



# RockStudy Music

The Theory Behind Rock & Pop

## Topic 6

### Form and Structure Part B

By Lachlan Wilson

[www.rockstudymusic.com](http://www.rockstudymusic.com)

# Form & Structure Part B

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# Overview

Rock and roll music developed throughout America from the middle of the twentieth century onwards. Young adults, then known as teenagers, looked to identify their contemporary status by way of specific clothing fashion, young role models, who were often film actors such as James Dean and Marlon Brando, and most importantly, a new musical style that projected optimism, excitement, and rhythmic vitality.

The emerging rock and roll musician was inevitably young, enthusiastic, and musically untrained. However by varying and adapting much of the musical language of previous styles, particularly Rhythm and Blues and Country music, a new form of music evolved, one that spoke clearly to the young people of America and subsequently throughout the whole world. This evolution has continued to develop over several decades thereby influencing the many stylistically variations within the genre.

Furthermore, many rock musicians have developed considerable technical skills without any real understanding of music notation and how the theoretical aspect of musical language relates to performance. There can be little doubt that a thorough understanding of music theory can further enhance performance and compositional skills within the musician, which ultimately leads to a more overall proficient musical artist.

## About the Author

Melbourne based musician Lachlan Wilson was drawn to Rock and Roll music from a very young age, and this involvement has since spanned many decades. Whilst also embracing many other musical styles, it was the initial impact of Rock music that has always remained a strong influence throughout his musical career.

As a performer Lachlan has played saxophone and flute in several groups and ensembles throughout Australia dating from the 1960's, through to more contemporary times.

The desire for a more comprehensive understanding of music theory saw him undertake further study where he completed a Bachelor of Music at the University of Melbourne, later leading to additional Post Graduate studies in both composition and education.

Lachlan has subsequently taught harmony and counterpoint at tertiary level for more than 20 years in contrasting musical genres ranging from the Renaissance era through to contemporary non-tonal theoretical practices.

During these educational sessions, the energy and authority of the musical language associated with Rock and Pop music has formed the basis of these instructive modules.

# User's Guide

The headphone symbol lets you know that there is listening material available via the links provided.



The vinyl record symbol lets you know when a specific piece of music is being discussed. The title, artist and composer will be listed here.



Analysis and notation examples are indicated by the image of a treble clef.



Generally notation examples are designed to reinforce the audio examples and offer support for different levels of music theory knowledge. Examples include:

The chord symbol or name. Amaj, Dmin, etc.

The chord's functional name: Tonic, Dominant, Mediant, etc.

The chord's function, represented as a Roman Numeral: I, ii, iii, IV, V etc. It should be noted that in this style an upper case numeral indicates a major chord, and a lower case numeral indicates a minor chord. Additional symbols provide further information such as o denotes that the chord is a diminished triad and the + sign denotes that the chord is an augmented triad. The musical notes, key signature and time signatures will also be laid out across a musical staff.

Additionally each topic will also have its own playlist available on Spotify. These playlists include the original artist version of the songs examined as well as extra listening examples related to the topic. Click [Here](#) to listen to Spotify playlist for this book.

Go to <https://www.rockstudymusic.com/> for details.

## Purchasing



If you wish to develop an educational version for use in the classroom, please contact the Victorian Music Teachers Association.

Go to <https://www.vmta.org.au/online-store/rockstudy-music-online-theory-courses/>

# Introduction

## Form and Structure in Rock and Pop music. Part B

As Discussed in Part A there are several elements involved in creating a successful Rock or Pop song. Melody, harmony, rhythm, and lyrics are all very important aspects of the overall piece. Although as has been highlighted, how the musical material has been assembled within a formal structure is also a vital feature of the compositional process. This second book regarding the subject of Form and Structure will seek to explore additional and more varied types of musical form as found in the ongoing development of the Rock and Pop genre and established during the decades since the emergence of the style.

### Podcast

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### Playlists

The Spotify playlist for this book can be found by clicking [here](#) or heading over to our website <https://www.rockstudymusic.com/ep-6-form-structure-part-b>

### Go to

<https://www.vmta.org.au/online-store/rockstudy-music-online-theory-courses/>

# Topic 1 - The AAA Structure.

The 12-bar blues format have a single repeating section, generally comprising 12 bars in length, with specific features associated with the music. Although another popular repeating section type form that has often been used in the Rock and Pop style is what can be best described as AAA form, with each section mainly consisting 16 or 8 bars, although longer bar durations can also be found. This type of form can be an ideal vehicle for those songs that are either story-based or contain important lyrical messages. American composer Jimmy Webb has employed the 16-bar version of AAA form in his song “By The Time I Get To Phoenix” to tell the tale of a dejected lover deciding to leave a faltering relationship and travel across the USA whilst reflecting upon his partners’ expected daily events. Glen Campbell released the best-known version of this tune in 1967 to much acclaim. The repeating AAA structure is ideal for this story-based lyric content, particularly when the final A section has been rounded off with a very brief coda, to complete the piece.



“By The Time I Get To Phoenix”  
Jimmy Webb.



Click on the link to listen to  
“By The Time I Get To Phoenix”  
from 0:10 – 0:57.



“On Broadway”  
Barry Mann/Cynthia Weil/Jerry Leiber/Mike Stoller.



Click on the link to listen to  
“On Broadway” from 0:15 – 1:32



One consideration surrounding songs composed in AAA form is the necessity for a strong melodic line. It has been suggested that if the music can stand-alone when performed as an instrumental work, then this is an indication of a memorable tune.



## “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face” Ewan MacColl.

The much-recorded song “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face” clearly illustrates this point. The fact that there have been over 100 different cover versions of this song testifies to the absolute quality of the piece. Initially composed as a folk song the following example is probably the best-known version released by soul singer Roberta Flack in 1972 and included in the Clint Eastwood film *Play Misty for me*. In this case the slow A sections are heard 3 times which incorporates a highly melodic condensed coda.



Click on the link to listen to  
“The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face”  
from 0:30 – 2:00



## “Blowin’ in the Wind” Bob Dylan.

The Previous examples all contain 16 bar sections, and a variation to this structure can be found in Bob Dylan’s protest song “Blowin’ in the Wind” which is a musical reflection relating to various social issues confronting the population of the day. In this case Dylan uses three repeating 8 bar A sections with developing lyrics, however he adds a further 8 bars as a response to his stated concerns of the values of society, thereby rounding off his message with an “answer”. This additional section added to the conventional AAA form, resulting in what can best be described as an AAAB structure, proves to be perfectly suitable for Dylan to relay his message.



Click on the link to listen to  
“Blowin’ in the Wind”  
from 0:03 – 0:45





## Topic 2 - The ABAB Structure

A similar alternative to the AAA form is the ABAB structure, in as much that each A and B section generally comprise 8 bars each, thereby providing a total of 16 bars per segment. The B section generally contrasts musically to the A section whilst musically complementing the initial A section rounding out the structure of each cycle.



“Hello”  
Lionel Ritchie.

Note how each of the contrasting segment compliment each other in the Lionel Richie song “Hello”. Interestingly whilst each component has 8 bars, the B section contains a 2/4 bar and as such slightly shifts the pulse at the end of each B section.



Click on the link to listen to  
“Hello” from 0:12 – 1:22



“Sunny”  
Bobby Hebb.

Similar to the AAA format, music written in the ABAB structure can also lend itself to regular upward tonal shifts to include a sense of forward motion. The Marvin Gaye recording of the much-covered Bobby Hebb R & B song “Sunny”, continually builds tension and excitement by this modulation method throughout the ABAB structure.



Click on the link to listen to  
“Sunny” from 0:36 – 1:10



Exercises and Activities.  
Form and Structure Book B





## Topic 3 - Verse/Chorus form

By far the most popular form used by songwriters in both Rock and Pop music has been the Verse/Chorus structure. This has particularly been the case since the 1980's where this format represents by far the majority of successful songs within this style. It is important to clarify how the term chorus relates to music written in the Rock and Pop genre, and that regarded as a chorus in previous styles, such as Broadway tunes and songs written by the well-known composers which are often referred to as "popular standards" In these cases, the chorus refers to a complete cycle of the overall form, be that AABA, ABAB, ABAC or similar. Many of these tunes would incorporate an extended

introduction prior to moving onto the total chorus proper. In fact, Jazz musicians regularly refer to improvising over one or more choruses, meaning the complete form, when performing these tunes. In reality there are very few authentic Verse/ Chorus tunes in the repertoire of the American popular song composed during the first half of the 20th century, or for that matter mainstream jazz, as AABA form was by far the preferred structure, along with similar variations of the 32-bar format. The major difference between the verse and the chorus in Rock and Pop music is the intensity of the melodic line, the underpinning harmony, and for the most part the use of the title of the song, which generally appears at either the beginning or the end of the chorus. Furthermore, the chorus tends to have a repeating lyric line, whereas each verse generally introduces new lyric material. In short, the role of the verse is to prepare the listener for the upcoming chorus rather than challenge the status of this following section.

The sheer volume of Rock and Pop songs composed using the Verse/Chorus structure in recent decades is so extensive that it almost seems pointless and unjust to highlight just a few specific musical examples.

However, in an effort to emphasise the significance of this format, a number of varying styles have been included to demonstrate the important role that this type of form has been to successful artists and songwriters.



"Highway to Hell"  
Angus Young/Malcolm Young/Bon Scott.

Consider how the chorus both compliments and contrasts dramatically with the verse in "Highway To Hell" recorded by the Australian hard rock 'supergroup' AC/DC in 1979. In this instance the vocal line in the verse serves to anticipate the powerful melodic and repeating lyric title of the chorus.



Click on the link to listen to  
"Highway to Hell"  
from 0:08 – 1:12





## "Ms Jackson" Andre' Benjamin/Antwan Patton/David Sheats.

Even including a chorus to more contemporary musical styles can add a distinctive element to the music. In their single "Ms Jackson", the hip-hop duo Outkast provide an excellent contrast between the rapping speech rhythms found in the verse and the very catchy melodic contour of the chorus.



Click on the link to listen to  
"Ms Jackson"  
from 0:43 – 1:36



## Hybrid Verse/Chorus forms.

The inclusion of a strong chorus can also be an effective addition to existing forms other than regular Verse/Chorus songs, thereby creating something of a mixed structure. For instance, the Adele tune "Rolling in the Deep" recorded and released in 2010 uses the AB format prior to introducing a powerful chorus.



## "Rolling In The Deep" Adele Adkins/Paul Epworth.



Click on the link to listen to  
"Rolling In The Deep"  
from 0:23 – 1:20



The reason for labelling the sections in this piece as A and B rather than pre-chorus is simply because the B section does not always precede the chorus and is similar in style to the initial A section, albeit with differing underlying harmonic progression. The song also includes an additional improvisation type segment based upon the chorus, which acts as a closing interlude prior to the final repeating chorus.



## "Can't Buy Me Love" John Lennon/Paul McCartney.

The addition of a chorus to a traditional 12 bar blues format has also been effectively used. A very good example of this combination of forms can be found in the early Beatles song "Can't Buy Me Love" which was later included in both the album and the film *A Hard Days Night*.



Click on the link to listen to  
"Can't Buy Me Love"  
from 0:00 – 0:55



In this case the music actually opens with a condensed chorus prior to alternating with the 12 bar verses, rather than the normal situation of the verse preceding the chorus. Each of the choruses within the main body of the song contain 8 bars each. As the previous examples demonstrate, the inclusion of a chorus containing strong melodic and lyric material can be successfully incorporated into various other structures thereby successfully creating a type of hybrid form.

## The Pre-Chorus

Many verse chorus songs also include an additional section that acts as a pre-chorus that increases the intensity of the music immediately prior to the actual chorus. This section may be quite short or a similar length to the verse.



## "(I've Had) The Time Of My Life" Franke Previte/John DeNicola/Donald

A good example can be found in the Academy Award winning power duet "(I've had) The Time Of My life", taken from the soundtrack of the film and musical *Dirty Dancing*, and performed by Bill Medley and Jennifer Warnes. In fact, similar to "Can't Buy Me Love" this song also begins with the chorus, albeit a slow and freely delivered interpretation. Each verse, pre-chorus, and chorus section contain 8 bars that progressively climbs towards the passionate peak of the Chorus where the true strength of the music is released.



Click on the link to listen to  
"(I've Had) The Time Of My  
Life" from 0:00 – 2:03





## “Sweet Caroline” Neil Diamond.

Another excellent example of a pre-chorus successfully building momentum can be found in Neil Diamond’s classic hit “Sweet Caroline”. It is hard to imagine a more crowd engaging musical segment than the chorus of this song when inevitably large groups of people, particularly at sporting events, join in to not only sing the words, but also the instrumental segments, associated with this song. However, it is the extended pre-chorus that really sets up the entry of the chorus.



Click on the link to listen to  
“Sweet Caroline”  
from 0:00 – 1:25



The overall structure of the song is quite interesting where unusually the introduction contains 7 bars, all of which emphasise the dominant harmony of song. The introduction gives way to a repeated 8 bar verse after which the pre-chorus climbs towards the actual chorus over the next 10 bars. Finally, the immensely popular six bar chorus arrives which is repeated thereby rounding off the structure.

## Topic 4 - The Bridge

An additional musical element that is often included in Rock and Pop songs is the inclusion of what’s known as a ‘Bridge’, sometimes referred to as a ‘middle eight’, even though this section may not always comprise 8 bars, and rarely found in the middle of the piece. The addition of this type of section can be a most effective device, and whilst mostly vocal, a bridge can also be heard as an instrumental interlude. The bridge generally acts as a musical connection linking differing sections, however at times it can also be inserted between two similar sections of the song. Importantly the bridge is almost always heard just once during the song, and is more likely to be located in the latter half of the piece and represents a clear departure from previously heard material. Other important aspects to be considered include variation from existing structural features, such as composing the bridge in a different key, where possible modulating into a distant tonal area. An alteration of texture will also help to highlight the contrast along with modification of rhythm, instrumentation, or the rate of harmonic change during this section.

## The Bridge used in different form types.

### AABA plus Bridge

In the following example taken from the Police song, “Every breath You Take”, a 10-bar bridge is added to the traditional AABA form of the piece linking the final A section back to the instrumental introduction which also contains a similar chord progression to the A section. In this case the bridge contains just two alternating chords of F major and G major, neither of which can be found in the diatonic home key of A major. This provides a clear contrast to the other sections of the piece. It should also be noted here that in the recording, the instruments tuning has been altered resulting in the tonality heard is actually A flat.



#### “Every Breath You Take” Sting



Click on the link to listen to  
“Every Breath You Take”  
from 1:10 – 1:45



### Verse/Chorus plus Bridge.

The inclusion of a bridge also is a valuable addition to the Verse/Chorus type song. In “Private Dancer”, written by Mark Knopfler and recorded by Tina Turner, the bridge modulates from E minor to a closely related dominant chord, and the harmonic rhythm shifts to a mostly single chord vamp during the 8 bars. The bridge then reconnects the music back to an instrumental solo based upon the opening chords as found in the introduction.



#### “Private Dancer” Mark Knopfler.



Click on the link to listen to  
“Private Dancer”  
from 1:50 – 2:36



## AB plus Bridge

A very interesting example of a song composed in AB form with bridge that also incorporates different tonal areas for each section can be found in the popular Australian rock group Little River Bands “Help Is On Its Way” written by lead singer Glenn Shorrock and winning the Australian song of the year in 1977. In this case each of the song’s sections comprise 8 bars, however the A section, which is made up of two identical 4 bar phrases, is heard in the key of B major, whereas the following B section, which shares some similarities to the preceding A section, also uses two identical 4 bar phrases, and abruptly moves up by semitone to the key of C major, before resolving back to B major as the piece returns to the next A section.

However, it is the eight-bar bridge that creates a significant shift, as the music alters both the feel and accompaniment in contrast to previously heard material. Furthermore, whereas each of the main sections has been set solidly in their respective key areas, the bridge becomes harmonically ambiguous and is more modally based with all chords being heard for the first time within the song. The use of guitars forms a significant component of the piece providing both excellent interludes and instrumental solo based upon the existing formal structure of the main sections. It is well worth listening to this international hit song in its entirety to fully appreciate how each of the components contribute to the overall cohesion of the piece.



“Help Is On Its Way”  
Glenn Shorrock.



Click on the link to listen to  
“Help Is On Its Way”  
from 0:00 – 3:50



Exercises and Activities.  
Form and Structure Book B



## Topic 5 -Extended forms in Rock and Pop music.

From the late 1960's in light of the Beach Boys song "Good Vibrations" with its' adventurous format and forward-looking sonorities, songwriters began experimenting with much more complex and extended structures that would comprise several sections, often irregular in length, ambiguous lyrics, along with a more sophisticated approach to the underlying harmonic progression. The first of these songs to gain popular acclaim was "MacArthur Park" composed in 1967 by the highly talented American composer Jimmy Webb and originally released in early 1968 by Richard Harris. This classically influenced piece contains several contrasting sections employing various tonal shifts, time signature, and metric alterations, whilst at the same time embracing a range of differing styles.

The substantial length of the tune, running at almost 7 and a half minutes, was generally considered far too long for a Pop song at that time, however the intricate nature and expanded duration of the song soon became a major influence for many artists and groups looking to create more complicated and comprehensive musical works.

Possibly the culmination of this influence and approach can be found in "Bohemian Rhapsody" recorded by the English super-group Queen.



### "Bohemian Rhapsody" Freddie Mercury.

With a playing time of almost 6 minutes, "Bohemian Rhapsody" composed by Freddie Mercury contains multiple sections varying from a distinctive mostly acappella introduction through to a further six more contrasting segments plus coda and interspersed with several differing guitar solos. Each of these contrasting parts musically compliment preceding sections and at times are clearly influenced by "classical" style musical composition. The piece is almost totally through-composed with very few sections being repeated, and even then, generally varied in some manner. Listening to the complete piece with the accompanying structural chart will provide an overall appreciation of how each of the composed sections form a complex, balanced, and cohesive musical work.



Click on the link to listen to  
"Bohemian Rhapsody"  
from 0:00 – 3:50





# Bohemian Rhapsody. (5'55")

Structural Chart Section. Duration. Timing Key.

Intro	16 bars	0:00 - 0:57	Bb
A	8 bars	0:57 – 1:23	Bb
B	8 + 2 bars	1:23 – 1:57	Eb - Bb
A	8 bars	1:57 - 2:24	Bb
B	2 4bars	2:24 – 2:38	Eb
Solo	1 8 bars	2:38 – 3:04	Eb
C	13 bars	3:04 – 3:25	A
D	7 bars	3:25 – 3.36	Eb
D	2 21 bars	3:36 – 4:09	Eb - Bb
Solo	2 4 bars	4:09 – 4:16	Bb
E	13 bars	4:16 – 4:38	Bb – Eb
Solo	3 9 bars	4:38 – 4:57	Eb
Solo	4 5 bars	4:57 - 5:13	Eb
F	6 bars	5:13 – 5:34	Eb
Coda	5 bars	5:34 – 5:55	F

# Conclusion

Form remains one of the most important compositional elements, not only in Rock and Pop music, but also throughout all musical genres. As such, careful consideration and pre-planning to this aspect, which is often determined by the lyric content and/or the title, is therefore vital to a successful musical work.

Furthermore, a flexible approach to the formal structure can also produce highly individual results whilst at the same time maintaining cohesion regardless of other stylistic characteristics.

## RockStudy. Form and Structure Book 2 (Part B). Listening examples.

**Title. "By The Time I Get To Phoenix"**

Songwriter. Jimmy Webb

Recording artist. Glen Campbell.

**Title. "On Broadway"**

Songwriter. Barry Mann/Cynthia Weil/Jerry Leiber/Mike Stoller.

Recording artist. George Benson.

**Title. "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face"**

Songwriter. Ewan MacColl.

Recording artist. Roberta Flack.

**Title. "Blowin' In The Wind"**

Songwriter. Bob Dylan

Recording artist. Bob Dylan.

**Title. "Hello"**

Songwriter. Lionel Ritchie

Recording artist. Lionel Ritchie.

**Title. "Sunny"**

Songwriter. Bobby Hebb

Recording artist. Marvin Gaye.

**Title. "Highway To Hell"**

Songwriter. Angus Young/Malcolm Young/Bon Scott.

Recording artist. AC DC.

**Title. "Ms Jackson"**

Songwriter. Andre Benjamin/Antwan Patton/David Sheats

Recording artist. Outkast.

## RockStudy. Form and Structure Book 2 (Part B). Listening examples.

**Title. "Rolling In The Deep"**

Songwriter. Adele Adkins/Paul Epworth

Recording artist. Adele.

**Title. "Can't Buy Me Love"**

Songwriter. John Lennon/Paul McCartney.

Recording artist. The Beatles.

**Title. "(I've Had) The Time Of My Life"**

Songwriter. Franke Previte/John DeNicola/Donald Markowitz.

Recording artist. Bill Medley and Jennifer Warnes.

**Title. "Sweet Caroline"**

Songwriter. Neil Diamond.

Recording artist. Neil Diamond.

**Title. "Every Breath You Take"**

Songwriter. Sting.

Recording artist. The Police.

**Title. "Private Dancer"**

Songwriter. Mark Knopfler

Recording artist. Tina Turner.

**Title. "Help Is On Its Way."**

Songwriter. Glenn Shorrock.

Recording artist. Little River Band.

**Title. "Bohemian Rhapsody"**

Songwriter. Freddie Mercury.

Recording artist. Queen.