Name: _____ Date: _____

How Does Taylor Swift Write a Song?

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 1112 words

How does a song get made when nobody can be in the same room? In 2020, because of the pandemic, music studios were closed. A producer named Aaron Dessner sent Taylor Swift folders of instrumentals, which is music with no words or tune on top. One report quotes Dessner saying that a few hours after he shared music, his phone lit up. It was a voice memo from her, with a fully written song. This book asks how Taylor Swift writes and records a song.

First, the job itself. Swift is a songwriter who is also a performer. Her first album, Taylor Swift, came out on October 24, 2006. She wrote or co-wrote every song on it. One report says she wrote over 40 songs for that album, and 11 made the standard edition. One report says her record deal came on the condition that her albums would be self-written. Through November 2026 she has put out twelve studio albums, and the newest came out in October 2025.

The craft started in Nashville, Tennessee. As a young teenager she signed a songwriting contract with a music publisher there. She practiced writing with experienced songwriters on a street called Music Row. One of them, Liz Rose, co-wrote seven songs on her first album and became a lasting partner. A showcase for record companies in November 2004 then led to her record deal. Writing a song is a craft, and she learned it next to people who had done it for years.

Swift has a plain way to talk about her words. In a speech for a songwriters' award in 2022, she described three kinds of lyrics, and she named each for a pen. Quill lyrics use old-fashioned words and phrases. Fountain pen lyrics tell a modern story with a poetic twist. Glitter gel pen lyrics are silly, carefree, and bouncy, with words that fit the beat. The pens give her a simple way to say what a song needs.

She does not always write in the same way. Her third album, Speak Now, came out on October 25, 2010, and she wrote it entirely by herself. On other records she has worked with a producer who builds the music while she writes the melody and the lyrics on top. The melody is the tune that a singer sings. Those are two quite different ways to make a song, and she has used both of them.

The album folklore shows the second way. In late April 2020, Swift asked Dessner about writing songs from far apart. He worked from the Hudson Valley. A second producer, Jack Antonoff, worked from New York City. Swift set up a home studio and sang her parts there with an engineer named Laura Sisk. The three sent digital files back and forth, and one report says Dessner worked on 11 of the album's 16 tracks. Over the next months, the songs came together that way.

On July 23, 2020, Swift posted nine photos with no captions and announced the album. It came out at midnight. A voice memo is just a recording that a phone makes of a voice. It is not a finished record, but it can hold a whole song, with a tune and words, until a studio can build the music around it. In the spring of 2020, that is how a song crossed the country.

A written song is still not a record. The Recording Academy, the group behind the Grammy Awards, lists the stages of making one. The first is pre-production. Here the blueprint of the song is made. The producer works on the songwriting and the arrangement, which means who plays what. The producer also plans the recording sessions. Before anyone starts to record, the team decides what the finished song should be.

Next comes recording, which people in the studio call tracking. This is where the performance is captured. The singer sings and the musicians play, and each part goes on its own track. Then comes editing, when the tracks are made tight in rhythm and in pitch. Each track is one small piece of the sound. The pieces still have to fit together, and that is the job of the next step.

That step is mixing. A mixer blends the tracks by balancing how loud each one is, placing sounds left and right in the speakers, and adding effects. The last step is mastering. A mastering engineer starts from the finished stereo mix, not the single tracks. Small changes help the song sound right on all kinds of speakers. Mastering is the final step, and it is about making the music sound its best. The Library of Congress compares it to a fresh coat of paint.

The same craft works on the road. Swift's album The Life of a Showgirl came out on October 3, 2025. She wrote and produced it with two partners named Max Martin and Shellback. They recorded it in Stockholm, Sweden. Part of the work took place in 2024 during the European shows of her Eras Tour, and more was done after the tour had ended. A record can be made one session at a time.

The Grammy Awards gave Swift Album of the Year four times: for Fearless in 2010, for 1989 in 2016, for folklore in 2021, and for Midnights on February 4, 2024. That made her the first artist to win it four times. Frank Sinatra, Stevie Wonder, and Paul Simon each won it three times. On October 26, 2026, the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame inducted her, in the city where she learned to write. The gala was held at the Music City Center, and it was the second hall of fame induction of her career.

One more fact shows why writing matters. Because Swift wrote her songs, she held the rights to the songs themselves. That is separate from the rights to one recording of them. The recording, called a master, is the file that every copy comes from. Reports said her old deal let her start re-recording in November 2020, and she did, making new versions of her first albums. She calls them Taylor's Version. Through November 2026, four of her first six albums have been released that way.

So the path runs like this. An idea comes, sometimes in a phone. Then come the words and a tune. A producer helps build the music, the team records and mixes it, and an engineer masters it. She announced Speak Now (Taylor's Version) at a show in Nashville in 2023, the city where she learned to write. In 2020, one song reached the studio as a voice memo sent across the country.

Questions

1. What did Aaron Dessner send Swift in 2020?

A. Finished songs
B. Folders of instrumentals
C. A new studio

2. What does tracking mean in a recording studio?

A. Capturing the performance
B. Selling the album
C. Painting the cover

3. Why could Swift record new versions of her first albums?

A. Studios gave her free time
B. She held the rights to the songs she wrote
C. The Grammy Awards allowed it

4. Which step works from the finished stereo mix?

A. Pre-production
B. Tracking
C. Mastering

5. Which city did Swift and her partners record The Life of a Showgirl in?

A. Stockholm, Sweden
B. Hudson Valley
C. Glendale, Arizona

Words to know

melody: the tune
instrumentals: music only
producer: recording leader
mixing: blending tracks
mastering: final polish

Answer key: How Does Taylor Swift Write a Song?

1. B. Folders of instrumentals
2. A. Capturing the performance
3. B. She held the rights to the songs she wrote
4. C. Mastering
5. A. Stockholm, Sweden