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## Be Specific

A song that generalizes too much won't have anything in it that people can be excited about or moved by. If there are not any details, there won't be enough information to make it real. Trust the listener to hear the story within the story. If you have an experience that is too personal, or painful, you can use it by putting it into a fictional context. Change the names to protect the innocent, and especially the guilty. It doesn't matter if the story is real or not, as long as the emotions ring true. The audience will sense the truth within it. Many writers change tense; go from the past to the present, or the present to the future. For example, let's say you write a song about your first love. The first thing to do would be to make a list of everything you can think of, in detail, about your own experience. Then try to tell the story from someone else's perspective. For examples listen to *Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic* by Sting or *I Married Her Because She Looks Like You* by Lyle Lovett.

### Exercise

Take a song like *Eleanor Rigby* by Lennon and McCartney. It is chock full of description and detail. Write about it and get as general and mundane as you can. For instance, you could say that the first verse is about a woman who is all by herself. By doing this it will be easy to see the difference between lots of detail and no detail at all.

## Lyrics and Rhythm

Every language has an inherent rhythm—the beat of the words. Even different accents can create a different pattern of speech. It is easy to hear the rhythm of a language when it is not your own, because you are not listening to the meaning of the words. An experienced writer can hear the rhythm of the words within the music. Consider the word “symphony.” It has three beats, with the accent on the first beat. The word “watermelon” has four beats, “world” has only one. Rap and hip hop artists are extremely gifted at working with the rhythm of words and creating patterns. Examples of this would be many songs by Queen Latifah, Boys II Men, or En Vogue.

### Exercise

Take popular television theme songs or nursery rhymes and speak them in a rap style, feeling the accents in the appropriate places.

## To Rhyme or Not to Rhyme

Rhyme is an excellent way to develop a sense of pattern in a song. There is a comfort in the expectation that the next line will rhyme. The two basic kinds of rhymes are hard rhymes and soft rhymes. A hard rhyme is like a line in a nursery rhyme. Like “lime” and “rhyme,” “time” and “crime.” A soft rhyme has the same vowel sound, but may start or end differently: “I don't mind that it doesn't exactly rhyme.” “Mind” and “rhyme” are soft rhymes. Sometimes a hard rhyme can be a little heavy handed: “When I went to the store,