

Lyric Stresses

What Are Stresses?

Stresses in lyrics are the emphasis placed on certain syllables or words within a line of a song. These stresses are used to create rhythm and musicality within the lyrics, and they contribute to the overall flow and feel of the song.

In written lyrics, stresses can be indicated by using accent marks or symbols, such as a stressed (´) or unstressed (-) mark above or below the syllables. In most cases, stresses are not marked and are instead implied through the natural flow and emphasis of the words.

Stresses can vary depending on the musical genre, style, and the intention of the songwriter. They can be used to create a specific rhythmic pattern, emphasize key words or phrases, or convey different emotions and moods.

How We Will Show Stresses

In this book we will use arrows to show stressed syllables.

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
Mary had a little lamb

Any time you see an arrow, say the part of the word the arrow is pointing to with emphasis to "feel" and hear the stress of the word.

How To Find Stresses

Spoken Stresses

Say:

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
"Mary had a little lamb".

The stresses sound like: "DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM". There are 4 stresses in this line.

The stresses come from the natural way we say the words. In the word "Mary" we say mArY, not maREE. Same In the word "little" we say LLittle, not liTUL.

Say:

↓ ↓ ↓
"I need you so badly".

The stresses sound like: "DUM da DUM da DUM da". There are 3 stresses in this line, even though the last stress has an extra "ly" on the end.

Musical Stresses

Using strong and weak beats, rhythms, ties, and performance marks, stresses can be changed. When we speak stresses as "DUM da DUM da DUM" they sound plodding, "too" basic, and a little awkward. The magic of lyrics is how that line of stresses are interpreted within the rhythm of the melody.

Underlying Pulse

Most lyrics have an underlying pulse of 2, 3, or 4. The 2 and 4 pulses work well in $\frac{4}{4}$. 3 pulse lyrics work well with $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{6}{8}$, and $\frac{12}{8}$. More on $\frac{6}{8}$ and $\frac{12}{8}$ in the next book.

Lyric Stress Analysis

For each line of lyrics, there is a rhyme scheme letter and the number of stresses in each line.

Example 1: "It Had To Be You" - Isham Jones

You can count "1, 2, 3" pulses between each stress. This song has a 3 pulse stress pattern.

Rhyme + Stress	Lyrics
A4	Why do I do just as you say?
A4	Why must I just give you your way?
B2	Why do I sigh
B2	Why don't I try
C2	To forget?
D5	It must have been that something lovers call fate
D4	Kept on saying I had to wait
E2	I saw them all
E2	Just couldn't fall
C2	Till we met
A2	It had to be you
A2	It had to be you
B2	I wandered around
B2	And finally found
A2	The somebody who
A2	Could make me be true
A2	Could make me be blue
C2	And even be glad
C2	Just to be sad
A2	Thinking of you

Example 2: "Mary Had A Little Lamb" - Traditional

You can count "1, 2" pulses between each stress. This song has a 2 pulse stress pattern. To make things more interesting there is a pattern in the number of pulses in each line. The first three lines of each couplet have 4 stresses, and the last line has 3 stresses. This change between the number of stresses is part of the movement of the lyrics that helps bring the song to life.

Rhyme + Stress

Lyrics

A4	Mary had a little lamb
A4	Little lamb, little lamb
A4	Mary had a little lamb
B3	Whose fleece was white as snow
A4	And everywhere that Mary went
A4	Mary went, Mary went
A4	Everywhere that Mary went
B3	The lamb was sure to go
A4	It followed her to school one day
A4	School one day, school one day
A4	It followed her to school one day
B3	Which was against the rules
A4	It made the children laugh and play
A4	Laugh and play, laugh and play
A4	It made the children laugh and play
B3	To see a lamb at school