How To Write Lyrics: Tips from an amateur

by Andrew Rightenburg
(Also known as: Acronym of Mic Row, Defect 97)

A mini-book on uncommon strategies, techniques and terms in lyricism.

Let's get started.
I'll try to be as straightforward and to-the-point as possible.

This book is for everyone, from the experienced lyricist looking to expand his/her knowledge, to the guy that just started yesterday and wants to know how to improve before he continues. I honestly hope you can get as much out of this as you need to.
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So, uh, how about them lyrics?
I'll let you know before we begin that I have little to no idea of what I'm talking about, but if you're reading this then you probably believe that you don't either.

My name is Andrew Rightenburg, I'm a self-taught lyricist of 8 years, and a lot of other things on top of that. I've mostly focused on hip hop throughout my "Career," (If you can call something you've made a grand total of zero dollars from a career) but I'm a lyricist of both hip hop and rock. I've independently studied and analyzed lyrics of many, many genres.

Now, enough of the introduction. Let's get started.
General
Introduction

Oh, lyrics. That subject we all know and love.

Many rappers and singers will attempt to mystify the creation of lyrics and their lyrical process. This is all bullshit. There's no "natural talent" required to write lyrics or music in any genre, however it is preferred you develop a sort of skill over time. (Talent is from birth. Skill is acquired.) There's techniques and categorizations of all sorts to help you along the way. I, of course, don't know if anyone else uses these specific ones, these are just what I've picked up from analyzing other peoples' and my own lyrics.

There are, of course, many sub-genres and categories of lyricism within the overall categories of music, however, but I figured I would try to group them together.

So let's divide them.

Styles of lyricism (could be applied to any genre):

• Abstract
• Poeticism
• Realism
• Poetic Realism

Within each of these, it goes deeper:

• First person
• Second person
• Third person/Non-reflexive
• Mixed person
But we won't talk much about the "persons."
I'll explain what all of this means in a moment. First, let me show you some general techniques.
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Terms
(And techniques)

TERM: BARS, BLOCKS

One bar is one measure of lyrics. One line, per se.
One block is a group of lyrics. Typically, blocks are groups of 4 lyrics at a time, depending on the structure of the beat. If you're not sure what it is for your beat, a safe assumption is 4 bars per block.

TERM: PAUSE

This really shouldn't have to be said, but it is needed. A pause is literally a pause. As in, not holding a syllable on a note or otherwise. But a literal blank space in the vocal track.

TECHNIQUE: PUNCHLINE PLACEMENT (Usually Hip Hop, but could be applied otherwise)

One of the main benefactors for me (when I started, that is) is WHERE to set the punchline. Now, the magic number in most hip hop and even most music is 4. Remember that. 4/4 time signature, verses in multiples of 4 (4 bars, 8 bars, 16 bars, 24 bars, 32 bars, etc). So, naturally, for the best possible impact on the listener you will want to structure your punchlines around the number 4.

Consider these lyrics:
(don't judge me, these were written on the spot.)
"cause if you show effort, then you've shown weakness
And if you've shown odd success, then you've failed even
If you've never cared, then you've never cried
And if you hate the rain, then don't step outside"
If you notice, the more powerful, hard-hitting lines go on the even numbers. The first line is a lead-in for the second, setting up for the entire block of bars as well. The third line isn't very powerful, sounds like some generic Facebook status shit, but it does keep a consistent tone as the fourth line comes in, which is much more powerful.

Basically, what I'm saying is set up your punchlines using the odd numbered lines, then when you have something which you believe to be more powerful, put it on an even line. Psychologically, people are more likely to take notice of an even numbered line. (I don't know if any psychologist has backed that up, I just know from experience that people tend to react less to lines on bars 1 and 3 of each block than on 2 and 4.

**TECHNIQUE: WRITING BACKWARDS**

I know it sounds like some crazy, satanic shit but it seriously helps. Given that people are more likely to react on the even numbered lines, and we all know the number 1 isn't even, it just makes sense to write the even numbered lines FIRST and then a lead-in for them. I find that it is really easy, when you have a punchline, to write that first. HOWEVER, after writing it, you should definitely write a lead-in, or setup, for it that goes before it. To take it to the extreme, you could write, say, a 16 bar verse with the 16th bar first, then the lead-in to that, and move backwards. I only recommend this if necessary though, because writing backwards to that extreme would typically remove the natural feeling and flow of the lyrics. But, it IS good to know where you're going.

**TERM: LINE CONNECTIVITY/SEPARATION**

Line connectivity refers to how connected or separated the lines feel. If you have one sentence split up in two lines, with a pause in-between, the lines are poorly connected. However, if you split up a sentence within one line, with no pause, those sentences are poorly separated. This is a balancing act, to say the least.

**TERM AND TECHNIQUE: STABILITY IN LYRICS (Credit to Pat Pattison)**

Stable lyrics say exactly what they mean. If you wanted to say that you appreciated your significant other, and meant it, then you would write in a typical fashion (Even number of lines per block, symmetrical rhyme schemes such as AABB or ABAB, etc etc etc). If you mean that you do NOT appreciate him/her, but saying, in a literal sense, the opposite then you would want to write in a more odd style. Maybe an odd number of lines, or a strange rhyme scheme such as ABBA.
Beginning with the most common of the styles, Realism is a very conversational form of lyricism. This means that when you write in this style, it should sound like somewhat of a conversation. In this style, you wouldn't say things that you wouldn't say when talking to someone else. I call it realism because it's a very realistic portrayal of every day wording, even when it's about obscure things or events.

Consider these lyrics:
(Credit to AZLyrics and Eminem. The song is called Marshall Mathers.)

"Yo, you might see me joggin, you might see me walkin
You might see me walkin a dead rottweiler dog
with its head chopped off in the park with a spiked collar
hollerin at him cause the son of a bitch won't quit barkin

Or leanin out a window, with a cocked shotgun
Drivin up the block in the car that they shot 'Pac in
Lookin for Big's killers, dressed in ridiculous
blue and red like I don't see what the big deal is."

These lyrics are from Eminem's song "Marshall Mathers."
Now, what he's depicting is absolutely absurd, obscure, whatever you want to call it. However, it's done in such a way where he earns a sort of "Credibility" regarding them. These aren't things you wouldn't hear from an average man who grew up in Detroit.

Let's break this down a little bit.

"You might see me joggin, you might see me walkin" - Bar 1
He sets up his verse [as well as the shock of the second bar] by describing something completely normal. This is a really good setup strategy for the more shocking, second
"You might see me walkin a dead rottweiler dog"
But, of course, it doesn't end there. He keeps a consistent flow for a feeling of connectivity, with the lines
"With its head chopped off in the park with a spiked collar, hollerin at him cause the son of a bitch won't quit barkin"

Now, of course, the first line was a setup for the next 3 lines. He somewhat lightens the mood with the first line to maximize the shock value of the following verse. Because the listener has adjusted to the everyday sound of the first bar's depiction, the lines that follow have much more of a shock than they would by themselves.

Now, an incorrect interpretation of these lyrics leads me to another thing:

Line connectivity and separation.

The second block of the lyrics,
  "Or leanin out a window, with a cocked shotgun
   Drivin up the block in the car that they shot 'Pac in
   Lookin for Big's killers, dressed in ridiculous
   blue and red like I don't see what the big deal is."
is incorrectly interpreted by the transcriber of these lyrics.

The incorrect line is "...dressed in ridiculous/ Blue and red..."

Eminem's actual lyrics had a much more fluid feel to them. He actually said, "Dressing ridiculous/ Blue and red..."
The point here is to NEVER continue your sentences after a long pause unless it feels NATURAL. To say "dressed in ridiculous blue and red" as one, fluid line is one thing. But, to split the flow after "Ridiculous," pause, and then continue is a very poor way to do this. Even if the sentence is obviously unfinished, the listener gets in in his/her head that the sentence is over. When you continue it, it throws them off guard..Then they kill a kitten or some shit out of frustration. Not really. But you get my point.
Poeticism is a less conversational form of lyricism than Realism, although not quite as "out there" as Abstract lyricism (Which, by the way, is hardly used, but I find to be very nice.) Poeticism sounds less like natural human speech and more like a poem (Hence the term Poeticism).

Consider these lyrics:
(Credit to Odys, song is called What Now?)

"Twelve grades away from bliss, twelve grades away from sailing ships
On bath water with wind from my impatient lips
Save a sip of that elixir for the graduate
Mind grown sharp from grindstones they attach to it
Sharp enough to slice the soft bones of a child
Sharp enough to re-carve his smile, add fear, greed,
Passion and denial...

These lyrics depict a child growing up tainted due to the education system. Although put very beautifully, you would NEVER say any of that in an actual conversation. This genre of lyricism cuts away the wording we go through naturally, and adds in a much more complex, adult phrasing that sounds almost unnatural.
By no means am I saying any genre of lyricism is superior, however. In lyrics, it's the quality, not the category.
Poetic Realism is, as far as I can tell, a fairly new genre of lyricism. The best explanation of this genre that I can offer is this:

Poetic Realism uses real-life situations, phrases, and conversational sentences to express much deeper meaning. The implications of the line are sent via the tone of voice, delivery or flow rather than the line itself. A lot of the time, even a specific moment in the instrumental is used. **Pat Pattison** talks consistently about stable and unstable lyrics. Hopefully he won't mind, I would like to recite this information for your benefit. I refer you to the General Techniques And Terms section, where I describe his ideas.

Stable lyrics aren't typically used in poetic realism, put simply.

Although new, this genre of lyricism is becoming very common and very popular. Even **Drake** has dabbled in it every now and then. I actually love this style, and I, personally, cannot get enough of it.
To be honest, this is such a minor concept that I'm unsure as to why I'm including it. To be brief, it's nonsensical lyricism that focuses more on the emotion sent than any consistent verbal message. You could throw in unconnected incidents, or random phrases/names of objects that provide a connotation of an emotion that you want to send. I've always loved the idea of this, but I've never seen it executed well and I don't think I could execute it very well, myself. I honestly wish there was more of this kind of lyricism.
Song structure, to me, is a very interesting concept for about 5 minutes. Then it gets boring because I've figured out, by then, whatever I want to do with my life for the moment.

Let's divide this by genre.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hip Hop</th>
<th>Rock</th>
<th>Pop</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro: 4-8 bars</td>
<td>Intros of multiple lengths are more common.</td>
<td>No intro</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hook: 4 bars, repeat once (making 8 bars.)</td>
<td>So, Intro: however long you feel suits the song</td>
<td>Verse: 4 bars</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verse: 16 bars</td>
<td>Verse: 8 bars</td>
<td>Hook: 8 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat hook</td>
<td>Hook: 4 bars</td>
<td>Repeat hook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse: 16 bars</td>
<td>Verse: 8 bars</td>
<td>Verse: 4 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat hook</td>
<td>Repeat hook</td>
<td>Repeat hook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fade/Outro: 4-8 bars</td>
<td>Repeat hook</td>
<td>Bridge: 4-8 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fade/Outro</td>
<td>Repeat hook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Repeat hook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fade/Outro</td>
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Of course, you don't absolutely HAVE to follow these formulas, it's just a proportional guideline.

Now, a question I get very often is, "How do I write hooks?"
Well, I'll tell you. A hook is meant to sum up the entire song in a short period of time, and is also meant (as the title implies) to "hook" the listener into the song.

Basic terms: It's meant to be catchy as hell and reiterate what you've already said.

Maybe "catchy" isn't the best word, but oh well. You get the point.

A quick way to write a chorus/hook is to first write the verses. After that, think to yourself: "What am I saying overall? What is the overall theme or mood of this song?" STAY CONSISTENT. STAY CONSISTENT. STAY CONSISTENT.
I can't stress this enough. There are too many songs where the lyricist writes 4 bars about the education system, 4 bars about family troubles and the hook is about Yo Gabba Gabba.

Even if your song isn't consistent, stay consistent in that it's all unrelated and inconsistent at the very least. Don't try to string together a concept at the last minute. If your song has multiple topics, make the hook about something new. A new topic.
However, if your song has a consistent topic, then think to yourself:

"How do I say, in one or two sentences, the overall theme of this song?"

Once you have that, you have your first (and possibly second) line(s) of lyrics to the hook.

Now I have a tip for hook writing that is specific to HIP HOP LYRICISTS. When you rap a verse, usually you will rap at a faster pace than on the hook. You will usually rap somewhat lengthy lines at a somewhat fast pace. When you write a hook, SLOW DOWN. Even if it's just a little, make the lines shorter, and say them a little slower. This isn't a cure-all, but it should help a lot.

Now, you rock people are thinking I've left you out, aren't you? Well, my tip specifically for rock singers is to CHANGE THE MELODY. Whatever melody clicks with you the most, use it for the hook.
Theme

Creating, maintaining and expressing it

A major problem that beginner to mediocre lyricists have lies in the themes of their music. Let's define "theme" as the topic of the lyrics. You know, the underlying message of them. Most lyrics need a theme, with the exception of lyrics in the Abstract genre. Abstract lyrics have a tone and no more, but if you're like most people and want to work with Poeticism, Realism or Poetic Realism then you probably need a theme.

The first problem we run into is creating a theme -- how? Well, a common way to create a theme is to take something that is troubling you, something that's on your mind, and use that. Maybe not ALWAYS "troubling," although that is very typical of modern day lyricists, including myself.

Alright, so we have our theme. How do we express it? Many lyricists will fall into the trap of directly saying it in the first few lines. This will only lead to a crumpled page of what used to be lyrics thrown into the trash because you're not satisfied. Side effects may include vomiting, nausea and death. No, but all joking aside, the best way to express a theme will depend on what you're going for. Say, for example, you're going for an entire album, all based around this theme. In this case, you would want to break the theme down to as many points as possible and spread those among each song.

Let's take this as a hypothetical theme: *The music industry is dying.* How would you express that in an entire album? In a single song? I hate to make this comparison, but if you've ever written a paper for high school with a minimum word count then you know exactly how to spread out the album. Elaborate. Elaborate. Elaborate.

(I once read a book from the sociological functionalist point of view. The entire 350 pages were just talking about the same thing: Things are better now than ever before in the world. THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY PAGES. If he can do that, you can do a single album.)

So, for a single song we just take all kinds of examples of the music industry dying, and
we explain them in whatever way you see fit. Correct? Then, what for an album? You see, most people don't have trouble with just one song. But -- for an entire album?! That's where people have trouble.

What you may have noticed is that I've been doing exactly what you should do. This entire section has been elaborated and bloated to the point where you want to keep reading, but you're also trying to figure out what I'm trying to, or going to say.

Put in a more simple wording, you should take each individual example and give them their own songs. In this case, our topic is "The music industry is dying," right? What are some examples of this? Well, hypothetically, from this point of view (which I strongly disagree with) we begin to see the quality of music to decline, both in the mainstream and indie areas of music.

What else? Maybe less people are actually buying recordings on vinyl or CD because of the internet. I mean, Metallica bitched about it enough, I'm pretty sure you can, too. (Sorry, a little frustration there.) You already have potential for 2-3 songs in just those two topics, depending on how willing you are to repeat yourself. Anything else? Well, these record labels tend to screw people over, don't they? Make a song about it. You're up to 4.

After that, we have the overthrow of the airwaves with pop music that you hate, less "real" people in the music business, the greed of the performers, 1 or 2 spaces for a potential "musical revolution," and a song about your own experiences in the music industry. You now have a 10 track album.

Congratulations, collect your pat on the back at the end of the show.
I'll start this section off by describing my personal lyrical process and writing a quick verse to further illustrate it.

The very first thing I do is determine what I want to write about -- actually, this is done before I even know that I want to write. I'm inspired to write by the topic, basically. From there, I think of a few things I want to say specifically, and how I want to say them.

So let's use the topic of the future. Possibilities for a coming, personal future in my life. What do I want to say? What are some specific lines?

I have my beat on replay, let's go.

Well, I'll want to introduce the concept in a slightly nudging way. I could start by saying I was looking in the mirror in the morning. Suddenly, I'm getting the idea to elude the fact that it's speculation of the future by saying what I "see." This will be rapped.

This quickly becomes a few intro bars (end rhymes are in **bold**, internal rhymes are *italic*):

"It's **one of those days** that I wake **up in a flash**,
*Rushing to bathe*, wondering, **what's in a fact?**
*Cause it's a fact* that I've been asked **what's in the bag**,
too many times, and it's a fact that it was **nothin' that bad**,"

We have our intro. But can we expand?

"But as I dry myself **off with the towel**,  
I take a look in the mirror, and I'm **offered a smile**,  
But this smile has been cracked and **watered right down**,  
By false friendships, drugs and **alcoholic turnouts**"
Great. We have 8 bars so far, written in the order that they're performed -- which is usually good for intros. Now what are some specific lines I want to use at this point? Well I want to get the listener lost in the speculation before I bring them back abruptly. An abrupt shift done correctly will usually cause a "chilling" effect when rapped.

"Trust breaks loose, and honesty falls in its place,  
I try to swear to police that I'm honestly sane,  
But honesty's a commodity so if you want me to pay  
Then you better offer exchange (pause)

Everything I'd hoped for was simply shot to the floor,  
Every relationship I had was really not like before,  
Every breath taken - gets its favorite song to adore,  
But this speculation doesn't last past a knock on the door."

Well, would you look at that, 16 bars ending with a lead-in to a hook! The first 8 bars were written in order, then I wrote the 16th bar, and after that, I wrote the preceding 7 bars (starting with "trust breaks loose, and honesty...." up until "....songs to adore")

So, my strategy, as we've discovered is to put an instrumental on for inspiration and begin writing. As I'm doing this, I think of a place that I want to end up -- typically a last line, or any hard-hitting line towards the end of the verse. I then jot that down and write the preceding lines as a lead-in for that, which is also a lead-in for the hook.

The best way to find your own lyrical process is to experiment -- take what I've given you and try it out. (Hey, it works for me!) Over time, trial and error, you'll adapt it for use by YOU rather than me, and you'll have your own lyrical process. The key here is practice. Eight years ago, I would've written much worse lyrics. (Not that those are all too great, though.)
So, a common issue among many beginner lyricists is rhyming. Maybe it's your problem, too. In my humble opinion, the best way to find better rhyming words is to begin to associate words in your mind by rhyme. Train yourself so whenever you think of a "train wreck," you think of "insane death," "drained breaths," and maybe even "payback" if you can bend it slightly. (Side note: overly bending words via fake accent is a method that shows nothing more than laziness, and although it can be done properly, most people that do it just don't know what they're doing.)

Now, a good way to start this mental process is with rhyming dictionaries. For perfect rhyme, I recommend Rhymezone (Google is your friend, here). For slant rhyme, I recommend B-Rhymes. Neither of them are paying me, and I'm not associated with either one -- I just used Rhymezone when I first started this mental training. I didn't use it on any songs, mind you, and you shouldn't either. It's just a good way to begin to see these words differently and associate them by rhyme. Also, I found B-Rhyme recently and I think that would be a nice shortcut for a lot of people that I didn't have.

A good mental exercise for this is to think of a list of random words. (Random word generators are a good resource here) Start with 2-syllable words, 5 of them. Come up with 10 rhymes for each (mentally), and repeat with a new list. After you repeat, move on to 3 or 4 syllable words -- do the same thing. Keep building up until you get to 8-or-9-syllable phrases (Doesn't have to be all one word, could be like "ridiculous places" or something) and try to increase the amount of rhymes you come up with to 15 or 20 if you can.

Do this every day, or as often as you can. I know, a lot of people will say things like, "If you don't practice [insert thing here] EVERY DAY then you will NEVER succeed," but that's always bullshit. Just do it as much as you feel like you want to. After all, you only want to exercise as much as you take lyrics seriously -- so your choices will naturally reflect that, and that's OK.
Everyone has a favorite myth, lyrically, that they hold dear. I have a few, you have a few, everyone has a few. Hopefully, I'll let go of some of mine during the writing of this when I realize how stupid they are.

Myth #1: "The only good lyrics are in indie music."
False, false, false, false, false. I hate it when people say this confidently. The fact of the matter is, whether or not they're your "favorite" lyrics, there ARE decent and even good lyrics in the mainstream. I won't bring up examples, because, at that point, people will usually get upset for some reason.

Myth #2: "Indie music can ONLY have good lyrics."
This is never spoken out loud, but rather believed subconsciously. There are TONS of bad lyrics in indie music. Hell, anyone with a headset and a computer can be considered "Indie."

Myth #3: "If you can't write good lyrics, you should stop writing."
This has to be the worst attitude ever. Of all time. Let's take this statement's format to other topics.
"If you can't get pregnant now, you should stop trying."
"If you suck at basketball now, you should stop playing."
"If you aren't hungry now, you should stop eating forever."
ALL of those statements are as equally stupid as the myth that they're based on. If you think or are told that you're bad at writing lyrics, then keep trying. Keep getting feedback, and keep listening to it. You WILL improve as much as you want to.

Myth #4: "If I don't like them, they suck."
This attitude will only make you look like an idiot. There's tons of lyricists that I don't like, even though there's nothing wrong with their lyrics. It's usually something like their voice, topic, the beat, their flow, their face, or whatever else that throws me off.
Myth #5: "All good lyrics have to have a good message."
Nope. Lyrics don't have to have, actually, ANY message to be good. It doesn't matter what you say, only how you say it. I don't care if your song is about the issues in Africa, conspiracy theories, having sex all day, money, drugs, or whatever else -- if it's poorly written, that's all there is to it. If it's written well, then so be it. Good lyrics are good lyrics, regardless of the topic they surround.

Myth #6: "Lyrics used to be better and more meaningful than they are today."
Really? Please, enlighten me. Was it when Madonna wrote, in 1984,
   "Like a virgin, ooh, ooh
   Like a virgin
   Feels so good inside"?

Maybe it was when Eazy-E rapped in 1986:
   "I looked at my car and I said, 'oh brother'
   I'll throw it in the gutter and go buy another."

Possibly it was when Loudon Wainwright III wrote, in 1972,
   "He didn't see that station wagon car,
   got squashed and there you are,
   you gotta dead skunk in the middle of the road,
   stinking to high heaven!"

My point is that there's always been a mix of good, bad and pointless lyrics in the industry and it's no different today whatsoever. You're just not looking hard enough.
People will tell you, all the time, that you should stop. *Especially* in the more competitive genres like Hip Hop. If you're a rapper, and you get told to stop rapping, take it as an inspiration. Words of encouragement. Take it as a sign that there's still somewhere to go with music, a place you haven't reached yet. Being "bad" at lyrics, rap, singing, or whatever art you're doing isn't a reason to give up -- if anything, it's more of a reason to *keep going*! We don't live life to have all the answers, we live for the questions. In a similar sense, if you were the absolute best at rap, then there would be no point to it anymore! The fact that there's still flaws should be inspirational, you have something to work for and dedicate yourself to!

And even so, the people telling you that you "suck" or whatever are probably *biased* due to things like how you're presented to them, your image, their relation to you, or whatever else.

If people *don't* know who you are, you've lost points in their mind. BUT, on the other scope of things, if they know you personally, then you've ALSO lost points in their mind. So, that narrows it down to: unless you're famous, you're already being subjected to a little bit of bias.

Not only that, but by putting your songs on websites like YouTube on a personal channel, or on your personal Facebook, Myspace, or whatever else, you're being presented in a way that makes you *appear* as if you're amateur. **EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT!** This is exactly why I stopped using social media as my main outlet for my music. The exact same people that were giving me unwarranted criticisms on YouTube now can't get enough of my music because it's on Bandcamp. Seriously, that's ALL it takes. So don't be discouraged by the negative comments and messages, listen to them. For many years, YouTube was my main outlet for music because I actually WANTED criticism from strangers. You should, too. The people on YouTube will always be brutally honest in a way that's completely necessary for improvement in the beginning.
My only mistake was not joining YouTube soon enough!

But, once you reach a certain point, the only people offering you advice will be pretentious people with no idea of what they're talking about. You have to keep in mind, most of the "rappers" on YouTube are complete amateurs that think they're lyrical geniuses.

So, when they tell you that your "delivery is off and your flow needs work," but you recognize that the delivery was displaying exactly as you wanted it to and the only thing that could be mistaken for flaw in your flow would be the fact that you were using triplets (music theory reference), then it's time to stop using YouTube.

Until that point, take the criticism -- it will only make you better.

Of course, this isn't an excuse to be a complete ass to other people because you think they need to improve. There's nicer ways to do it than that, but if you get any of that, don't take it the wrong way.
A lot of the time, I'll hear a killer lyricist with very poor delivery. It's very aggravating, to me, that he or she never had the proper guidance in this aspect of Hip Hop. Delivery is ABSOLUTELY KEY to making your lyrics hard-hitting, powerful, and whatever the hell else you want them to be. Your lyrics can only do so much. If you want to be good enough to appeal to the average listener, you need good delivery as well.

So, what is delivery? Right there. That sentence. How did you read it?

Now, compare how you read those sentences to this:
So, what's delivery? Right there. That sentence. How did you read it?

What you've just done is changing your delivery. Delivery is how you say the words that you say. The most important part of any song's delivery is emphasis.

How do I describe emphasis? Like that.

Now, the one place you will ALWAYS emphasize, in ALMOST EVERY SONG is at the end of each line. Why? Because that's where the rhymes go. You always, always, ALWAYS emphasize the rhyming words a little more than the rest of the line. You could have the greatest rhyme schemes in the universe, but no one will give a shit if you don't emphasize them. If you say the entire verse in a monotone voice, people will seriously ask themselves if it even rhymed at all.

So, logically, you should put emphasis on the rhyming words. Not too strong, but not the same as the rest of the verse.

OK, what else? Another key part of delivery is the emotion displayed in your voice.
The emotion should typically match the line. This is especially key in writing in the style of Poetic Realism, as the tone of your voice will entirely change the meaning of the verse.

I'll give you some examples. Read these out loud:

"FUCK YOU FOR EVERYTHING THAT YOU'VE DONE!"
"Would you please take me back?"
"I can't believe I was so stupid then!"

You probably put emotion into each one. Yeah, do that in a song and you're golden.

There's also tons of videos on YouTube that will explain this in a way that is impossible to do with a book. Looking up those videos will probably help you a lot more, since you can actually hear how the person is talking.
A friend of mine has asked me, "Is there such a thing as being overly descriptive?"
The short answer is yes.

Now let me explain a better answer. Commonly, especially in rock and pop music, you'll want to leave some description to the imagination of the listener. This allows your content to be easier to relate to. I'll cover that in a second, but the main thing I want to cover in this answer is how to be properly descriptive.

Let's give some examples.

Here's a bad few lines describing an event with a girl:

"Her brown hair, green eyes
Her soft voice, yet keen smile
Smooth clothing, the seams find
each imperfection and make a clean shine

Each passing second with her cries
Bright and beautiful, she says
'Here comes the night,
and I won't settle for deep breaths'"

Now, the REASON those lyrics are bad lies purely in the fact that the description lasted either too long or too short. A shift in topic, no matter how slight, should always begin on an ODD NUMBERED line.
In the 2 blocks, the first one, in its entirety, only describes the girl. The second one partly describes her, but on the second line in the block, shifts topic to a depiction of her, speaking.
We all know that "2" is an even number, so a shift of topic on line 2 of any given block is NOT good. It's uncomfortable when sung in rhythm, and even if it's only slight, it has a negative impact on the impression of the song.

Now, it doesn't take much to fix a problem like that. Just a little rewriting and restructuring of the lyrics.

So, in short, it's not so much being OVERLY descriptive as being descriptive for too long or too short of a time.

Another common question:
"What is 'slant rhyme'? What's the difference between slant rhyme and perfect rhyme?"

Really good question.

Two quick definitions:
Perfect rhyme is when you rhyme both vowels AND consonants.
Slant rhyme only rhymes vowels, and in multi-syllablic rhyme it doesn't have to perfectly rhyme the middle vowels, and certain minor vowel sounds at the end aren't necessary. (Minor vowel sounds as in, -ed, -an, -en, etc)

I'll give you an example.


Note: in slant rhyme [2], the ending syllable of reasoned (-ed) isn't rhymed. This is because it is a minor vowel sound, primarily consonant and is at the end of the phrase. Therefore, it's not necessary to rhyme it just for the sake of rhyming it.

Notice how perfect rhyme produces a sort of elementary feeling to the lines in which it is used. This is perfect for creating a giddy, happy or generally stable feeling. Slant rhyme, however, sounds more human and with it, it is easier to produce a generally unstable feeling such as depression or overall sadness, anger, etc.

Slant rhyme is much more commonly used in Hip Hop than any other genre of music.
Another common question I get is, "How I do fix writer's block? I have no problems right now, what do I write about?"

Well, what's to stop you from writing about being relaxed? Or even happy? Although, I'm going to have to ask you to NEVER, EVER FORCE LYRICS. People can tell when they're forced, and it sounds very uncomfortable and disorienting to the listener. The best answer I can offer is: Live. Just continue life until you find your inspiration, and take advantage of it then.

"How do you keep your lyrics vague enough to be easy to relate to, but specific enough to be expressive?"

Well, let's see. This goes back to being overly descriptive, so I'm going to finish that thought. If your goal isn't JUST to express yourself, but also to remain a sort of relation to the listener, then there's even more of an opportunity to be TOO descriptive. Let's say your ex girlfriend is the topic. The theme is: she's a bitch. Right? Right. There's millions of people in the world who can relate to that already.

Now, don't go into enough detail to describe her skin pigmentation, eye color, hair color, name, birthday, birth year, general scent, social security number, etc etc etc. Try to keep it at a level that describes the situation well but doesn't go overboard. This does not mean to never use specific events. Just limit yourself is all.

One or two specific events should be sufficient, after all, these listeners aren't your therapist and they don't care about YOUR problems -- they want something they can use to compare to theirs, right? Right.

"I feel like I've written about everything already/I've rhymed every word I can/There's nothing more to say. What should I do?"

You've never said EVERYTHING. It's impossible. Just keep living and you'll find inspiration soon enough. For the rhyming part, I refer you back to the Rhymes (Section 5) part of this book. You can always look up rhyming dictionaries to help you get better rhymes stored in mind for future reference, but never use rhyming dictionaries to help you write -- it kills creativity.

"Do you have any idea of what you're talking about?"

That's a great question.
Thanks for reading this, I hope it helps you in some way or another. Of course, I'm no scholar. I'm just a kid who has studied lyrics for a very long time.

Please pass this on to as many people as you think is necessary. This is (or should be) a completely FREE publication. This book should not be charged for, and if you paid for it, you've been ripped off. I'm sorry, but I can't return any money to you because I didn't get any. (Like I said, I don't charge for this -- even if other people do so illegally)

Thanks again,

-Andrew Rightenburg