



# *The 4 Most Common Mistakes (and Surprising Fixes) for the Developing Lyricist*

By Jeremy Siskind

*Mistake 1:  
Stressed Out*



## Poetic Meter & Foot

//  
**spondee**

///  
**molossus**

- //  
**baccius**

/ -  
**trochee,  
choree**

// -  
**antibaccius**

- / -  
**amphibrach**

- /  
**iamb**

/ - /  
**cretic,  
amphimacer**

- - /  
**anapaest  
antidactylus**

- -  
**pyrrhus,  
dibrach**

/ - -  
**dactyl**

- - -  
**tribrach**

*Which foot are you?*

- first name
- middle name
- last name

## Poetic Meter & Foot

// spondee	/// molossus	- // baccius
/ - trochee, choree	// - antibaccius	- / - amphibrach
- / iamb	/ - / cretic, amphimacer	- - / anapaest antidactylus
- - pyrrhus, dibrach	/ - - dactyl	- - - tribrach

by Sabio Lantz 

# *Musical stress?*



Rhythmic stress (stressed “beats”)



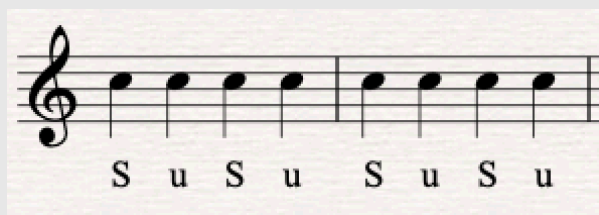
Longer notes v. shorter notes



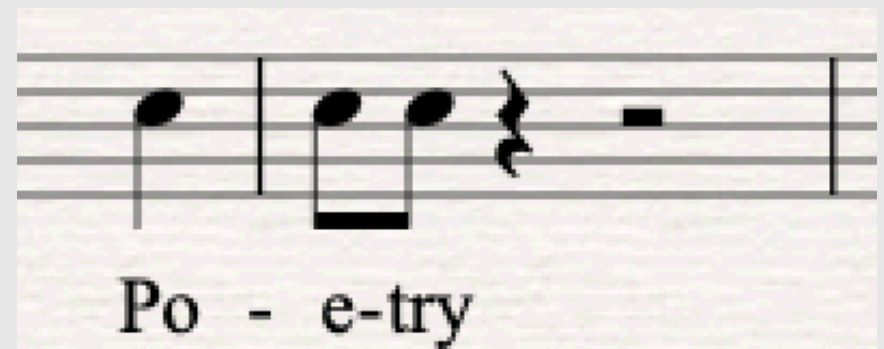
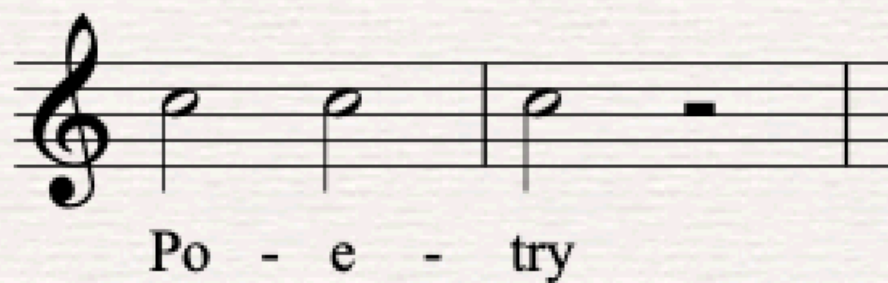
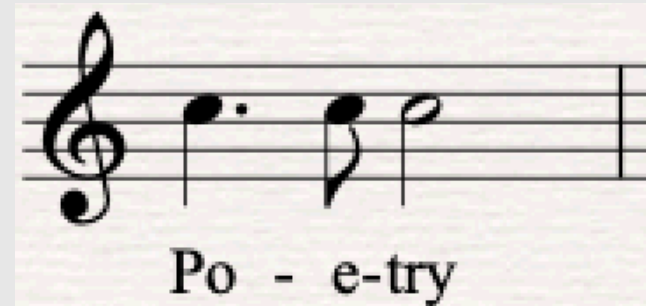
Pitch

# *RHYTHMIC STRESS*

Stressed syllables  
should go on  
rhythmically stressed  
beats



*“POETRY”*



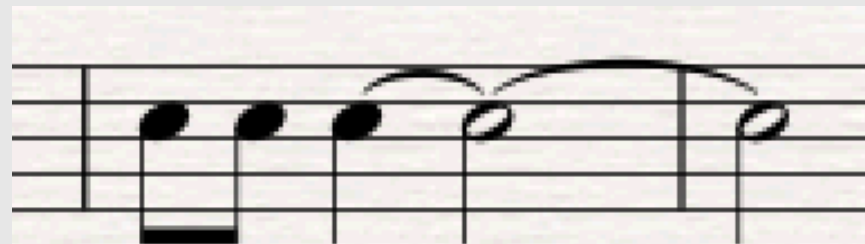
# *NOTE LENGTH*

Stressed syllables  
should go on longer  
notes





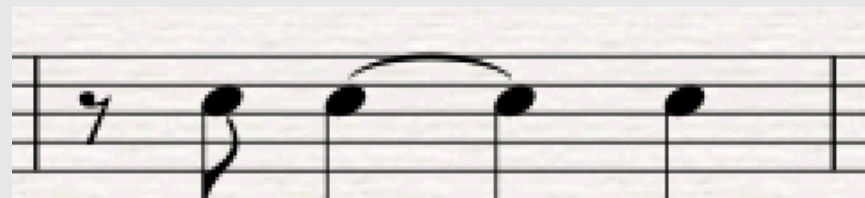
Po - e - try



Po-e- try—



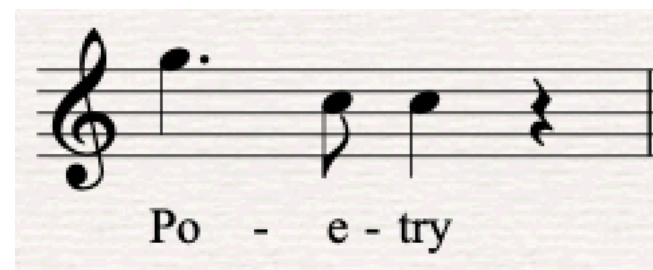
Po - e - try



Po - e - try

# *PITCH*

Stressed syllables  
frequently are placed  
on higher pitches





*“UNCONDITIONAL”*





*“IF I GOT LOCKED AWAY,  
AND LOST IT ALL TODAY”*



**vevo**





“SAY YOU'LL SEE ME AGAIN  
EVEN IF IT'S JUST IN YOUR  
WILDEST DREAMS”

*Style Matters.*

## *Solutions*

1

Speak your lyrics aloud with a metronome to find the natural speech pattern

2

Edit, edit, edit! Don't settle for your first lyric.

3

Analyze – refer back to three ways of creating musical stress and reflect on whether your musical and lyrical stresses match.

*Mistake 2:  
Rhymes and Reasons*

# *Rhymes Have Two Parts*



Final Stressed Vowel



Final Stressed Consonant



*“FIVE”*

*Pure Rhymes for  
“Five”*

- Hive
- Dive
- Live
- Strive
- Alive
- Revive
- Survive

# *ASSONANT RHYMES*



*Assonant Rhymes  
for “Five”*

- Hide
- Dime
- Light
- Strike
- Align
- Retry
- Survive
- Analyze



“CAUSE THE PLAYERS GONNA PLAY, PLAY, PLAY, PLAY, *PLAY*  
AND THE HATERS GONNA HATE, HATE, HATE, HATE, *HATE*  
BABY, I'M JUST GONNA SHAKE, SHAKE, SHAKE, SHAKE, *SHAKE*,”  
I SHAKE IT OFF, I SHAKE IT OFF”

- “SHAKE IT OFF, TAYLOR SWIFT

# CONSONANT *RHYMES*

*Consonant  
Rhymes for  
“Five”*

- Gave
- Dove
- Love
- Save
- Move
- Suave
- Reprieve

“And true, it may seem like a *stretch*,  
But its thoughts like this that *catch*  
My troubled head when you're away  
When I am missing you to *death*.”

- “Such Great Heights,” Postal Service

“They walked along by the old canal  
A little confused, I remember well”

- “Simple Twist of Fate,” Bob Dylan

# *“Need”*

Pure	Assonant	Consonant

Pure	Assonant	Consonant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lover</li> <li>- Hover</li> <li>- Discover</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Another</li> <li>- Shudder</li> <li>- Summer</li> <li>- Wonder</li> <li>- Brother</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ever</li> <li>- Sever</li> <li>- Over</li> <li>- Rover</li> </ul>

*(Feminine Rhymes for “Cover”)*

# Rhyme Continuum

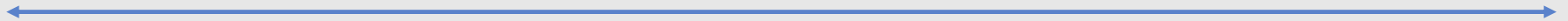
Musical Theater

Singer-Songwriter

Nursery Rhyme /  
Children's Song

Pop Song

Art Song

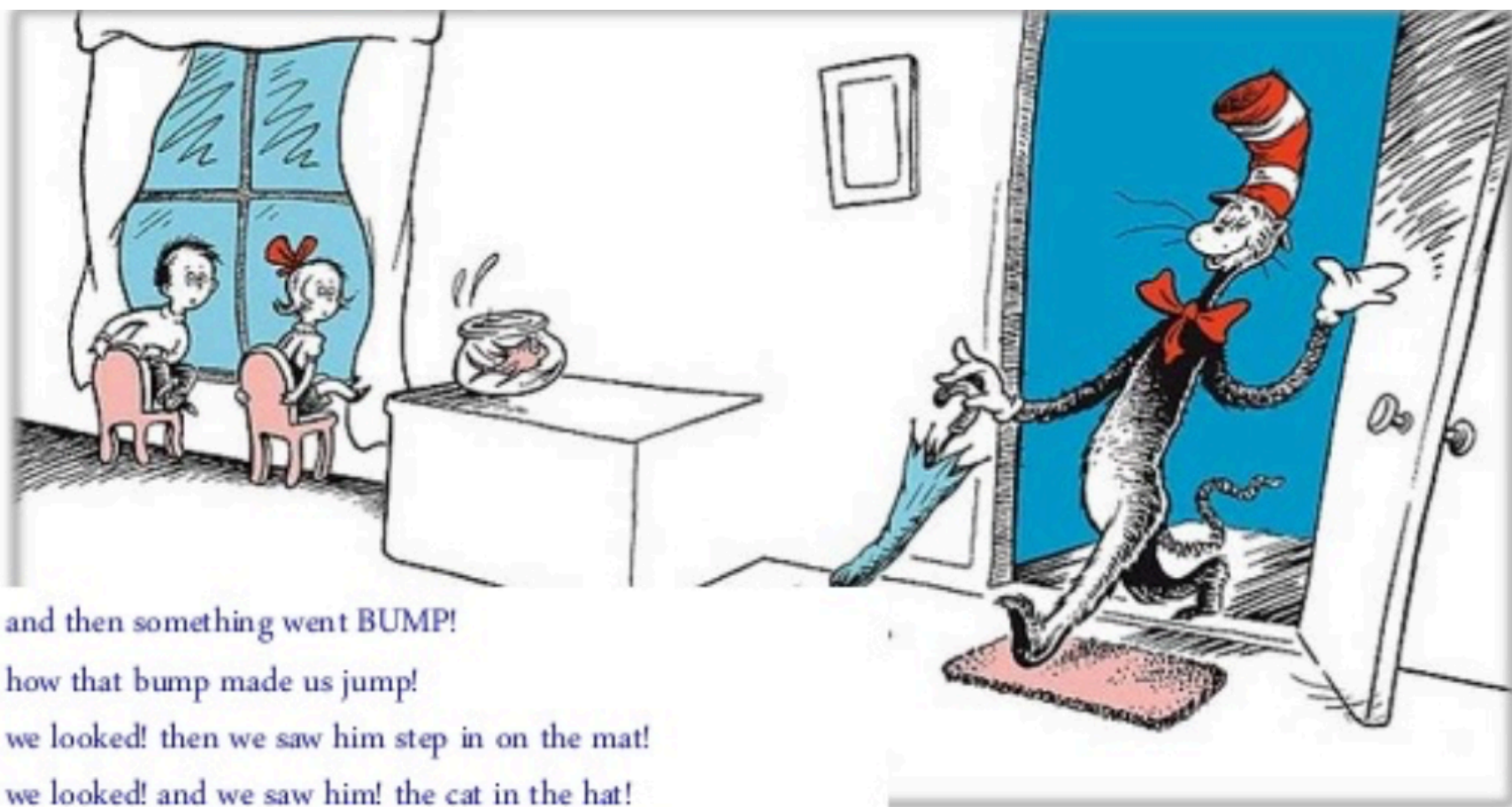


- ✓ Pure rhymes
- ✓ Lots of Rhyme
- ✓ Multisyllabic Rhymes

- ✓ Assonant/Consonant rhymes
- ✓ Not too many rhymes (not too noticeable)

- ✓ Few rhymes
- ✓ Very few pure rhymes





and then something went BUMP!  
how that bump made us jump!  
we looked! then we saw him step in on the mat!  
we looked! and we saw him! the cat in the hat!  
and he said to us, 'why do you sit there like that?'  
'i know it is wet and the sun is not sunny.  
but we can have lots of good fun that is funny!'

It's coming on Christmas  
They're cutting down trees  
They're putting up reindeer  
And singing songs of joy and peace  
Oh I wish I had a river  
I could skate away on  
But it don't snow here  
It stays pretty green  
I'm going to make a lot of money  
Then I'm going to quit this crazy scene  
I wish I had a river  
I could skate away on

JONI MITCHELL *Songs Of A Prairie Girl*



# *Solutions*

1

Use multiple types  
of rhymes

2

Space out rhymes  
longer between  
lines

3

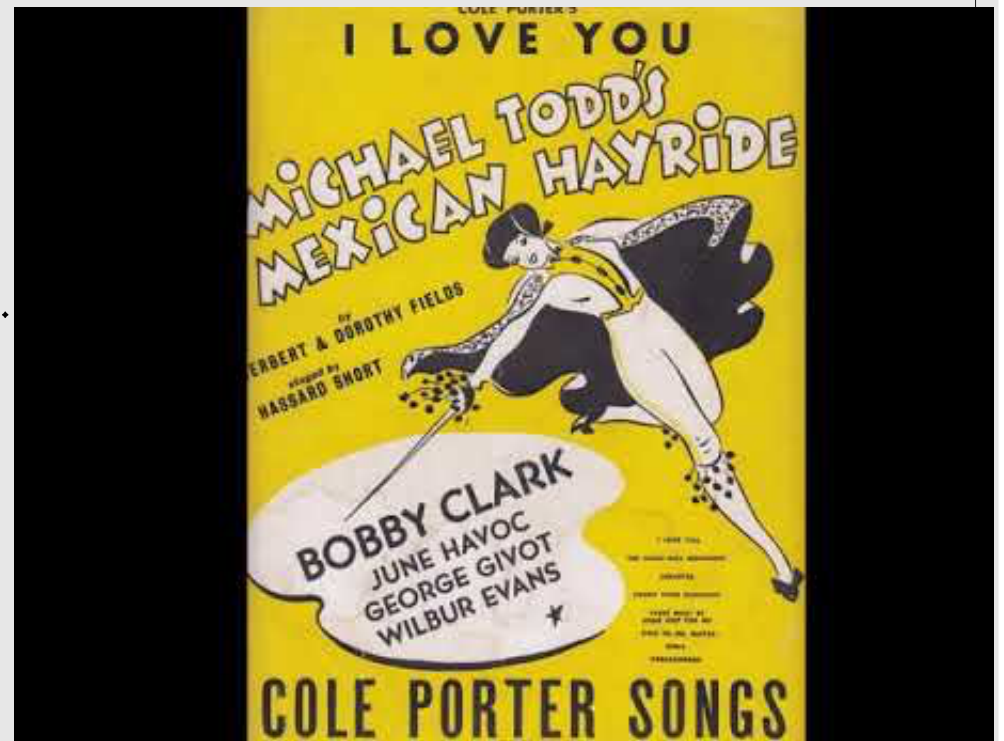
Make sure rhyming  
style matches style  
of your song

*Mistake 3:*  
*Don't Tell Me You Love Me!*

## Cole Porter – “I Love You” (Verse)

If a love song I could only write,  
A song with words and music divine,  
I would serenade you every night,  
Till you'd relent and consent to be mine.

But alas, just an amateur am I,  
And so I'll not be surprised, my dear,  
If you smile and politely pass it by,  
When this, my first love song, you hear.



*SHOW, DON'T TELL*

*ADDING IMAGERY  
(PARTS OF SPEECH)*

# Nouns

*“Wolves in the middle of town*

*And the chapel bell ringing through the wind-blown trees*

*To wave to the butcher's boy*

*With the parking lot music everybody believes*

*And then out like a dying bird*

*In the corner of the penny arcade.”*

- “Song of the Shepherd’s Dog,” Iron & Wine



## *Proper Nouns*

*“While home in New York was champagne and disco  
Tapes from L.A. slash San Francisco  
But actually Oakland and not Alameda  
Your girl was in Berkeley with her Communist Reader  
Mine was entombed within boombox and Walkman  
I was a hoarder but girl that was back then.”*

- “Step,” Vampire Weekend

# Verbs

*“We'll steer the car towards the reservoir,  
And poison our senses as nightfall commences,  
Rise up, Brother,  
Rise up from the monotony that is hemming you in.*

*“If he darkens your doorway, you come and tell me,  
Where he resides, text me or bell me,  
Rise up, Sister,  
I'll make sure he never darkens your doorway again.”*

- “1000 Acres of Sycamore,” Fionn Regan

# Adjectives

*"I was driving across the burning desert*

*When I spotted six jet planes*

*Leaving six white vapor trails across the bleak terrain."*

- "Amelia," Joni Mitchell

*"We were married on a rainy day*

*The sky was yellow*

*And the grass was gray...*

*The rooms were musty*

*And the pipes were old."*

- "I Do It for Your Love," Paul Simon

# Adverbs

*“The shore was kissed by sea and mist tenderly  
I can't forget how two hearts met breathlessly”  
- “Tenderly,” Walter Gross, Jack Lawrence*

# *How to Get Specific*



“Zoom in, zoom out”



“Fast forward, rewind”



Know your characters & setting

## Metaphor/Simile

*“Your lips were like a red and ruby chalice, warmer than the summer night*

*The clouds were like an alabaster palace, rising to a snowy height”*

- “Midnight Sun,” John Mercer, Johnny Burke

## Metaphor/Simile

*“I could liken you to a werewolf the way you left me for dead  
But I admit that I provided a full moon.*

*And I could liken you to a shark the way you bit off my head  
But then again I was waving around a bleeding open wound.*

*And you are such a super guy ‘til the second you get a whiff of  
me*

*We’re like a wishing well and a bolt of electricity.”*

*“Werewolf,” Fiona Apple*

*“Your lips were like a red and ruby chalice”*

Tenor	Vehicle
“Your lips”	“a red and ruby chalice”

*“I could liken you to a werewolf, the way you left me for dead”*

Tenor	Vehicle
“You”	“A werewolf”



*“Papa died smiling  
Wide as the ring of a bell.  
Gone all star white  
Small as a wish in a well.”*

*“Sodom, South Georgia,” Iron & Wine*

*“Papa died smiling wide as the ring of a bell.”*

Tenor	Vehicle
The width of Papa’s smile.	The ring of a bell.

*“Gone all star white.”*

Tenor	Vehicle
The whiteness of papa’s skin (?)	The color of a star

*“small as a wish in a well.”*

Tenor	Vehicle
Papa’s size when he died (?)	A wish in a well

## *Solutions*

1

Show, don't tell! Use all parts of language to paint a picture.

2

Use tricks like zoom in/zoom out and fast forward/rewind to think more closely about your scenario.

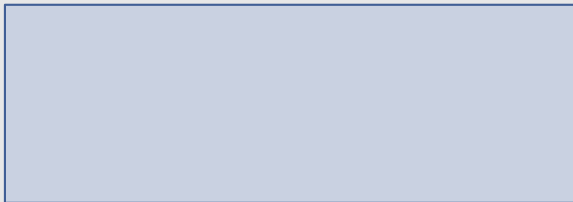
3

Expand your metaphor/simile techniques beyond simple, direct comparisons.

*Mistake 4:  
What's the Purpose?*

# *STORY SONGS*

Strophic form  
suggested



Same music repeats every stanza

Lyrics change every stanza

UPLOAD MP3S AT [MPS2TUBE.COM](http://MPS2TUBE.COM)



# The Complete Ella Fitzgerald Song Books



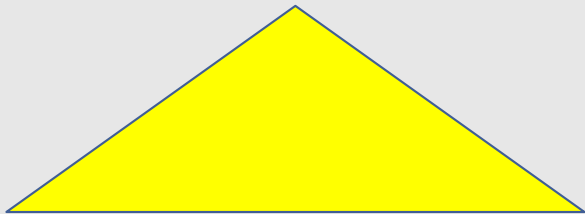


*EXPRESS AN  
EMOTION*

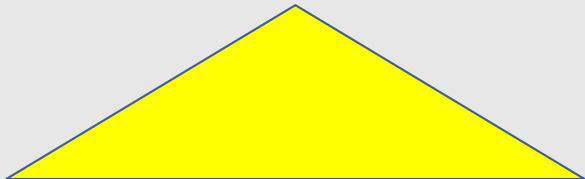
Verse-Chorus form recommended



Verses have the same music  
but different lyrics each time



Choruses have the same music but and the  
same lyrics each time





*FILLING  
PEOPLE IN*

AABA song form recommended



*Songs can also...*



Present a list (with a reason in mind)



Ask a question



Paint a picture



Convince or persuade (emotionally)

## *Solutions*

1

Study song forms and figure out what best suits the purpose of your song

2

Know what you ultimately want your song to do – paint a picture? Express an emotion?

3

Try writing songs that “do things” that you’re less comfortable with. Write one that tells a story or presents a list!

*Thank you!*



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