

Lyrics in the Age of AI

Signal Engine — Book 4

By Danny Rules

For every musician who's ever finished a beat, loved the track, and left it sitting there with no words.

Introduction: You're Not Bad at Lyrics. You're Just Scared.

Here's the thing nobody says out loud: most musicians who "don't write lyrics" aren't actually bad at writing. They're afraid of being bad at writing. There's a difference.

With production, you can hide. A bad mix gets called "lo-fi." An off-tempo part becomes "experimental." But lyrics sit there, naked, in plain language, and they either mean something or they don't. That's terrifying.

So you leave it. You loop the track. You tell yourself you'll add words later. Later never comes.

AI changed that. Not because it writes great lyrics — it mostly doesn't — but because it removes the blank page. It gives you something to react to instead of something to create from nothing. And reacting is something you already know how to do.

That's this book.

This isn't about outsourcing your voice to a machine. This is about using a machine to get unstuck, then doing the real work yourself. The real work is the editing. The real work is finding what's true in the draft and cutting everything that isn't.

What AI Can't Do For You

AI doesn't know what your song is actually about. It doesn't know the specific image in your head — the one that made you start this track in the first place. It doesn't know your cadence, your vocabulary, the way you phrase things. It can't hear what sounds good when you sing it. It has no idea what you've been through.

That's all you. And that's the part that makes a song worth hearing.

The One Rule

Lyrics are **heard**, not read.

Print that out. Tattoo it. Set it as your lock screen.

Everything in this book comes back to that rule. A lyric that looks elegant on a page but clogs in your throat is a bad lyric. A lyric that looks rough on paper but hits every time you sing it is a great lyric. The page is not the test. Your voice is the test.

What You'll Be Able to Do

By the end of this book, you'll be able to:

- Write a complete lyric set for any song in under an hour
- Generate a usable AI draft in five minutes
- Edit that draft until it sounds like you — not a robot
- Build any song structure from scratch: verse, chorus, bridge, done
- Write lyrics that land when sung, not just when read
- Stop leaving songs unfinished forever

Let's start.

Chapter 1: How Suno Reads Lyrics

If you're using Suno to generate and produce your music — and if you've read *Sound Like You* (Book 1 in this series), you probably are — then you need to understand one thing before you write a single word:

Suno does not read your lyrics the way a human does.

It doesn't appreciate your imagery. It doesn't care that your second verse is more emotionally complex than your first. It processes your lyrics as a set of timing and phonetic cues, and it maps them to its generated melody based on syllable density and punctuation signals.

Understanding this changes how you write.

What Suno Actually Does With Your Lyrics

When you paste lyrics into Suno's custom lyrics field, here's roughly what it's doing:

1. **Counting syllables per line** to determine phrasing length
2. **Using punctuation** as phrasing guides (commas = breath, periods = stop, line breaks = phrase end)
3. **Recognizing structure tags** to understand where it is in the song
4. **Matching phonetic density** to the style and tempo you've described
5. **Ignoring your meaning entirely** unless you've embedded emotional words it can translate to a vocal performance style

It is a pattern-matching system with a very sophisticated ear for timing. It is not a poetry reader.

Why Syllable Count Matters More Than Rhyme

Rhyme is a bonus. Syllable count is mandatory.

If your line has 12 syllables and the next has 7, Suno will either cram the shorter line awkwardly or stretch it in ways that kill the phrasing. The melody will feel broken because the phrasing *is* broken.

Count your syllables. Every line. Especially in the chorus.

Example — Before: > I've been waiting for you all my life, holding on through the night >
Gone

That “Gone” is one syllable. The previous line was 14. Suno will either mash “Gone” into the tail of the previous line or leave a weird gap. Neither is what you want.

Example — After: > I've been waiting for you all my life, holding on through the night >
And now you're gone, you're finally gone from me

Now the syllable counts are closer: 14 vs. 12. It flows. Suno can work with that.

How Punctuation Affects Phrasing

Think of punctuation as your conductor's baton.

- **Comma (,)** — short breath, keep moving
- **Period (.)** — full stop, phrase ends here
- **Dash (—)** — dramatic pause, something follows
- **Line break** — natural phrase end
- **Double line break** — new section within the same structural block

Don't over-punctuate. Suno reads commas as breathing instructions. If every line ends with a comma, the vocal performance will feel choppy and rushed.

Example — Over-punctuated: > I wake up, every day, and wonder, if you'll stay, >
Looking, at the door, waiting, for your face.

Example — Clean: > I wake up every day and wonder if you'll stay > Looking at the door,
waiting for your face.

The second version breathes. One comma, one breath. The rest flows.

Structure Tags: Non-Negotiable

This is the single most important formatting skill you can learn for Suno.

Structure tags tell Suno what section of the song you're in. Without them, Suno treats your entire lyric block as one continuous verse and produces something shapeless.

The core tags:

[Intro]

[Verse]

[Verse 1]

[Verse 2]

[Pre-Chorus]

[Chorus]

[Bridge]

[Outro]

[Hook]

[Break]

[Instrumental]

Every section needs a tag. No exceptions.

Example — Correctly tagged lyrics:

[Verse 1]

I found your jacket in the backseat
Still smells like the last night we had
I keep it there to remind me
Of everything good and everything bad

[Pre-Chorus]

Maybe I'm holding on too long

Maybe I should let this go

[Chorus]

But it's the only thing that's left of you

The only proof that you were real

I can't throw out what I can't replace

I can't stop feeling what I feel

[Verse 2]

I drive the same roads we used to drive

I order the same food we used to share

It's like I'm looking for you everywhere

In everything, in no one there

[Pre-Chorus]

Maybe I'm holding on too long

Maybe I should let this go

[Chorus]

But it's the only thing that's left of you

The only proof that you were real

I can't throw out what I can't replace

I can't stop feeling what I feel

[Bridge]

I know you're not coming back

I know this isn't helping me

But grief doesn't follow logic

And I'm not ready to be free

[Chorus]

But it's the only thing that's left of you

The only proof that you were real

I can't throw out what I can't replace
I can't stop feeling what I feel

[Outro]

It's the only thing
The only thing

Notice: every section labeled. Choruses repeat in full. Bridge is distinct. Tags are in brackets, on their own line.

What You Can Do Now

- Write lyrics in sections, tag every one
 - Count syllables per line and keep them consistent within a section
 - Use punctuation sparingly and deliberately
 - Don't rhyme if it costs you syllable flow
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Chapter 2: The AI Draft — Getting Unstuck

The blank page is your enemy. AI is your crowbar.

You are not using AI to write your lyrics. You are using AI to give you something to react to. The difference is everything.

How to Prompt AI for a Lyric Draft

Bad prompt: *"Write me a sad song."*

That's a topic. Topics produce generic output. You'll get rain metaphors, tears on a pillow, someone leaving in the night. It's not wrong — it's just not yours.

Good prompt structure: 1. **Concept** — What’s the song actually about? 2. **Emotion** — What does it feel like? 3. **Key image** — What’s the one specific visual or detail you keep coming back to? 4. **Tone** — How does it sound? Dark, hopeful, angry, numb? 5. **Structure** — What sections do you need?

Example bad prompt: > Write sad breakup lyrics.

Example good prompt: > Write lyrics for a sad, slow R&B song about someone who keeps their ex’s jacket in their car because they can’t bring themselves to get rid of it. The feeling is grief disguised as routine — they’re not dramatic about it, they’re just going through the motions and the jacket is the only honest thing left. Tone: quiet, aching, specific. Structure: Verse 1, Pre-Chorus, Chorus, Verse 2, Pre-Chorus, Chorus, Bridge, Chorus. Chorus should hit the title: “Only Thing Left.”

That prompt gives AI something to work with. You’ll still need to edit — heavily — but you’ll have a shape to work from.

What Good AI Lyrics Look Like

Good AI output: - Has correct structure (sections make sense) - Has consistent syllable density - Has at least one image or specific detail worth keeping - Has a clear emotional throughline - Sounds like it could be sung

What Bad AI Lyrics Look Like

The “beautiful disaster” problem:

Your love was a beautiful disaster A storm that destroyed everything I built I loved you through the fire and the laughter But now all I have is the guilt

Nothing wrong with this technically. Syllables work. It rhymes. It has an emotional arc. But it’s a Hallmark card. “Beautiful disaster.” “Storm.” “Fire.” These images are borrowed. They belong to no one. They could be in any song, from any artist, in any year.

The “abstract spiral” problem:

Shadows of tomorrow Echo in the vast unknown Fragments of our sorrow Scattered seeds we've sown

This sounds lyrical. It is not. It means nothing. It is a collection of poetic-sounding words that have been arranged to rhyme. There is no image. No specific feeling. No person. No situation.

The 5 Things to Cut Immediately From Any AI Draft

When you get an AI draft, do a first pass looking for these. Cut them without mercy. You'll add back better versions in the edit.

1. Any word ending in “-tion” used as a filler rhyme > *Hesitation / foundation / situation / dedication* These words are heavy, abstract, and they make your lyrics sound like a motivational poster.

2. Weather metaphors used as emotional stand-ins > *Storm / rain / lightning / thunder / hurricane* As metaphors for relationships or feelings. They're the first thing AI reaches for and the first thing that should go.

3. Vague emotional nouns > *Pain / sorrow / longing / grief / joy / love / hope* These are labels. They tell the listener what to feel instead of making them feel it. Replace with the specific image that produces the emotion.

4. The word “forever” It rhymes with “never” and “together” and AI uses it constantly. It means nothing. Every song has someone loving someone forever. Cut it.

5. Any line that starts with “I know that” or “I feel like” > *I know that you're gone forever* > *I feel like I'm dying inside* These are hedges. They distance the singer from the emotion. Cut the hedge. Say the thing.

You're gone ← just say it. *I'm dying inside* ← if you must, but make it specific.

What You Can Do Now

- Write the 5-element prompt for your current song
- Generate a draft

- Read it once all the way through
 - On pass two: cut the 5 categories above
 - What's left is your raw material
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Chapter 3: The Edit — Making It Yours

This is the real work. The AI draft is the skeleton. You're putting the flesh on it.

The Gutting Process: Cut First, Then Rebuild

Your first edit pass is destruction, not construction.

Read through the draft. Anything that sounds like it came from a movie trailer, a greeting card, or a LinkedIn post — cut it. Don't try to fix it yet. Just cut.

What's left will be less. Maybe much less. That's correct.

Now you have the actual starting point: the lines that have something real in them, even if rough. The lines that touch the specific thing you were trying to say. Build from those.

Replacing Generic Phrases With Specific Images

Generic: *Your love saved me* Specific: *You made me coffee every day for three years without asking*

Generic: *I can't forget you* Specific: *Your name is still in my phone under "don't answer"*

Generic: *Everything reminds me of you* Specific: *I still change the station when that song comes on*

The specific version does more work. It tells the listener something. It creates a picture. It proves you were actually there.

You don't need to explain the emotion — the specific detail carries it.

Exercise: Take the most generic line in your AI draft. Ask: *What is the actual, physical, specific thing that produced this emotion?* Write that. That's your line.

Fixing Syllable Count Without Killing the Meaning

You've found your real line. Now it doesn't fit the syllable count of the surrounding lines.

Two tools:

1. Cut qualifier words > *I still sometimes change the station when that sad song comes on* (14 syllables) > *I still change the station when that song comes on* (11 syllables)

"Sometimes" and "sad" are qualifiers that don't add meaning. Cut them first.

2. Restructure the phrase > *Your name is still in my phone under "don't answer"* (12 syllables) > *Still saved in my phone: don't answer* (8 syllables)

Same meaning. Half the syllables. Works better as a lyric because it's punchy.

The rule: keep the image, trim the structure around it.

Reading It Aloud: The Only Real Test

Print it or put it on your phone. Go somewhere private. Read it out loud, as if you're singing it, at the tempo of the song.

Anywhere you stumble — that's a problem line. Not because you stumbled, but because if you stumbled *reading* it, you'll choke on it while *singing* it while also thinking about pitch, breath, delivery, and everything else.

A lyric that's comfortable to say out loud is a lyric that frees you to perform.

What to listen for: - Lines where you have to squeeze too many syllables - Lines where you run out of breath mid-phrase - Lines that feel awkward in your mouth (too many similar consonants, bad vowel flow) - Anything that makes you cringe when you say it out loud — trust that instinct

Finding YOUR Voice in an AI Draft

Your voice is not your vocabulary. It's your specificity, your rhythm, your tolerance for abstraction, and the emotional range you're willing to claim.

You find it by asking, for every line: *Would I actually say this?*

Not “would a lyricist say this.” Not “does this sound like a professional song.” Would *you* say this. In a text, in a conversation, in a song.

If the answer is no — change it until you would.

A note on style: Some artists are abstract. Some are hyper-literal. Neither is wrong. What's wrong is pretending to be abstract when you're actually literal, or forcing specificity when your natural instinct is to generalize. The AI draft will probably write in a generic middle ground. Your job is to pull it toward where *you* actually live.

What You Can Do Now

- Take your post-cut draft
- Replace every generic phrase with a specific image
- Read it aloud — fix anything that trips you
- For every line: ask “would I actually say this?”
- Rewrite anything that gets a “no”

Chapter 4: Structure — Verse, Chorus, Bridge

Structure isn't a constraint. Structure is the architecture that makes a song feel satisfying. Without it, you have lines. With it, you have a song.

What Each Section Does

Verse: Establish. Set the scene. Give the listener something to stand on. Verses are where you tell the story — specific details, the situation, the person, the moment. Verses build toward something.

Chorus: Deliver. This is the payoff. The chorus is the emotional center of the song — the thing you've been building toward. It should feel inevitable when it hits. It should also be the most memorable section: singable, compact, built around the title or central image.

Bridge: Surprise. The bridge shifts something — perspective, tempo, emotional register, the argument. It's where the song admits what it's been avoiding, or escalates to the thing it's been circling. A bridge that says the same thing as the chorus in different words is not doing its job.

How to Write a Chorus That Lands Every Time

The chorus has three jobs: 1. State the central idea of the song clearly 2. Do it in a way that's singable (vowel-heavy, landing on strong beats) 3. Make the listener feel like they've been waiting for it

The title placement test: Your title (or the central image/phrase of the song) should appear in the chorus. Usually at the start or end of the first or last line. That's where the ear is listening for it.

The singability test: Open vowels (oh, ah, ay, ee) carry better on held notes. Choruses end on open sounds when possible.

Example — Title buried (weaker): > *I keep running from the things I feel* > *But I can't escape the way you made me real* > *And though I've tried to move beyond the pain* > *I always end up calling out your name*

“Your name” could be the title. But it's buried at the end of the last line. If someone heard this once, they wouldn't know what the song was called.

Example — Title placed (stronger): > *Calling out your name at 2 AM* > *When the room is dark and I'm alone again* > *You're already gone but I keep calling out your name*

Same idea. Title appears twice. Second repetition lands on the emotional peak. Listener can't miss it.

The Bridge: When to Use It, What It Should Do

Use the bridge when the song needs to turn.

If verses and choruses keep circling the same emotional territory, the listener starts to feel trapped. The bridge is the escape valve — or the escalation. It does one of these things:

- **Shifts perspective** (“I’ve been blaming you — but maybe I was the one who left first”)
- **Escalates the stakes** (“And now you’re engaged and I’m standing in a parking lot at midnight”)
- **Drops the armor** (“I’ve been pretending I’m fine. I’m not fine.”)
- **Resolves a tension** (“I forgive you. Not for you. For me.”)

The bridge usually hits once, at about 75% through the song. It doesn't need to be long — four to eight lines is often enough.

What the bridge should NOT do: - Repeat what the chorus already said - Introduce a completely new topic - Rhyme perfectly when the rest of the song doesn't (or vice versa — consistency matters)

Pre-Chorus: The Tension Builder

The pre-chorus is optional but powerful. It's the moment between the verse's storytelling and the chorus's emotional release — a gathering of energy.

Think of it as the deep breath before the leap.

Example:

[Verse builds a scene about a relationship falling apart]

[Pre-Chorus] > Maybe I should go > Maybe I should stay > Either way I'm wrong

[Chorus] > I'm standing at the door > I've been standing at this door for years...

The pre-chorus introduces uncertainty. The chorus delivers on it. The tension was built in that small “maybe” section.

Intros and Outros: When to Have Them, What They Say

Intro: Optional. Use it if the song needs context before the first verse, or if you want an instrumental lead-in with a hook fragment. If your verse already works as an opening, skip the intro.

Outro: Optional. Use it for resolution or fade. A spoken word phrase, a repeated chorus fragment, a single line sung quietly. The outro is your last impression — make it land or skip it entirely.

When to skip both: Most contemporary songs don’t need them. If your verse is strong enough to open with, open with it. If your chorus makes a clean ending, let it end there.

What You Can Do Now

- Map your song’s structure before writing a single line
- Choose: [V][PC][CH][V][PC][CH][B][CH] or whichever shape fits
- Write your chorus first — know where you’re landing before you build toward it
- Decide if you have a bridge (do you have something new to say, or are you just filling time?)

Chapter 5: The Craft — What Makes Lyrics Great

You can write functional lyrics by following everything in the previous chapters. This chapter is about writing lyrics that people remember.

Specific Beats Generic: Every Time, Without Exception

This point was made in Chapter 3 but it belongs in this chapter too because it's the single most important principle of craft.

Specificity is not just useful — it's the difference between a song that gets skipped and a song that makes someone pull over their car.

Why specific works:

The listener doesn't connect to the general. They connect to the specific and then *generalize from it themselves*. That's the transaction.

You write: *I still change the station when that song comes on*. The listener hears: *their* song. The one from their own relationship. The one that hits them the same way.

You gave them a doorway with a specific detail. They walked through it into their own memory. That's the magic trick. General lyrics have no doorway.

Writing for Sound, Not Page

You're writing something that will be sung. Which means you're working in phonetics — the physical sound of language — not just meaning.

Vowels carry. Long vowel sounds (stay, mine, go, free, feel) sustain on held notes. End-of-line words should favor these when the singer needs to hold a note.

Consonants cut. Hard consonants (k, t, p, b, g, d) create attack and rhythm. Great for driving sections, verses with momentum, rap-adjacent flows.

Avoid consonant clusters at phrase ends. Words like “strength,” “texts,” “glimpsed” are hard to sing long and hard to sing cleanly at high volume. Beautiful on a page. Choking hazard in a booth.

Match the sound to the feeling:

- Soft, open vowels: *open, alone, go, flow, slow* — melancholic, tender, aching
- Hard, closed consonants: *cut, sick, stuck, wreck, black* — angry, urgent, precise

Example — Wrong sound for the emotion (tender song with harsh consonants):

> *I cracked and shattered, wrecked and broken, black*

Example — Right sound: > *I'm falling slowly, hollow, letting go*

Same grief. Different sonic texture. The second one sounds like what it means.

Repetition as a Tool (Not a Crutch)

Repetition in lyrics is not laziness. It's emphasis. It's rhythm. It's the way poetry and music work together.

But it has to be intentional.

Effective repetition: - Repeating the title line in the chorus (expected and correct) -

Anaphora: starting consecutive lines with the same phrase ("*Every time I close my eyes / Every time I hear your name / Every time*") - The callback: using a word or phrase from the verse in the chorus with a shifted meaning

Ineffective repetition: - Saying the same thing twice in a row because you ran out of lines - Using filler lines to hit a syllable count without adding meaning

The callback example:

[Verse] > *I put your picture in a box under the bed > Everything you left, everything you said*

[Chorus] > *Everything I gave, everything I was > I'd do it all again just because*

"Everything" does double duty — it connects verse to chorus and gives the chorus emotional weight it didn't have to build from scratch.

The Closing Line: How to End a Verse That Makes the Chorus Inevitable

The last line of your verse has one job: create such unbearable tension that the chorus feels like relief.

What creates that tension: - A question that demands an answer - A statement that demands a response - A detail that reveals something new and upsetting - A line that hangs in the air, unresolved

Weak verse ending: > *And that's why I'm standing here, missing you tonight.*

(The verse resolved itself. The chorus has nothing left to answer.)

Strong verse ending: > *I'm standing at your door in the dark at midnight* > *And I still can't bring myself to knock.*

(The tension is almost physical. The chorus has to answer: what happens? what do you do? what do you feel?)

Emotional Honesty: Writing Something You'd Actually Mean

You can feel the difference between a lyric someone wrote from inside the feeling and a lyric someone wrote from outside it. The outside version is technically correct and emotionally empty.

The test: would you be embarrassed if someone found out you wrote this?

If yes — it's probably too honest. That's usually the right direction.

If no — ask yourself if you're playing it safe.

The songs that get remembered are the ones where the writer said the thing they were afraid to say. Not because vulnerability is inherently valuable, but because specificity and honesty are the same thing. You can't be specific about something you're not willing to admit is true.

What You Can Do Now

- Find the most specific image in your life related to this song's topic — use it
- Read your lyric out loud, listening only to the sounds (not the meaning) — does it sound like how it feels?
- Find every repetition: is it doing work, or filling space?
- Check your verse endings — do they demand the chorus?

- Ask: is there anything in here I was afraid to write? If not, go back.
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Chapter 6: Lyrics for Concept Albums

If you're writing one song, you're telling one story. If you're writing an album, you're telling a larger story — and your lyrics need to know that.

How Standalone Lyrics Differ From Album Lyrics

A standalone song is self-contained. It introduces a world, lives in it, and closes it. The listener needs no context before and brings nothing after.

An album track is a chapter. It can assume certain things have already been established. It can leave threads open. It can reference events that happened two tracks ago. It's in conversation with the rest of the record.

This changes what you do in the verse. You don't have to establish everything from zero. You can come in mid-scene. You can name things the listener already knows.

Motifs and Callbacks: Using Images Across Multiple Tracks

A motif is a recurring image, phrase, or symbol that appears across multiple songs on a record. It creates a thread. It makes the album feel like a unified work instead of a playlist.

Examples of motifs:

- A color that keeps appearing (*red door / red dress / red light — my hands are clean but they're stained red*)
- A physical object (*the letter you never sent / I burned the letter / I still have the ashes*)
- A repeated action that shifts in meaning (*running: running from you / running toward something / finally standing still*)

The motif doesn't need to be obvious. If you're the only one who knows it's there, it will still do unconscious work on the listener. If they catch it consciously, it rewards them for paying attention.

For concept albums specifically:

Map your motifs before you write. Decide: what objects, colors, characters, phrases will appear throughout this record? Where do they first show up? Where do they transform?

Then let that map guide your drafting prompts to AI — include the motif in the prompt. Keep it consistent.

Using AI to Maintain Lyrical Consistency Across a Whole Record

This is one of the most underused applications of AI for album writing.

Start with a master prompt — a paragraph that describes your album, your character or narrator, the emotional arc, and the key motifs. Every time you generate a new lyric draft, prepend this paragraph to your prompt.

Master prompt example:

This is a concept album called *The Leaving*. The narrator is a man in his 30s who moved across the country for a relationship that ended. He's living in a new city alone. The emotional arc of the album moves from bitter → numb → grief → acceptance → something new. Key images: airports, empty apartments, maps, wrong turns, the Pacific Ocean as a destination that felt like failure. Tone: understated. The narrator doesn't perform his emotions — he observes them. He's not dramatic. He's tired.

Now every draft you generate will have the narrator's voice. Not perfectly — you'll still edit — but the raw material will be in the right universe.

What You Can Do Now

- Write a one-paragraph master prompt for your album
- Map 3–5 motifs that will appear across multiple tracks

- Decide where each motif first appears, where it shifts, where it resolves
 - Use your master prompt at the top of every AI draft session
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Chapter 7: Writing Without AI

There will come a moment when the AI feels like a wall instead of a door.

You give it a prompt and it gives you something correct and empty. You edit it and you're just rearranging furniture in a room that isn't yours. You spend more time fighting the draft than using it.

That's when you put the AI down.

When to Put the AI Down

- When you already know exactly what you want to say and AI keeps saying something adjacent
- When you're editing more than 80% of every draft it gives you
- When the song is deeply personal and every AI version feels like a translation
- When you're in a flow state and the draft breaks it

These aren't failures of the tool. They're signs that you've developed enough to not need it right now.

The Notebook Method: Chords First, Then Words

Sit down with your instrument. Play the progression. Loop it.

Let your mouth make sounds before it makes words. Hum. Half-words. Vowel sounds that fit the melody you're feeling out. Don't force language yet.

At some point, a word will fit. Write it down. Not because it's perfect — because it's true to the sound.

Now you're finding lyrics, not writing them. The chord progression is the boss. Your job is to find words that were already there, hiding in the music.

This is the oldest method. It's also the most personal. The words you find this way belong to the song in a way that drafted lyrics usually don't.

Fitting Words to a Melody You Already Love

If you have a melody but no words:

1. Record yourself humming or la-la-ing the melody
2. Listen back and write out the syllable pattern: da-DA-da-da-DA-DA-da
3. Find a phrase that fits that exact stress pattern
4. The meaning of the phrase will often surprise you with what's true

Syllable patterns are meaning-agnostic. They hold many different phrases. Your job is to find the one phrase that's both metrically correct *and* emotionally true.

Example: Melody pattern: *da-DA-da-da-DA-da-DA*

Possible fits: - *I'm ready to leave you tonight* ✓ - *The coffee is cold in my cup* ✓ - *I never meant any of this* ✓

All three fit the meter. Now ask: which one is actually true for this song?

Why Imperfect Handwritten Lyrics Beat Perfect AI Lyrics

There's a quality in lyrics that were wrestled with.

You can hear when someone fought to find the right word and landed on something that's 90% right but sounds completely real. You can also hear when a lyric was generated and polished into something technically flawless but slightly hollow.

The fight shows. Not because imperfection is charming — but because the fight means someone cared enough to struggle. That caring is audible.

Your imperfect, handwritten lyrics, fixed three times and still not quite right, will often beat a clean AI draft. Because they're yours. They carry the weight of what you were actually trying to say.

Use AI when you're stuck. Write by hand when you're not.

What You Can Do Now

- Know your own threshold: when does AI help vs. hinder?
 - Try the chord-first method on your current project
 - If you have a melody, map its syllable stress pattern and find three phrases that fit
 - Write one lyric this week without AI. Messy. Real. Yours.
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Quick Reference

The Lyric Checklist (Before You Finalize Anything)

Run through this before you call a lyric set done.

- Every section has a structure tag
- Syllable counts are consistent within each section
- Punctuation is deliberate, not decorative
- Every generic phrase has been replaced with a specific image
- I've read it aloud at tempo — no stumbles
- The chorus title placement is clear
- The verse endings create tension that demands the chorus
- The bridge says something the chorus doesn't
- I would actually mean this if I sang it
- No "forever," no "-tion" rhymes, no weather metaphors I didn't earn

Structure Tag Guide

Use these exactly – brackets, no spaces, on their own line:

Tag	Use
[Intro]	Opening section, often instrumental or single phrase
[Verse 1]	First verse – establishes the story
[Verse 2]	Second verse – advances or deepens the story
[Pre-Chorus]	Tension-building section before the chorus
[Chorus]	Main hook – use for every chorus repeat
[Bridge]	Shift in perspective or escalation – appears once
[Outro]	Closing section – resolution or fade
[Hook]	Short, repeated melodic phrase (can be used in place of chorus for some styles)
[Break]	Instrumental or vocal pause
[Instrumental]	Full instrumental section

10 Phrases to Cut From Any AI Draft Immediately

1. *Beautiful disaster*
2. *Shadows of tomorrow* (or any “shadows of ____”)
3. *Storm inside my heart* (or any weather-as-emotion metaphor)
4. *I know that [thing I’m about to say]*
5. *I feel like [thing I’m about to say]*

6. *Forever and never* as a rhyme pair
7. *Lost in translation*
8. *Fighting through the pain*
9. *You were my salvation / foundation / dedication*
10. *At the end of the day*

When you find these, don't fix them — cut them. Find the specific image underneath and write that instead.

The 5-Minute AI Draft Prompt Template

Copy this. Fill in the brackets. Paste it into ChatGPT, Claude, or your AI of choice.

Write lyrics for a [genre] song.

CONCEPT: [What is this song actually about? One sentence, specific.]

EMOTION: [What does it feel like? Not the situation — the feeling. Numb? Furious? Quietly devastated? Relieved?]

KEY IMAGE: [One specific visual, object, action, or detail that captures the heart of the song.]

TONE: [Understated / raw / ironic / tender / angry / matter-of-fact]

TITLE (optional): [Your working title, or the phrase you want to appear in the chorus]

STRUCTURE: [Verse 1 / Pre-Chorus / Chorus / Verse 2 / Pre-Chorus / Chorus / Bridge / Chorus]

NOTES: [Anything else: syllable feel, comparisons to other artists, what to avoid]

Example filled in:

Write lyrics for a slow R&B song.

CONCEPT: A person who keeps their ex's jacket in their car because they can't bring themselves to remove it, even months after the breakup.

EMOTION: Grief that doesn't announce itself – it's in small routines, not big dramatic moments. Quiet. Persistent.

KEY IMAGE: The jacket. Still smelling like them. Taking up space in the backseat.

TONE: Understated, specific, matter-of-fact – the narrator isn't performing sadness, they're just describing what's true.

TITLE: Only Thing Left

STRUCTURE: Verse 1 / Pre-Chorus / Chorus / Verse 2 / Pre-Chorus / Chorus / Bridge / Chorus

NOTES: Avoid weather metaphors. No "beautiful disaster" energy. Syllable count should be consistent – aim for 10–12 syllables per line in the verse, 8–10 in the chorus. Think Frank Ocean energy: quiet and observational.

A Final Note

The musicians who finish songs are not more talented than the ones who don't. They just made peace with imperfection earlier.

Your first set of lyrics won't be great. Neither will your tenth. At some point in the middle — probably when you're tired and just committing to something instead of perfecting it — you'll write something true. Something that sounds like no one else.

That's the goal. Not perfect lyrics. Yours.

AI gets you to the page. The page is where the real work starts. And the real work is just being honest about what you actually mean, in words that actually sound like you, with enough structure to hold it all together.

That's not a technical skill. That's a practice.

Start the practice.

Signal Engine — Book 4: Lyrics in the Age of AI By Danny Rules

Also in this series: - Book 1: Sound Like You — Building Your Sound Identity with Suno - Book 2: (available in the Signal Engine series) - Book 3: (available in the Signal Engine series)
