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R O Y A L
C O L L E G E
O F M U S I C
London

Backing Music Writing

RCM Sparks is the Royal College of Music's learning and participation programme.
To find out more and get involved visit www.rcm.ac.uk/sparks



In this section we will look at writing and playing your own backing music for your song, if you are not using the RCM Song-Writing Track Maker Tool.

Step One

Choose a key to sing your song in.

If you have a lower singing voice, keys like C Major or E minor will work well.

If you have a higher singing voice, F Major or G minor will work well.

Step Two

Choose major or minor. Major and minor songs have a different emotion to them. Here are some general rules for a Major or minor sound:

Major: Happy, upbeat, simple

Minor: Emotional, sad, complicated.

Step Three

If you or a family member or friend are playing on the piano/keyboard or guitar, use the chord charts on the next page to find a pattern of chords that you like.

All four of these keys (C Major, F Major, G minor and E minor) are good to play on the piano – C Major just uses the white notes, so this might be a really good choice for you if you are a piano player.

E Minor is a really good key for guitar players.



Below are the chords for four different keys: C Major, F Major, G minor and E minor:

NOTE:

When a letter is on its own, that means it's Major: C, F, G etc

When a letter has an 'm' after it, that means it's minor: Cm, Fm, Gm etc

When a letter has 'dim' after it, that means it's diminished.

On the next slide you will find links to find all of these chords on piano and guitar.

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	B dim
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
F	Gm	Am	B \flat	C	C	D
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
F	F \sharp dim	Gm	Am	Bm	C	D
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
F	A dim	B \flat	Cm	Dm	E \flat	F

Using Chords:

When you are writing a song, a good way to start is to choose a key to sing in. This just means what set of notes you are using for the tune (melody) of your song.

Some people prefer to sing in the key of C Major, and others in F Major. A good key for young voices is F Major. If you are choosing a minor key, you might choose G minor, or E minor.

You might also make choices depending on if you are also playing an instrument and which chords you feel comfortable playing.

When choosing a chord sequence, a good idea is to write out what chords are in that key, like on the previous slide.

If you play the guitar or piano and would like to look up the chords to play in your song, you can use these websites:

www.guitar-chords.org.uk

www.pianochord.org

All the chords except the 'dim' chords will sound really good for this kind of songwriting. (Dim means diminished, and it's a great chord, but a little tricky to use sometimes.)

Try to use chords I, IV and V especially.

Try putting them in different orders and seeing what sounds good.

Beginning and ending on chord I will make your song sound complete.

Here are four examples of chord sequences that you could use for your song, in four different keys:

C Major example:	F Major example:	E Minor example:	G Minor example:
All chords x 4 beats:	All chords x 4 beats:	All chords x 4 beats:	All chords x 4 beats:
Verse: C Am Dm G C Am Dm G C Am Dm G C Am Dm G	Verse: F Am C Gm F Am C Gm F Am C Gm F Am C Gm	Verse: Em Am D G Em Am D G Em Am D G Em Am D G	Verse: C Am Dm G C Am Dm G C Am Dm G C Am Dm G
Pre-chorus: E Am E Am Dm Dm G G	Pre-chorus: Bb C F F Bb C F F	Pre-chorus: Bm Am Bm Am Bm Am D D	Pre-chorus: E Am E Am Dm Dm G G
Chorus: F G C C F G C C F G C C F G C C	Chorus: F C Dm Bb F C Dm Bb F C Dm Bb F C Dm Bb	Chorus: Am D G Em Am D Em Em Am D G Em Am D Em Em	Chorus: Gm C F Gm Gm C F Gm Gm C F Gm Gm C F Gm

Remember that you don't have to use a pre-chorus.

Some different structures you could use for your song:

Verse 1
Chorus
Verse 2
Chorus
Chorus

Verse 1
Pre-Chorus
Chorus
Verse 2
Pre-Chorus
Chorus
Chorus

Or make up your own order of sections!
There is no right or wrong way to do this!