

# Tools of Contrast

by Kim Copeland



Why is it that you can sing the chorus of some songs after only hearing them one time? Why do some "hook" lines stick so well that you can't get them out of your head?

It is because the songwriter has used special "tools" to make those sections of the song very memorable to the listener. The most important of those tools is contrast. Making the chorus distinctive from the verse sections of the song, calls the listener's attention to it. There are several ways to make the chorus and hook line contrast the verses and make the listener pay closer attention to them.

One way is to use a chord structure in the chorus that differs from that of the verse, and/or to introduce a chord that hasn't been used elsewhere in the song; to take the listener someplace new and interesting.

Another way to make the chorus (and especially the hook line) of your song stand out is to change the phrasing of the lyric. If the verse lines have choppy or rapid-fire phrasing, with lots of syllables and consonants, try elongating the phrasing in your chorus by using fewer syllables and more open vowels in each line. If your verses are sparse and airy, you might want to make your chorus more noticeable and memorable by picking up the phrasing and number of syllables in it.

Along with the phrasing, you can also use a variance in the meter, or rhythm, to grab the listener's attention; such as going from a four-four to a half-time, or cut time, feel. Often times, a drummer will use a rim shot in the verse, but change to a full snare hit in the chorus. He may also use extra hits on the bass drum, toms, or cymbals to give the chorus a bigger, busier feel than the verse. Another effect sometimes used is to have the music stop to introduce the beginning of the chorus. All of these things let the audience know that the chorus is the high point of the song.

One more way to draw the audience in with your chorus is to give it a new rhyme scheme. If you have used an AABB rhyme scheme in your verses, try an AABA in the chorus. To make your hook line stand out even more, try an AAAB rhyme scheme. This lets the hook line stand all alone and makes it much more noticeable.

Perhaps the most obvious, and most commonly used, way to make your chorus shine is to make it the highpoint of the song melodically. Many songs climb into the chorus by letting the melody gain in intensity and range until it climaxes at the chorus. Or it may add contrast by beginning on a much lower note than the verse.

Ultimately, any and all of these tools are effective ways of providing contrast between your verses and choruses. And the more contrast, the better chance you have of making your chorus memorable.

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