



THE 30-DAY SPEED SONGWRITING CHALLENGE

ED BELL



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ABOUT THE SONG FOUNDRY

At The Song Foundry it's our mission to share great songwriting ideas with the world. At thesongfoundry.com we publish articles about songwriting, host free videos on various songwriting topics, and offer Skype songwriting coaching worldwide.



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YEP – YOU’RE GOING TO WRITE FIFTEEN SONGS THIS MONTH

Hello – and welcome to *The 30-Day Speed Songwriting Challenge*, where you’re going to spend the next month writing fifteen brand new songs.

Yep. That’s not a typo. You’re not hallucinating.

You’re genuinely going to complete fifteen new songs in the next thirty days.

How? I’ll explain.

Why? I’ll explain that too.

Actually, let’s start with why.

One of the hardest things about songwriting is getting started. That’s true whether you’re writing your first song or holding your first Grammy. The blank page is scary. It could be anything. It could be something you’re not proud of. It could be something that leaves people disliking it – or worse, leaves people thinking ‘meh’.

If you can relate, congratulations: it means you’re human. It means you’re normal.

It’s completely normal to feel scared or nervous when you start a new song. But if there’s one cure for fear, it’s this: action.

Do something.

Try something.

Get the \$&%! on with writing something. Anything.

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Courage isn't about getting rid of fear. It's about overcoming it – feeling afraid but doing what you have to do anyway.

And oh boy, if you want to be creative, you have to learn to be courageous.

You have to be courageous enough to start, even when you don't know where you're going. You have to be courageous to keep going even when you're *still* not sure what you're doing, your big idea for this project has changed four times already and you're not sure how or when you'll get this project finished.

You have to find the courage to *do*, even when you don't feel like it. That's all there is to it.

And like virtually everything else, your ability to do that is like a muscle – the more you use it, the stronger it gets.

The more comfortable you get being uncomfortable – conquering your resistance and doing what you've got to do anyway – the better prepared you'll be for taking on bigger creative challenges in future.

And that, in short, is why *The 30-Day Speed Songwriting Challenge* exists – to help you take a hatchet to your comfort zone, to help you prove to yourself what you're capable of, and to help you overcome w****r's b***k for good.

And that's why you're going to write fifteen new songs over the next thirty days – to prove to yourself that you can write under pressure, to prove to yourself that you can make snap creative decisions and roll with whatever ideas you have, and to prove to yourself that it's always better to write something OK and improve it later than sit around writing nothing at all. (Because you definitely can't improve a blank page.)

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Still, I'm not going to lie – writing fifteen new songs in thirty days is no small task. And while we're being honest, I'm not going to guarantee that every one of the fifteen songs you're about to write will be your best, most individual, most ground-breaking work. Because it doesn't work like that.

But by writing fifteen new songs in as little as a month you will see an incredible transformation not only in your ability to write, but in your ability to shut your inner critic up, your ability to be brave enough to try things out, and your ability to overcome self-doubt and just keep moving towards your songwriting goals.

At the end of this book – like in all of my 30-Day Challenges – we'll talk about how you can turn the material you created in this challenge into something more substantial and polished if you want to, but let me say it again: that's not the primary goal of this challenge.

If you end up with some great material – and let's face it, you probably will – great. But that's kind of a side effect of getting through this challenge.

Your most important goal in the next thirty days is to turn out fifteen competent, coherent songs, to prove to yourself that you can. To convince yourself that you're full of tons of great ideas – way more than you realize – but the only way to prove that is to get those ideas down on a page, on a screen or in a voicenote. To remind yourself that play and procrastination have their place in the creative process, but at the end of the day, good things come to those who write – often.

So that's why you're going to write fifteen songs this month.

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Now let's talk about how.

Most of all, there's really only one ground rule when it comes to completing these challenges: write.

Write something.

Write anything.

Write now, think later. Just get it down – build, create and get those ideas out.

Each challenge begins with a specific stimulus or starting point – a lyric, a page full of words, an idea, a chord progression, something like that – to make that as easy as possible for you.

Each challenge challenges comes with at least a couple of paragraphs of tips or advice to help you hit the ground running. It's obviously up to you how seriously you want to take all of that – you might already have your own ideas and working methods – but as long as you roll with the challenge in front of you and do your thing with it, it's all good.

You can – and should – complete the challenges in whatever style or genre you like, with whatever combination of instruments and technology you've got, and with whatever prior songwriting knowledge and experience you have already.

All of the challenges are open-ended enough they'll work in any style with whatever you can bring to the table as a songwriter. So get ready to do what you already do, and take everything to the next level.

You can do the challenges solo if you're happy writing both music and lyrics, or you can work with a co-writer if you'd prefer that or need to schedule writing sessions with someone else to keep you on

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track throughout the thirty days. That's totally up to you. (You could even do the challenges once through solo and again with one or more co-writers if you like.)

I recommend you spread the challenges evenly across the thirty days – one every other day for the month. You could, of course, do them in less or more than thirty days, but if you can I recommend that you complete each challenge in one sitting. Like I said, that's no small task, but you'll probably get more from each challenge by doing it in one intensive burst, rather than spread out over two or more writing sessions. That's why I recommend alternating write days and rest days for thirty days.

In theory, you could spend as much or as little time as you like on each project. But honestly, spending eight to ten hours on each one wouldn't be much of a speed songwriting challenge and probably wouldn't help you out that much. That's why I strongly recommend you give yourself 60–90 minutes for each project – no exceptions.

I know, that's not a ton of time. But it's bang in the goldilocks zone: long enough to complete each challenge but short enough that there's no time for overthinking or umming and ahing – which is definitely the technical term – to keep you, your fingers and your ideas moving.

So go ahead: come up with a plan for fifteen 90-minute slots over the next thirty days. Write it down somewhere. Then, like bacon to a cheap frying pan, make sure you stick to it.

That's because – like in all of my 30-Day Challenges – the key to getting to the end of this one is everyone's favorite C word: consistency. You have to show up consistently if you want to get the maximum benefits from these challenges.

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That means starting consistently – sticking to your plan – but it also means finishing consistently – giving each 60–90-minute slot everything you’ve got. In these challenges, that means especially that you don’t start letting your inner perfectionist get the better of you somewhere around Day 14, and you keep writing and try to get each project finished, no matter what.

Honestly, if you don’t finish some days, but you give the 60–90 minutes you all, that’s OK. Give yourself permission to have an off day or write less than your best work every now and then. Let yourself complete something that works for now and save worrying about filtering or editing what you write for some other time. (We’ll talk more about how you can do that once you’re done.)

If some days you finish a challenge with time to spare though, you can always go back and edit, polish or rewrite what you’ve got. But before you worry about any of that, it’s important to focus on getting a complete first draft finished for each challenge, and only then thinking about making changes.

Again, you have free rein to complete each challenge in whatever style or genre and with whatever technology, instruments and/or voices you like. But whatever you do, I recommend you generally stick with simple versions of two of the most straightforward song forms: verse-chorus form and refrain form. Sometimes it’s fun to see how you can reinvent the wheel, but not when you only have 90 minutes to do it.

I’ve also given you a ton of bonus material in the back of the book which you can consult either before you start or as you work through the challenges.

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First up is a bonus chapter I've glamorized as the book's 'Coda', which outlines five specific and powerful techniques for busting w****r's b****k. While I wish I could tell you busting every resistance to writing you'll ever experience is as simple as reading nine pages of ideas, it doesn't work like that. But still, if you get particularly stuck at any point in the challenges – as well as in real life – the techniques in this section will definitely come in useful. So this section is absolutely worth checking out before you get started on the challenges. (Or before you start every new challenge if you need it.)

After that there are three short appendixes:

Appendix 1 summarizes the two song forms I recommend you use in these challenges if you need a quick refresher.

Appendix 2 outlines one simple but effective process you can use for crafting songs from scratch, based on the process I outline in my book [*How to Write a Song \(Even If You've Never Written One Before and You Think You Suck\)*](#).

Then finally, Appendix 3 contains 107 specific song prompts in case you need them for a couple of the challenges or just want to use them for writing other songs in the future.

And that's about it. That's pretty much everything you need to know to get started.

Other than that, now is a great time to give your inner critic one final reminder that it's not welcome anywhere near here for the next thirty days – because there's writing to be done.

So let's get cracking.

“That’s how you accomplish things in life. You don’t sit around talking about it; you just do it. If you really want to go far in life, you do things that are hard and that you think you can’t do.”

MARTIN BECKNER

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[DAYS 1–2]

CHORUS LYRIC STARTER

“Don’t judge it. Just write it. Don’t judge it.

It’s not for you to judge it.”

PHILIP ROTH

Alrighty, for your first challenge I’m going to give you a generous head start. I’ve written a complete chorus lyric, and it’s up to you to build a complete song around it.

As I said in the Introduction, while in these challenges you can write in any genre or style, I recommend you keep each song structure simple. In fact, for your first challenge I recommend you aim for a Verse–Chorus–Verse–Chorus structure, with 8 lines and 16 measures for each section.

Why it matters: The key to all of these challenges is to get your ideas down without pausing to judge or edit yourself. In today’s challenge, you’ve already got a nice head start – you just have to keep building from there.

DAYS 1–2 CHALLENGE



60–90 mins

Build a complete song given this chorus lyric:

ONE OF A KIND

**You're one of a kind,
Ain't no denyin'.
I couldn't replace ya,
Ain't no point tryin'.
You stole my heart and my soul
And my goddamn mind.
Cuz there ain't nobody like you,
You're one of a kind.**

Start working on this challenge any place you like, but if you're not sure, a great place to start is by finding a melody and chords to match this lyric, then a groove underneath that seems to support what it's saying. (You're welcome to make minor changes to the lyric if it helps.) From there you can start thinking about the verses – what they're going to say and what they're going to sound like.

Now is also a good time to take a step back and decide what this song is about overall – who is singing, who they're singing to, and why they're sharing this song's message – before you write the rest of the song. (You can check Appendix 2 for more guidance on this.)

[DAYS 3–4]

CHORD PROGRESSION STARTER

“I never judge my own songwriting. It's just my heart.

What's there to judge about your own heart?”

BANKS

One of the best ways to get into a new song is to start with a chord progression – it gives you a solid base and structure to build everything else on top of.

So that's what you're going to do in today's challenge – I've written verse and chorus chord progressions for you, then it's up to you to write the rest of the song using them.

Like before, you'll want to spend some time thinking about what the song is about – what story or concept it explores – before you dive into any serious writing.

Why it matters: A solid chord progression is a great foundation for an entire song – so being able to build grooves, melodies and lyrics around them is an essential songwriting skill.

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DAYS 3–4 CHALLENGE



60–90 mins

Build a complete song out of these verse and chorus chord progressions:

VERSE

Am	G	F	G	
Am	G	F	G	
Am	G/B	C	Am	
Dm	F	G		

CHORUS

Am	F	C	G/B	
Am	F	C	G/B	
Am	F	C	C/E	
F		C		

Start building musically from wherever you like – with a groove, vocal melody, rhythm, anything. Once you have a song idea or story that suits the music you’ve created, you can then try crafting a full lyric. In this challenge, I recommend you keep the chorus lyric really simple and repetitive, and save most of the details for the verses.

As a quick reminder, ‘G/B’ means a G chord over a B bass. Write a bridge today if you like, but you’ll need to add your own chords.

[DAYS 5–6]

TITLE STARTER

“Suffer the pain of discipline or suffer the pain of regret.”

ANONYMOUS

Another great way into a song is a title. Most of the time, a song’s title is also its lyrical hook – the key word or phrase that’s repeated a lot in the song’s lyric. And as you might know, a good title captures your song’s central idea in a direct, succinct and interesting way.

In fact, one hallmark of great songwriting is where every line in a song repeats, explores or expands on the song’s title – or at least its big idea – in some way.

That means the trick with starting with a title is making sure your song’s idea and title fit each other well, then building a lyric around that idea and title. That’s what you’re going to practice doing in this challenge.

Why it matters: A great song is organized around a great title – not only to capture your listener’s attention but also to give you a single focus to craft a song about.

DAYS 5–6 CHALLENGE



60–90 mins

Write a song using one of the following titles:

- [1] Enough**
- [2] Hasta Mañana**
- [3] Look But Don't Touch**
- [4] Too Late Now**
- [5] One More Time**
- [6] Class**
- [7] Patience**

If you want to, you can make changes to the title you've chosen – especially if it helps you integrate it within your chorus lyric.

Start wherever you like, but after you've figured out your song's central idea, story or message, it's a good idea to try write a chorus lyric that hammers your song's big idea home and includes the title somewhere, maybe more than once.

From there you might play around with finding instrumental grooves that also support your song's big idea – if it's a song with an upbeat message, you probably want an upbeat groove, for example – and add verses that expand on, explore and add detail to your song's overall message.

[DAYS 7–8]

FORBIDDEN LOVE

“Do what you can with all you have, wherever you are.”

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Sometimes, the trick to creating something remarkable is to give yourself a specific limitation or restriction. Creativity thrives on limitations, so paradoxical as it might sound, challenging yourself to work around a particular restriction can be a great way of motivating yourself to create something really original.

In today’s challenge, you’re going to write a really common song type – a love song – given one specific constraint.

Why it matters: If you want to create differently, you have to think differently. One great way of doing that is by giving yourself a specific restriction or limitation, then seeing what creative ideas it leads you to.

DAYS 7–8 CHALLENGE



60–90 mins

Write a love song that never uses the word ‘love’.

The trick here is coming up with an interesting and convincing way of saying ‘I love you’ without actually saying ‘I love you’.

As always, try to figure out your song’s big idea – who is singing, who is being sung to and what your song’s main message is – before you begin. Whatever way you decide to say ‘I love you’ without using the word ‘love’ may also become your song’s lyrical hook.

If you’ve written a similar song before, or you just fancy taking on an even tougher challenge, you can write a love song that never uses the word ‘you’ instead.

[DAYS 9–10]

WORD CLUSTER #1

“The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing.”

WALT DISNEY

One really powerful way of getting your ideas flowing is to lower your standards and get down whatever ideas you have, as they come – because you can improve a bad idea but you can’t improve no idea.

That means that early on in the creative process, the more ideas you can get down, the better. From there you’ll usually find your mind picks out the most interesting ideas and starts joining them together – making the connections that you’re going to use to build a complete song.

Today’s challenge is about putting this idea into practice – I’ve given you a handful of words to play with and it’s up to you to find connections between them and transform them into a lyric.

Why it matters: Songwriting is about forming connections between different ideas. Sometimes a great way to start a song is by sketching out words, phrases or musical ideas then figuring out how to connect them.

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DAYS 9–10 CHALLENGE



60–90 mins

Write a song that uses at least five of the words in this word cluster:

belong

see devotion

truth attitude forever

loving something

never knowing

...!!

...that's it for this preview.

To complete the full 30-Day Challenge, pick up a copy at

thesongfoundry.com/30-day-challenges