

EPISODE 046

## Writing A Turning Point Moment in Lyrics – Waypoint #2: The Turning Point Progressive Complication

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See the show notes at [storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-046](https://storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-046)

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**[00:00:00]** Hi, this is Melanie from Stories in Songs - Writing the Lyrics.

Why do we talk about all this stuff of how to actually come up with WHAT we're writing our lyrics about?

Why is the content so important? WHY should we not just write some... any words ... to the music and be done with it?

If you're like me, you have something valuable to share.

Right?

Something that matters.

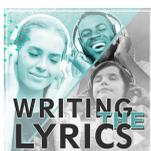
And that we know that can help someone who will listen to our song.

And in order to get our message across in a way that bypasses a listener's critical mind, we have to wrap what we have to say into an experience.

And we create that experience through the journey that we send our song's main character on.

So that's why we talk about the waypoints of that journey.

So that we can create that experience that leads someone from their mess to a better place.



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And today, we will talk about the second waypoint on that journey.

Today, we'll make it even worse for our song's main character.

Because that's life, right?

It has to get worse first before it can get better.

So let's get right to it.

## TEASER

## Overview

**[00:01:13]** Two weeks ago, in episode 44, we talked about the first waypoint of our song's main character's journey.

That was the inciting incident, right?

That was the ball of chaos that spun into our character's life and threw it completely off balance.

And it created a drive in them.

Because now that there's this imbalance, they wanna get rid of it.

They wanna get rid of the problem that arose.

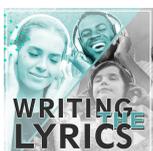
They wanna feel good again.

So they just wanna get to the other side. They wanna get to a better place.

But that's no straight path.

There are complications along the way.

- If it's a love song, maybe there's a rival who wants to conquer our loved ones heart.
- Or maybe, there are people who are against the relationship?



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- It could also be that it's a positive complication. And it actually helps the song's main character get closer to what they want.
- So maybe, when we stay with love songs, the two people in love have developed a certain ritual that connects them on a deeper level.
- Or maybe there's someone in favor of the relationship and speaks up for them.

In general, those complications that follow the inciting incident are met by the song's main character with character-specific tactics.

They just rely on what has worked before to get a certain result.

But the thing is... unfortunately, what they think would happen, doesn't happen.

Their tactics fail.

And it pushes them closer and closer to the edge.

Their repertoire of choices of how they can try to get their life back in order, that repertoire of choices shrinks together with each failed attempt.

It's like sometimes when we're in a mess, we try everything to get out of it again.

But our attempts are based on what we think will get us out of there.

And if we haven't experienced that circumstance before, we are not equipped yet to successfully handle it.

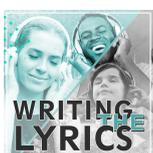
So we hit a wall every time.

Every attempt fails.

And all that means is that we are pushed closer and closer to the edge until we fall over the edge.

We hit a turning point.

And at that moment, we realize that we have to make a fundamental change in order to salvage some form of victory.



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And if we want to have a shot at still reaching that goal, or get to a better place at least ... then we gotta change first.

We can also decide, we won't.

That's especially important when it comes to the song's character's values when they are in a position when they have to sell out. And they can step back from that edge.

It's like in the song "Eye of the Tiger" by Survivor.

They sing:

*So many times it happens too fast  
You change your passion for glory*

That character consciously chose not to sell out.

But in most cases, especially if the character starts out with a certain flaw that we wanna help them overcome, the character will have to make a choice.

And that turning point pushes them into a crisis where they will have to make a binary choice: Will they change or will they not in order to reach what they want?

And I tell you, if you want to make an impact on your audience with your song lyrics, there better be change included.

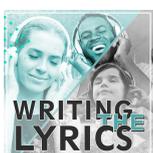
If the song's main character doesn't change or overcome their problem, obstacle, or challenge, then there's nothing the audience can take away from the lyrics.

They lead nowhere.

So that crisis is what the turning point will lead up to.

And we'll talk about the crisis in an upcoming episode, but for now, let's stay with the turning point.

Because that unexpected event is the lifeblood of a powerful song.



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## Progressive Complications

**[00:05:56]** Now you don't have to include complications that will lead up to a turning point.

You can, but it is not required.

There are songs, though, that use progressive complications masterfully, like

- Hero of War by Rise Against
- or “You Shouldn’t Kiss Me Like This”

Both songs we’ve already analyzed in this podcast.

If you want to check them out, the episode numbers are included in the show notes.

But here’s what to keep in mind when you choose to include complications.

Firstly, they must force your song’s main character to deal with the problem or their mess, or the challenge.

So when it comes to how our character initially reacts to our inciting incident, they might take a series of steps of what they think is right to restore the balance that existed before the inciting incident threw everything out of whack.

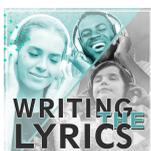
But each of these steps fails — or is complicated — because the expected result does not happen.

And that forces the character to move to their next tactic, and the next and the next until every known tactic regarding that incident has failed.

I would like to illustrate progressive complications by using the song “Stan” by Eminem as an example.

If you don’t know that song, you should definitely check it out. The lyrics are amazingly well crafted.

The song is basically about a fan, called Stan, who seeks the attention of his favorite idol. That idol is Slim.



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And for those two, the inciting incident happened as they met in Denver and Slim promised Stan to write back if he ever sent him a letter.

So that's what Stan does.

Because now that he knows that Slim will write him back, it creates that desire in him that he really, really, and absolutely wants and needs a letter from Slim.

That's all what he thinks about.

And so, he just does what he thinks will get him that result.

And that's where the lyrics start.

More specifically, the first verse refers to Stan writing another letter because his first two might have not been delivered because he always writes the addresses too sloppy when he jots them.

So this time, he writes the address on the letter perfectly, and he expects a response.

But he doesn't get one.

So Stan thinks that maybe he should show up in person again.

So he's waiting with his kid brother outside in the blistering cold for four hours outside Slim's concert.

He thinks that's how he can get Slim's attention again that he absolutely desires.

But Slim doesn't wanna meet anyone, so Stan's tactic fails again.

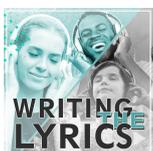
Another unfulfilled expectation.

So Stan writes Slim another letter and telling him about how he waited outside.

He's a little pissed but it's not so bad.

And after that letter, which was the second verse, Stan chooses to wait for a response.

And he does so for about half a year.



Call that perseverance.

In that time, he writes two more letters with the address on them perfectly.

But he still doesn't get a response.

And after those six months of waiting,... now it's almost been a year since they met in Denver and Slim told him he'd write back, that's what pushes Stan over the edge.

Not getting a reply after Stan has done everything in his power to get Slim's attention... now that every available tactic to him has failed... Stan is pushed over the edge.

And that happens quite literally as the third verse of the lyrics are about Stan recording a cassette tape for Slim. He's drunk and he's doing 90 on the freeway. And he wants to kill himself. He crashes through a bridge barrier and drowns.

Destruction was what Stan chose in his crisis.

But you can see how those progressive complications added up until they drove Stan over the edge of the cliff.

## Creating Progressive Complications

**[00:10:03]** Now if you want to use progressive complications, here are some tips for creating them.

First off, **the Stakes Must Escalate.**

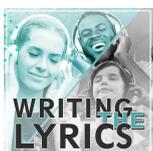
That means, with each complication the stakes get higher.

If complications are progressive, each successive complication presents an increased challenge to the character because it becomes harder and harder to go back.

Secondly, **the Choices Must Grow in Irreversibility.**

This just means that each decision becomes harder to reverse.

Because the situation is becoming more complicated.



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It's like building up a spider's web of decisions around the character that eventually traps them and forces them to the CRISIS.

Thirdly, the **Complications Must Connect Back to the Inciting Incident**.

All that means is that the complications must be relevant to your character's journey from where they are to where they wanna go, preferably to that better place.

And lastly, the **Complications Must Exhaust the Existing Tactics and Resources of the Character**.

So as the character takes action on getting to the better place their tactics prove useless, and they get back unexpected results.

So they will cling to any remaining skills they have in their familiar toolkit until, finally, they are forced to confront the truth that they don't yet have what it takes to handle the problem they face.

And that leads them to the turning point.

## Turning Point

**[00:11:32]** Because the turning point refers to the moment when the character has to face the truth: They are not equipped to solve the problem presented by the inciting incident.

This moment illustrates that their tactics are failing because of a larger problem.

Their strategy is not suited to the situation at hand.

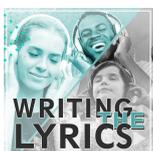
It exposes the flaws in the character's worldview or their cognitive frame.

Now, when hitting the turning point the character can't go on as before.

For example, in "**You Shouldn't Kiss Me Like This**" by Toby Keith, the two characters can't go back to being just friends.

Something fundamentally has changed between them.

In the song "**Stan**" by Eminem, once the fan has exhausted all his tactics and still hasn't gotten a reply, he can't go back to his initial strategy of waiting.



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He's over the edge now.

Quite literally.

So when the song's main character faces the impossibility of staying the same, they are forced to change.

Because all the existing strategies to deal with the INCITING INCIDENT have been used.

And there's one more thing about turning points.

## Turning Point Categories

**[00:12:41]** They can fall into one of two categories.

The first is **active**.

This means that the turning point arises because of a change in the situation.

This could happen

- because of the actions of another character,
- because of something happening in the environment
- or because of an external force bearing down on the characters.

The second category is the **revelatory** turning point.

In this case, the character is forced to change direction because of some new information that has come to light.

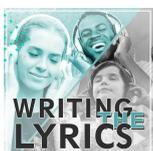
In Toby Keith's song "**You Shouldn't Kiss Me Like This**", the turning point is a revelation.

And it's a positive turning point. Because he realizes what he truly feels for this woman who kissed him.

But in the song "**Stan**" by Eminem, the turning point for Stan was Slim's inaction.

That drove him over the edge.

For Slim, on the other hand, the turning point was a revelation.



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It was when he realized that the drunk man who drove his car over the bridge was Stan.

So when it comes to the turning point, keep in mind that it needs to force your character to change.

And in order to make an impact on our audience, they need to see that the song's character can only get to that better place if they change their cognitive frame first.

So the turning point is what connects the listener to the character in the song.

It generates empathy between the audience and the character because the listener experiences the failed attempts to restore balance along with the song's main character.

So the turning point is a powerful moment for the audience.

And it's a must have in lyrics.

This one can't be left out.

Or there is nothing that changes for the song's main character.

And they or their situation won't change.

And your audience — who empathizes with the character because of facing the same problem or having that same universal human need unfulfilled – they experience the failure of the character's way to see the world along with the character.

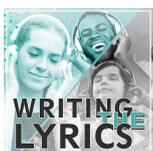
And when the turning point exposes the change necessary for the character, the audience faces the choice of whether to change, too.

The choice they face is the third commandment, the crisis.

And we will get to that in episode 48.

Now if you want to hear more about the turning point and the progressive complications that lead up to it, I highly recommend you listen to my podcast episode 27.

In that episode, I walk you through the song "Hero of War" which is an amazing example for Using Progressive Complications.



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So check out that song.

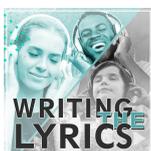
It's mind-blowingly well-crafted!

And I'll see you in our next episode next week, when we answer a listener's question who wanted to know how we can "Combine Song Parts into One Central Meaning of the Lyrics!"

So stay tuned.

## Show Notes

- Throwing Someone's Life Out Of Balance – Waypoint #1: The Inciting Incident – <https://storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-044/>
- Eye of the Tiger lyrics © Wb Music Corp., Sony/atv Melody, Easy Action Music
- Develop your Lyric's Verses by Using Progressive Complications – <https://storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-027/>
- "You Shouldn't Kiss Me Like This" by Toby Keith – <https://storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-032/>



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