

Analysis 2: Lyrics in Modern Popular Music

Learn how to read, analyze, and understand the words (lyrics) in modern pop songs. Understanding the rhymes of lyrics will help you identify sections of a song!

How to Identify Rhymes

What are Vowel Sounds?

The vowels we use in conversation take many forms. For example: the "a" in "hay" sounds like "ay". The "a" in "halt" sounds like "ah".

Perfect Rhyme

A perfect rhyme (also called "full rhyme and "true rhyme") is when the sound of the ends of two words match perfectly with a common vowel sound and consonant sound. This means the letters do not need to match (**great: fate**), just sound the same when spoken aloud.

Vowel: "Ay"	"Ooh"	"Ah"	"Ay"
Rhymes: great: late: grate: fate	dutiful: beautiful	part: heart: cart	day: prey: say

Imperfect Rhyme

An imperfect rhyme (also called a "family rhyme") uses three groups of sounds to match for a close rhyme. To identify an imperfect rhyme, look for matching vowel sounds and consonant sounds from within the groups for the end of the words.

- Group 1:** b, d, g, p, t, k
- Group 2:** v, z, zh, j, f, th, s, sh, ch, gh, ft
- Group 3:** m, n, ng

Group 1 Imperfect Rhymes

Vowel: "Uh"	"Eh"	"lh"
Rhyme: flub: dud: duck: tucked: but	beg: fed: nutmeg	bit: stick: lid: big: pip: bib

Group 2 Imperfect Rhymes

Vowel: "A"	"lh"	"Eh"
Rhyme: laugh: bath: mismatched: jazz	itch: lift: wish: unhitch	tenth: bench: entrench

Group 3 Imperfect Rhymes

Vowel: "Oh"	"Ah"	"Owh"
Rhyme: foam: bone: brownstone	farm: barn: overarm	belong: gone: mom

Additive and Subtractive Rhymes

Additive and subtractive rhymes match in vowel sound, but have different consonants, beginnings, and endings. Don't worry about telling the difference between additive and subtractive rhymes.

Vowel: "I"	"E"	"O"	"lh"
Rhyme: cry: ride: alive: smile	free: speed:	glow: stove	grits: fit

Consonant Rhymes

Consonant rhymes do not match vowel sounds, only the consonant sound at the end of the words. Consonant rhymes are the least "rhyming" of all the rhyme types so far. For this reason they are sometimes considered a rhyme, and sometimes they are not considered to be a rhyme.

Vowel:	"ce"	"ne"	"me"	"ed"
Rhyme:	defense: innocence	one: gone: alone	come: home	fitted: crawled: snared

Rhyme Scheme and Analysis

To understand, identify, and analyze the rhyme scheme we will use capital letters from the alphabet to label different rhyming groups. The rhymes we are looking for happen in the last word in a "line" of lyrics. Where a lyric line begins and ends is up to the writer of the lyrics of a song, you may find different interpretations of how the lines are written in a single song in online lyrics websites.

Rhyming words can be found at the ends of lines in different parts of songs! They are not always right next to each other. Search and explore all the lyrics to find matching perfect, imperfect, additive and subtractive, and (sometimes) consonant rhymes!

In the example below, "wrong" is at the end of the first line and is labeled "A". The last word of the third line "long" rhymes with "wrong" so it will also be "A". The second line ends with "discourteously" and is labeled "B". "discourteously" rhymes with "company".

Each paragraph of lyrics is called a "stanza". Every time there is a space between stanzas, go back to letter A. The A letters from different stanzas do not need to rhyme. For example, "wrong" in the first line of the first stanza does not rhyme with "joy" at the end of the first line of the second stanza.

Lyrics

Alas, my love, you do me **wrong**,
 To cast me off **discourteously**.
 For I have loved you well and **long**,
 Delighting in your **company**.

Greensleeves was all my joy
 Greensleeves was my delight,
 Greensleeves was my heart of gold,
 And who but my lady Greensleeves.

Your vows you've broken, like my **heart**,
 Oh, why did you so enrapture **me**?
 Now I remain in a world **apart**
 But my heart remains in **captivity**.

Greensleeves was all my joy
 Greensleeves was my delight,
 Greensleeves was my heart of gold,
 And who but my lady Greensleeves.

Rhyme Scheme

A
B
A
B

A
B
C
D

A
B
A
B

A
B
C
D

How to Perform a Rhyme Structure Analysis of a Song

1. Write an "A" next to (before or after) the first line of each stanza.
2. Write an "A" next to any other line that rhymes with the first line in that stanza.
3. Write a "B" next to the next line in each stanza that does not rhyme with "A".
4. Write a "B" next to all the lines of the song that rhyme with the "B" line in that stanza.
5. Write a "C" next to the next line of each stanza that does not rhyme with "A" or "B". (Not pictured).
6. Write a "C" next to all the lines of the song that rhyme with the "C" line in that stanza. (Not pictured).
7. Continue on down the alphabet until all lines for all stanzas have been assigned a letter.

1.

Amazing grace how sweet the sound, **A**
 That saved a wretch like me.
 I once was lost but now I'm found,
 Was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, **A**
 And grace my fears relieved.
 How precious did that grace appear,
 The hour I first believed.

3.

Amazing grace how sweet the sound, **A**
 That saved a wretch like me. **B**
 I once was lost but now I'm found, **A**
 Was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, **A**
 And grace my fears relieved. **B**
 How precious did that grace appear, **A**
 The hour I first believed.

2.

Amazing grace how sweet the sound, **A**
 That saved a wretch like me.
 I once was lost but now I'm found, **A**
 Was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, **A**
 And grace my fears relieved.
 How precious did that grace appear, **A**
 The hour I first believed.

4.

Amazing grace how sweet the sound, **A**
 That saved a wretch like me. **B**
 I once was lost but now I'm found, **A**
 Was blind but now I see. **B**

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, **A**
 And grace my fears relieved. **B**
 How precious did that grace appear, **A**
 The hour I first believed. **B**

Rhyme Type	Vowel Match	Consonant Match
Perfect	✓	✓
Imperfect	✓	
Additive/Subtractive	✓	
Consonant		✓