

LORNA BRACEWELL RESIDENCY  
AGE RANGE: HIGH SCHOOL, COLLEGE, ADULT

# Lyric Writing 101: A Five Day Residency

In this five day residency, students will learn the requisite skills to develop their ideas into complete, engaging and effective song lyrics.

**COURSE OUTLINE:** In “Lyric Writing 101”, students will explore basic literary techniques, study examples of lyrics from songs ranging in genre from hip-hop to folk to country to standards, and, most importantly, will write, write, write and critique their own work as well as that of their peers.

**Target Audience:** Content is adaptable to high school, college and adult audiences.  
**Presentation Space:** Small classroom.  
**Duration:** Recommended: five sessions of one to two hours per day for five days, allowing students to generate ideas and work on their material outside of class.  
Alternate scheduling: upon request.

## Day One: Structure and Form

The focus of the workshop’s first day will be the basic structure and form of a song. Examples of popular songs from a variety of genres and styles will be listened to, analyzed and discussed in an effort to uncover the underlying mechanics of a song. At the end of this first day, students will be able to identify a song’s verses, chorus and bridge. Beyond this, they will have learned how to use this structure to organize and render communicable their own ideas and experiences.

## Day Two: Finding a Subject

The focus of the workshop’s second day will be answering the question, “What on this earth should I write about?!?” Two songs composed by Mary Chapin Carpenter will be emphasized, This Shirt and I Am a Town. At first glance, each of these songs is about something exceedingly commonplace and mundane, an old shirt and a small Southern town. However, closer scrutiny reveals that they are actually about the full range of human experience, from birth to death, love to loss, the comic to the tragic. At the end of this second day, students will have learned that, whatever topic they choose to write about, the center of their lyric must be some emotional truth.

## Day Three: Show! Don’t Tell!

The focus of the workshop’s third day will be the importance of imagery. Literary terms such as “metaphor,” “simile” and “analogy” will be introduced and defined. Again, examples of popular songs will be considered and special emphasis will be placed on two of Bob Dylan’s masterpieces, Blowin’ in the Wind and A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall. Examples of students’ own work will also be considered. At the end of this third day, students will have learned to think and write in images rather than in concepts and abstractions.

## Day Four: Peer Review

The workshop’s fourth day will focus on the most vital part of the creative process: peer review. Students will share with each other the compositions they have been creating and honing throughout the workshop’s first four days. They will be invited to react to and comment on the work of their peers. They will also have the opportunity to benefit from these reactions and comments. By the end of this fourth day, students will have learned both to give and receive criticism with courtesy and graciousness.

## Day Five: I Have a Song. Now, What Do I Do?

The workshop’s fifth and final day will focus on introducing students to the business of songwriting. Common questions such as, “How does a songwriter earn a living?” “How do I get a particular artist to record my song?” and “How can I make a recording of my song?” will be addressed. By the end of this fifth day, students will have gained a realistic sense of how the so-called “music business” works.