

# Song Evaluation & Editing

Crafting a great song involves a lot of hard work – there are multiple components that need to be excellent in their own right and to come together with beauty and skill. The whole process, from initial inspiration all through each cycle of editing, can feel more like a battlefield than a ballet, but an awareness of the elements you’re trying to coax into coherence is a start. With that in mind, the following summary covers each major component of a song, providing questions and pointers to help you evaluate its strengths and weaknesses; this in turn will help to direct and inform any editing work you do on your own songs, as well as any feedback and collaboration you are involved in with other writers.

## A Word On Workflow

After the initial song creation phase – during which you probably want to keep your internal editor powered off while you simply get raw material onto the once-blank page – most songs will require at least a little editing to help them reach their fullest potential and bring them to completion.

When editing a song you might find it helpful to start with the bigger picture elements before moving on to the detail, and to work on the chorus (or the section that is the heart of the song) before focussing on other sections. Bear in mind that editing is often a backwards and forwards dance of working on one element of the song, then another, then back to the first.... It can feel a bit like snakes and ladders when making a needed improvement to one line requires you to rewrite the rest of the verse, but every drop of editing sweat is worth it – not just for the finished song, but for the strengthening of our skill as writers and for the surprising directions the creative process can lead us in, even as we learn to relinquish our initial plans for the song in order to bring what’s in its DNA to life.

## Overarching Core Components

<b>Concept</b>	What is the song’s vision? What is the central theme that everything else is built around? Can you say it in one sentence? Do “all roads lead home” i.e. does every section of the song directly or indirectly lead back to the song concept?
<b>Application</b>	Who, what, when, and where is the song written for (what age group, event, culture, viewpoint, setting etc.), and why?
<b>Form or Structure</b>	What is the song form (AAA, AABA, Verse-Chorus etc.)? Is it easy to follow and recognisable? Is there a good level of contrast between sections (in melody, lyric, phrasing, groove, chording)? Is any section too long or too short? Are there any sections that could be added or removed? Is there good balance between predictability and surprise? Does the form support both concept and application?
<b>Style</b>	Is the style of the song on target for its concept and application?
<b>Title</b>	Is the title the best choice or could there be another? Is it a good title (unusual, memorable, intriguing vs. generic, clichéd and uninteresting)? Can you determine the title just by listening? Does the title appear in a strategic place? Does it repeat enough, too often, or not enough?

## Basic Building Blocks

<p><b>Lyrics</b></p>	<p>Always ask yourself, “Could it be said any better?” Then take a look at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose: does every section and line support the song concept, and does every section/line have its own unique purpose within the overall journey of the song? Does everything hang together or does it seem like one section/line has nothing to do with those preceding/following? Even if the phrases are abstract, do they come together to offer a common thought? Is there any unnecessary “padding/filler/duplication” that could be deleted/repurposed?</li> <li>• Syllable count: is it consistent between sections that use the same melody?</li> <li>• Phrasing: does the natural cadence of the words fit the melody i.e. do the lyrical and melodic emphases line up? Are there too many syllables for the musical timeframe (leading to “crunched” lyrics) or too few (leading to unnaturally stretched words)? Are there any syllables that feel awkward or distract attention from the meaning of the line?</li> <li>• Line length &amp; number: how do they affect shape, direction and momentum?</li> <li>• Consistency: are the pronouns consistent (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> person)? Is the point of view consistent? Who are you singing to – is this directional aspect settled?</li> <li>• Freshness: are the lyrics engaging? Does the first line make you want to hear more? Do they hold your attention after the 1<sup>st</sup> line, does each line build on the one before it and create anticipation for what’s coming next? Do they have originality and an ability to move us in the details or with a particular angle, or are they predictable and full of clichés?</li> <li>• Rhyme: what is the rhyme scheme? Is there enough rhyme to satisfy the ear and aid memorability, or is it under/over-used? Is there contrast between rhyme schemes in different sections? Is there effective use of different types of rhyme e.g. perfect rhyme, near rhyme, end rhyme, internal rhyme?</li> <li>• Literary devices: is there effective use of tools such as repetition, alliteration, assonance, imagery, metaphor, simile, contrast, personification etc.?</li> <li>• Understanding: do they communicate the song concept effectively? Is there good syntax between lines/sections? Do they communicate emotion? Is the dance between poetry and meaning appropriate for the song’s application?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Melody</b></p>	<p>You might want to evaluate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall: is it memorable? Does it move me? Is there a sense of melodic story/movement/direction? Does it have the interest of varying ascents and descents, a high point, and do you feel like you are journeying through it? Is there a strong use of melodic motif (repeated, developed themes)?</li> <li>• Section-by-section: which sections have good melodies and where could the melody be stronger? Do any of the sections sound too similar melodically? Is there enough melodic contrast between sections, including in phrasing (so that e.g. you can’t sing verse lyrics to the chorus melody)?</li> <li>• Balance: does it have a good balance of repetition &amp; contrast, expected &amp; unexpected, regular &amp; irregular line/phrase length, sound &amp; space, steps &amp; leaps, chord notes &amp; colour notes?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prosody: does it imprint the lyrics into your head, does the melody support the lyrics and overall story of the song? Does the choice of key support the emotional tone of the song? Do particular chords support the meaning of the words they set? Do the syllables that you naturally stress when saying a word line up with the notes that the metre naturally stresses in the melody? Does the melody reflect the meaning of the words it sets?</li> </ul>
<b>Hooks</b>	What/where are the hooks (melodic, rhythmic, lyrical, instrumental, harmonic)? Are they strong or not obvious enough?
<b>Harmony</b>	Is there enough contrast between sections? How does the harmony support or create tension with the lyrics? Are the chord patterns predictable, or too unusual? Do transitions between sections flow well? Is the harmonic style suitable for the song's application?

### Additional Areas

These considerations are perhaps more pertinent to writing for gathered worship but are worth us – as Christian songwriters in any arena – bearing in mind for any kind of song.

<b>Singability</b>	Does it sing well? Are the words pleasing in both your mouth and your ears? Do the lyrics flow? Is it simple enough for a congregation to engage with? Is it memorable (could you sing it now)? Is there passion in the music and lyrics?
<b>Theology</b>	We might not all call ourselves theologians, but as God's people we need to have an awareness of what our songs teach others about Him and His kingdom in whatever arena they are heard and sung in. What does the song teach? Is it true?
<b>Honesty</b>	Is there lyrical integrity (theologically, biblically, experientially)? Does it embody honesty? Is it revelatory?
<b>Prophetic Voice</b>	Does it have an ear to heaven, an ear to culture, and does it speak into what God is doing and wants to do in our time? Does it carry the "now" word of God for the context it is intended for, and does it call for a response?