

NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT for the ARTS

And the National Alliance for Musical Theatre

MUSICAL THEATER
SONGWRITING
CHALLENGE

In collaboration with Concord Theatricals, Disney Theatrical Productions,
and NMPA S.O.N.G.S. Foundation

MODULE 1: TONE & STYLE

Tone is your ticket to conveying character emotions, and Style is about situating the audience into the world of your story. Through experimenting with different musical and lyrical styles, you will be able to hone the tone of your song and leave listeners inspired.

TONE

WHAT IS TONE?

The song's mood, vibe or emotional appeal.

QUESTIONS EVERY SONGWRITER MUST ASK ABOUT TONE:

- 🎵 How does my character **FEEL** in this moment?
- 🎵 How does the tone of the song **EXPRESS** my character's emotion(s)?
- 🎵 What is the audience **PERCEIVING** from the tone of the song?

Tone tells us everything we need to know about how a character is **feeling** in a specific moment. Once you **identify** the emotion(s) your character is experiencing, that will **guide the tone** of the music and lyrics. Sometimes, music and lyrics are **matching** in tone, but other times, they **contradict** one another to reveal something about the character.

For example, if a character sings optimistically about their future, but the music is sad and unsettling, the **tone** of the music tells us the **truth** about how this character is worried and trying to disguise it.

STYLE

WHAT IS STYLE?

The genre, tradition and school of thought for the songwriting.

QUESTIONS EVERY SONGWRITER MUST ASK ABOUT STYLE:

- 🎵 What **MUSICAL** style best conveys the **EMOTION** of the song?
- 🎵 What **LYRICAL** style best conveys the **MESSAGE** of the song?
- 🎵 How can I play with style to set up **EXPECTATIONS**, and/or do something **UNEXPECTED**?

Style, along with tone, **informs** the audience what kind of **world** they are in. A classical style might let us know we are in a more formal environment, while electronic/techno music might indicate a fun, high-energy setting. The use of comedy gives us permission to laugh at the characters and their circumstances, while the use of epistolary (letter writing) might put us in a specific setting of wartime. Style sets up **expectations**, and by playing with style, you can find ways to **surprise** your audience and strengthen your message.

EXAMPLES OF TONE

TRAGIC COMEDIC HAUNTING ADVENTUROUS SASSY BITTERSWEET
CELEBRATORY DREAMY SORROWFUL ANGRY PASSIONATE
NERVOUS DIGNIFIED PLAYFUL TENSE ENERGETIC CURIOUS

EXAMPLES OF MUSICAL STYLE

CLASSICAL ELECTRONIC/TECHNO FOLK HIP-HOP/RAP COUNTRY
DISCO R&B/SOUL POP MUSICAL THEATRE FUNK LATIN

EXAMPLES OF LYRICAL STYLE

DIALOGUE EPISTOLARY (LETTER WRITING) SATIRE POETRY PROSE
JOKES/COMEDY NARRATION DIRECT ADDRESS HEIGHTENED SPEECH

EXERCISES FOR EXPERIMENTING WITH TONE & STYLE

These questions and suggestions will help you explore and solidify the tone and style of your song.

Part 1: Questions to Consider

1. Look at the feedback you received from Draft 1 for Tone & Style. Does the **TONE** identified in your feedback match what you want listeners to feel from your song?
2. Listen to the **FAMOUS SONGWRITERS** suggested in your feedback. How do those songwriters use tone and style to convey the messages in their song? Can you incorporate one thing they do into your song?
3. How is your character **FEELING** in this moment?

Part 2: Playing with Style

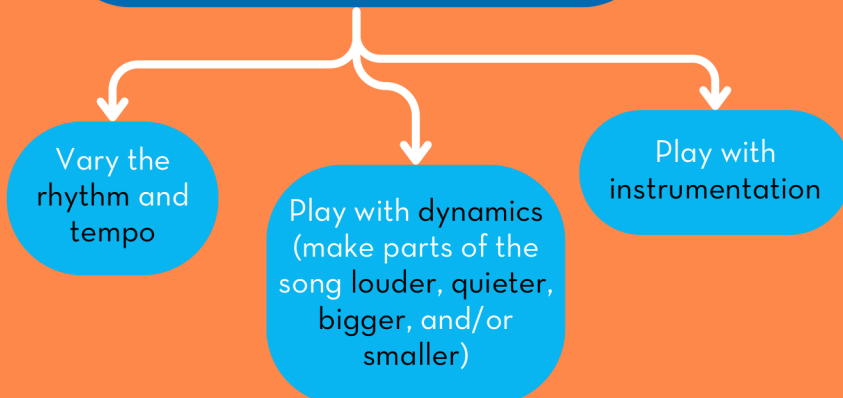
- Rewrite a verse or chorus of your song in a completely different **musical** style
- Rewrite a verse or chorus of your song in a completely different **lyrical** style

What do you discover about your character and the world?

Part 3:

Playing with Tone - Musically

Try to the following to emphasize how your character is feeling



Part 4:

Playing with Tone - Lyrically

Try the following to reflect the tone in how your character speaks

