be strengthened. If instead you place the chord changes on beats four *and* one, both of those beats will gain some gravity. A chord change brings some attention to any rhythmic subdivision. It's a good idea to place chord changes strategically to emphasize the rhythmic feel, or groove, of your piece.

Often your music will benefit from adding more chords in between the structural chords you started off with. For this you can go back to your non-chord tones, as shown in the previous section. Some of the non-chord tones you

added while stringing together your chord tones may provide rhythmic accents. Or maybe you just like these notes and want the listener's attention drawn to them. So why not add chord changes at those same moments? You can call these *passing chords*.

Figure 4-28 shows the example again with all the non-chord tones that were added.

Figure 4-28:
Adding all
the non-
chord tones.



Now add some passing tones to go along with the non-chord tones (see Figure 4-29).

Figure 4-29:
Adding
passing
tones again.



That makes for a richer, more colorful phrase, doesn't it? The possibilities are limitless. You could have a chord change every beat, every half beat, or whatever suits your intentions. This would be a good time to study the earlier lists regarding "rules" for major and minor chord progressions. Knowing which chords flow into which can be helpful here. And don't forget about the moods you evoke with your choices. A study of jazz can provide you with some ideas about chord substitutions as well.

On the other hand, there are times when a chord change is distracting and pulls away from the hypnotic, trancelike mantra of your groove. As an example, Ravel's *Boléro* (which was written intentionally as a piece with no structural development) pulls listeners along and drives them deeper and deeper into its feel. When Ravel exhausts the dynamic headroom of his orchestra, he surprises us and wakes us up into a new realm by changing the chord and the tonality all at once, near the very end. This alerts us that the climax is on its way (it also puts the orchestra in a range where there is some additional dynamic power to be tapped into). It's totally unexpected and somewhat disconcerting, but he had to launch an ending somehow.



You're okay when you can use an unexpected wake-up chord change as powerfully as Ravel, but in the meantime be careful not to loosen your hold on the listener with too many chord changes if you've got a good groove on.



You can have more than one musical idea going on at the same moment in the same piece. Three or more are perhaps too many, because confusion ensues and the listener doesn't know where to turn. You always want to retain a sense of focus, even when your music gets chaotic.

You could have your chords change in one rhythmic pattern and have the melody move in another pattern. Mixing it up like that would convey two different rhythmic statements. You might think of it as keeping the non-chord tones and the chord structure and throwing out some of the structural chord tones in your piece. Figure 4-30 shows an example with a tiny bit of polishing.

Figure 4-30:
Melody and
harmony,
together in
perfect ...
well,
harmony.

The musical score for Figure 4-30 is in 4/4 time. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the harmony is written in the bass clef. The chords are: F, Bb, C, Dm, Bb, C, Dm, Bb, C, F.



From what you've read in this chapter so far, it should be easy enough to reverse these processes if you had a melody to start with and were looking for the right chords to go along with it. You have to decide which notes in your melody are structural. Then you can determine the key of your piece and where you feel you need to accentuate your melody with chords. The

challenge here is to be aware of the many harmonic possibilities available to you for harmonizing your melody. There are more harmonic possibilities in a single note than there are melodic possibilities in a chord.

Exercises for Composing with Chords

This chapter covers a lot of ground. The following exercises are designed to help you distill and apply the information in this chapter to begin your own compositions.

1. Harmonize an ascending 5th (one letter name clockwise around the Circle of Fifths; see Chapter 3 in Book VII for more on the Circle of Fifths).

Find chords that fit with a D note held for two beats followed by an A above held for two beats. Ideas:

- Start with a D major chord.
- Start with a B flat major chord.
- Start with an E minor 7th, flat 5th chord.
- Start with a G major chord.

2. Try chord progressions at random.

Write the names of a dozen or so chords on small pieces of paper. Make sure you include some of the ones that sound strange to you. You can use any chord in any key. Put them in a hat and shake them up. Pick out four or five of them and write them down in the order you picked them on some staff paper. Compose a melody that makes sense of this chord progression. You can add some passing chords if you like.

3. Lead Exercise 2 to a perfect cadence.

Add chords and melody where needed. Give it a key signature.

4. Take any two notes and explore the chord combinations available.

5. Take any two chords and explore the melodic possibilities between them.

6. Listen to some familiar music and see if you can identify the non-chord tones by ear.

7. Write a chord progression and extract the structural tones.
8. See how many different non-chord tones you can add and determine which ones work well for your style of music composition.
9. Invent a whole new melody by removing some of the original structural tones and leaving the non-chord tones.

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