

HOW TO WRITE A SONG ON THE GUITAR

Hands on
Tutorial for
Guitarists

sofession

This free ebook is part of a song writing tutorial available on

<http://blog.sofasession.com/how-to-write-a-song-on-the-guitar-hands-on-tutorial/>

The online version includes sound and video examples of all techniques presented in this article. It also features a song that has been created using the techniques.

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In this ebook I am going to show you how to write a song on the guitar – without any knowledge of music theory. I have no background in music theory whatsoever, the process I'm laying down in this article made me write over 50 songs on my guitar, of which some are very popular for the audiences I am playing.

Writing a song on the guitar can be challenging because it is not easy to figure out where to actually start. I will help you getting started.

In each step I will first present the technique that I applied on every song I wrote and then illustrate it with a concrete example.

At the end of this ebook I will share some helpful resources for songwriting available on the internet.

Requirements

You are a guitarist and own a guitar.

You know what a chord is.

You can read tabs and can play chords that are noted as tabs.

Let's get started!

Inspiration

Inspiration will help you narrowing down the potential endless possibilities of WHAT KIND of song you're going to write.

Will it be a heavy metal song? Or a folk song? Will it be a love song? A funny song? Or do you want to write a sad song about that horrible thing that happened to you lately?

In my experience the best way to get inspired is by listening to music.

It's very likely that you are already inspired and that you know what kind of song you want to write on your guitar.

If not do this: Create a playlist of songs on Spotify or Youtube that you like, find inspiring and that you enjoy listening to. This playlist should include songs that are in the style and mood of the song that you are attempting to write.

Listen to this playlist in preparation of your songwriting session.

If there is a particular song in your playlist that you really like, check if other playlist have the same song and browse those playlists for more inspiration. If you find another good song, add it to your playlist.

In the particular case of [my song](#), I wanted to write something with a slight pop / folk influence, because this is the kind of music I'm listening to at the moment. I kind of already knew what I wanted to write about: Austria (my home country).

The idea came from a particular song by Michel Polnareff, a French musician that I really adore. In his song “Lettre à France”, he sings about his home country, France and how he misses it (he basically spent half his life in exile). I heard this song on the radio.

That particular song was the starting point of my inspiration.

So before even picking up my guitar, I already had a rough idea what the song will be about. But what about the music? Since I knew it will be a song about Austria, I created a playlist on Spotify with Austrian artists and listened to the playlist when I was riding in the subway or when I was travelling. It included some very well-known artists here, as well as some artists that are maybe lesser known and that I discovered

while browsing playlists of other people. I tried to pick songs that fit my idea of a song with a pop / folk edge.

Listening to the playlist did not only give me the joy of listening to great music, but it also got me into the mood to write my own song.

Pillars of Music

One of the most valuable lessons I learned on my own is to respect the three pillars on which a good song is based.



My songwriting approach incorporates those three pillars into a process.

The guitar is a great instrument to write a song, because all of those pillars can be incorporated into your songwriting process: Harmony by chords, rhythm by the strumming pattern that you chose to play and melody by playing melody lines on the guitar and later by singing.

I always follow the order above when I start to write a song on the guitar: First working on harmony, then rhythm, then melody (vocals).

Sticking to this process has made writing songs on the guitar much easier for me.

Harmony

I assume that you are inspired by your playlist and have a rough idea what your song should sound like and what topic it shall cover. Let's start with the harmony for your song.

In this step you will layout one part of the song (verse or chorus) by creating a chord progression.

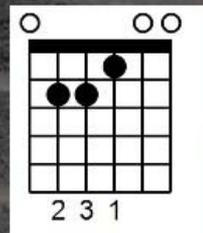
A chord progression is a progression of chords that are played throughout a certain part of your song. There are no rules on how many chords you need to play throughout your verse or chorus. Actually, just one chord alone could do the trick.

Protip: do not overcomplicate your progression! **Less is more!** Some of the best songs on this planet consist of three chords only. There is actually videos on YouTube that will show you how many well-known songs consist of only three chords. Google it, you will be surprised.

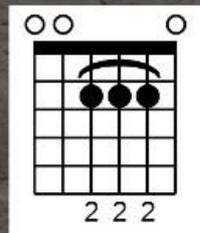
First, pick a key that you are familiar with and that has many open chords. Open chords are chords that you can play on the first three frets of the guitar and that contain one or more open strings. By using open chords you can really focus on the sound of what you are playing and the music, instead of counting frets and transposing chords all the time, which will draw your attention away from the music.

Here's a list of all open chords that you can play on your guitar.

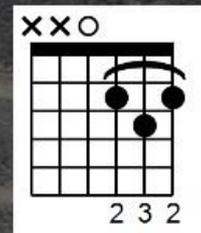
OPEN CHORDS on the guitar



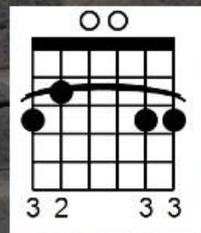
E major



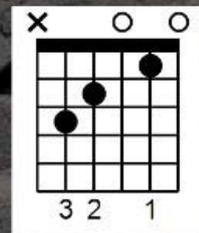
A major



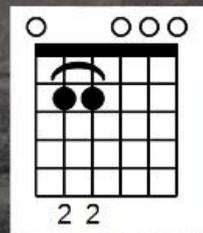
D major



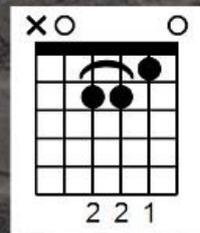
G major



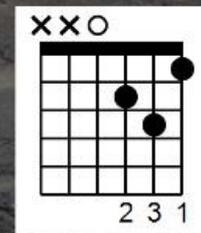
C major



E minor



A minor

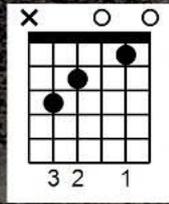


D minor

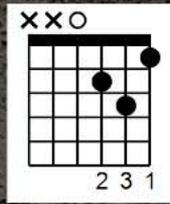
And here is a list of keys ranked by the highest number of open chords per key.

KEYS FOR SONGWRITING

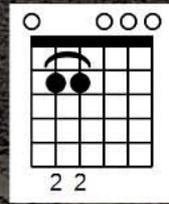
with open chords for guitar



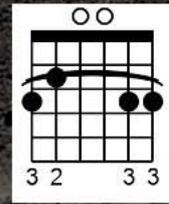
C major



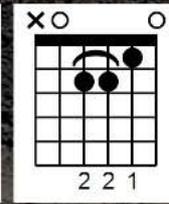
D minor



E minor

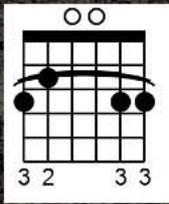


G major

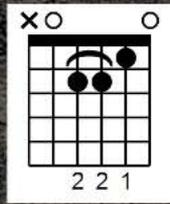


A minor

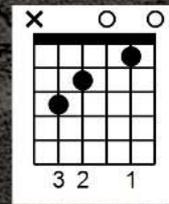
C major / A minor



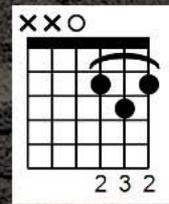
G major



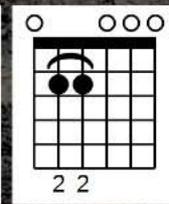
A minor



C major

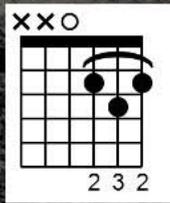


D major

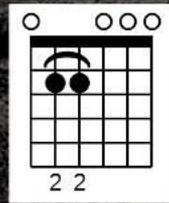


E minor

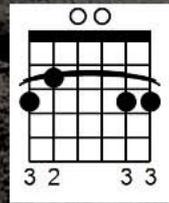
G major / E minor



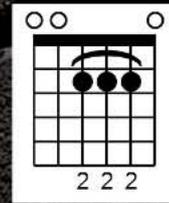
D major



E minor

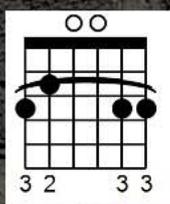


G major

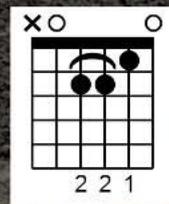


A major

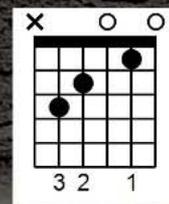
D major / B minor



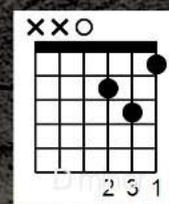
G major



A minor

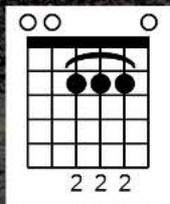


C major

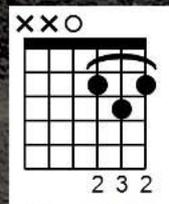


D minor

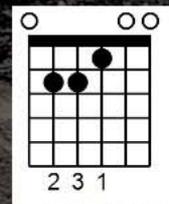
F major / D minor



A major



D major



E major

A major / F# minor

If you do not know where to start, pick one of the keys above. For your information: C major / A minor is by far the most popular key in music.

Now let's create a chord progression, which is simply a sequence of chords.

Again, I suggest that you start with an easy progression. Now that you have selected a key, just try other chords in your progression. Experiment with different number of those chords, different sequence.

Example: For the key of C major you could try C Major – G Major – A Minor – C Major. Or C Major – D Minor – G Major – C Major.

All of those two progressions are composed of chords listed in the respective key in the chart above.

The most important: Rely on your ear! Cycle and play through the different chord possibilities and pick the one that you like the most.

Congratulations. You have just created your first rough sketch of a part of your song.

In case you didn't find a progression for your song, I have described another approach using an app further below in this tutorial.

Let's see how I applied this method above on my song.

First I picked a key, namely D major. It's not the number 1 key in terms of open chords in the list above, but it still ranks at number 3. The reason why I picked this key is because lately I had written a lot of songs in the key of A minor and E minor and I just wanted to use something different this time.

The next step was to create a chord progression.

I picked the progression D – G – A – D, which is the I – IV – V – I chord progression. I picked it because the two other chords in this progression, G and A, are open chords, so they are easy to play. Also, this progression is the classic three chord Rock'n'Roll progression. My background is actually in rock music, so I went for a real standard here. I just feel very comfortable using it and I really wanted to keep it simple.

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