

Song Doctor

helping you get better
at writing songs

www.songdoctor.co.nz

Song Health Check Up

Run this health check up list over your song. If you can honestly answer these questions, you've got nothing to worry about. Hooray! A sure fire hit! If you're wavering over any of the things covered, then there might be something to examine more closely. Let's have a good look.

1. What is your song about?

Can you tell me what it's about in one (yep, just one) sentence? If I need an accompanying lecture, chances are you're not clear, the song's lyric is watered down and the meaning's muddled.

So, what are you trying to say?

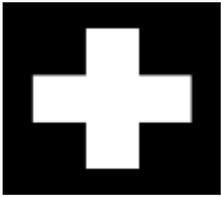


2. Why should I care?

If you want to write songs for yourself, good for you! But if you want your songs to have a life outside of your bedroom, then they need to mean something to people other than you. These people are called your audience. And your songs need to communicate something easily understood that the audience cares about.

So, is your song built around one simple idea that lots of people can relate to?





Song Doctor

helping you get better
at writing songs

www.songdoctor.co.nz

Song Health Check Up

3. What does your song make me feel?

To make an impact, your song should invoke a simple clear emotion that the audience can feel and respond to. This can be triggered by the melody, the groove, the chords you use, the snappy hooks, the great lyrics, but usually it's a combination that conveys your intention and draws us in. Unlike movies and books, songs don't always resolve their plots. They maintain the mood. Your song could be heartfelt, gripping, exciting, sorrowful, honest, angry, anguished, sexy, passionate - anything! But it should be authentically and genuinely emotional. It should move us.

So, what mood is your song in?



4. What is the name of your song?

We need to know what the song is called. Hey you! Songwriter! Introduce us to your awesome song! Tell us what it's about with the title. It should be something universal – something a lot of us will care about. It will help us remember if you repeat it more than any other words in the lyric, put it in the chorus, spotlight it there in a really strong position (beginning and/or end). It should capture our attention when we read it or hear it – like a great headline.

So, what's the title of your song?

HELLO
my name is



Song Doctor

helping you get better
at writing songs

www.songdoctor.co.nz

Song Health Check Up

5. What's your opening line?

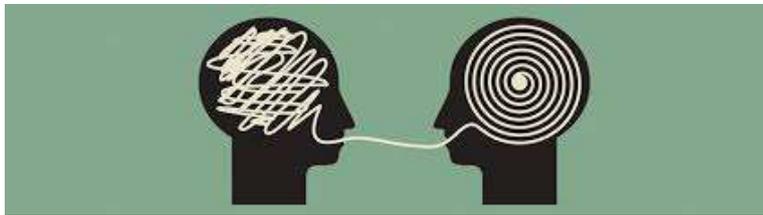
Your song is meeting us for the first time and first impressions count. What's the first thing you're going to say? Time to make an impact! Engage us. Make us want to know more. Really make us an offer we can't refuse. Ask us out. Buy us a drink.

So, what's your killer first line?

6. Are you talking to me?

Not everyone can sing, but most of us can talk. The language of successful song lyrics is primarily the language of everyday speech. If you can say it, you can sing it. Lyrics aren't just words – they're words to be sung. So do your lyrics flow naturally? Are the rhymes comfortable or squashed together forced in a couplet for the sake of it? Do they sound like lines someone would actually say in ordinary conversation? Does it sound 'normal' or are the lyrics oddly packed in a weird order?

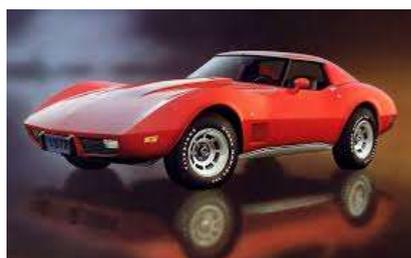
So, what language is your song using?



7. What's so special about you?

Specificity is the magic fairy dust ingredient. The more specific your images are, the easier it is for your audience to see what you're trying to say. What are the characters wearing? *Blue suedes shoes?* Driving? *A little red corvette?* Doing? *I'm waiting for my man – twenty-six dollars in my hand.* Feeling? *First I was afraid. I was petrified.* Get specific and you take us with you. No confusion. Who/what/where – show us what's in your head! Show - don't tell!!

So, does your song have clear specific images?





Song Doctor

helping you get better
at writing songs

www.songdoctor.co.nz

Song Health Check Up

8. Have I heard it all before?

It's pretty hard to write a truly original song. Hey, if it was easy everyone would be doing it! We all stand on the shoulders of giants and are the product of our influences. But you can make at least something in your song shiny and new by putting your spin on it, be it the tune, the story, the title, the setting, the chorus, the chord sequence, a hook, the feel or just one new unpredictable rhyme.

So, what is original in your original song?

9. Can I sing your song?

The tune of your song should be able to be easily sung, not necessarily well, but at least recognisably rendered by Joe or Josephine Average. And if they can sing it passably, imagine what a really strong singer could do with your song. And the lyrics roll off the tongue or are they tongue twisters?

So, who can sing your song?



10. What can I remember about your song?

Great songs are memorable. But they travel in real time. People can hear songs for the first time in concerts, elevators, supermarkets, airports, waiting rooms and they can't push pause or scroll rewind or write down the words. If they can remember something from that first, maybe really distracted, listen – the chorus, the title, the opening line, anything – then you've made a connection and chances are they'll want to hear it again. That is a very good thing for a songwriter!

So, is your song easily remembered?



Song Doctor

helping you get better
at writing songs

www.songdoctor.co.nz

Song Health Check Up

11. What shape is your song in?

Songs have an easily recognisable form. They are built in sections and those sections have an inherent structure too. How you build your song affects what you are trying to say with it. Form gives your song a map for the audience to follow and allows your song's intention to develop. Does your song have a chorus/verse format, maybe a bridge? Is there a vocal or instrumental hook, a solo, an intro/outro, a pre-chorus? Is there a contrast between the melody of the verse and the chorus? Is it roughly 3 or 4 minutes long?

So, what's the shape of your song?

VERSE	CHORUS	VERSE	CHORUS	BRIDGE	CHORUS
A	B	A	B	C	B

12. Are the words and music of your song in a long term relationship?

There has to be serious intimacy between the words and music. The melody has to support the rise and fall of the lyrics, the rhythm and note length should stress the most important words in your lyric and the groove of your song needs to reflect the mood of the story you're trying to tell. This unity or fitting together is called prosody and it should be so strong, you find it hard to recite the lyric without actually singing it.

So, are the words and music of your song inseparable?





Song Doctor

helping you get better
at writing songs

www.songdoctor.co.nz

Song Health Check Up

13. Have you taken your song for a spin?

Performing your song live will give you a pretty good idea if your ideas and feelings are coming across as you intended, and can point out any possible lumps, bumps and glitches. Have you sung your song or played it to someone like an open mic audience, a teacher, the rest of your band, another writer, another singer? Someone you trust to get a reaction or some feedback? Does it move anyone apart from you?

So, how did your song go on the test drive?



That's it! You made it! How did you go? Honestly!!
If you have trouble answering any of these questions about your song,
then it probably needs some attention.

However, it's one thing to identify what's wrong with a song and
quite another to know how to fix it.

I can help you with that.

I can help you get better at writing songs.

**Email me on songdoctorclinic@gmail.com
I'm all ears.**

