



In my opinion, the key to being able to play the drums in a way that will guide the band is by knowing the song well. Being familiar with the song structure and what is needed in each section is a skill that all drummers should have. In order to accomplish this, first we need to learn the common parts that all songs share and how to identify them when listening to a song.

There are widely used and accepted titles for the different sections or parts of songs that all musicians use and understand. My goal is to help you identify and understand the job of each of these parts. In the next lesson we will learn how they are "chained" together to create a song.

Most people have heard the terms "verse," "chorus" and they know what a guitar solo is. Some songs are simple, while other songs are longer and more complex; every song is different. Learning these sections will prepare you to interact with other musicians and learn songs from recordings. These section names aren't only related to drums; they are universal to all instruments. Here we go!

"Intro"

Let's start with an easy one...Simply put, the "intro" is the start of any song; the very first part you hear. Most of the time, if the song has a signature riff or melody ("hook"), it will be played here, at the top of the song. There are usually no vocals (singing) in an intro. Not all songs have an intro section, but most do.

"Verse"

Typically, songs tell a story, make a statement or describe how someone feels about something in life. The verse is usually where the "story" of the song begins, with the vocals. The lyrics of the verses usually are what sets the scene and tells the story of the song.

A song will usually have at least two verses, though some have more. The lyrics of verses are hardly ever the same. You usually name them "verse 1" or "verse 2." The verses are usually towards the first half of the song, though sometimes there might be a "verse 3" after a solo later in the song.



"Chorus"

The chorus is the part of the song that people usually think about when they think of a song. It is the "anthem," where the main idea or theme is expressed, usually with a very catchy, memorable vocal melody. Often times, the title of the song is sung in the chorus. Unlike the verse, usually the lyrics of the chorus are the same each time the chorus is played in the song.

The chorus usually follows the verse and it is common to hear the chorus several different times in a song. Sometimes a chorus might be repeated twice in a row, usually towards the middle or end of a song. In rare occasions, some songs open immediately with a chorus.

"Hook / Riff"

Usually, a song will have a signature riff or melody that makes you instantly recognize the song. Whether played on guitar, keyboard or other instrument, it often defines the song just as much as the title. Think of the opening riff to "Sweet Home Alabama," "Hotel California" or "Stairway to Heaven... usually after three or four notes, you already know what song it is. That's the hook.

It is quite common to hear the "hook" at the intro, after every chorus and near the end of the song (outro).

"Pre-Chorus"

Out of all of these, the pre-chorus is probably the hardest to explain because it often sounds like it's part of the verse, yet it actually comes AFTER the verse and right BEFORE the chorus. A major give-away of a pre-chorus is that 95% of the time it has the same lyrics each time. Also, It usually has a different chord progression than the verse.

I should warn you that not every song has a pre-chorus. You need to understand them, though, because usually the drums will step up a bit during the pre-chorus as you prepare to get even bigger in the chorus. You want to build some excitement and raise the tension a bit and the pre-chorus usually accomplishes that.



“Solo / Instrumental”

Aahhh, another easy one! Everyone knows what the solo section is, so I’ll just point out a few things to note. The solo is commonly found just after the 2nd chorus, unless there is a bridge first. Most of the time, it is a guitar solo, but could also be a keyboard, saxophone or any other instrument.

There are also times where there isn’t a dominant solo or melody, but could just be a musical interlude where no vocals are heard for a bit. In this case, the section could be called an “instrumental” or even an “interlude.”

“Bridge”

The bridge of a song usually comes just before or just after the instrumental or solo section. It typically has lyrics that are not heard in any other part of the song. The bridge often has a unique chord progression, different than the verse and chorus. Sometimes, the entire bridge section is repeated more than once, usually with the 2nd time louder and “bigger” than the first (very common in modern praise and worship music).

“Tag”

Occasionally, songwriters will choose to repeat the last line of a certain section in a song. This is called a tag.

“Outro”

Put simply, The outro is basically the space between the last chorus and the song ending. It is usually instrumental, but sometimes there are vocals. It is extremely common for the hook or main riff to be played during the outro. Most songs will have an outro, though some do not.

“Ending”

There aren’t too many variations for song endings. A very common method is a final, single crash, which I just call a “RING OUT.” It is also common to hit a final crash and then “roll” the crash cymbal with both sticks, creating a shimmer effect. Many times on recordings, the song will just fade out as the musicians are playing. In this case, when the song is played live, some type of ending must be created.



Another very common way to end a song is called a “circus” ending. The general idea is to “ring out” with a big crash and then all the musicians “go crazy” for a few seconds. To wrap it up, there is usually a big snare hit and then hit a final crash. This ending is called a “circus” ending and is great for creating excitement and enthusiasm with the audience.

Unique Drum Parts

It is common for each part of the song to have its own drum part unique to that section of the song. For example, in any particular song, all of the verses will usually have the same type of beat, yet in another song, the drum part in the verses might be different. The same goes for choruses; WITHIN each song, they will be similar to each other, but different from song to song.

Keep in mind, all songs are different and you will likely encounter songs that “make their own rules!” That is part of what makes music so interesting!