

# MARC GALLAGHER

## SONGWRITING BASICS

### 1) The Blues

The Blues are some of the easiest songs to write. They generally follow the **12 Bar Blues** chord progression (pictured right). In place of the Roman numerals, you can just count through the alphabet on your fingers to find the chords that match your key.

Lyrically, they follow the **AAB** form which sounds complicated but is actually very simple. Let's take this verse.

### 12 Bar Blues Chord Chart



The opening line (**A**) establishes the story or the essence of the verses message

**“Well I woke up this morning, and my baby was gone  
Well I woke up this morning, and my baby was gone  
She was here in the evening, and out by dawn”**

The second line (also **A**) is exactly the same as the first line, you simply repeat it!

The third line (**B**) develops the story of the other two, acting as an answer of sorts. This rhymes with the A line.

So to write a blues song, all you need is two lines that rhyme and the 12 bar blues progression, and you're sorted!

### Other Blues Verse Examples

“You ain't nothin' but a hound dog, crying all the time  
You ain't nothin' but a hound dog, crying all the time  
Well you ain't never caught a rabbit, you ain't no friend of mine”

“I feel good, I knew that I would  
I feel good, I knew that I would  
So good, so good, I got you”

# Harmony

When writing a song it's important to make sure we use chords that fit with each other, otherwise we might get some unpleasant or **dissonant** sounds that put the listener off. Most pop songs use chords that are in the same key.

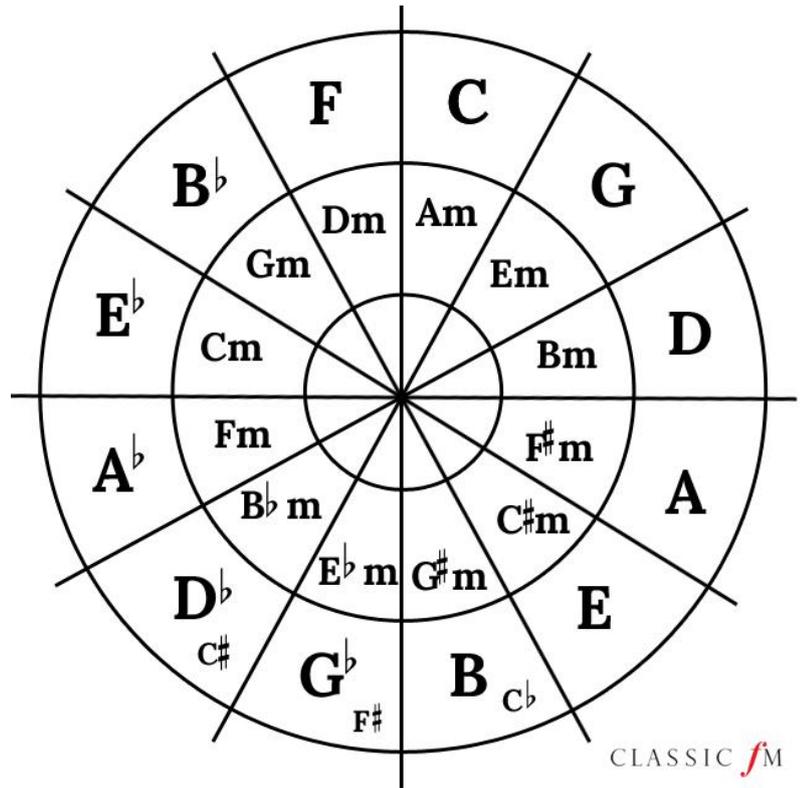
To find what chords fit we can look at the **Circle of Fifths**

So we find the key we want to be in (e.g. G), so the chord G major will be our I chord-our 'home' chord.

Moving one step clockwise (one fifth) will give us our V chord-our 'away' chord, in this case D. Going one step anticlockwise (one fourth) will give us our IV chord, in this case C.

All the minor chords underneath these three **also fit in the key**

So when writing a song in the key of G, our chords are G, C, D, Am, Em and Bm



## Some common chord progressions include:

The **4 chords** aka the **I V vi IV**. For example chords C G Am F. Used in Don't Stop Believing, Let It Be, Hey Soul Sister, and Can You Feel The Love Tonight

The **50's progression** aka **I vi IV V**. For example chords C Am F G. Used in Blue Moon, Hey Baby, Runaround Sue and Nothings Gonna Stop Us Now

The **Jazz Progression** aka **ii V I**. Example chords Dm G C. Used in Autumn Leaves, and Sunday Morning (Maroon 5),

**The 12 Bar Blues**, uses chords C F and G and is used in every blues song ever!

# Lyrics

Probably most songwriters' favourite part about songwriting. It's important to bear a few things in mind

## Cliches

Try to avoid tired clichés like 'oh baby', 'when you walk into the room' or 'down on my knees'

And I personally hate people who rhyme life with strife!

Try instead to find other ways of saying what you want to say, possibly by using...

## Connotations

You may need to whack out a thesaurus, but Ed Sheeran's line from "Wake Me Up" includes the following line

*"see I could do without the tan, on my left hand where the fourth finger meets my knuckle".*

This is such a beautiful way of saying "I want to marry you".

Another Ed Sheeran song "Shape of You", uses "I'm in love with the shape of you" to describe someone's figure, as opposed to saying 'you look hot'.

Consider what you're saying, and if there is another, prettier way to say the same thing.

## Senses

Consider the following phrase

*"We walked along the beach holding hands".*

A direct, simple phrase, but let's go deeper.

What did you hear? Describe it. What did you see, or smell? Describe the feeling of your partner's hand. How does this feeling make you feel. Now we can make a line like

*"As we strolled gently, sea breeze brushing against my face, your fingers tickle my palms in blissful moonlight."*

## **Who, What, Where, When, Why**

Use the 5 W's to help add depth to your lyrics.

**Who-** Who are you, who are you singing to? Are you singing from someone else's perspective?

**What-** What is your character singing about, what is its significance to you or the story.

**Where-** Consider the setting. Describe the place/house/beach further describing the walls, the size of it. Is this space significant to you?

**When-** When is this happening, is it over a passage of time? Are the events happening at an important time in your life?

**Why-** Why are you writing this song? Why are you in this place, at this time, with this person?

## **Metaphor + Extended Metaphor**

This is one of my favourite techniques to use, and can make for great lyrics.

Instead of saying directly what is taking place, find something else that can be used in its place.

For example: In my own song 'Baseball Game', I'm comparing love to baseball with the line

"People have their home runs, they have it all. I have never hit the ball".

Without saying anything directly, I used the metaphor to describe my comparative love life to my peers.

The Benny Benassi song 'Cinema' also uses the following line

*I could watch you for a lifetime*

***You're my favorite movie***

*A thousand endings*

*You mean everything to me*

As a way of stating his love for his partner and how much he likes them.

Try using metaphors to write more colourful, romantic lyrics.

# Melody

Consider your melodies and their movement throughout your song. Melodies help drive the emotion and energy, especially in their placement.

As a general rule, our chorus melodies are higher in pitch. This is because we tend to sing higher notes with more energy, so it makes sense for our choruses to raise in energy from the verses.

A common songwriting approach is to play around with a chord progression or pattern, and start humming a melody. It can be anything you want, just what feels right to you. Piece by piece, start adding words to fill your hummed melody.

**Chorus melodies should be the catchiest.** You might want to work on them first, make sure they're something that's gripping and singalongable.

Try looking at melodies of songwriters you look up to. Look at what they're doing and why it inspires you, maybe you can lift something from them into your song.

Use emotion, particularly what makes you feel something, and steer into that. From there you can develop songs that form a connection, and if it connects with you on an emotional level, it'll likely connect with the listener.