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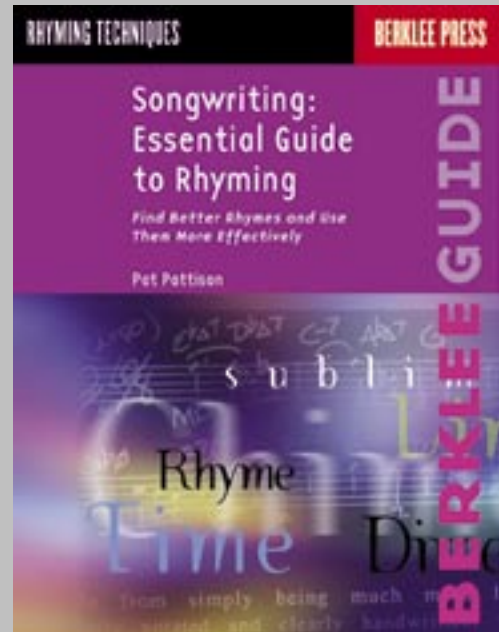
Songwriting: Essential Guide to Rhyming

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Chapter 1

Rhyme is Your Friend

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CHAPTER ONE

RHYME IS YOUR FRIEND

SHAKING HANDS

Rhyme is a connection between the sounds of syllables, not words. Only the ~~last~~ syllables rhyme in

underwear
repair

The other syllables,

under
re

do not figure in at all.

When **two** syllables rhyme, it means three **things**:

1. The syllables' vowel **sounds** are the same

wear
cast

Even though these syllables' vowels have different letters, they make the same sound in these words. Only your ears count, not your eyes.

2. The sounds **after** the vowels (if any) are the same,

ear
air

(As you can see by the "ea" in "wear" and "ear," sometimes the same letters sound different in different contexts.)

"(If any)" is important because syllables don't always have consonants after their vowel sounds, as in

disagree
referee.

3. The sounds before the vowels are different.

wear
pair

This third characteristic is important. It shows that rhyme works by the basic musical principle of tension/resolution: difference moving into sameness. When you hear a rhyme,

wear **gree**
pair ree

your ear notices that, in spite of the difference at the beginnings of the syllables, they end up sounding alike!

Beginnings of rhymed syllables have to be different so your ear will notice the similar sounds at the end. otherwise, your ear will pick up only repetition, not rhyme. When you hear a cheer-leader yell

go! go! go! go! go!

you pay attention to the repetition, not to the sounds of the syllables. No one in the stadium **thinks "Hey!** Those syllables sound the same!"

When the beginnings of syllables are the same, the syllables cannot rhyme. This is called an IDENTITY:

fuse
confuse

It is not a rhyme. Your ear does not pay attention to the sounds of the syllables. There is no tension, no "difference" to be resolved by sameness.

peace lease
piece police

These words do not call attention to their sounds either, because their syllables do not resolve difference into sameness. The same sounds are repeated, just like a cheerleader's yell. But **try**

peace piece
lease police

These are a big difference from the Identities above them. There is also a big difference between these two lists:

1. birthplace, commonplace, misplace, place, **rephce**
2. ace, brace, chase, erase, **face**, disgrace, resting place

Say them aloud. Your ear does not focus on the sounds in the first list, but is drawn like a magnet to the sounds in the second list. In the first list you hear simple repetition. In the second list you hear the sound of music — or, rather, of tension /resolution.

Look at the three conditions again.

1. The syllables' vowel **sounds** are the same
2. The sounds **after** the vowels (if any) are the same,
3. The sounds before the vowels are different.

When syllables meet all three of these conditions, call it PERFECT RHYME. Later I will show you other **kinds** of rhyme besides **PERFECT RHYME**.

MASCULINE RHYMES/FEMININE RHYMES

Most rhymes, including **PERFECT RHYMES**, belong to one of two categories. Never to both. Every rhyme is either **MASCULINE** or **FEMININE**. (We will conveniently ignore three-syllable rhymes, at least for now.)

Here are some **MASCULINE RHYMES**:

command
land
understand
expand
strand

Here are some **FEMININE RHYMES**:

commanding
landing
understanding
expanding
stranding

As you can see, the difference is in the way they end.

MASCULINE RHYMES are either one-syllable words, or words that end on a **stressed** syllable

command
land
understand
expand
strand

FEMININE RHYMES always end on an unstressed syllable. They are always two-syllable rhymes. (Masculine rhymes are one-syllable rhymes.)

commanding
landing
understanding
expanding
stranding

Look at the stressed syllables in the FEMININE RHYMES above and you will see that they are all **PERFECT RHYMES**:

mand ing
land ing
stand ing
pand ing
strand ing

Stressed syllables, whether in FEMININE RHYMES or MASCULINE RHYMES, create rhyme's tension and resolution.

The unstressed ending syllables above are all IDENTITIES, which is normal for Feminine Rhyme. These **IDENTITIES** only continue the resolution. Unstressed syllables of FEMININE RHYMES are usually **IDENTITIES**, but they do not have to be.

commander
understand **her**
expand me
strand thee

Call these pairs above MOSAIC RHYMES, since they are put together with syllables of different words, like stained glass pieces in a church window.

Some words end on secondary stress, a syllable that, while it is not the primary stress in the word, is stronger than the syllables around it. Use “//” to mark secondary stress.

ap-pre-ci-ate

Listen to it. You can tell by the pitch of the last syllable that it is stronger than the syllable before it. You cannot treat it as Feminine Rhyme, since its second-last syllable is the unstressed syllable. All Feminine Rhymes have a stressed second-last syllable, or at least their second-last syllable is stronger than the last syllable.

You have two choices when you rhyme "appreciate":

1. You can treat it as a one-syllable Masculine Rhyme.

appreciate

fate

relate

Even better, you can rhyme it with other secondary stresses:

appreciate

navigate

compensate

2. You can treat it as a three-syllable rhyme. (Here as a Mosaic):

ap *pre ci* ate

quiche he ate

These three-syllable rhymes are still Masculine, since their last syllable is more stressed than the one before it. The somersaults you have to turn for these little gems are worth it only if you are writing comedy. They sure do dance.

FINDING RHYMES

Occasionally when I've asked writers what rhyming dictionary they use, some have been indignant, as though to say, "I do not cheat. I am self-sufficient." Others have looked at me sadly, as if hoping that someday I will abandon my artificial crutch and get in touch with my creative inner self.

Use a rhyming dictionary. This is one place where self-reliance and **rugged** individualism is silly. **Finding** rhymes is almost never a creative act. It is a purely mechanical search. On those few occasions where it is creative (finding mosaic rhymes, for example), a rhyming dictionary can still stimulate the creative process.

The self-reliant writer who thinks rhyming is a spontaneous expression of personal creativity can usually be seen gazing into space, lost somewhere in the alphabet song, "discovering" one-syllable words. This "alphabet process" is certainly at least as artificial as a rhyming dictionary. Nothing about it is creative or pure, nor is it spontaneous. The worst part of it is its inefficiency.

Try it. Clench your jaw, assume your best self-reliant posture (legs planted, hands on hips, staring determinedly beyond the horizon) and come up with rhymes for "attack."

Here is a typical result:

back quack

hack rack

jack sack

lack tack (oops!)

mack wack

knack zach

pack

Mentally running through the alphabet misses in two areas:

1. It misses words that begin with more than one consonant.

Here are some you might have missed:

black smack

brac snack

clack stack

crack thwack

plaque track

shack whack

slack

2. It misses multi-syllable words ending on the rhyme sound. Here are more you might have missed:

aback
 almanac
 bareback
 bivouac
 blackjack
 cardiac
 egomaniac
 haystack
 kleptomaniac . . .

If you're going to use an artificial process, at least use an efficient one!

Finding rhymes is mechanical. Once you have found out what is available, the real creative process begins: **using** rhyme. And the more alternatives you have to choose from, the more room you have to be creative. Anyone can find a rhyme; not everyone can use rhyme creatively.

The Complete Rhyming Dictionary, edited by Clement Wood (Doubleday), is the best rhyming dictionary around. It divides rhymes into Masculine, Feminine, and three-syllable rhymes. It is organized phonetically by vowel sound, italicizes archaic words, and is as complete in its listings as something in print can be. (Nothing can keep up with current slang. But you **can** write those in.) Get it in hardcover so it will last.

EXERCISE 1: WALK TO A BOOKSTORE AND BUY YOUR RHYMING DICTIONARY.

USING YOUR RHYMING DICTIONARY

There are three sections. The first lists masculine Rhymes; the second, Feminine Rhymes; the third, three-syllable rhymes. Each section is organized alphabetically according to the vowels, a, e, i, o, u.

To find a rhyme, ask two questions:

1. *Is the word I want to rhyme Masculine or Feminine?*

The answer **will** direct you to Section One or Section Two. Now ask the next question:

2. *What is the vowel sound of the stressed syllable?*

Look at the bottom of any pages. You will see the following list:

ale, care, add, ärm, äsk; mē, hēre, ěnd; ice, ĩll; ōld, ôr, ödd, oil; fōot, out; ūse, ūrn, ŭp; THis, thin;

This is your vowel index. It uses familiar words to help you identify the sounds, and gives you phonetic markings over each vowel.

Look up "attack." First, it is Masculine: (attack). You will find it in Section One.

Look at the phonetic index for the vowel sound of the stressed syllable "tack." It is the short **a**, as in "add,"

The rhyming dictionary lists by vowel and ending consonant. You will find it under the column, headed "AK." All Masculine words ending with short **a** + "k" are listed in the column. Most are Perfect Rhymes for "attack." Some are Identities.

Try the Feminine: (hollow). It will be in Section Two.

Look in the phonetic index for the vowel sound of the stressed syllable "hol." (**Yes**. The short o as in "odd.") Look in the Feminine section under the vowel "O." (The fourth part of the Feminine section.) Look alphabetically for "ÖL + O."

The stressed syllable is in CAPS and the unstressed syllable is in lower case. You **will** find "hollow" plus other words, "Apollo, swallow, wallow," among others.

Practice using your rhyming dictionary for a while. You may be slow at first, but like anything else, you **will** get better with practice.

EXERCISE 2: USING YOUR RHYMING DICTIONARY, FIND TWO INTERESTING RHYMES FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING WORDS.

1. love:
2. leadership:
3. blessed:
4. attendant:
5. crude:
6. Athena:
7. cripple:
8. grease:
9. stroked:
10. filet: