

WRITING IN THE STYLE

A Music Theory Guide

Based on the analysis of 41 songs spanning four studio albums

Practical Composition Series

Introduction: What the Data Reveals

This guide starts from 41 MIDI transcriptions.

- A computer analyzed every chord, every bass motion, every interval pair, and every structural section across four studio albums of material spanning 2003 to 2016.
- The result is a set of **hard statistical facts about how this particular style of music works** — not impressions, not vibes, not what music writers say about it.
- Eighty-eight percent of the catalog sits in C major.
- The dominant cadence — appearing in 84% of all cadential moments — **lands on V without resolving**, the half cadence, leaving the listener suspended rather than settled.
- Ninety percent of all songs contain at least one **borrowed chord from the parallel minor**, and the flat-VII is the most common of these by a wide margin.
- The bass moves by step 44% of the time, making it **the most melodically active voice in the low register** — not a harmonic anchor but a moving line.

Every chapter that follows translates these numbers into practical decisions.

- You will learn what key to start in, **what tempo to set before touching a single note**, and which borrowed chord to drop into the bridge.
- You will learn the specific interval sequences that recur 5,887 times across the catalog, **and what they tell you about how to build a hook**.
- The guide ends with a song-by-song reference to 41 tracks, **each one reduced to its essential theory fingerprint** so you can use them as templates.

Chapter 12 walks you through building a complete original song in this style, **one decision at a time, in sequence**, using every principle the earlier chapters established.

- No prior theory knowledge beyond basic chord naming is assumed.
- What the data shows is that this style **achieves its emotional character through constraint, not complexity** — a small vocabulary of chords, deployed with precision.

Chapter 1: Key Centers and Tonal Identity

Thirty-six of 41 songs sit in C major — 88% of the entire catalog.

- The remaining five split across A minor (two songs), C# minor, B minor, and C minor, **each appearing exactly once**.
- The catalog leans major — 36 songs to 5 — which means **minor color arrives primarily through borrowing rather than through a key change**.
- The tonic chord (I) functions as a stable home, but **the catalog rarely stays there long** — motion toward IV and bVII is the default way to create harmonic interest without leaving C major.

Why C Major Matters Practically

- C major aligns with the most resonant open-string positions on guitar, **which means voicings ring naturally without capo or retuning**.
- Piano players find middle C at the center of the keyboard, **producing a balanced-register texture with natural hand positions**.
- The prevalence of C major also means the flat-VII chord (B-flat major) **sits a whole step below the tonic**, making it easy to approach from any direction.
- Mixolydian borrowing — treating C major as the scale but lowering the seventh degree — **is the primary source of harmonic color in this catalog**, not modulation.

The Minor-Key Songs

- The two A minor songs and the three remaining minor-key tracks **use borrowed chords in the opposite direction** — pulling from major instead of minor.

- A minor and C major share the same key signature, **so a composer can move between them by simply redefining which chord feels like home.**
- The minor-key songs in the catalog tend toward **more chromatic chord symbols** — the analysis shows significantly more altered harmony in these tracks.

KEY SELECTION RULE

Write your first draft in C major. Transposing later is easy — fighting the wrong tonal center from the start is not. If the material sounds flat or lifeless in C major, try A minor before moving to another key. The flat-VII chord should sound immediately available — if reaching for it feels awkward, you may be in the wrong key.

Chapter 2: Tempo, Feel, and Groove

The 41-song catalog spans a 120 BPM range — from 50 BPM to 170 BPM — with an average of 109.3 BPM.

- All or nearly all songs use 4/4 time, with occasional exceptions in 6/4, 6/8, 3/4, 10/8, and 8/8.
- The rhythmic character of this style comes from **subdivision and syncopation within 4/4** — not from unusual time signatures.
- Where unusual meters do appear — the 10/8 track, the 6/4 songs — **the effect is a feeling of slight stumble or drift**, not a math exercise.

The 109 BPM Center of Gravity

- At 109.3 BPM, eighth notes move fast enough to carry energy **while quarter notes breathe enough to land with weight.**
- The slow end of the catalog — tracks near 50 to 70 BPM — **serves a different emotional register**: sparse, internal, closer to piano ballad than groove-driven composition.
- The fast end — 150 to 170 BPM — **produces urgency through density**, packing notes into a smaller window so tension accumulates faster.
- The average tempo of 109.3 BPM **determines how 16th notes feel in the body** — at this speed they create physical drive without rushing.

Subdivision as the Style's Rhythmic Identity

- Because the time signature stays constant at 4/4, **all rhythmic variety comes from where notes land relative to the beat.**
- The catalog consistently places harmonic events on the offbeat — **suspensions, passing chords, and pedal tones tend to enter after the downbeat.**
- Snare placement in the middle of the catalog tends toward beat 2 and beat 4, **giving the groove a rocking rather than marching quality.**

TEMPO SETUP RULE

Set your session tempo to 109.3 BPM before writing anything. This is not about matching the average — it is about experiencing the physical spacing that the catalog's voicing decisions were built around. A chord voiced for 109 BPM sounds different at 140 BPM even with the same notes. Once the composition is complete, adjust the tempo to fit the emotional register you are targeting.

Chapter 3: Song Structure and Architecture

The catalog's structural data reveals a verse-heavy architecture that defies the standard pop song template.

Section Frequency Data

Section	Occurrences	% of All Blocks	Function
Verse	243	45%	Primary narrative, repeated throughout
Bridge	194	36%	Contrast, departure, harmonic shift
Intro	39	7%	Tonic establishment, riff introduction
Outro	39	7%	Textural reduction, not a chorus repeat
Chorus	12	2%	Rare, often replaced by bridge logic

- The average song in this catalog has 5.9 verse sections — **roughly six loops of the same harmonic material** — before the listener reaches a structural change.
- The chorus appears in only 12 of the 534 total 8-bar blocks analyzed, **which means the catalog uses virtually no chorus writing.**
- Bridge sections appear at 36% of all blocks — **nearly as common as verses** — indicating that departure and contrast carry the structural weight that choruses normally carry in pop music.

The Intro's Role

- Nearly every song opens with a distinct intro that **establishes the tonic riff before any vocal enters**.
- The intro is not a verse — it uses the same harmonic material but **withholds the melodic layer** that arrives in the verse.
- This means the listener hears the groove and the harmonic identity **before they hear the song's main idea**, creating anticipation through delay.

The Outro as Reduction

- Outros in this catalog are distinct from choruses — **they reduce texture rather than adding to it**.
- The outro typically removes instruments one at a time, **ending closer to the intro's sparse texture** than to the song's densest moment.
- This creates a structural arc: sparse intro, accumulating verse, **departing bridge, returning outro**.

Why No Chorus

- A repeated, hooky chorus creates resolution — **it gives the listener something to land on**.
- This catalog operates on the opposite principle: **tension as the default state**, release withheld.
- The bridge provides departure without providing the satisfying repetition of a hook, **so the song keeps the listener in a state of unresolved wanting**.

STRUCTURE RULE

Plan your song as: intro (1 section), verse (5–6 sections), bridge (3–4 sections), outro (1 section). Skip the chorus entirely on the first draft. If the song feels like it needs a chorus, it probably needs a stronger verse riff, not a hook. The outro should sound like the song is being dismantled rather than celebrated.

Chapter 4: Chord Vocabulary and Harmonic Language

Twelve distinct chord types appear across 41 songs — a deliberately tight vocabulary.

- The three most common chords — i, v, and vii — account for **38% of all chord events in the catalog**.
- This concentration means the style achieves its emotional range **through voicing, duration, and ordering** — not through harmonic novelty.

The 12 Core Chord Types

| Chord | Occurrences | Description | |---|---|---| | i | 18 | Tonic minor — home base in minor-inflected passages | | v | 15 | Minor dominant — avoids the leading tone | | vii | 14 | Leading tone chord — creates directional pull | | iii | 13 | Mediant — middle register color | | ii | 11 | Supertonic — pre-dominant motion | | vi | 10 | Submediant — deceptive resolution target | | i5 | 10 | Power chord tonic — stripped, ambiguous | | #i | 8 | Sharp-one — chromatic approach chord | | #iv | 8 | Sharp-four — tritone color | | iv | 7 | Subdominant — plagal motion | | #v | 6 | Sharp-five — raised dominant | | iv5 | 5 | Subdominant power chord — ambiguous modal |

- The presence of both i and I (minor and major tonic) in the catalog **signals constant modal ambiguity** — the music refuses to commit to pure major or pure minor.
- Power chords (i5, iv5) remove the third entirely, **leaving the root-fifth interval to define the harmony without declaring major or minor**.
- The chromatic chords (#i, #iv, #v) **function as approach chords rather than extended harmony** — they pull toward diatonic targets by half step.

How Constraint Produces Identity

- A catalog with only 12 chord types over 41 songs **makes every chord choice immediately recognizable** as belonging to the style.
- Broader harmonic vocabulary produces richer variety but **dilutes the style's fingerprint**.
- The emotional variety in this catalog comes from **how long a chord lasts, how the bass moves under it, and where it sits in the phrase** — not from swapping in a new chord type.

Chord Voicing Philosophy

- Inversions (first inversion, second inversion) appear constantly in the analysis — **chords voiced with notes other than the root in the bass** create melodic motion even when the chord doesn't change.

- A chord can move from root position to first inversion and back **while maintaining the same Roman numeral**, creating motion within stasis.
- This inversion movement is part of why the catalog's bass lines **feel melodic even when the harmony stays static**.

CHORD SELECTION RULE

Use these 12 chord types exclusively on the first draft. Resist the urge to add ii7, IV maj7, or other extended harmonies early in the composition process. Vary voicing (inversions, omitted thirds, added octaves) before adding new chord types. If the progression sounds too simple, add a passing chord using a chromatic approach (#i or #iv) rather than a new diatonic chord.

Chapter 5: Cadences and Resolution Patterns

The half cadence — a phrase that stops on V without resolving to I — appears 3,165 times in the catalog.

- That number represents **84% of all cadential moments across 41 songs**.
- Plagal (IV to I) cadences appear 353 times at 9%, **deceptive (V to vi) at 3%, and authentic (V to I) at 3%**.
- The full resolution — the classical V-to-I cadence — **appears in only 130 moments across the entire catalog**.

What the Half Cadence Does

- A half cadence lands the phrase on the dominant (V) and stops there, **leaving the listener without a home to return to**.
- In classical music, the half cadence signals that more is coming — **it is a comma, not a period**.
- In this catalog, the half cadence **functions as the default ending for sections** — a comma that never becomes a period.
- Tension becomes the resting state, **and resolution feels like an event rather than a default**.

The Plagal Cadence as Gentle Return

- The IV-to-I plagal cadence — the "Amen" cadence — **resolves to the tonic without the urgency of a V chord.**
- At 9% of cadences, the plagal motion provides **quiet resolution at section endings** where the half cadence would feel too aggressive.
- In practice this means writing IV before I at the end of an outro or a bridge's final moment, **not at the end of a verse.**

The Deceptive Cadence

- A V-to-vi deceptive cadence **promises resolution and delivers the submediant instead.**
- At 3%, this cadence appears selectively — **usually at a structural moment where the listener expects a landing but the song continues.**
- The deceptive cadence is more disorienting than the half cadence **because it gives you something, just not the right thing.**

Authentic Resolution as Structural Event

- The authentic V-to-I cadence — appearing in only 130 moments — **carries enormous weight precisely because it is so rare.**
- When a song in this catalog finally resolves V to I, **the listener registers it as a major structural moment.**
- Reserve authentic cadences for the structural climax — **the one moment in the song where landing fully is earned.**

CADENCE RULE

End all verse phrases with a half cadence — land on V and hold it. End the bridge with either a half cadence (tension) or a plagal cadence (quiet return), never an authentic cadence. Place the single authentic cadence, if you use one, in the outro or at the bridge's structural peak. If a phrase sounds too settled or too finished, it probably resolved authentically — replace V-I with V alone.

Chapter 6: Borrowed Chords and Modal Mixture

Thirty-seven of 41 songs — 90% of the catalog — contain at least one borrowed chord.

- A borrowed chord comes from the parallel mode — **in C major, from C minor; in C minor, from C major.**
- The flat-VII (bVII) appears in ten songs as the most common borrowed chord, **with eight additional chord types following closely.**

The Eight Most Common Borrowed Chords

| Chord | Songs | Source Mode | Effect | |---|---|---|---| | bvii | 10 | Parallel minor | Modal ambiguity, avoids leading tone | | #v2 | 8 | Chromatic approach | Tension toward target | | v (minor dominant) | 8 | Parallel minor | Softer dominant, no leading tone | | v6 | 8 | Parallel minor | First inversion minor dominant | | #i6 | 8 | Chromatic | Chromatic neighbor approach | | v65 | 8 | Parallel minor | Extended minor dominant | | bVII#5#3#2 | 8 | Parallel minor | Altered flat-VII variant | | biii74 | 7 | Parallel minor | Flat mediant, strong modal color |

How the Flat-VII Works

- In C major, the bVII chord is B-flat major — **a major chord built on the lowered seventh scale degree.**
- It comes from C Mixolydian (C major with a lowered seventh), **making it a modal borrowing rather than a chromatic alteration.**
- Moving to bVII instead of V **avoids the leading tone (B natural in C major)**, keeping the tonality ambiguous and unresolved.
- The bVII feels like motion without commitment — **the harmony moves but doesn't signal where it's going.**
- In minor-key contexts, the flat-VII is actually diatonic — **it functions as the natural VII and carries no borrowed quality at all.**

The Minor Dominant (v)

- A minor dominant chord — v instead of V — **removes the major third that produces the strong pull toward tonic.**
- In C major, the diatonic dominant is G major; **the borrowed minor dominant is G minor.**
- G minor to C produces a quieter, more passive resolution — **motion without urgency.**

Using Borrowed Chords in the Bridge

- The bridge is the primary site for borrowed chord placement in this catalog, **signaling harmonic departure from the verse's established territory.**
- A borrowed chord at the opening of the bridge **announces structural change without a key change.**
- After the bridge's borrowed chords, returning to the verse's diatonic material **feels like coming home** — even though home was never fully resolved.

BORROWED CHORD RULE

Write the verse and intro entirely in diatonic C major chords. Drop the bVII (B-flat major) into the bridge — either as the opening chord or at the midpoint. Replace V with v (minor dominant) in one or two verse phrases to reduce resolution urgency. Use bVII and v together in the bridge's second half for maximum modal departure before the return.

Chapter 7: Bass — Role, Pattern, and Motion

Fifteen of 34 bass tracks in the catalog use chromatic or walking motion — 44% of all bass lines.

- Rhythmic or pedal bass accounts for 29%, arpeggiated patterns for 24%, **and root-fifth patterns for a single track (3%).**
- The dominance of walking bass means **the bass functions as a melodic voice, not a harmonic anchor.**

The Four Bass Patterns

Pattern Type	% of Tracks	Characteristics
Chromatic/Walking	44%	Step motion between chord roots; chromatic passing tones
Rhythmic/Pedal	29%	Repeated note or short figure; creates rhythmic drive
Arpeggiated	24%	Bass outlines chord tones; defines harmony in low register
Root-Fifth	3%	Alternates root and fifth; basic harmonic anchor

How Walking Bass Works

- A walking bass line connects chord roots by step, **using passing tones — diatonic and chromatic — to fill the gaps.**
- When the chord changes from C to F, the bass might move C–D–E–F, **arriving on the new root by step rather than by leap.**
- Chromatic passing tones — notes outside the key — **add tension to the approach:** C–D#–E–F instead of C–D–E–F.
- The bass line's step motion is visible in the analysis — **individual tracks show 74% to 99% step motion in their bass parts.**

The Bass and the Rest of the Low Register

- When the bass moves melodically, **other low-register instruments must leave it room.**
- Left-hand keyboard, low-octave guitar, and any instrument playing below the staff **should stay above the bass register** when the bass is walking.
- Two melodic voices in the same register **produce mud rather than counterpoint.**

The Pedal Bass in Context

- Rhythmic or pedal bass — a repeated note or short pattern — **appears in sections requiring sustained energy without forward motion.**
- Pedal bass under changing harmony creates **harmonic tension as the upper voices move against the static low note.**
- The "Bodysnatchers" analysis shows 97 consecutive D pedal instances — **the entire verse section built on a single repeated bass note** while the guitar harmony moves above it.

BASS WRITING RULE

Write the verse bass as a walking line — connect chord roots by step, add chromatic passing tones on the approach to key moments. Use pedal bass (sustained or repeated note) in energetic sections where harmonic motion above the pedal creates tension. Keep the arpeggiated bass (outlining chord tones) for softer sections: intros, outros, sparse moments. Never double the bass line in another instrument in the same register.

Chapter 8: Instrument Families and Voicing

Guitar appears on 78 tracks across 41 songs — an average of 1.9 guitar tracks per song.

Instrument Family Distribution

| Family | Total Tracks | Avg Per Song | Primary Role | |---|---|---|---| | Guitar | 78 | 1.9 | Melody, rhythm, and texture layers | | Wind (vocals/synthesized melody) | 38 | 0.9 | Lead melodic voice | | Bass | 34 | 0.8 | Low-register melody and harmonic anchor | | Other (percussion, sfx, vibraphone) | 33 | 0.8 | Textural and rhythmic color | | Piano | 19 | 0.5 | Harmonic filler and melodic support | | Choir | 18 | 0.4 | Textural layer, long-held notes | | Strings | 18 | 0.4 | Sustained pads, middle register fill | | Synth pad | 13 | 0.3 | Atmospheric background | | Synth lead | 6 | 0.1 | Occasional melodic lead | | Brass | 5 | 0.1 | Rare color — punctuation only | | Organ | 4 | 0.1 | Rare sustained texture |

Guitar's Dominance

- At nearly two guitar tracks per song, **guitar covers multiple registers and functions simultaneously** — one track handles rhythm, another handles melody or upper-register texture.
- Two guitars in the same song typically move in contrary motion — **the analysis shows this pattern across multiple song pairs.**
- The rhythm guitar stays in the middle register while the lead guitar **occupies the upper middle, below the vocal line.**

Strings as Sustained Pads

- Strings appear on 18 tracks — nearly half the catalog — **but they function as sustained background layers, not melodic voices.**
- String parts in the analysis show high step-motion percentages and long note durations, **confirming their role as slow-moving pad texture.**
- A string pad fills the space between the keyboard's right hand and the vocal register, **creating continuous harmonic support without competing with the lead voices.**

Choir as Textural Thickening

- Choir and backing vocals appear in 18 tracks but **rarely carry independent melodic lines** — they double the lead vocal at the octave or third.

- Choir entries tend to arrive later in the song — **the bridge rather than the first verse** — as a way to add density without adding a new instrument family.

How Piano and Guitar Divide the Middle Register

- When both piano and guitar appear in the same song, **they tend to divide the middle register by section** — piano in the quieter sections, guitar in the denser ones.
- The two instruments rarely occupy the same frequency space at the same time, **which is why the arrangements stay clear despite using many tracks.**

INSTRUMENTATION RULE

Start with two guitar parts — one for rhythm in the middle register, one for upper-register texture. Add bass as the third voice — it should occupy the register below both guitars. Add strings or synth pad as the fourth voice — use sustained, slow-moving notes in the upper middle register. Choir arrives in the bridge, not in the verse. Piano and guitar share the middle register only if they are in different sections — not simultaneously.

Chapter 9: Melodic Motifs and Hooks

The single most common melodic interval sequence in the catalog is four consecutive unisons.

- This pattern — staying on the same pitch four times in a row — **appears 5,887 times across all tracks.**
- The second most common is the fourth-down-fourth-up pattern (P4, -P4, P4, -P4), **appearing 1,442 times.**

The Five Signature Motif Patterns

Interval Sequence	Occurrences	Character	Use Case	--- --- --- ---	Unison × 4	5,887
Static, drone-like	Riffs, ostinato, sustained notes	P4, -P4, P4, -P4	1,442	Oscillating fourths		
Guitar riffs, melodic hooks	-P4, P4, -P4, P4	1,402	Oscillating fourths (inverted)			
Counter melody, bass figure	P4, -unison, P5, P4	669	Rising with octave drop	Vocal phrases, melodic arches	P5, P4, -unison, P5	656
	Ascending then reset	Instrumental melodic lines				

Unpacking the Unison Motif

- A four-note unison sequence is, in simple terms, **a repeated pitch — the same note held four times.**
- At 5,887 occurrences, this pattern isn't incidental — **it is the foundational melodic gesture of the entire catalog.**
- The effect of a repeated pitch against moving harmony is **a pedal-tone melody — the note stays fixed while the chord below it changes meaning.**
- When the chord changes from C major to G minor and the melody stays on E, **that E moves from being the major third to being the minor sixth** — the pitch is identical but the harmonic relationship transforms.

The Oscillating Fourth

- The P4/-P4 pattern — up a fourth, down a fourth — **creates a rocking motion around a central pitch.**
- It appears in guitar riff construction and in bass line figures, **providing rhythmic momentum without melodic ascent or descent.**
- This pattern is identifiable in two bars: **one statement of the riff, a beat of space, and the repeat.**

Building a Hook from Static Material

- The catalog demonstrates that a hook doesn't need to ascend — **a repeated pitch with strong rhythmic placement is more memorable than a climbing line.**
- Repetition at the same pitch emphasizes rhythm over melody, **making the rhythmic pattern the hook** rather than the pitch.
- The moving harmony underneath the static melody **provides sufficient harmonic variety** without requiring the melody to move.

MOTIF WRITING RULE

Build your verse riff from a single repeated pitch or a fourth-oscillation figure. Play the motif once, leave two beats of space, and repeat it — the pause is part of the motif. The riff must be identifiable within two bars — anything requiring more space belongs in the solo or bridge. Allow the chord below the repeated pitch to change — the melody stays fixed, the harmony transforms it. The rhythmic pattern of the repeated pitch matters more than the pitch itself.

Chapter 10: Counterpoint and Instrument Interplay

Contrary motion dominates 161 of 311 analyzed melodic instrument pairs — 52% of all two-voice relationships.

- Parallel motion dominates 150 pairs, or 48%, **making this a near-even split that favors contrary motion by a small but consistent margin.**
- Contrary motion — two voices moving in opposite directions simultaneously — **is the most efficient way to create textural fullness without redundancy.**

What Contrary Motion Sounds Like

- When Guitar 1 moves from C up to E, Guitar 2 moves from G down to E at the same moment, **both voices converging on the same pitch from opposite directions.**
- The two lines cover different parts of the pitch spectrum simultaneously, **creating a sense of stereo width from pitch content alone.**
- Contrary motion between guitar and vocal — visible in multiple songs in the analysis — **means the guitar often descends when the vocal ascends.**

When Parallel Motion Works

- Parallel motion — two voices moving in the same direction — **produces emphasis and unity** at the expense of independence.
- A passage where both guitars ascend together **creates a unified push toward a structural peak.**
- Parallel thirds — two voices moving the same direction a third apart — **produce warmth and sweetness:** the harmony vocal technique.
- The catalog uses parallel motion selectively — **at peaks, at unisons, and in moments of arrival** — reserving it for impact rather than default use.

The 52–48 Ratio as a Working Rule

- A 52–48 split between contrary and parallel motion means **the two approaches alternate throughout any given song**.
- Neither pure contrary motion nor pure parallel motion for an entire song — **the variation between them is itself a source of texture change**.
- When two melodic parts stay in parallel motion for more than two beats, **the texture collapses into a single compound voice** — audible as thinning, not thickening.

Applying Counterpoint Between Instruments

- When writing for guitar and keyboard, **default to contrary motion as the starting point**.
- If the keyboard ascends over a chord change, **bring the guitar down by a similar interval**.
- The vocal and the guitar almost never need to agree in direction — **when the vocal climbs to a phrase peak, the guitar's descent provides space for it**.

COUNTERPOINT RULE

When writing two melodic parts, verify after completion that they move in opposite directions more than 50% of the time. If both parts ascend together for more than two beats, invert one of the lines. Use parallel motion deliberately — at peaks, at moments of arrival, at unison landings. The vocal and the lead guitar should move in contrary motion by default.

Chapter 11: Pedal Points and Harmonic Suspension

Seven hundred and thirty-seven pedal point instances appear across 24 of 41 songs — 59% of the catalog.

- A pedal point is a sustained or repeated pitch in one voice **while the harmony changes in the other voices**.
- D is the most common pedal pitch at 126 instances, **followed by C (111), C# (88), E (85), and F (59)**.

D as the Primary Pedal Pitch

- D is the second scale degree in C major — the supertonic, **one step above the tonic and one step below the mediant**.
- As a pedal, D creates a persistent tension against the changing harmony above it, **because D fits awkwardly into some chords and smoothly into others**.
- Against C major, D is the ninth — a mild dissonance.
- Against G minor, D is the fifth — consonant.
- Against F major, D is the sixth — modal.
- The pedal D **changes harmonic color without changing pitch**, letting the chords above it recontextualize the same low note.

C as Tonic Pedal

- The C pedal — appearing 111 times — **freezes the bass on the tonic while the harmony moves above it**.
- A tonic pedal creates a "hovering before landing" effect — **the home pitch is present but the harmony hasn't resolved**.
- The C pedal in "Little by Little" and other songs **appears for 28 consecutive instances** — an entire verse section with an unmoving bass note under harmonic motion.

Pedal Duration and Function

- The average pedal event in this catalog lasts 6.5 note repetitions, **which places these pedals in the short-to-medium range**.
- Short pedal runs — under 8 repetitions — **function as transition devices rather than extended drone sections**.
- A pedal point of 6 beats at 109 BPM lasts roughly 3.3 seconds, **long enough to establish tension but short enough to release into the next phrase**.

Bass Pedal vs. Inner Voice Pedal

- Most pedal points in the catalog sit in the bass, **creating a static floor under moving chords**.
- Occasional inner-voice pedals — a sustained guitar note while chords change around it — **create a different quality of tension**: the static element floats in the middle of the texture rather than anchoring the bottom.

PEDAL POINT RULE

Place a bass pedal on D under the verse's most harmonically active moment. Keep the pedal to 4–8 note repetitions — enough to establish tension, short enough to release. Use a C pedal (tonic pedal) in the intro and outro as a structural frame. Try an inner-voice pedal in the bridge — sustain a G or E in the guitar while the other instruments change harmony.

Chapter 12: Building a Song in This Style — Step by Step

This chapter walks through a complete composition in sequence, one decision at a time.

- Each step draws directly from the statistical findings of the previous eleven chapters.
- The result, if you follow each step in order, **will produce a song that sits within the style's established parameters.**

Step 1: Choose Key and Mode

- Open a new session and set the key to C major.
- The catalog uses C major 88% of the time — **working in this key before transposing is standard practice** for writing in this style.
- Note the parallel minor (C minor) as the source for borrowed chords in later steps.

Step 2: Set Your Tempo

- Set the session to 109.3 BPM in 4/4 time.
- The physical feel of 16th notes at this tempo — **their spacing, their urgency, their breathability** — shapes every voicing decision that follows.
- Adjust tempo only after the composition is complete.

Step 3: Write the Primary Riff

- Build a two-bar guitar figure using a repeated pitch or a fourth-oscillation (up a fourth, down a fourth).

- The riff should be identifiable on first hearing — **two bars with a beat of space between repetitions.**
- Do not harmonize the riff yet — let it stand alone to test its strength.

Step 4: Write the Verse Chord Progression

- The verse progression should draw from the core 12 chord types: i, v, vii, iii, ii, vi, i5, iv.
- Avoid starting the verse on the tonic chord (I or i) — **the catalog rarely settles on home at the start of a section.**
- End all verse phrases with a half cadence — **land on V and stay there for at least two beats before the phrase repeats.**
- An effective starting template: ii — v — iii — vii, ending the phrase on v for the half cadence.

Step 5: Write the Bass Line

- Write the bass as a walking line — **connect chord roots by step, adding chromatic passing tones at approach moments.**
- If the chord changes from G to C, try: G–A–B–C (diatonic) or G–A–B $\blacksquare$ –C (chromatic passing tone on B $\blacksquare$).
- Keep the bass below all other instruments — **nothing in the arrangement should sound lower than the bass note at any given moment.**

Step 6: Add the Second Guitar

- Write a second guitar part that moves in the **opposite direction from the first guitar whenever possible.**
- If Guitar 1 ascends over a chord change, Guitar 2 descends.
- Check the counterpoint after writing it — **contrary motion should dominate at roughly 52% of all beat-by-beat comparisons.**

Step 7: Place the Pedal Point

- Identify the verse section's most harmonically active moment — **where the most chords change or where the progression feels most mobile.**
- Add a D pedal in the bass at that point, lasting 4–8 note repetitions.

- The pedal freezes the bass while the chord above it continues to change, **creating harmonic tension without adding new chords.**

Step 8: Build the Bridge

- Open the bridge with the bVII chord (B-flat major in C major).
- The bVII **signals departure from the verse's established harmonic territory** — everything before it was home, everything after it is departure.
- Add the minor dominant (G minor instead of G major) in the bridge's second half.
- End the bridge with a half cadence — **resist the urge to resolve fully before returning to the verse.**

Step 9: Write the Intro and Outro

- The intro is the verse riff without the vocal or melodic layer — **one to two cycles of the chord progression with the guitar figure only.**
- The outro reduces the texture rather than adding to it — **remove instruments one by one, ending with the primary riff or bass alone.**
- The outro should sound like the song is being dismantled, not celebrated.

Step 10: Check Counterpoint Throughout

- Go back through the full arrangement and **verify that every pair of melodic instruments shows contrary motion more than parallel.**
- Fix any passage where two voices ascend together for more than two beats.
- The vocal and the lead guitar should move in opposite directions at every phrase.

FULL COMPOSITION CHECKLIST

- Key: C major ✓
- Tempo: 109.3 BPM in 4/4 ✓
- Verse riff: unison or fourth-oscillation, identifiable in 2 bars ✓
- Verse progression: starts off tonic, ends on V (half cadence) ✓
- Bass: walking, chromatic passing tones, below all other voices ✓

- *Two guitars: contrary motion dominant (>50%) ✓*
- *Pedal point: D, 4–8 repetitions, at peak harmonic motion ✓*
- *Bridge: opens bVII, contains minor dominant, ends half cadence ✓*
- *Intro: verse riff without melody, 1–2 cycles ✓*
- *Outro: textural reduction, no new material ✓*

Chapter 13: Song-by-Song Reference Notes

The following entries provide a condensed theory profile for each analyzed song. Use these as composition templates or analytical reference points.

1. 2+2=5

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 149 BPM | **Time:** 8/8
- **Primary Motif:** Unison × 4
- **Bass Pattern:** Chromatic/walking (77.7% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×4 – Bridge×2 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** Heavy — over 100 borrowed chord types; chromatic passing harmonies dominate the bridge.

2. Sit Down, Stand Up

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 81 BPM | **Time:** 3/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison × 4
- **Bass Pattern:** No bass; synth carries low register
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×8 – Bridge×7 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** iv⁷₄, bvii, i+4 — minor-inflected subdominant and leading-tone variants throughout.

3. Backdrift (Intro)

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 93 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison ascending

- **Bass Pattern:** None noted
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×2 – Bridge – Outro
- **Borrowings:** biii, #ivbb7, ivb7 — flat-three and altered fourth chords create unsettled center.

4. Go to Sleep

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 152 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** P4 oscillation
- **Bass Pattern:** Chromatic/walking (76.7% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×8 – Bridge×7 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bvii, bVII, bIII — flat-seven and flat-three form the bridge's harmonic language.

5. Where I End and You Begin

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 115 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison × 4
- **Bass Pattern:** Chromatic/walking (78.9% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×11 – Bridge×8 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** #v, biii, bVII — sharp-five and flat-three borrowings sustain ambiguity through 11 verses.

6. We Suck Young Blood

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 157 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison × 4
- **Bass Pattern:** Rhythmic/pedal (49.4% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×13 – Bridge×12 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** biii, bVII, bvii — flat mode borrowings define the entire harmonic palette.

7. The Gloaming

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 133 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison × 4
- **Bass Pattern:** Chromatic/walking (100% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Chorus×2 – Verse×4 – Bridge×4 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bvii2, viib8 — minimal borrowing; chromatic bass does the harmonic work.

8. There, There

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 127 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** P4 oscillation
- **Bass Pattern:** Chromatic/walking (85% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×11 – Bridge×10 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bvii, bVII — flat-seven only; harmonic austerity balanced by rhythmic drive.

9. I Will

- **Key:** C# minor | **Tempo:** 75 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** M3–m3–P5 descent
- **Bass Pattern:** Guitar only (3-voice texture)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×2 – Bridge – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bi+64 — unusual double-borrowed chord; harmonic complexity lives in its density.

10. A Punchup at a Wedding

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 79 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** P4 oscillation
- **Bass Pattern:** Arpeggiated (19.1% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×6 – Bridge×5 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** biii#7, bIII — flat-three borrowings appear in multiple positions; complex inner voice movement.

11. Myxomatosis

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 99 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** m3 descent
- **Bass Pattern:** Rhythmic/pedal (44.5% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×5 – Bridge×4 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** Minimal — most harmonic interest comes from bass pedal and rhythmic drive.

12. Scatterbrain

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 127 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison descending
- **Bass Pattern:** Chromatic/walking (81.7% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×6 – Bridge×5 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** biii+7#4, bVII+5#3 — augmented flat-three creates distinctive unease.

13. A Wolf at the Door

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 139 BPM | **Time:** 6/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison × 4
- **Bass Pattern:** Chromatic/walking (79.4% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×5 – Bridge×3 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bIII6, bvii — flat-three and flat-seven; 6/4 time changes phrase weight without changing meter feel.

14. Paperbag Writer

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 103 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison × 4
- **Bass Pattern:** Rhythmic/pedal (C# throughout)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×5 – Bridge×3 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bvii+4, #i, bIII — multiple borrowings; C# pedal throughout creates constant tonal pull.

15. 15 Step

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 94 BPM | **Time:** 10/8
- **Primary Motif:** m3 descent
- **Bass Pattern:** Rhythmic/pedal (45.2% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×2 – Bridge – Outro
- **Borrowings:** #v, biii — compact borrowing palette; 10/8 meter shifts phrase length unpredictably.

16. Bodysnatchers

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 168 BPM | **Time:** 4/4

- **Primary Motif:** P4 ascending
- **Bass Pattern:** Rhythmic/pedal (D throughout)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×10 – Bridge×9 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bvii, bVII — flat-seven dominant; D pedal sustains tension across entire song.

17. Nude

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 62 BPM | **Time:** 6/8
- **Primary Motif:** P4 descending
- **Bass Pattern:** Arpeggiated (37.8% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×2 – Bridge – Outro
- **Borrowings:** #v, #i43, biii+7#4 — unusual augmented borrowings; 6/8 gives the melody a rocking lilt.

18. Weird Fishes/Arpeggi

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 152 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison × 4
- **Bass Pattern:** Chromatic/walking (79.1% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse/Chorus alternating – Bridge – Outro
- **Borrowings:** Minimal — #i4, #vb42 only; guitar arpeggios carry the entire textural weight.

19. All I Need

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 90 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** m2 static
- **Bass Pattern:** Synth lead (no conventional bass)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×6 – Bridge – Outro
- **Borrowings:** Minimal diatonic; synth texture replaces harmonic borrowing as the primary color source.

20. Reckoner

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 106 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** P5–P4 ascending
- **Bass Pattern:** Arpeggiated (33.1% step)

- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×7 – Bridge×5 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** VI#75#3, biii+6#3 — augmented sixth chords and flat-three borrowing; strings provide contrary motion.

21. House of Cards

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 112 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** P4–P4 pattern
- **Bass Pattern:** Rhythmic/pedal (F throughout)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×9 – Bridge×8 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bvii, bVII — flat-seven family; F pedal creates modal ambiguity for the entire song.

22. Jigsaw Falling Into Place

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 170 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison × 4
- **Bass Pattern:** Chromatic/walking (74.2% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×11 – Bridge×9 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bVII#3, #i2 — Mixolydian flat-seven and chromatic sharp-one create tension at the catalog's fastest tempo.

23. Videotape

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 77 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison × 4
- **Bass Pattern:** Chromatic/walking (78.4% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×6 – Bridge×4 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** #i5, III#3 — sharp-one and major-three borrowings; repeating C#/E/A pedal pattern anchors the entire song.

24. Down Is the New Up

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 110 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison × 4
- **Bass Pattern:** Root-fifth (46.9% fifth motion)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×6 – Bridge×4 – Outro

- **Borrowings:** iiib85, bIII+6 — unusual raised-five and augmented flat-three; the catalog's only root-fifth bass.

25. Go Slowly

- **Key:** B minor | **Tempo:** 120 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** P5–P4–M3–m3 ascending
- **Bass Pattern:** No bass track
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×6 – Bridge×4 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** Minimal — i5b44; B minor with piano and guitar only, strings provide sustained pads.

26. Last Flowers

- **Key:** A minor | **Tempo:** 160 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** P5–P4–M3–m3 ascending
- **Bass Pattern:** No bass track
- **Structure:** Intro – Chorus×3 – Verse×6 – Bridge×9 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** vii#2, I — major tonic borrowed from parallel major appears at structural peaks.

27. Bangers and Mash

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 132 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** P5–P4–M3–m3 ascending
- **Bass Pattern:** Arpeggiated (53.1% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×7 – Bridge×5 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bvii, bvii2, VI76#2 — flat-seven dominant with major VI borrowing; pedal alternates F and A.

28. 4 Minute Warning

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 60 BPM | **Time:** 6/4
- **Primary Motif:** P4–M3–m6 pattern
- **Bass Pattern:** Arpeggiated (38% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×2 – Bridge – Outro
- **Borrowings:** #vo4, #v, III#3 — raised-five and major-three; 6/4 at 60 BPM produces extreme breath between beats.

29. Bloom

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 110 BPM | **Time:** 1/4 (complex)
- **Primary Motif:** P4–P4–M2 static
- **Bass Pattern:** Rhythmic/pedal (29.8% step)
- **Structure:** Detected as single extended section
- **Borrowings:** G pedal throughout; brass section enters in bridge; unusual 1/4 time signature in MIDI transcription.

30. Little by Little

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 115 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** M2 static
- **Bass Pattern:** Arpeggiated (25.1% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×8 – Bridge×6 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bVII6#5#3, bVII#7#5#4#3 — heavily altered flat-seven voicings; C pedal throughout the verse.

31. Feral

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 136 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** P4 ascending
- **Bass Pattern:** Rhythmic/pedal (51.4% step)
- **Structure:** Detected as minimal sections (electronic)
- **Borrowings:** Minimal standard harmony; drone-based electronic texture with rhythmic pedal bass.

32. Lotus Flower

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 120 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** m3 ascending
- **Bass Pattern:** None (choir texture)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse/Chorus alternating – Bridge – Outro
- **Borrowings:** biii2, bVII6 — flat-three and flat-seven in chorus; the verse stays almost entirely diatonic.

33. Codex

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 62 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison descending
- **Bass Pattern:** Chromatic/walking (87% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×4 – Bridge×3 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bVII — single flat-seven borrowing; piano and strings carry the harmonic weight with minimal complexity.

34. Separator

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 112 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison × 4
- **Bass Pattern:** Rhythmic/pedal (F throughout)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×9 – Bridge/Chorus alternating – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bvii, bvii4, bvii#5 — flat-seven in multiple voicings; F pedal matches House of Cards in harmonic concept.

35. Burn the Witch

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 75 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison × 4
- **Bass Pattern:** Chromatic/walking (92.8% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×4 – Bridge×3 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** III, #ibb75 — major mediant and chromatic alterations; F#/E pedal alternation creates signature hook.

36. Daydreaming

- **Key:** A minor | **Tempo:** 50 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** P5 descending
- **Bass Pattern:** None (piano texture)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×4 – Bridge×3 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bII+, bVI+7 — flat-two and augmented flat-six; catalog's slowest tempo at 50 BPM.

37. Ful Stop

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 150 BPM | **Time:** 6/4
- **Primary Motif:** M3 ascending
- **Bass Pattern:** Chromatic/walking (99% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×10 – Bridge×8 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bvii+#8##5, viib8 — altered flat-seven variants; 6/4 at 150 BPM produces relentless forward drive.

38. Glass Eyes

- **Key:** C minor | **Tempo:** 60 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** m6 ascending
- **Bass Pattern:** No bass (piano and strings)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×2 – Bridge – Outro
- **Borrowings:** #ib8b7542 — rare double-altered borrowed chord; the catalog's sparsest arrangement.

39. Identikit

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 74 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** Unison × 4
- **Bass Pattern:** Chromatic/walking (69.4% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×2 – Bridge – Outro
- **Borrowings:** #v, #v2 — sharp-five borrowings; descending bass pedal sequence creates chromatic motion.

40. The Numbers

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 80 BPM | **Time:** 4/4
- **Primary Motif:** M3–m3 descending
- **Bass Pattern:** Arpeggiated (28.2% step)
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×6 – Bridge×5 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** bIII64, v6 — flat-three and minor dominant; guitar/strings show strong contrary motion pattern.

41. Present Tense

- **Key:** C major | **Tempo:** 95 BPM | **Time:** 4/4

- **Primary Motif:** M3–m3 static
- **Bass Pattern:** No dedicated bass
- **Structure:** Intro – Verse×7 – Bridge×6 – Outro
- **Borrowings:** #v, biii+6#3 — sharp-five and augmented flat-three; catalog's most complex borrowed chord voicings.

Appendix: Raw Aggregate Data

Key Distribution

Key Songs Percentage	--- --- ---	C major 36 88%	A minor 2 5%	C# minor 1 2%
B minor 1 2%	C minor 1 2%			

Time Signatures

Time Signature Songs	--- ---	4/4 33	6/4 3	8/8 1	3/4 1	10/8 1	6/8 1	1/4 1

Cadence Type Distribution

Cadence Type Count Percentage	--- --- ---	Half (→V) 3,165 84%	Plagal (IV→I) 353 9%	Deceptive (V→vi) 132 3%	Authentic (V→I) 130 3%
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Bass Pattern Distribution

Pattern Tracks Percentage	--- --- ---	Chromatic/Walking 15 44%	Rhythmic/Pedal 10 29%	Arpeggiated 8 24%	Root-Fifth 1 3%
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Counterpoint Motion

Motion Type Pairs Percentage	--- --- ---	Contrary motion dominant 161 52%	Parallel motion dominant 150 48%
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Top 5 Melodic Motifs

Interval Sequence	Occurrences
--- --- Unison × 4	5,887
P4, -P4, P4, -P4	1,442
-P4, P4, -P4, P4	1,402
P4, -unison, P5, P4	669
P5, P4, -unison, P5	656

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