

The Songwriter's Cheat Sheet

Chord progressions by mood, by genre, song structure and a hook & melody checklist.

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01 Chord progressions by mood

Shown in C major / A minor. Lower-case numerals are minor chords, $\flat$ chords are borrowed from the parallel minor. Hear every one in any key: thesonicsecrets.com/songwriting/chord-progression-generator

MOOD	NUMERALS	IN C / AM	FEEL	HEARD IN
Dark	i - VI - III - VII	Am - F - C - G	Minor loop, circling, unresolved	Save Tonight (Eagle-Eye Cherry)
	i - iv - i - V	Am - Dm - Am - E	Classic minor, dramatic, resolving	Classical, film scores, metal
	i - VII - VI - VII	Am - G - F - G	Dark, driving, perpetual motion	All Along the Watchtower (Jimi Hendrix version)
Hopeful	I - V - vi - IV	C - G - Am - F	Open, optimistic, universal	Let It Be, No Woman No Cry, Don't Stop Believin'
	I - IV - I - V	C - F - C - G	Simple, grounded, honest	Folk, country, early rock and roll
	I - ii - IV - I	C - Dm - F - C	Warm, gently sophisticated	Soft pop, singer-songwriter, gospel-influenced ballads
Tense	I - I/VII - vi - V	C - C/B - Am - G	Descending bass, cinematic tension	A Whiter Shade of Pale (descending bass)
	IV - V - iii - vi	F - G - Em - Am	Yearning, searching, bittersweet	"Royal road": J-pop and K-pop
	i - bII - i - V	Am - B $\flat$ - Am - E	Phrygian darkness: threatening, exotic	Misirlou (Dick Dale), flamenco, thriller scores
Euphoric	I - V - IV - I	C - G - F - C	Rock-anthem resolution	Rock, blues-rooted and stadium anthems
	IV - I - V - vi	F - C - G - Am	Lift-off, building euphoria	Modern pop and EDM choruses
	I - IV - vi - V	C - F - Am - G	Bright with a shadow	Pop-punk, power pop, singalong choruses
Melancholy	vi - IV - I - V	Am - F - C - G	Wistful, nostalgic, longing	Zombie (The Cranberries)
	I - V/7 - vi - IV	C - G/B - Am - F	Gentle descent, nostalgic	Ballads and singer-songwriter songs
	ii - V - I - IV	Dm - G - C - F	Jazz-tinged longing	Jazz standards, bossa nova, neo-soul
Triumphant	I - IV - V - I	C - F - G - C	Complete cadence: arrival, triumph	Hymns, gospel, anthems
	bVI - bVII - I	A $\flat$ - B $\flat$ - C	Heroic, unexpected arrival	The "Mario cadence" (Super Mario level-complete fanfare)
	I - V - I - IV - I	C - G - C - F - C	Ceremonial, repeated arrival	Anthems, hymns, celebration songs
Mysterious	i - IV - i - IV	Am - D - Am - D	Dorian vamp: cool, mysterious groove	Oye Como Va (Tito Puente; Santana), Evil Ways (Santana)
	i - v - bVI - bVII	Am - Em - F - G	Natural minor: dark wonder	Alternative rock, film and game scores
	I - bVII - IV - I	C - B $\flat$ - F - C	Mixolydian: bright but floating	The coda of "Hey Jude" (The Beatles), classic rock
Intimate	I - iii - IV - I	C - Em - F - C	Warm, personal, close	Singer-songwriter and folk ballads
	I - I/III - IV - IV/VI	C - C/E - F - F/A	Gentle, contemplative	Acoustic soul, piano ballads
	ii - V - I - vi - II7 - V - I	Dm - G - C - Am - D7 - G - C	Jazz phrase: sophisticated intimacy	Jazz standards, bossa nova, lounge soul

Chord progressions by genre

Each progression is shown in the key of the song it comes from, checked against published transcriptions. PAGE 2 / 4

02 Pop, EDM and indie

Songs often change chords between sections, so the section is listed. Chord progressions aren't owned by anyone: borrow the loop, write your own melody and lyric.

GENRE	NUMERALS	CHORDS (SONG KEY)	HEARD IN	KEY
Pop	I - V - vi - IV	A - E - F#m - D	Someone Like You (Adele), chorus	A major
	I - vi - IV - V	A - F#m - D - E	Stand By Me (Ben E. King), verse and chorus	A major
	i - VI - III - VII	Bm - G - D - A	Despacito (Luis Fonsi ft. Daddy Yankee), chorus	B minor
	i - iv - VI - VII	C#m - F#m - A - B	Shape of You (Ed Sheeran), intro and chorus	C# minor
	i - v - VII - IV	Fm - Cm - Eb - Bb	Blinding Lights (The Weeknd), chorus	F minor
	IV - V - I - vi	Db - Eb - Ab - Fm	Viva la Vida (Coldplay), verse	Ab major
EDM / Dance	i - VI - III - VII	D#m - B - F# - C#	Faded (Alan Walker), every section	D# minor
	i - III - VII - VI	C#m - E - B - A	Levels (Avicii), every section	C# minor
	ii7 - V7sus4 - vi7 - iii7 - IV	Bbm7 - Eb7sus4 - Fm7 - Cm7 - Db	Clarity (Zedd ft. Foxes), every section	Ab major
	IV - vi - V - ii	C - Em - D - Am	Summer (Calvin Harris), chorus	G major
	ii7 - vi - I - IV	Am7 - Em - G - C	Feel So Close (Calvin Harris), verse	G major
Indie / Alt	I - III - IV - iv	G - B - C - Cm	Creep (Radiohead), verse and chorus	G major
	I - vi - III - IV	E - C#m - G# - A	Where Is My Mind? (Pixies), intro, verse and chorus	E major
	vi - V - I	Bbm - Ab - Db	Riptide (Vance Joy), verse and chorus	Db major
	i - III - VII - IV	Fm - Ab - Eb - Bb	Boulevard of Broken Dreams (Green Day), verse	F minor
	VI - III - VII - i	Db - Ab - Eb - Fm	Boulevard of Broken Dreams (Green Day), chorus	F minor
	i - III - VII - iv	F#m - A - E - Bm	Wonderwall (Oasis), verse	F# minor
	I - v - ii	Eb - Bbm - Fm	Clocks (Coldplay), intro, verse and chorus	Eb major

Chord progressions by genre

Country and K-pop, plus the job of every song section.

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03 Country and K-pop

GENRE	NUMERALS	CHORDS (SONG KEY)	HEARD IN	KEY
Country	I - V - vi - IV	A - E - F#m - D	Wagon Wheel (Old Crow Medicine Show), verse	A major
	I - vi - V - IV	A - F#m - E - D	Take Me Home, Country Roads (John Denver), verse	A major
	IV - I - vi - V	D $\flat$ - A $\flat$ - Fm - E $\flat$	Fast Car (Luke Combs), chorus	A $\flat$ major
	VI - III - VII - i	C - G - D - Em	Something in the Orange (Zach Bryan), chorus	E minor
	i - III - VII - i	C#m - E - B - C#m	Jolene (Dolly Parton), chorus	C# minor
	I - IV - I - V	C - F - C - G	Classic country, bluegrass and honky-tonk	C major
K-pop	IV - V - iii - vi	C - D - Bm - Em	Into the New World (Girls' Generation), played as IV - V/IV - iii - vi	G major
	IVmaj7 - iii7 - vi7	Dmaj7 - C#m7 - F#m7	Bubble Gum (NewJeans), chord loop	A major
	vi - ii7 - V7sus4 - I	C#m - F#m7 - B7sus4 - E	Dynamite (BTS), chorus	E major
	i7 - v7 - VImaj7 - VII7	Em7 - Bm7 - Cmaj7 - D7	TT (TWICE), chorus	E minor
	iv9 - v7 - i7	Am9 - Bm7 - Em7	Hype Boy (NewJeans), intro and verse	E minor
	VI - VII - i - III	A - B - C#m - E	LOVE DIVE (IVE), pre-chorus	C# minor
	i - bII	D#m - E	How You Like That (BLACKPINK), intro	D# minor

Play every progression in any key: thesonicsecrets.com/songwriting/chord-progressions-by-genre

04 Song sections

SECTION	LENGTH	JOB
Intro	4–8 bars	Establish the world
Verse	8–16 bars	Establish the story and need
Pre-Chorus	4–8 bars	Build tension — make the chorus feel earned
Chorus	8–16 bars	Deliver the emotional peak — the title, the feeling, the release
Post-Chorus	4–8 bars	Extend the emotional release — a melodic "exhale"
Bridge	8–12 bars	Disrupt, reveal, and transform — the emotional turn
Outro	4–16 bars	Resolve and release — the emotional landing

Typical pop form: Intro · Verse · Pre · Chorus · Verse · Pre · Chorus · Bridge · Chorus · Outro.

Hooks & melody

The checklist to run before you call a song finished.

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05 Melody shapes

CONTOUR	EFFECT
Arch	Rises to a peak then descends. Most common contour in pop and R&B.
Continuous Rise	Builds steadily upward. Creates escalating tension. Common in pre-choruses.
Descending	Falls from a high point. Communicates release, resignation, or intimacy.
Wave / Undulating	Rises and falls multiple times. Creates a sense of breathing and conversation.
Static / Riff	Repeats on one or few pitches. Creates tension or hypnotic groove.

07 The 7 ingredients of a hook

- **Melody:** singable, surprising, inevitable
- **Rhythm:** the groove the body locks onto
- **Lyric:** the phrase that stays in the brain
- **Prosody:** melody and lyric moving as one
- **Repetition:** the hook that earns its repeats
- **Contrast:** the chorus must feel different from the verse
- **Simplicity:** the hardest thing to write

06 The 7-point melody check

- ☐ **Hummable Without Words**
Can someone who has never heard the song hum the chorus back to you after one listen — without any words?
- ☐ **Clear Melodic Contour**
Does your melody have a clear shape — rising toward a peak, falling for release, or waving conversationally — rather than wandering randomly?
- ☐ **Range Matches Emotion**
Is the chorus melody higher in pitch than the verse? Does the highest note of the song fall on the most important word?
- ☐ **Prosody is Clean**
Does the melodic stress align with the natural spoken stress of the words? Would the lyric sound natural if spoken with the same rhythm?
- ☐ **Sections Sound Different**
Do the verse, pre-chorus, and chorus each sound clearly different from each other? Could you tell them apart by melody alone, with no lyrics or production?
- ☐ **Title in the Right Place**
Is the title of the song in the chorus? Does it appear on or near the highest, most memorable note of the chorus melody?
- ☐ **Simple Enough to Stick**
Is the chorus melody simple enough that someone can sing it back after two listens, even if they are not a singer?

Want an exercise for every item on this sheet?

SongwriterMap turns this sheet into an interactive tool: structure, hooks, melody shapes, lyric devices and 24 chord progressions by mood, with a practical exercise for each. Free demo in your browser.

thesonicsecrets.com/songwriting/songwritermap