

Sell your songs!

FabJob Guide to
**Become a
Songwriter**



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1. Introduction

Imagine driving in your car and hearing a song that you wrote being performed by a famous artist on the radio. It happens every day. The creativity, hard work and passion put into a song all pays off when the song is recorded or performed for a wide audience.

Who are the people who write songs? They put the feelings that so many of us experience into a song that can touch the hearts of millions. Songwriters are musicians, moms, truck drivers and students. They are people who have always known they wanted to write, and they are people who stumbled across their talent and love of songwriting completely by accident.

I know of a truck driver/songwriter. He wrote a #1 country hit back in the mid-90s and has had several songs on the country charts. Truck driving was his occupation, songwriting was his passion; and he could not do one without the other. They just worked together for him. He was an everyday man who followed his dream, just like you and me.

I first started writing when I was a teenager. I never really followed my dream back then because I had no one to encourage me. As an adult I was encouraged to sing by some friends, which naturally led me back to songwriting. I have since found that there are a lot of people who will encourage your craft and talent in this business; all you have to do is find them. I was pleasantly surprised by the camaraderie I found in this field. I discovered that many songwriters will often help other songwriters.

I am writing this guide from the perspective of someone who had no connections in this business when I started. I am just like you – a person who had a dream and wanted to find the resources to make it happen. In my quest to become a professional songwriter I have come across publishers, managers and songwriters who are more than willing to give information and direction to someone who is just starting out. In this guide I share with you what I learned from these industry insiders.

1.1 A Quick Overview Of The Industry

A songwriter writes songs which usually contain both music and lyrics. Someone who writes only lyrics or only music can find a partner to write songs with. There are many famous songwriting teams, such as Elton John's partnership with lyricist Bernie Taupin, and Andrew Lloyd Webber's partnership with lyricist Tim Rice.

Once a song has been written, the songwriter must try to find someone to record it. This process is known as "marketing" the song and typically begins with producing a "demo" recording of the song to send to people who might be interested in it.

Songwriters usually market their songs to publishers, record companies, and recording artists. Since most famous recording artists are too busy to personally review all the songs submitted to them, songwriters normally submit songs to the artist's manager. If you prefer not to market your own songs, you could work with a publisher to market your songs for you.

Typically songwriters are paid in royalties, which will be shared with a publisher if you are working with one.

As you will see in this guide, you can also have your songs used in film and TV, or you could become a staff writer for a publisher, manager or record company.

Speaking Like A Pro

Knowing how to “speak the language” of music industry insiders can help you connect with them and market your songs. Throughout this guide you will be introduced to a variety of music industry terms. Here are a few to get you started:

<i>Advance</i>	The payment received by a writer in expectation of future royalties to be earned. The advance is paid back to the publisher or other industry professional when the song earns royalties.
<i>Audit Clause</i>	A clause in an agreement between a songwriter and a publisher, or any other agent, that allows the writer to have access to the publisher’s books to determine the accuracy of royalties paid.
<i>Catalog</i>	The most commonly used word that refers to a songwriter’s list of songs.
<i>Copyright</i>	The exclusive legal rights of a copyright owner (in our case, a songwriter) to make and distribute recordings of a song or perform it publicly.
<i>Demo</i>	A CD of several of a songwriter’s songs. It “demonstrates” a songwriter’s skills and is used to market songs.
<i>Exclusive Songwriter Agreement</i>	A contract between a songwriter and a publisher that assigns all songs written by the songwriter during the contract period to the publisher. Usually signed when a writer is hired as a staff writer.
<i>Infringement</i>	A violation of a copyright.

<i>License</i>	A grant to a user allowing them to use a copyright. For example, a record company can be granted a license to make recordings of a song.
<i>Lyrics</i>	The words of a song.
<i>Master</i>	The main recording used to make copies.
<i>Performing Rights Society</i>	Organizations that monitor use of recorded music, collect the royalties, and pay them out to songwriters and publishers.
<i>Public Domain</i>	Refers to a work having no copyright.
<i>Royalties</i>	The amount of money earned from the sales or use of a recording, usually indicated as a percentage (also called “points”).
<i>Sample</i>	The use of part of someone else’s recorded material as part of a new song. Also the recording of a short sound into a sampler or computer.
<i>Showcase</i>	A live performance put on for a specific group of music industry people. Sometimes referred to as a “pitch session.”
<i>Single Song Agreement</i>	A contract between a songwriter and publisher that gives the publisher sole rights to market one particular song.
<i>Songshark</i>	A music publisher who charges a fee for services that a legitimate publisher would typically bear. It is not illegal but is considered unethical in the industry.
<i>Split Publishing</i>	When the publishing rights of a song are held by more than one publisher.

These are just a few terms that you should know. As you read this guide and become more involved in the music industry you will learn even more terminology.

1.2 Benefits Of A Songwriting Career

Many songwriters write for the sake of the craft. Writing takes talent and passion. To see a concept or a thought develop into a fully structured song brings a sense of accomplishment. Yet, we all have to eat. While I am a songwriter, my occupational background is as a career development professional. I have always told my clients and students that we are far more likely to make a higher salary if we do something we love. In addition, if we can earn a living doing what we are passionate about we are far more likely to be happy.

In addition to offering a sense of accomplishment and the opportunity to do something you love, a career in songwriting offers these benefits:

High Income Potential

Songwriters who establish themselves in this business can earn an incredible income. A song that makes it high on the music charts can easily earn six figures for the writer. Imagine earning eight cents per song, per CD for a release from a major artist. Let's say that you wrote two songs on that release and the artist sold two million copies. You could earn \$320,000.00 for that one release. Not a bad income!

Glamour

With various award ceremonies and big parties, the music industry really does have a lot of glamour. If you enjoy traveling, you could attend industry functions around the globe.

Ability To Touch Lives

"I write the songs that make the whole world sing..."

— *Barry Manilow, written by Bruce Johnston*

Songs and songwriters have the power to comfort and inspire people. I'm sure you can recall a song or two that marks a page in your history. Songs that stand out for me personally include "The Wind Beneath My Wings" recorded by Bette Midler and "The Greatest Love of All" recorded by Whitney Houston. After the 9/11 tragedies, songs that touched millions included Mariah Carey's recording of "Hero," Alan

Jackson's "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)," and Celine Dion's rendition of "God Bless America."

Opportunity To Meet People

People are key in this industry. As a songwriter, you may have many opportunities to develop relationships with music industry insiders, including performing and recording artists, managers, and publishers. You can expect to meet many people who are talented, and possibly some who are celebrities. If you write songs for movies or television, you can expect to meet people in those industries as well.

Freedom

As an independent songwriter, you will work mostly from your home. There will be a need to take care of business errands within certain time frames, but for the most part you determine your own hours and schedule. You are in control of what you do and when you do it.

If this sounds like the career of your dreams, read on to see how this guide can help you break in and succeed as a songwriter ...

1.3 Inside This Guide

In this guide you will find valuable information and resources on how to make your dream of becoming a published songwriter a reality.

Although this guide focuses on the business of songwriting rather than the craft, Chapter 2 (*Getting Ready*) offers tips on songwriting. It looks at songwriting basics, your musical style, and ways to improve your songs. It includes links to the best free songwriting advice available online.

Chapter 3 focuses on *Your Demo*. A quality demo recording of your music is essential to market your songs to industry professionals. In this chapter you will get practical information on how to select the right songs, record your demo (either in a professional studio or at home), and prepare your printed materials.

The next step is *Marketing Your Songs*, covered in Chapter 4. Here you will find insider advice to help you break into the competitive field of songwriting. You will learn how to submit your songs to music publishers, artists and their managers, as well as record companies. You will find other ways to connect with music industry insiders, find artists that need songs, and participate in showcases. This chapter also offers valuable advice on the best cities for marketing your music, tips on understanding royalties, and information on how to become your own publisher.

In Chapter 5, you will find a variety of *Other Opportunities* for songwriters. These include: becoming a staff writer for a music publisher or record company, writing commercial music, writing songs for movies and television, entering contests, and the Internet.

To help you be as successful as possible in your career, Chapter 6 offers advice on *Taking Care of Business*. Here you will find the best resources for information on such matters as starting a business and using a business name or band name. You will also get good advice on managing your money, working with an entertainment attorney, and professionalism.

Finally, Chapter 7 gives you a technique for mapping out your career goals, so you will know what step to take next and where to go from there. Throughout the guide you will find advice and interviews with music industry insiders.

Hopefully, by applying what you learn in this guide, it will be just a matter of time before you will hear your own songs on the radio and realize your dream of becoming a successful professional Songwriter!