

K-POP TOPLINE WRITING

5

K-pop Topline Secrets

Five professional techniques every aspiring K-pop toplineer needs to know — before they write a single note.

01

MOOD & TONALITY

Choose Your Mood Before You Choose Your Key

"The emotional decision you make in the first 30 seconds determines everything that follows."

THE RULE

In K-pop, mood and key are inseparable. Before you sing a single note, you need to know one thing: **is this song bright or dark?**

Bright mood → **Major key**. This is the world of hope, first love, and energy. Think TWICE — "Cheer Up", NewJeans — "Hype Boy". The major scale gives you a natural emotional optimism that's baked into the notes themselves.

Dark mood → **Minor key**. Intensity, mystery, longing, and power. Think BLACKPINK — "Pink Venom", aespa — "Black Mamba". Minor keys feel cinematic — like something important is about to happen.



PRO TIP

Make your mood decision before you hear the track — or even before the track exists. If you're working from a brief, the concept tells you the mood. If you're creating from scratch, pick your emotion first. Then pick the key. Never the other way around.

BRIGHT / MAJOR

Happy, hopeful, energetic, cute, romantic. Use for: girl group pop, ballads about longing-with-hope, bubbly concepts.

DARK / MINOR

Intense, mysterious, powerful, emotional. Use for: dark concepts, hip-hop fusion, girl crush, mature R&B.

REAL-WORLD REFERENCE

- TWICE — "Cheer Up" (major) → bright, playful, irresistible
- Red Velvet — "Peek-A-Boo" (minor) → dark, playful with an edge
- BTS — "Boy With Luv" (major) → warmth and joy
- Stray Kids — "Thunderous" (minor) → power and intensity

02

SONG STRUCTURE

Think in 4-Bar Blocks — Always

"K-pop is architecture. Every room is exactly 4 bars wide."

THE RULE

Nearly every K-pop song is built from repeating 4-bar units. This is non-negotiable. If your melody doesn't resolve naturally every 4 bars, it won't sit on the track.

Think of 4 bars as a sentence. **Bar 1–2 is the question, bar 3–4 is the answer.** When you string two of these together, you get an 8-bar section — a complete verse, pre-chorus, or chorus block.

Beginners often write melodies that are 3 bars, or 5 bars, and wonder why they feel "off." It's because they've broken the architecture. **Every section must be a multiple of 4 bars.**



PRO TIP

When you're writing your chorus hook, sing it and count the bars. If it resolves on bar 5 or 6, you have two options: cut it down to 4 bars, or extend it to 8. Never leave it at an odd number.

STANDARD K-POP STRUCTURE

Intro — 4–8 bars. Sets the mood. Often instrumental or minimal vocals.

Verse 1 — 8–16 bars. Narrative and low energy. Listener gets oriented.

Pre-Chorus — 4–8 bars. Tension builds. The emotional runway before the explosion.

Chorus — 8–16 bars. The hook. Maximum energy. This is where the song lives.

Bridge — 8 bars. Contrast. Everything changes — energy, register, perspective.

Final Chorus — 8–16 bars. Bigger than before. Outro fades or ends sharp.

03

PRE-CHORUS

The Pre-Chorus Is Your Secret Weapon

"The chorus doesn't land hard because it's good. It lands hard because the pre-chorus earns it."

WHY MOST BEGINNERS GET THIS WRONG

Most beginners jump straight from verse to chorus and wonder why the chorus doesn't hit as hard as their favourite songs.

The answer is almost always: **there's no pre-chorus.**

The pre-chorus is an 4–8 bar section between the verse and chorus. Its only job is to **build tension and anticipation** so that the chorus feels like a release — a payoff for built-up emotional energy.

Think of the verse as a question, the pre-chorus as holding your breath, and the chorus as finally breathing out.



PRO TIP

In the pre-chorus, raise the energy slightly but DON'T release it. Hold back the most powerful vocal moment for the first word of the chorus. A good technique: end the pre-chorus on the 5th note of the scale (the dominant) — it creates harmonic tension that the chorus resolves.

VERSE ENERGY

Low and conversational. Tells the story. Creates emotional context for what's about to happen.

PRE-CHORUS ENERGY

Rising but contained. Builds urgency. Might include a melodic "lift." Never fully releases.

CHORUS ENERGY

Full release. Maximum melody. This is where emotion peaks and the hook pays off completely.

THE RULE

The bigger you want your chorus to feel, the more tension you need to build in the pre-chorus.

04

CONCEPT FIRST

Define the Concept Before You Write a Note

"Your melody should have an opinion. The concept tells it what opinion to have."

WHAT A CONCEPT REALLY IS

In K-pop, "concept" isn't just visual — it's a musical direction. It tells you **how the melody should move, how the voice should deliver it, and what every lyric should feel like.**

A **Girl Crush** concept means melodies with sharp attacks, confident low-register delivery, syncopated rhythms that don't sit politely on the beat.

A **Pure & Innocent** concept means light, stepwise melodies, breathy delivery, simple honest lyrics — like a diary entry.

A **Dark & Mysterious** concept means dramatic pauses, dissonant intervals held longer than comfortable, whispered verses contrasting with explosive choruses.

The concept is your creative compass. Without it, you're just writing random notes.



PRO TIP

Before writing, write one sentence that captures what this song **IS**. Not what it's about — what it **IS**. "This song is a fist in the air" (Girl Crush). "This song is a whisper in the dark" (Dark concept). That sentence should be audible in every melodic choice you make.

CONCEPT → MELODIC TECHNIQUE

- **Girl Crush** → Sharp attacks, descending lines on power words, syncopation
- **Dark & Mysterious** → Minor intervals, dramatic pauses, build from whisper to power
- **Pure & Innocent** → Stepwise motion, light register, avoid aggression
- **Cute & Bubbly** → Short punchy phrases, repetition, notes that "bounce" up and resolve
- **Retro & Vintage** → 4-bar singable loops, open vowels, warm groove-based phrasing

05

PROFESSIONAL DELIVERY

The Demo Email That Gets You Heard

"Your demo is only as good as the email that delivers it."

WHY THIS MATTERS

K-pop producers receive hundreds of demo submissions. A great topline sent with a vague or unprofessional pitch often gets ignored. A good topline — sent with a clear, specific, professional email — gets listened to immediately.

The goal of your pitch email is not to be impressive. It's to make it **as easy as possible for the producer to say yes**. Tell them exactly what you sent, why it fits, and what you want next.

THE FORMULA

Line 1 — Who you are. One sentence. Name, role.

Line 2 — What you sent. Style, key, group type. Show that you read the brief.

Line 3 — The concept in one sentence. What is the song about emotionally? Not lyrically — emotionally.

Line 4 — What you're hoping for. Feedback? Co-write? A credit? Be direct.

Attach: Demo file (mp3 or wav) + PDF lyric sheet. Never a link to a private SoundCloud.



EXAMPLE EMAIL

"Hi [Producer Name],

I'm [Name], a topline specializing in K-pop. I've written a topline for your dance pop track — G major, uptempo, for a girl group with a Girl Crush concept.

The song is called "Voltage" — it's about reclaiming your confidence after someone underestimated you. Chorus hits hard in the first two bars.

Demo and lyric sheet attached. Would love your feedback or to explore a co-write.

Best, [Name]"

READY FOR THE FULL EXPERIENCE?

The Complete K-pop Topliner Map

You've seen the theory. Now put it into practice. The interactive tool walks you through every step — from producer brief to finished vocal concept.

 Personalized Mission Briefings	 10-Step Guided Writing Process	 8 Styles × 8 Concepts
 Real Song References	 AI Track Prompts	 Works on Any Device

K-POP TOPLINER MAP

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