

## Matching word rhythms to music rhythms.

Almost all music has rhythm and beat. They are two separate things.

A beat is a series of regular pulsations that do not vary --- like a heartbeat.

Rhythm is the series of longs and shorts that occur over the top of the beat. They are represented by whole, half, quarter, eighth notes, rests, etc.

Beats can be slow (macro beats). Beats can be quick (micro beats).

(ex. = Silent Night & There's No Business . .)

Often, the "right" beat for setting lyrics, is somewhere in the middle.

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Lyrics, too, have rhythm and beat.

Beats in poetry (lyrics) are like beats in music

Rhythm amounts to how many or few syllables you fit to a poetic beat.

One syllable to a beat = Fee Fi Fo Fum

Two syllables to a beat = "The mouse ran up the clock

Three syllables to a beat = Hicory Dickory (Dock)

**HERES THE TRICK:** Find the beats of the song and the rhythm of the original lyrics (First verse). As closely as possible, match the rhythm of your new lyrics to the rhythm of the original lyrics (first verse).

**AND HERE'S THE RUB!**

It is easy to compose lyrics to music. You can force most any number of syllables onto a melody and make it work as long as only one person is singing. This is why a solo recording (and most sheet music) can vary the rhythms, (pick-ups, etc.) from verse to verse. The rub comes when you have a few or more people singing, and each of them has the original lyric and melody in his or her head. *If rhythm of your lyrics, do not closely resemble the rhythm of the original lyrics, AND if you are not consistent from verse to verse, confusion is highly likely. People will musically stumble and the audience will not understand the message.*

### The problem of pick-ups.

Pick-up notes are syllables and notes which occur before the downbeat of a line.

Some lines do not have a pick-up.

“Lady Madonna”

Some lines have a single pick-up

“She Loves Me yeah, yeah, yeah,

Some lines have double or triple pick-ups.

“And I Love her”

It is a common mistake to not match the pick-up notes of newly composed lyrics to the original lyric that already exists in everyone’s heads.

As long as the following guidelines are followed, you can crowd two, three, or even four syllables into a single beat (except for pick-ups). This is where you can take some liberties. Just beware that the more syllables, the harder it is for your audience to understand.

Again, this is an easy process, accessible to most anyone, and it’s fun. Take your favorite cause, find a favorite song, and start writing. Below is an example and a few suggestions. Give it a try, but be warned, you may get hooked.

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- Step 1. **Choose a well known melody.** Preferably, the melody . . . should not have many long notes or rests. (Dream) should not have an abundance of short notes. (This Old House) **Songs that have both verses and a chorus often work well.**
- Step 2. Choose a cause about which you are passionate.
- Step 3. Write down some specifics about this cause. Be concrete and succinct.
- Step 4. Sing the melody and begin fashioning new lyrics to fit (A more detailed way of doing this is to write out the original lyric -- first verse only.  
Find and mark the evenly spaced beats or pulsations. Then fashion the new lyric to closely resemble the rhythm of the old lyric. Pick-up notes should have identical rhythm.
- Step 5. As you fashion a second verse, try to keep it as rhythmically close as possible to the first verse.

Following these guidelines will insure smooth rehearsals and clarity of your message to the audience.

**OTHER TIPS:**

**RANGE:** The smaller the better. Over an octave, you're asking for trouble. Most women are mezzos. Women's voices deepen with age. G below middle C to G above works well for us.

**Rehearsals:** Sing first talk later.

If you have trouble with lyrics fitting the music, create a committee of three to work out the kinks.

**Technique:** Breathe deeply, sing strongly, over enunciate.

**Performing:** Try to sing for stationary audiences --- not audiences on the move. Hand out your lyrics. Encourage people to sing along and take the sheets home.

Be outrageous!