

Songwriting Article #4, by Clayton B Howell,
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Ok gang, you've gotten your children's Bible and we've worked on the story of Noah. Now let's talk about some of the common forms of songwriting. Many times, a song will be written in one of these formats originally, but the producer/arranger will start with the chorus or something because they feel like the song will "grab" the listening audience more quickly. Still, Verse-Chorus –Verse-Chorus-Bridge-Chorus is commonly used by every songwriter from novice to veteran. So with that said, let's discuss the two most common song forms that are commercially used in the business, especially country.

Verse-Chorus Format or A,B,A,B,C,B Format has been used successfully commercially for the past 50 or more years that the song biz has been on radio. It is an easy format to master and you will notice that it is commonly used in the country and pop markets. In this format, the verses are usually 4, 6 or 8 lines, followed by a chorus that is 2 or 4 lines long. This same format is adhered to in the structure of the 2nd verse and chorus, sometimes rigidly, sometimes loosely, but still recognizably. The bridge is quite often ½ the length of the chorus, but not always. (In a song with a 2 line chorus, it is not uncommon to also have a 2 line bridge). It is believed in this format, that the lyricist should strive to make their "hook" come in the first 45 seconds to 1 minute and 10 seconds. The hook is the catch phrase that sells the idea of the song and is probably the most important element OF the song.

I know I've been very elementary and quite didactic in my teaching approach, but for you more experience writers, even though you've heard it a thousand times before, it's still valid and true. Now let's look at the 2nd and not as commonly used format, the storyteller' format.

Story-teller Format has been around for many years. It was honed to a fine art by the people in Appalachia and given to us in the best of the country stories from great singers like Patsy Cline, Hank Williams, etc. Basically, the story-teller format is 4, 6, 8 or 12 lines (most commonly) with 1 or 2 lines of each "verse" as a repeated theme, so that it functions almost like a chorus. It can even be Verse-Verse-Bridge-Verse, perfectly illustrated by Jim Reeve's song, "He'll have to go. As in the other type of formats, the "hook" should come anywhere from 45 seconds into the song to 1 minute 10 seconds.

Of course, the variety, like writers, is endless, but you can adapt these two formats quite successfully. I'd still be interested in seeing some of your work on the Noah song or maybe some examples from these formats. If you want to share them with Keith and I, you can contact us by going to www.kcchmusic.biz and going to the "Submit Your Music" button and clicking. Send us your lyrics, make a note that they are for the songwriter's article request and importantly INCLUDE YOUR COPYRIGHT INFO. If you don't have it officially copyrighted, no problem, just say ©2009 and use your name as the copyrighter. I assure you it will be used only for comparison and comment. Please include your e-mail so we can respond to you. At this time, please send us only lyrics. We will solicit chord charts and melody lines later on in further articles. If you are a Texas resident, please join us for songwriting workshops through Texas Christian Songwriter's Association. Go to www.texascsa.com for more information, and most importantly, KEEP WRITING.