

# YOUR GUIDE TO STUDYING LYRICS IN A GENRE

by Robin Frederick

The quickest way to learn about lyrics in a contemporary genre is to listen to songs that are successful in that style. In this PDF, there are resources that will help you find and listen to current songs sorted by genre. Explore the options and choose the ones that work best for you. When you feel comfortable, go ahead and explore beyond these.

Once you've identified a genre you're interested in, make it part of your musical life. Don't listen to just one or two songs. Listen to as much as you can as often as you can. Play genre songs in the car or while you're out walking or around the house. Embedding the sound through frequent listening makes everything easier.

You'll find a list of questions at the end of the PDF that will help you take a closer look at lyrics in any genre.

## **RESOURCES FOR LISTENING TO SONGS BY GENRE**

### **➔ MUSIC CHARTS**

You can research current successful songs in a genre by going through the industry music charts. They're available online and they're free. The best sources for mainstream music charts are...

**Billboard Charts**    <http://www.billboard.com/charts>

You can scroll down the page to see all the charts they offer. It's waaaay too many! To get things a little more in focus, click on "Genres" near the top of the page, You'll see a list charts by genre.

Some of these genres are actually radio formats, such as "Adult Contemporary." Genres and radio formats are often used interchangeably. If someone in the industry asks you what genre you write in and you answer "Adult Contemporary" they'll know what you mean.

**BDSRadio Charts** <https://www.bdsradio.com>

At BDSradio.com click on “Select Chart here” to see the radio airplay charts. These charts are all named for radio formats, not genres. The first four are Pop charts, then Rock, Urban, and Country. You’ll notice quite a lot of overlap between some of these charts. They’re aimed at similar audiences.

**TuneFind.com** <https://www.tunefind.com/>

There aren’t any charts for songs that are successful in the Film & TV market, so check out Tunefind.com instead. There you’ll find TV shows that use songs and a list of the songs that were played in each episode. Look through the lists and check out the music until you find a show that uses the kinds of songs you’re interested in.

You’ll find a wide range of genres used in these shows because there are songs used as “source music”—for example, a scene in a nightclub with a DJ—and songs used as underscore to add emotion or atmosphere to a scene. To find out what genre these songs are in, look up the artist or band at AllMusic.com where they list relevant genres and styles in the right-hand sidebar.

### **Make a list as you go**

As you look through the charts, make a list of songs to listen to. These might be new artists you haven’t heard or new releases from artists you already know. Or they might be songs with interesting titles, or songs on a TV series you usually find interesting.

### **Listen to the songs on your list**

This is where a stream-on-demand app like Spotify or Apple Music can be helpful. You can preview the songs on iTunes and buy the ones that sound interesting. Or you can look for the songs on YouTube. I recommend lyric videos, if that option is available, rather than fully produced music videos with storylines that might distract you or influence the way you perceive the lyrics.

## ➔ SPOTIFY PLAYLISTS

As an alternative to the music charts, Spotify has large playlists that cover most genres. You can audition songs quickly and find ones you like. If you don't have it already, you can sign up for the free version of Spotify. The links below will take you to Spotify online. I prefer the downloadable app rather than the Spotify website, but use whatever's easiest for you.

### **You can download the Spotify app here:**

<https://www.spotify.com/us/download/other/>

### **COUNTRY HITS PLAYLIST** (Contemporary Country radio hits)

<https://open.spotify.com/user/digster.fm/playlist/6nU0t33tQA2i0qTI5HiyRV>

### **POP RIGHT NOW** (Pop, Dance-Pop, R&B-Pop radio hits)

<https://open.spotify.com/user/spotify/playlist/37i9dQZF1DWWILVXKTOAYa>

### **BILLBOARD ADULT CONTEMPORARY** (Pop AC radio hits)

<https://open.spotify.com/user/jcbermu/playlist/4eAvu1ekKzwqgnqwyFygLs>

### **CONTEMPORARY ROCK & ALTERNATIVE** (Rock '90s to the Present)

<https://open.spotify.com/user/1274630086/playlist/4MOCHTnm9mi0ZtRhk4363t>

### **URBAN FLAVOUR** (Contemporary R&B hits. Some explicit lyrics)

<https://open.spotify.com/user/spotify/playlist/37i9dQZF1DXa49JU4zzjb9>

### **INDIE FOLK TOP TRACKS** (Contemporary Folk and Folk-Rock songs)

<https://open.spotify.com/user/soundrop/playlist/6ddPVckTHgSpWc1EVvDXX0>

### **AFTERNOON ACOUSTIC** (Acoustic Singer-Songwriter)

<https://open.spotify.com/user/spotify/playlist/37i9dQZF1DX4E3UdUs7fUx>

### **FILM and TV SONGWRITING**

<https://open.spotify.com/user/129674510/playlist/0Ldw4s8GRN5kJHCOF9gv5w>

If you're interested in the Film & TV song market, check out my "Film and TV Songwriting" playlist at the link above. Every song on the list has been featured in a TV show, movie, or commercial. Many of the songs are in the singer-songwriter genre with production styles that can be recorded and mixed in the average home studio.

You'll find more playlists on Spotify from Contemporary Blues to Alt Rock to Children's songs. Just search for the genre you're interested in.

### **TRY IT NOW: BREAK DOWN LYRICS IN YOUR GENRE**

On first listen it might seem like the lyrics in a genre don't have a lot in common, but the similarities are there. A closer look at lyric theme, character, situation, emotional content and language style will help you find them.

Choose one song from a music chart or playlist to study in depth. Listen to the song and print out the lyrics. You can find them online or rake them down by ear. Try answering the following questions after you listen. Make a note of anything else that strikes you as interesting about the song. When you feel you've learned all you can, move on to another song.

**- Lyric content:**

- What is the central idea of the lyric? Try to sum it up in one sentence.
- What emotion is the singer feeling? How did the lyric tell you that?
- What kind of person do you think the singer is? How is that expressed in the song?
- Is the lyric believable? Do you feel the singer is being honest?
- Did you still have questions when the song was over or were you satisfied?
- In general, are there a lot of visual images? Are other physical senses engaged?
- Does the lyric feel conversational, like someone talking? Are there poetic elements?
- Are the rhymes fresh and unexpected, or familiar, or a mix of both?

**- Song structure:**

- What would you say is the song's structure?
- Does the song have a big chorus, or a simple, repeated refrain line at the end of each verse, or something in between?
- Is there a pre-chorus? A bridge? Any other sections?

**- Sing the lyric:** Sing along with the recording while keeping time by tapping your foot or clapping along. Get a feel for how the lyric fits into the steady, underlying beat of the song. This can help you strengthen your phrasing skills and embed a feel for the sound of today's lyrics and the way they relate to melody.