

## 1 SPEAKING

- a** Work in pairs and discuss the questions together.
- 1 Is there a pop song or piece of music that you like a lot? Why do you like it?
  - 2 What do you think makes a song good or bad – the tune, the lyrics, the singer's voice or something else?

## 2 VOCABULARY: Music words

- a** Match the words in **bold** in sentences 1–4 to definitions a–d.

- 1 ☐ The thing I don't like about rap music is that the rhythm is more important than the **melody**.
- 2 ☐ I can't remember all the lyrics of the song – only the words of the **chorus**.
- 3 ☐ Whenever he concentrates hard, he usually **hums** a tune.
- 4 ☐ That song has a really **catchy** tune – I can't get it out of my head.

- a the part of the song that is repeated more than once, often between each verse
- b pleasing and easy to remember
- c the tune of a piece of music
- d to sing a tune without opening your mouth

- b** Discuss the questions.

- 1 Do all pop songs have a chorus?
- 2 Are you able to hum? Do you know someone who hums a lot?
- 3 What's a current pop song that has a catchy tune?
- 4 Do you prefer simple or complicated melodies?

## 3 READING 1

- a** Read the article on page 53 about how to write a hit pop song. Student A: read Ella's part of the text. Student B: read Josh's part. Follow these steps:

Step 1

Read only the three headlines and think about what the songwriter might say in each section.

Step 2

Read the article quickly to see if your predictions were correct or not.

Step 3

Read the article again and make notes. You will need to use your notes to tell another student about your songwriter.

## 4 SPEAKING

- a** Work in pairs, Student A with Student B. Tell each other about the songwriter you read about. As you listen and speak, think about questions 1 and 2.

- 1 What suggestion do both songwriters make?
- 2 What differences are there in the two songwriters' approach to songwriting?

- b** When you have finished exercise 4a, discuss your answers to questions 1 and 2 with another pair of students.

## 5 READING 2

- a** Read the part of the article you didn't read in exercise 3a. Of all the advice that both Ella and Josh suggest, which do you think is the most useful for people who want to write songs? Why?



### BETTER READING: IDENTIFYING STYLE AND TONE

A part of understanding a text means understanding the writer's tone or style as well as all the information in it.

#### Ella writes:

But really it's better to keep it shorter – people can't concentrate forever!

#### And Josh writes:

You might be at the supermarket or washing the dishes.

- 1 Do these examples make their texts ...?
  - a formal and serious
  - b neutral and informative
  - c informal and quietly amusing
- 2 Find more language in the texts that is similar to the examples above. Answer these questions.
  - a Both writers use the pronoun 'you'. Does this refer to readers in general or only songwriters?
  - b Why do Ella and Josh use 'you'?

## 6 SPEAKING

- a** You can have two free tickets to a music concert. It can be any singer, band or orchestra that you would like. Make notes about the following:

- 1 The name of the performers or musicians
- 2 Why you would like to go to the concert
- 3 Where you would like the concert to be held
- 4 Who you would take with you and why

- b** In pairs, tell each other about the concert you would like to attend. Are there any similarities in your choices?

# How to write a **HIT POP SONG**



**Ella** (songwriter)

## ***It's all about the timing***

History tells us that pop songs have got longer over the decades. In the 1950s, the average pop song was just 2 minutes and 36 seconds long, which is nothing at all. By the beginning of the 2010s, the average length was 4 minutes and 26 seconds. In 1997, the British band Oasis released the song 'All Around the World', which is 9 minutes and 20 seconds – one of the longest songs in the history of pop music. But really it's better to keep it shorter – people can't concentrate forever! So avoid a long introduction, start with the melody and make sure it's about 3 to 4 minutes long.

## ***You've got to have a hook***

No, not a fishing hook! A hook is that catchy bit of melody that sticks in a person's ear and they hum it all day. The Germans call it an 'ear worm'. ABBA songwriters Benny and Björn suggest having about five hooks in one song, which is good advice – look at how many hits ABBA had. Everyone says you shouldn't begin a song with the chorus. But American songwriter and producer Nile Rodgers admits that most of his songs begin with a chorus – and he's sold more than 100 million records. So don't be afraid to start with a chorus. Just make sure the tune is good.

## ***Say something new***

Don Black, who writes the lyrics of songs for films, says that a successful song should try and say something new – about people, about love, about life. Maybe. But if you think of the word 'love' and the number of times it comes up in pop songs, then you don't want to be too original. It's probably better to have a simple message, which is what the Beatles did – look at 'All You Need is Love'. But you'll probably be more successful if you write a song about something you know. Even if you are saying the same old thing, at least you'll be saying it your way. And your way might just sound fresh and new to everyone else.



**Josh** (songwriter)

## ***Get that idea down quickly***

You never know when you're going to have a good idea for a song. You might be at the supermarket or washing the dishes. When you do get a good idea, make a note of it immediately – before the melody disappears from your mind. This is the point where we say thank goodness for mobile phones. You can just get it out and sing or hum the bit of melody into one of the voice notes, which means you've got it recorded. The same goes for lyrics: if you suddenly think of a good phrase, write it down or record it on your phone. These are moments of inspiration which might just turn into hits.

## ***Don't try and write a hit***

OK, so this afternoon you'll sit down and write a hit song. Sorry. It just won't happen. You'll sit there, and the ideas won't come. And if they do, you'll be constantly asking yourself if the song has the potential to be number one. There's a good chance you'll end up writing a boring song. You're more likely to write a hit if you think about what you really want to say. Write about something that's familiar to you – a situation, a feeling, a story. Just try different melodies and lyrics until they seem to come together. And who knows? You might get lucky and it'll be a hit.

## ***Do it all the time***

If you want to be a good songwriter, you need to be writing all the time. More often than not, you'll make a note of ideas for melodies and lyrics, and they won't develop into a full song. Don't worry about it. Save them somewhere and move on to something else. But never throw away an idea! Six months later, you might have another great idea. And you'll find that the new idea will go together brilliantly with an old idea that you thought was rubbish. Some hit pop songs have been written in an afternoon, but lots more have been worked on for months. Sometimes, hits take time.