

Untitled

VERSE/CHORUS FORMS

The varieties of this most popular form provide a maximum of chorus repetition and two or more verses to tell your story

#1

A Verse
B Chorus
A Verse
B Chorus
A Verse
B Chorus

A B, A B, A B

#2

A Verse
B Chorus
A Verse
B Chorus
C Bridge
B Chorus

A B, A B, C B - Dan's form

#3

B Chorus
A Verse
B Chorus
A Verse
B Chorus

B, A B, A B

#4

A Verse
A Verse
B Chorus
A Verse
B Chorus
B Chorus

A A B, A A B

#5

A Verse
B Pre-Chorus
C Chorus
A Verse
B Pre-Chorus
C Chorus

A B C, A B C

Version #1 gives you a maximum verse and chorus repetition. A potential problem is that, if you have a lot of melodic repetition within each verse or chorus, such as an 8-bar section made up of three 2-bar melodies with a slight variation in the fourth 2-bar melody line, you may have too much repetition.

In that case, #2 with the substitution of a bridge for the third verse helps to break it up.

Version #3 with the chorus first can give you more repetition of the chorus in a shorter time. The choice of whether to start with a chorus depends on the lyric development of the song. If it's important to generate a dynamic opening to the song, try the chorus first unless you want the verses to build interest and suspense and "set up" the chorus as a "payoff." Many '60s Motown hits used variations of this form. It's always a good idea to give it a test by switching the verse and chorus positions to see which works best.

Version #4 with two verses in front is also a much used form. Its workability depends on a very strong lyric continuity between the first and second verses to offset the delay in getting to the chorus. This is a much greater problem in a slow

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ballad than an up-tempo song because of the additional time it takes to get to the chorus. Every word has to propel the story forward. Repetition of information is deadly. If each of the two verses cover the same information in a different way and don't depend on each other, this may not be the best form to use since you should have a very important reason to delay the chorus. If you do need to use two verses, you may want to look for some arrangement devices or write a variation of the first verse melody to help sustain musical interest in the second verse. You could also consider using your title in the first line of the chorus to avoid even further delay in reaching the hook line.

Variations of this form opening with three verses (AAABAB or AAABAAB) are rare and the two examples that come to mind; The Eagles' "Lyin' Eyes" (Don Henley/Glen Frey) and Kenny Rogers' "The Gambler" (Don Schlitz) both have such exceptional lyric continuity that a chorus any earlier would be an unwelcome intrusion. Otherwise, you court boredom as much as you might with an AAA structure.

You'll also occasionally hear an AABAABB variation, particularly on up-tempo songs. Again, those choices will be different for each song but the guiding principle is that you don't delay the chorus unless you have another good way to sustain the listener's interest. An interesting variation is the beautiful message story song "Chain of Love" (Rory Lee/Johnny Barnett) recorded by Clay Walker that has such strong lyric continuity that it was a hit as an AABAABA with only two chorus repeats.

#5 offers the excitement of three different melodic segments. The pre-chorus is the segment that makes the difference here. This form works best in up-tempo songs where the three segments go by quickly. Many variations are possible with this form including repeated instrumental versions of any of the segments and instrumental breaks between segments. Here are some examples:

AABC ABC BC BC or

ABC ABCD BC or

ABC ABCD ABCD, the "D" being a bridge with a new melody, with or without lyrics.

Remember that these are basic formats and each song is its own universe with different requirements based on the strengths of your lyric, groove, production and melodies. This information is meant to show that there are many ways to use song structures to hold your listeners attention by balancing predictability with surprise.

add'l forms

blues

AAA

AABA

etc

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Taxi Tip: Pre-Choruses & Bridges
by Jason Blume

Within a verse, there may also be a pre-chorus--a two or four line section, rarely exceeding four bars musically, immediately preceding the chorus. It is crafted to propel the listener, both melodically and lyrically, into the chorus.

The pre-chorus is optional. However, if the first verse includes a pre-chorus, all subsequent verses typically also include a pre-chorus section. The pre-chorus is sometimes referred to as the lift, the channel climb or B-section.

*

All pre-choruses in the same song have the same melody.

*

It is acceptable for each verse's pre-chorus to repeat the same lyric or to introduce a new lyric.

The bridge serves as a departure or a release from the rest of the song. It usually consists of two or four lines of lyric, and four or eight musical bars. The bridge's job is to add a new dimension to the song, take it to the next level, and lead the listener back to the chorus, title and hook, from a new angle. If that's not enough of a challenge, the bridge needs to accomplish all of this while still managing to sound consistent with the rest of the song.

When using a structure that includes verses and choruses, the bridge can occur in only one place--between the second and third choruses

(Verse--Chorus--Verse--Chorus--Bridge--Chorus). When utilizing the A-A-B-A song form, the bridge will be between the second and third verse.
(Verse--Verse--Bridge--Verse).

The bridge is a release or departure, both lyrically and melodically, from the sections that surround it. Note that outside the United States, the bridge is sometimes referred to as "the middle eight."

Lyrically, the bridge presents an opportunity to add a new dimension, a new perspective to your story. It is your last chance to lead the listeners back to your title and make it pay off one final time.

The tools that can help differentiate your bridge lyrically from the rest of the song are:

*

Revealing an added element to the story that ties it together.

*

Changing the person--from I to She or He.

*

Switching from specific, detailed imagery to general statements.

*

Alternating the time frame--looking back on the past Disclosing a surprise.

Musically, effective bridges may add an element of contrast by:

*

Introducing one or more chords that haven't been used previously.

*

Changing the rhythm.

*

Using notes that are either higher or lower than those used in the other sections.

Additional guidelines for creating effective bridges:

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- * Do not include the title.
- * Limit yourself to two or four lines of lyric.
- * Occasionally, bridges can be instrumental.

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Here are a few key principles to apply as you learn to use the Verse-Chorus Song effectively:

1) The Chorus MUST Contrast

-- The chorus, which contains the hook of the song, must stand out and contrast from the rest of the song. This is usually done musically with a "lift" in the melody. In other words, the music of the chorus is often placed higher in the scale to make it stand out and to spotlight the hook. Writers often use a key change at the chorus to separate it and set it apart. Lyrically, also, the rhyme pattern and even the cadence of the syllables can and should change at the chorus to define and emphasize it.

2) The Chorus MUST Repeat

-- The whole purpose of the Verse-Chorus Song is to call attention to the hook or the main idea. To do this effectively, the chorus must repeat several times throughout the song. Most commercial songs today contain at least two verses and two choruses with a possible third repetition of the chorus to conclude the song. It is extremely important that the verses are constructed in such a way that the chorus sounds like the inevitable and logical conclusion to each of the verses.

3) The Chorus MUST Arrive Soon

-- There is a famous little couplet that is almost a mantra for songwriters. It goes something like this:

If you don't move quickly to the chorus
Chances are your song will bore us

Boredom is the "kiss of death" for any song. When writing a Verse-Chorus Song, in particular, the songwriter must be keenly aware that the all-important hook of the song will not usually appear at all until the first chorus. That means we have to get through the introduction and at least one complete verse before we even arrive at the section that contains the most memorable moment of the song. One of the most common weaknesses in aspiring Verse-Chorus writers is creating an overly long-verse that delays the arrival of the chorus and thereby "loses" the listeners.

4) The Chorus MUST Pay Off

-- One hit songwriter has said: "Writing a Verse-Chorus Song is like climbing a mountain. When you get to the top, the view better be worth the climb!" The purpose of the verses is to take us up the mountain, and when we arrive, the chorus provides the "view." The chorus must deliver that "Eureka Moment" that brings satisfaction and emotional fulfillment for the listener. Whatever you need to do to make that happen, do it -- and you will have written a great Verse-Chorus Song.

We have now met two of the three sisters in our Song Form Family. Tune in next month when we will meet the last and most elegant, sophisticated member -- the AABA Song Form.