

SONGWRITING SECRETS



SONG FORM



# FORM 1

best music coach



SUPER SONGWRITER SUCCESS SYSTEM LEVEL 1: FORM

YOUR WORKBOOK

LET'S DO THIS!

[www.bestmusiccoach.com](http://www.bestmusiccoach.com)

# your coach

workbook

songwriting secrets: form

2



## Dan Spencer

Dan Spencer has 10+ years of music coaching experience and is the author of many books in the “Best Books for Beginners” series with 7,000+ books sold since 2020.

His studio experience includes writing, playing on, and producing indie charting songs in various genres for indie labels. Dan’s live performance experience includes performances in most modern genres including, CCM, blues, funk, fusion, rock, and more.

Dan is currently coaching students, recording, producing songs, writing more books, and can be seen and heard as a music expert on TV stations, The Best Music Podcast, Music Mastery Podcast, and YouTube.

**@bestmusiccoach**  
**@musicmentordan**

# your dream

## me

Whatever you want to do in music is your dream music goal. This dream made you want to make music in the past or now. A dream music goal can be big or small, the size does not matter... what matters is that it is your dream and you want it to be real.

What is your dream music goal?

**dream  
music  
goal**

**my dream music goal**

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bonus group



# truth

Answer each question

**01.** does talent matter?

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**02.** are you bad at music?

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**03.** are you too old to learn music?

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# welcome



## Welcome #MusicMaker

1. A Music Maker is a passionate lover of music anywhere on their musical journey.
2. A Music Maker creates music without judging themselves or others. They make music for the love of making music.
3. A Music Maker is always improving and celebrating progress. They love the goal as much as they love the journey.
4. A Music Maker Shares the joy, expression, and emotion of making music with themselves and others.

You are a #musicmaker.

Dan Spencer

## Introduction

The way people have been taught song form for the past 50 years has been confusing. Most of the time, you would have been shown a list of different song forms, then been told to "go figure it out yourself". I found this way of learning confusing, and many students who have worked with me over the years have shared the same feeling. Here, you have a much easier and simpler way to understand song form, and you will "get it" much faster and have more fun than I did when I first started out in songwriting. In fact, I have made this as easy and simple as possible, you can just sit back and relax as you download this incredibly valuable understanding into your brain. Enjoy!

## What we will cover

Included in this book and course is **green**

Included in other books and courses in this series is **black**

### **1. All songs use contrast and symmetry**

#### **1a. Contrast is key**

##### **1a.1 Repetition**

##### **1a.2 Energy**

#### **1b. We crave symmetry**

### **2. A song is a musical framework consisting of 5 parts**

#### **2a. Form**

##### **2a.1. Cyclical songwriting**

###### **2a.1.1. Intro**

###### **2a.1.2. Verse**

###### **2a.1.3. Refrain**

###### **2a.1.4. Chorus**

###### 2a.1.5. Pre chorus

###### 2a.1.6. Post chorus

###### **2a.1.7. Bridge**

###### **2a.1.8. Solo**

###### **2a.1.9. Instrumental**

###### **2a.1.10. Interlude**

#### 2b. Lyrics

#### 2c. Rhythm

#### 2d. Melody

#### 2e. Harmony

# repetition

## 1. All Songs Use Contrast and Symmetry

### 1a. Contrast is Key

#### 1a.1 Repetition

Most of the songs you know and love use something called **cyclical songwriting**. Cyclical songwriting is when there are different sections that repeat. How those sections repeat can make or break a song.

##### 1a.1.1 Too much repetition = boring/cheesy

Songs are like meals at a restaurant.

They have different sections that contrast with each other to keep things interesting. Each section of the meal has a name.

1. Bread basket or "amuse bouche" (a small "fun thing for your mouth" before the appetizer—say ah-mooz boosh)
2. An appetizer
3. A main course
4. Dessert

If a restaurant serves you bread all four sections of the meal

1. Amuse bouche  
Bread

2. Appetizer  
Bread

3. Main course  
Bread

4. Dessert  
Bread



It would be boring because it's the same thing over and over again.

**(Too much repetition = boring/cheesy)**

# repetition

## 1a.1.2 Too Much Variety = Chaos

If a restaurant serves you unconnected food all four sections of the meal

1. Amuse bouche  
Bread



2. Appetizer  
Fruit salad



3. Main course  
Hot wings



4. Dessert  
Sushi rolls (maki)



You might feel sick from the jumps in flavor and texture

**(Too much variety = chaos)**

**too much repetition = cheesy  
too much variety = chaos**

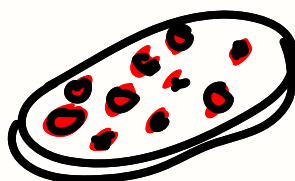
## 1a.1.3 Balance of Repetition and Variety = A Good Song

If the restaurant serves you Italian food all four sections of the meal

1. Amuse bouche  
Bread



2. Appetizer  
Pepper flake crostini



3. Main course  
Pasta marsala



4. Dessert  
Almond gelato



There is a balance between repetition and variety. All the dishes are Italian, many have the same ingredients, and the similar flavors ties the meal together.

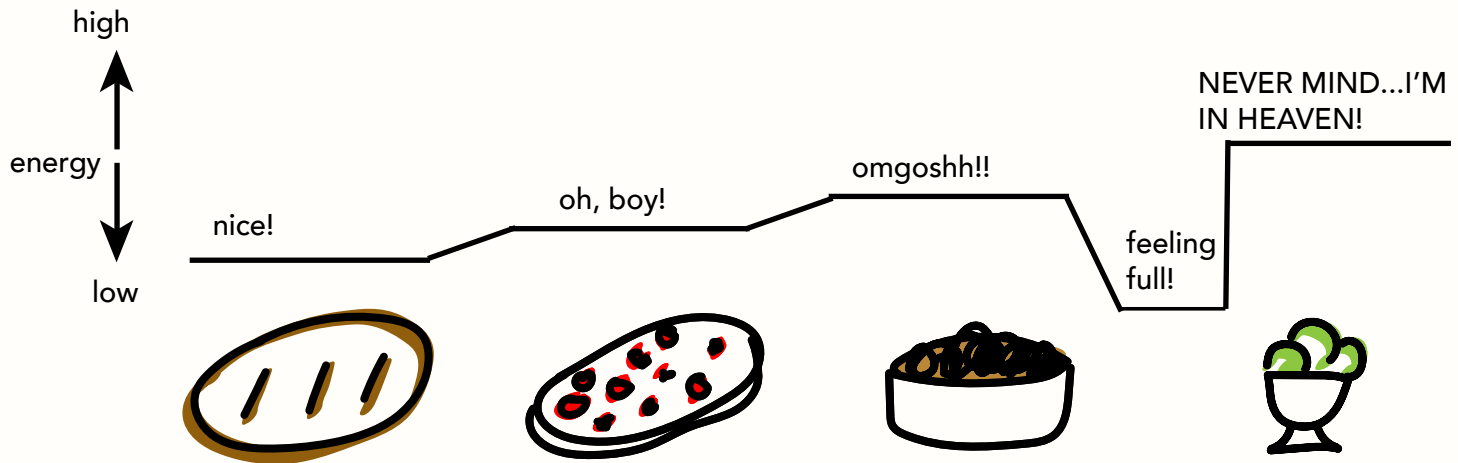
Song form works the same way. When you have a balance in the foundation or skeleton of your song, it puts all the parts (sections) of your song in the right order so everything sounds and feels good.



# energy

## 1a.2 Energy

Each section of a well-planned meal creates a different level of energy in your mind and body.



Songs sections work the same way, bringing the energy up and down to keep a song interesting through contrast.

### 1a.2.1 Energy Increase

Most movies, books, and stories use a general increase in energy from the start through the end. This is what makes the story exciting—it goes somewhere. Your songs will be stories too.

### 1a.2.2 Energy Decrease

Too much repetition is cheesy, so having moments where the energy comes down is a great way to use the principal of “contrast is key”. We will explore how the top songwriters from many decades have used this principal in the coming pages.

### 1a.2.3 Energy Stays the Same

Sometimes the best move is to keep the energy at the same level in order to highlight a part of your song. Perhaps you want the audience to focus only on the words (story) for a particular section. If you don't change energy levels, they might have an easier time focusing on the **meaning** and **message**. It is also true that you can bring attention to the meaning and message of your song with an artful use of an increase or decrease in energy.

## 2. A Song is a Musical Framework

### 2a. Form

Now we are going to dive deep into form, how it works, and how the principal of **Contrast Is Key** plays out to create interesting songs.

#### 2a.1 Cyclical Songs

Cyclical songs have sections that repeat in **cycles**.

##### 2a.1.1-10 Song Section Names

I = Intro

An intro is the introduction of a song. There can be instruments and singing/words.

V = Verse

V' = Secondary Verse

A verse is where the story of the song is told. "Once upon a time...Happily ever after..."

C = Chorus

A chorus is the repeated part of the song that happens in between verses, typically using the same words each time it repeats. This is the catchiest part of the song that everyone remembers. The chorus can sum up the "main idea" of the song. The chorus celebrates the idea of the song, it throws a party for the whole thing the song is about!

R = Refrain

A refrain is sung words repeated at the end of a section each time that section is heard.

B = Bridge

A bridge can help tell the story of the song, or be nonsense. It is usually sounds different compared to the rest of the song. A bridge is a change of pace, a new flavor, a shift in gears.

Inst = Instrumental

Intr = Interlude

An instrumental is a section of a song with only instruments. When an instrumental section creates a short pause between sections of a song, we call it an interlude. Interludes can include voices.

Instrumental = Long duration

Interlude = Short duration

S = Solo

A solo is an instrumental that is highlighted by a featured instrumental performer playing a solo that could be improvised on the spot, written out beforehand, or a mix of both.

O = Outro/Fade Out

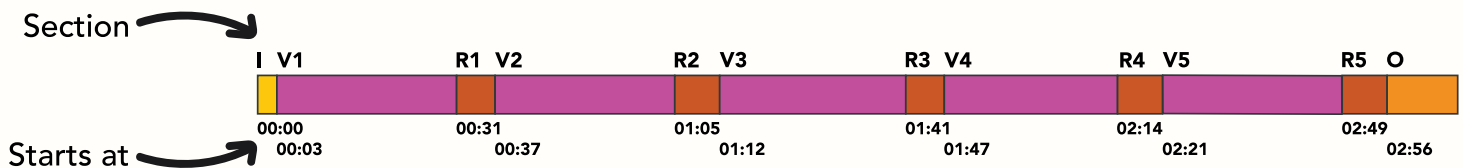
An outro is the end of a song, sometimes similar to the intro, but often very different. When the song ends with the volume of the music being reduced to silence over time, it is called a "fade out."

## Song Maps

Song maps are the key to being able to quickly understand form using real songs. Song maps show the order of sections (the form) and sometimes the energy of each section.

### How to Read Song Maps: Form

Song Maps show the Form of a song. Each section is labeled with the short version of the section name. Below the Song Map are timestamps at the start of each section so you can know for sure what section you are in at all times. There are numbers after the short version of some section names so we can tell which verse, refrain, or chorus we are in. Intros, bridges, and outros don't repeat and we won't keep track of instrumentals, interludes, and solos. In the song map below, verse 1 starts at 00:03, refrain 1 starts at 00:31, verse 2 starts at 00:37, and refrain 2 starts at 01:05.



### How to Read Timestamps

The timestamp shows how many seconds or minutes into the song sections begin.

03:29  
minutes:seconds

# energy maps

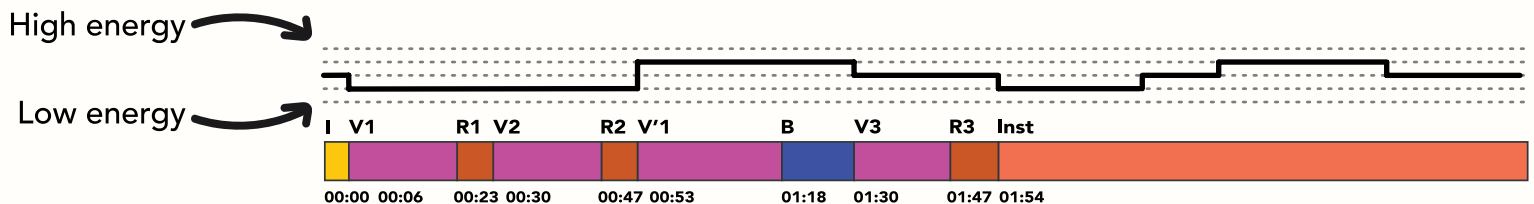
## Definitions

**Song.** A song is words set to a melody.

**Production.** A production is the wrapping paper for a song...it is the drums, guitars, bass guitars, instruments, sound effects, background vocals...everything besides the words sung by the main singer.

## How to Read Song Maps: Energy

Energy Maps are above song maps and show the energy of each section so you can see how Form is not just about the section names—it's also about what happens in the sections! The intensity of the sections in recordings can be a little misleading. Sometimes the production changes levels of energy to make up for a lack of energy change in the words and melody of a song. Because of this "production energy" that can be different than the "song energy", the energy maps are not perfect, but they show a general idea of the energy of a section.



What contributes to energy? We will unpack this question a bit more in other books and courses—for now just see if you can hear the change in energy.

# form examples

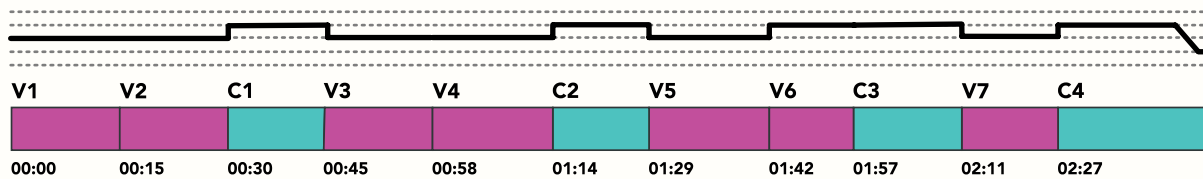
## Form Examples

These examples are already set up for you in your course. Listen through the songs and follow along with the maps so you can tell what section of the song is happening at all times. After going through several maps you will start to spot the patterns and understand how the different sections make up the form of songs. You can listen through these songs as many times as you want until you feel like you are hearing the change between sections.

### Blow the Man Down - The Longest Johns

Song duration: 02:48

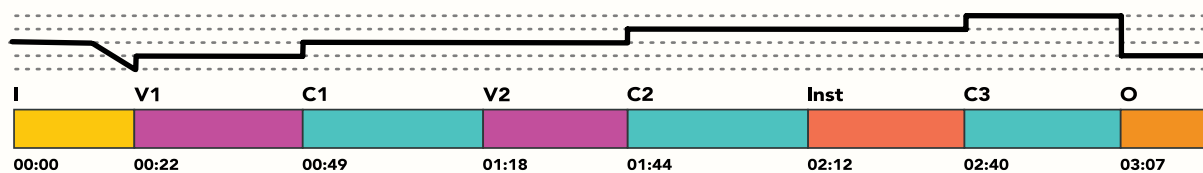
Each verse tells part of the story. Each chorus repeats the main idea of the song.



### Greensleeves - The Celtic Ladies

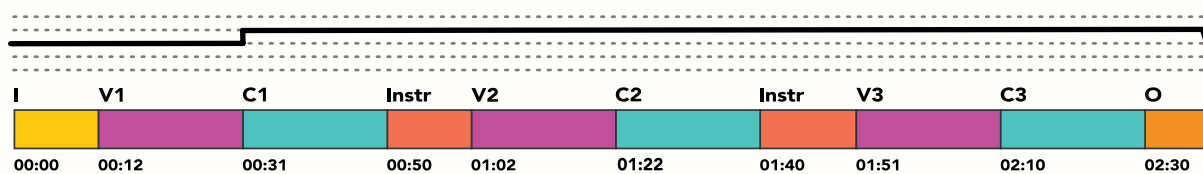
Song duration: 03:20

The intro sets the feeling for the song. Each verse tells part of the story. The choruses repeat the main idea of the song, a broken love. The instrumental provides a break between choruses where the instruments keep the energy going! The Outro wraps the song up.



### Wabash Cannonball - Johnny Cash

Song duration: 02:40

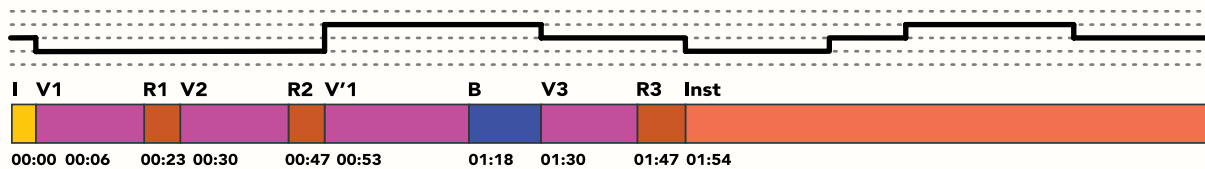


# form examples

## Cheek to Cheek - Fred Astaire

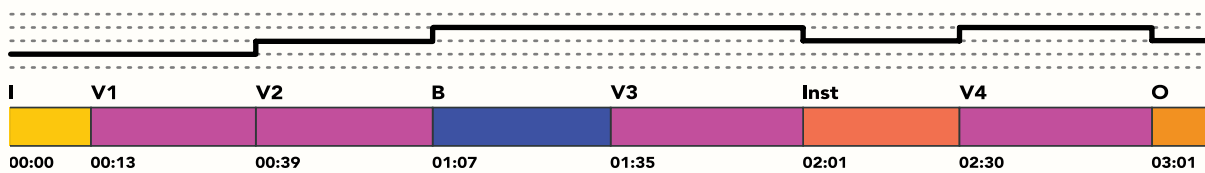
Song duration: 03:17

R = "When we're out together dancing cheek to cheek."



## The Christmas Song (Merry Christmas To You) - Nat "King" Cole

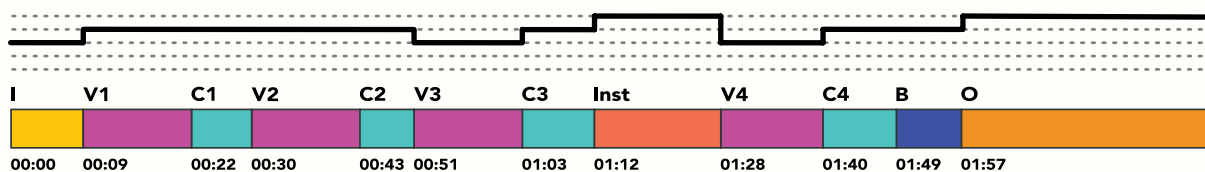
Song duration: 03:11



## Respect - Aretha Franklin

Song duration: 02:29

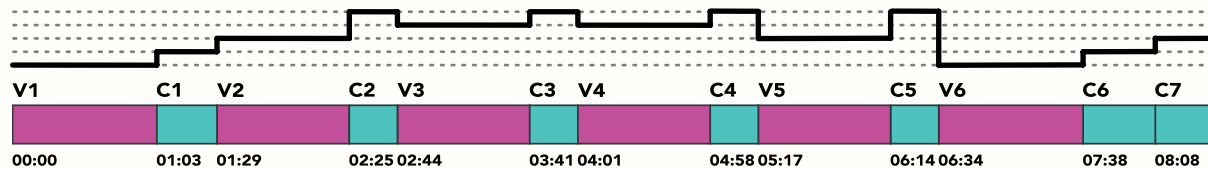
This song does not have a chorus. There is a section after each verse that is "kinda" a chorus, so we will call it a chorus. There is no bridge, but there is a breakdown section where Aretha sings "R-E-S-P-E-C-T..." that we will call a bridge.



# form examples

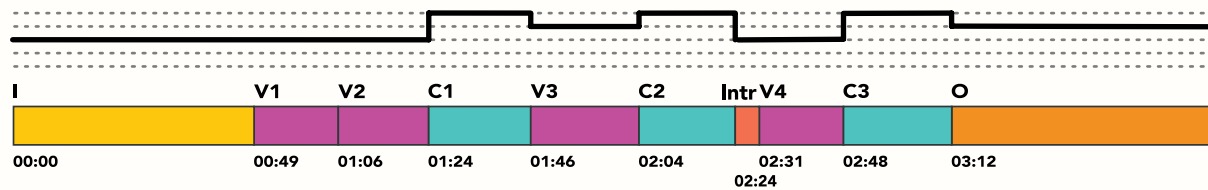
## American Pie - Don McLean

Song duration: 08:30



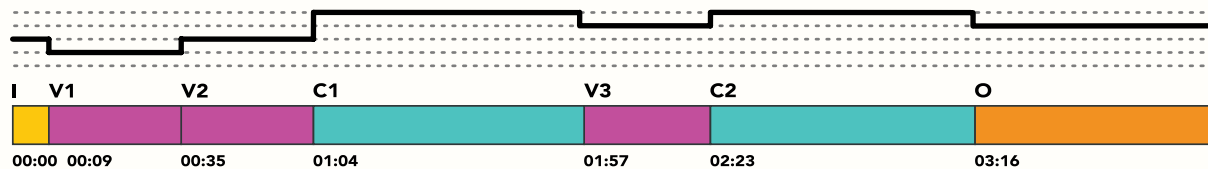
## Eye of the Tiger – Survivor

Song duration: 04:05



## Something About The Way You Look Tonight - Elton John

Song duration: 04:06



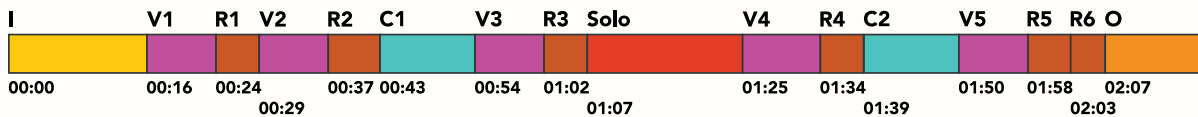
Now we will explore some more combinations of sections from famous songs.

# form examples

## Verse + Refrain + Chorus

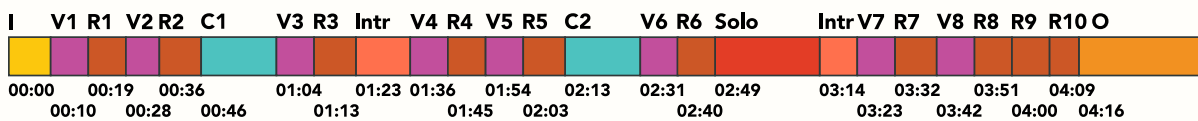
### I Feel Fine - The Beatles

Song duration: 02:19



### Wake Me Up When September Ends - Green Day

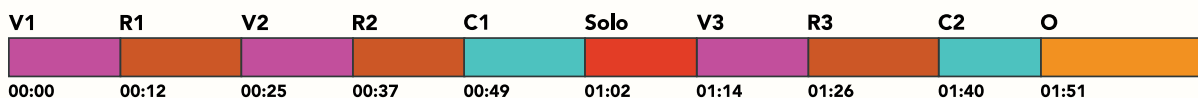
Song duration: 04:47



### All My Loving - The Beatles

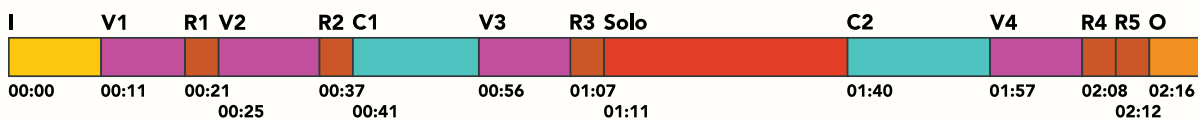
Song duration: 02:09

Is the chorus really a chorus or is it a bridge? What do you think?



### On The Road Again - Willie Nelson

Song duration: 02:23





# form examples

## Verses Only

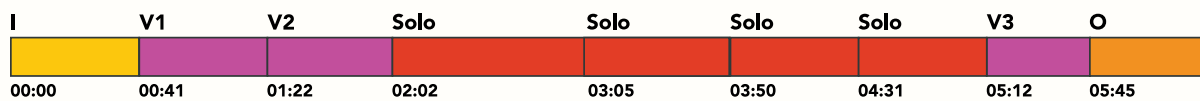
### Words of Love - Buddy Holly

Song duration: 01:53



### Money - Pink Floyd

Song duration: 06:23



### Never Dreamed You'd Leave In Summer - Stevie Wonder

Song duration: 02:52

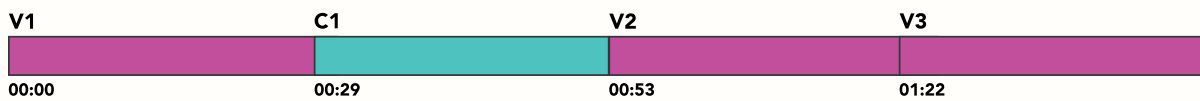


# form examples

## Verse + Chorus

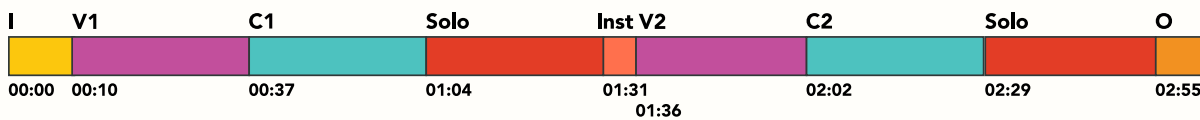
### Single Verse and Chorus

Ready To Go Home - Hank Williams Sr.



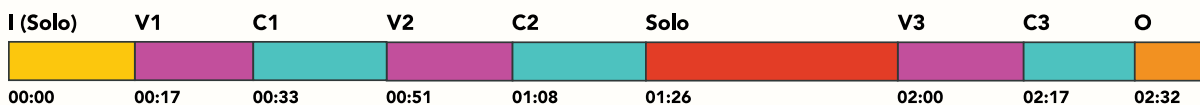
I Shall Be Released - Bob Dylan

Song duration: 03:03



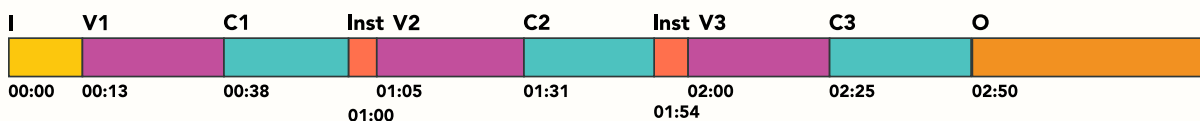
Johnny B. Goode - Chuck Berry

Song duration: 02:42



Fire and Rain - James Taylor

Song duration: 03:32



# form examples

## Double Verse

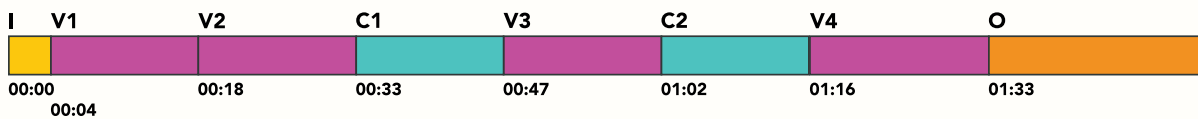
### I'm In Love With A Girl - Big Star

Song duration: 01:47



### The Letter - The Box Tops

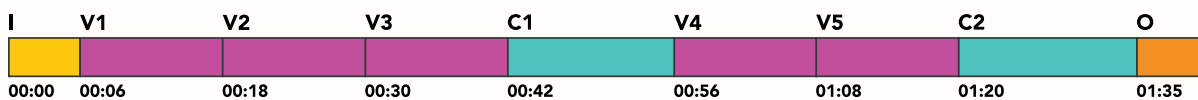
Song duration 01:54



## Triple Verse

### Buy Me a Pony – Spiderbait

Song duration: 01:41

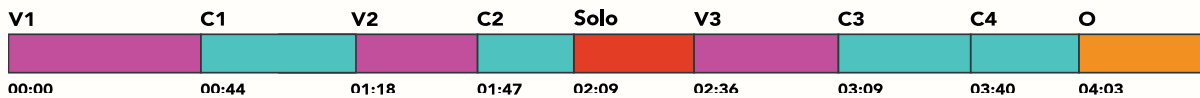


# form examples

## Double Chorus

### I Will Always Love You - Whitney Houston

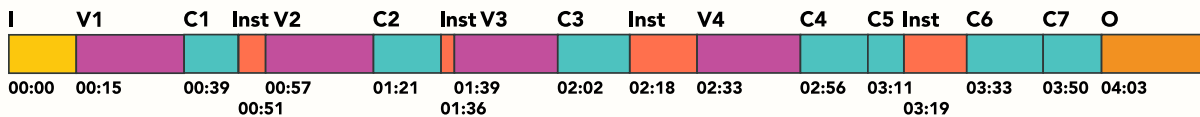
Song duration: 04:32



### Bang a Gong - T-Rex

Song duration: 04:27

C5 feels like a false start...it's a 1/2 chorus that leads into the instrumental section...how exciting!



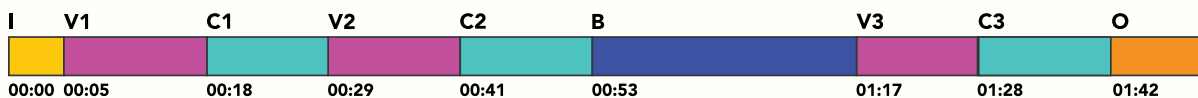
# form examples

## Verse + Chorus + Bridge

### Single Verse + Chorus

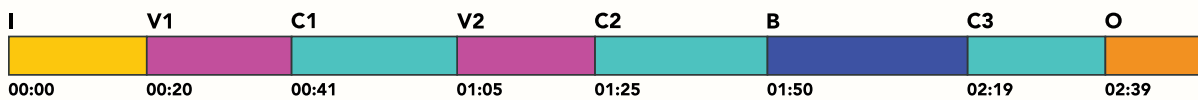
#### Koka Kola - The Clash

Song duration: 01:49



#### Tracks of My Tears - Smokey Robinson

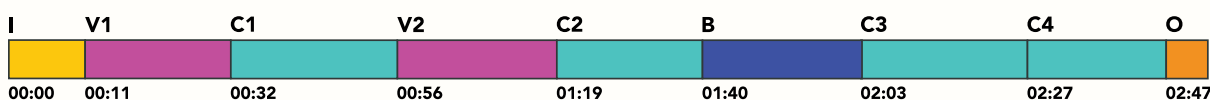
Song duration: 02:54



### Double Chorus

#### Stay With Me - Sam Smith

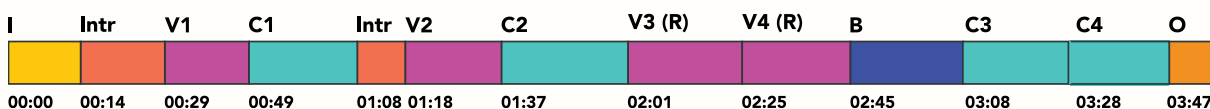
Song duration: 02:53



#### Crazy in Love - Beyoncé

Song duration: 03:56

The instrumental sections in this song contain both an interlude (with vocals) and a purely instrumental section. V3 and V4 are performed as a rap by Jay-Z.



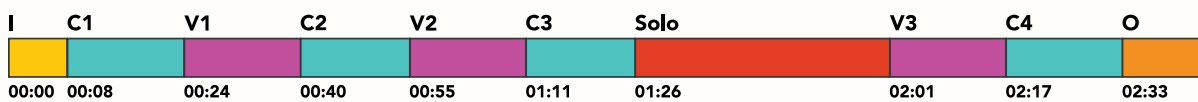
# form examples

## Chorus first

You can start any song with a chorus.

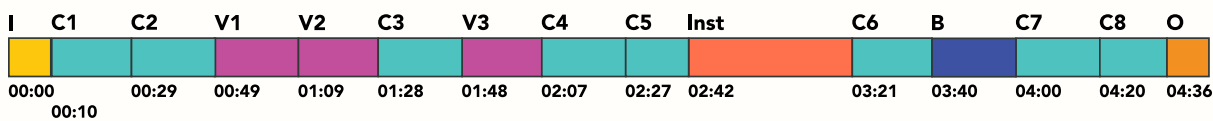
### Louie Louie - The Kingsman

Song duration: 2:45



### Shout - Tears For Fears

Song duration: 04:46



### Le Freak - Chic

Song duration: 03:31

