

EPISODE 048

## The Ultimate Dilemma for the Song's Main Character – Waypoint #3: The Crisis

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

In today's episode, we're gonna explore what it looks when we write about facing a crisis.

We've all been in a dilemma in our life, right?

It's when no matter what we choose, there's always something to lose, but also something to gain.

But it's normal if we fear the loss more than having the potential to gain something.

Being in a dilemma, there's just so much uncertainty attached it.

And we might fear to make a choice at all.

So when we write lyrics about a dilemma, we can actually provide guidance to our audience ... whenever they face a similar crisis.

And in this episode, you will find out how you can write lyrics about a person's dilemma.

What it takes to truly create a hard choice for your song's main character and I'll also show you all the options of where you can place that crossroad moment in your lyrics' narrative.

And as a lyric example, we'll look at Gloria Gaynor's song: "I Will Survive" because there's so much to take away from the way those lyrics were written.

Sound good?



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Awesome, then let's get started!

## TEASER

### Overview: Waypoints Inciting Incident, Turning Point, Crisis

**[00:01:45]** So I hope you've listened to my previous episodes because when we talk about the crisis or crossroad moment our song's main character faces, then it's actually the third waypoint in their journey from getting to where they wanna go.

And it's the hardest part on their journey, for sure.

Because it's the moment when they either give up or push through.

So just for a quick recap.

The first waypoint was the Inciting Incident.

That was an event that threw our song's main character's life completely out of balance.

Like the breakup in Gloria Gaynor's song: "I Will Survive".

The song started right with the repercussions of that incident.

She sang: *"At first, I was afraid. I was petrified. Kept thinking I could never live without you by my side."*

So that's an inciting incident. Something that drops into your song's main character's life that they gotta make sense of.

And then, in the character's approach to deal with that incident, their tactics keep failing. Until they hit a turning point moment when they understand the true nature of the inciting incident.

Or when something unexpected happens.

Like in Gaynor's song "I will Survive", her ex-boyfriend is showing up again. She comes home and he's there waiting for her!



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That's a turning point moment because it throws the song's main character into a crisis.

And that's what we're gonna talk about in today's episode.

And if you wanna hear more about those waypoints and how you can create a strong lyric outline for your next song, I invite you to join my Powerful Lyrics Masterclass.

In that masterclass, I give you the tools and the strategy that helps you get from finding a strong idea, turning it into a solid lyric outline, writing the first draft, and revising it so that you can get your lyrics done.

I will lead you through the process so that you never fall into self-doubt again when you doubt yourself, your ability to write lyrics, and how good your lyrics are.

You will just know that they are good, because you will learn everything that goes into a great lyric that has the power to make an emotional impact on your audience, inspire them, and touch their hearts! So that you can communicate what matters to you in a way that people get it. And so you can offer guidance or comfort through your song lyrics.

So if you wanna write captivating and compelling lyrics without getting stuck in songwriter's block, and even if you think you're not good with words, then join the Powerful Lyrics Masterclass.

Visit [writingthelyrics.com/masterclass](http://writingthelyrics.com/masterclass).

And move from unsure to unstoppable when it comes to writing lyrics!

## Crisis

**[00:04:29]** Alright, and now let's continue talking about the crisis for our song's main character.

Because lyrics can really dial in on a person's dilemma when they have to choose between two incompatible options and there's a lot at stake.

And there's just no clear wrong or right way.

That is so hard, right?



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Like when we look back at Gloria Gaynor's song "I Will Survive".

That guy broke up with her and she had to gather the pieces and put herself back together.

And then he shows up again and throws her into a crisis.

How is she gonna react to this?

Is she really as strong as she thought she is?

She gets tested, right?

And now she has a choice to make about what to do.

She's facing a crisis.

And the crisis is a real choice between two incompatible options.

It is a binary, this-or-that, choice

So she can either return to him or throw him out and end their relationship for good.

If she chooses him, then she's not choosing herself.

She can't be a strong woman if she stays with him, but she could have the man back that she loved.

But if she chooses to let him go for good, she'll lose that guy forever.  
And she might end up alone.

So what option will she choose?

And you know, the great thing about the crisis is that our audience will be emotionally invested in the stakes. Because in a crisis there's always something at stake.

If you choose option A, you forgo option B. And vice versa.

There are costs and benefits to each option!



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So the crisis keeps the listener glued to his headphones.

It just makes them keep listening to the lyrics. This is like the cliffhanger in a TV series. We wonder what the character will do.

So when it comes to drafting a crisis for your song's main character, there are two things to keep in mind.

## Real Choice

**[00:06:41]** First, the crisis needs to be a real choice.

There can't be a clear right or wrong way.

Because if there was a clear right way and a clear wrong way, we expect the character to take the right way. It doesn't teach us anything about them.

And if they choose the wrong way, we feel like they don't deserve our emotional investment anymore.

We don't understand WHY they make the choices that they do.

And so we lose that connection with them.

So what that means is that we need a choice that tells us clearly something about the character based on which way they decide to go.

And it needs to be something where a reasonable person could go either way.

That means the two options available to the character in the song must be mutually exclusive.

By choosing option A, the character completely forgoes option B and vice versa.

No matter what the character chooses, they are giving up something or pay a price.



## Meaningful Stakes

**[00:07:42]** But there's one more thing when it comes to drafting a crisis.

It must not only be a real choice, but the choice the character faces must also matter.

It must be a hard decision for the character to make.

Otherwise the tension and the excitement will fizzle and the listener will lose interest.

So there must be two seemingly impossible choices.

So when we look at the stakes in Gloria Gaynor's song "I Will Survive", there's love at stake, right?

She could end up alone if she lets go of that guy for good.

There's no certainty she'll ever find someone else.

But there's also her own self-worth at stake.

Does she have the strength to continue to survive on her own without that man's love?

Can she keep up outgrowing the chained up little person that she used to be?

So there's not only love at stake, or better not being alone for the rest of your life but there's also her own personal growth at stake.

She can stay who she was and not be alone.

Or she can choose the path of growth that might get lonely.

So these are meaningful stakes, right?

## Choices

**[00:08:50]** So the crisis needs to be a real choice with meaningful stakes.

And that choice can fall into one of two categories.



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## Best Bad Choice

**[00:08:59]** The first is the best bad choice.

In these cases, no matter which way the character looks, there's a problem, there will be a cost.

A best bad choice crisis has negative options.

So what the character in the song is trying to do, is minimize the amount of harm that they do by choosing between the options. They look for the best bad choice.

We use this type of crisis to illustrate what the character is willing to endure to get what they want.

So when we look at the character in Gloria Gaynor's song "I Will Survive", we see how much emotional pain the song's main character is willing to endure to get the love she deserves and keep believing in love.

On both sides, there is potential for loss.

If she lets go of her ex-boyfriend, she may never find love again, right?

On the other hand, if she uses that guy just to not be alone, she risks her happiness.

No matter what she chooses, we feel anxious about the risks the character faces when they emerge from the crisis and take a course of action.

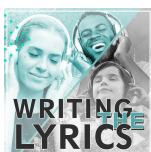
## Irreconcilable goods

**[00:10:08]** But the choice doesn't necessarily need to be about two negative options.

There's also the possibility that we are presented with a crisis that offers incompatible positive outcomes.

That's an irreconcilable goods crisis.

In these cases, there are different possibilities in each direction, but we can't have both things.



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We can only pursue one of them.

Often an irreconcilable goods crisis comes down to something that's good for the character versus something that's good for everyone else.

Like in Gloria Gaynor's song "I will Survive", she can either pursue what she wants which is love, right?

But what she needs is self-actualization.

It's her own personal growth.

And she can't have both.

At least not at that very moment.

So no matter if you go for a best bad choice or an irreconcilable goods choice, in both categories of crisis, each option has potential costs and benefits.

The type of crisis depends on how you choose to present the options and frame the character's choice.

But no matter what that crisis looks like, we need to build out a compelling choice with stakes that have a real impact on the character.

So the crisis poses a real choice between incompatible options with meaningful stakes.

And when the character must choose one path, it forces them to reveal their true character.

We learn about them by observing which values they prioritize over others and which costs are justified to achieve an outcome.

For example, it's easy to say what we value but the true test is whether we will stand by that value when we must pay a price.

So when the choice between option A and B is made, that's the climax.

And we'll get to that waypoint on our song's main character's journey and simultaneously the 4th commandment of storytelling in an upcoming episode.



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That's the moment when the character's true character is revealed.

Because when our song's main character faces a dilemma, the kind of person who goes left is not the same kind of person as the one who goes right.

Right, if the character in Gaynor's song would have chosen to return to their former relationship, they would have remained the chained up little person still in love with that guy.

And all that talk about being strong enough to survive without him, would have all been a lie.

But she became a different person, a stronger person. And her actions proved it.

Nonetheless, she had to go through that crisis.

## Crisis Placement in Lyrics

**[00:12:50]** And lastly, I wanna show you where you can place the character's crisis in your lyrics.

And you have several options for how you can present the crisis in your lyrics.

I'll mention them first, and then we dive deeper.

So firstly, you can include the crisis in your lyrics and by that you can

- let your lyrics start with the crisis
- you can use the crisis as an attention-grabbing opening technique
- Or make the song revolve around the crisis for instance by putting it in the chorus
- or you can just state it without putting the focus on it

But it's also possible to just imply the crisis.

Now let's go through each of those options.

Firstly, you can include the crisis in your lyrics.

You can do that in your first lines or some place else in the lyrics.

So the crisis in those cases is pretty straightforward. The character in the song shares what their options look like.



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For example when The Clash sings: *“Should I Stay or Should I Go”*.

They go over the two options they have for reacting to the turning point and sometimes even weigh the cost and benefits of each.

For instance, Eminem’s song **“Lose Yourself”** starts with the character’s crisis right away.

He says: *Look If you had One shot Or one opportunity To seize everything you ever wanted In one moment Would you capture it Or just let it slip?*

And then he goes on to illuminate what that character’s situation looks like.

He talks about the stakes

And later on, how that character decides.

So his song revolved entirely around that crisis.

And by starting the song with stating the character’s crisis, the audience knows that everything that follows will explore this dilemma.

But if you want to really highlight the character’s indecision, you can also put the crisis in the chorus.

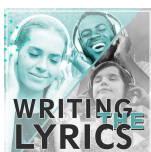
For instance, there’s this song **“If I let You Go”** by the Irish band Westlife.

It’s a prime example for building the chorus around the crisis question.

They sing:

*And once again I’m thinking about  
Taking the easy way out*

*But if I let you go,  
I will never know  
What my life would be  
holding you close to me  
Will I ever see  
you smiling back at me?  
how will I know*




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*if I let you go?*

Cool thing here is, the song's title already refers to the crisis.

And the song delivers on it.

But there are also many songs, where the crisis is included but it's not the center of attention.

It just slips in there and we hardly notice it.

Because it's not explored with all the calculations and stakes and everything.

For example, in Green Day's song "**Warning**", they just list so many things in those lyrics that raise the question: Listening to every warning or judge for oneself?

But they also state the crisis.

*Sanitation, expiration date, question everything?  
Or shut up and be a victim of authority*

It's an important question, right?

And the choice matters.

Now secondly, apart from stating the crisis in the lyrics, you can also just imply the crisis.

The crisis in and of itself is not a must-have thing, that needs to be clearly stated in lyrics.

But we should be able from seeing the turning point and the character's decision or how that situation all turns out for them, what the crisis must have been.

So the crisis can be implied, or somehow being found between the lines.

Lots of songs skip over stating the crisis out loud.

For example, in the Monkees song "**I'm A Believer**", we get the turning point "Then I Saw Her Face" and in the next line is the resolution: "Now I'm A Believer".

The crisis is not explored in that song.



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But since we hear about the character's backstory in the verses, we get a feeling what that crisis must have been for him.

He could have either renounced love entirely, or give it another shot while he risks getting hurt again.

We choose to imply the crisis like this, when we don't need the crisis to get our point across.

Or when it distracts from what we want the audience to feel.

Because we don't have much space for long explanations in the lyrics, so it's okay to leave out the crisis as long as we imply it.

Alright, I think we've learnt so much about the crisis now.

But there's a lot more to explore about it, that we unfortunately don't have time for right now.

But if you're interested to find out how we can truly exploit the crisis and make our entire song revolve around it, or what we can do to imply it, again, I invite you to join the Powerful Lyrics Masterclass.

Go to [writingthelyrics.com/masterclass](http://writingthelyrics.com/masterclass).

I will help you draft those waypoints in your song's main character's journey so that you can make the audience relate to what you're saying in your songs, keep them engaged, and make them wanna listen to the end of the song!

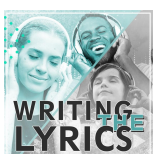
And pay attention to what you have to say!

So that you can ensure that your message gets across!

And that masterclass comes with lots of song examples that we study.

Examples from every music genre!

So if you wanna know how to truly write the content of what your song will be about, then the Powerful Lyrics Masterclass is the most in-depth (and easy to implement) course ever created on how to outline the CONTENT and write your lyrics by discovering the next level mindset, strategies and tools to confidently write lyrics that impact people in today's NEW world.



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So visit [writingthelyrics.com/masterclass](https://writingthelyrics.com/masterclass) and level up your lyrics writing skills to make an emotional impact on your audience, and tell your story.

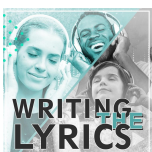
Alright, that's it for the Crisis.

I will see you next way when we talk about how to overcome the things that hold us back!

Have a great week, Melanie

## Show Notes

- Powerful Lyrics Masterclass: <https://www.writingthelyrics.com/plm-masterclass>
- Throwing Someone's Life Out Of Balance – Waypoint #1: The Inciting Incident – <https://storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-044/>
- Writing A Turning Point Moment in Lyrics – Waypoint #2: The Turning Point Progressive Complication – <https://storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-046/>
- “Lose Yourself” by Eminem
- If I Let You Go lyrics © Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd., Universal Music Publishing Group
- Warning lyrics © Warner Chappell Music, Inc
- I'm a Believer lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Universal Music Publishing Group



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