

The Rock-'n'-Roll Guide to Grammar and Style

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By

Michael J. Zerbe

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vii
Opening Act	x
Abbreviations Used in This Book.....	xv
Love Hurts: Simple Sentences.....	1
Rapture: Solo Nouns.....	4
Royals: Plurals, Compounds, and Coordinates.....	7
Us: Personal Pronouns.....	9
Roam: Solo Verbs.....	12
Guerilla Radio: Noun and Verb Phrases.....	14
Strange Magic: Adjectives.....	18
I Predict a Riot: Nouns and Pronouns as Direct Objects	32
Sing Me Spanish Techno: Nouns and Pronouns as Indirect Objects.....	35
I am the Walrus: Nouns and Adjectives as Complements	38
Naturally: Adverbs	43
After the Storm: Prepositions	48
Boom! Interjections	54
Life is a Rock, but the Radio Rolled Me: Compound Sentences.....	56
Wake Me Up When September Ends: Complex Sentences.....	64
Hurray for the Riff Raff: Compound–Complex Sentences.....	72
Rumour Has It: Sentence Function.....	74

Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves: Other Punctuation.....	76
Capital Letters: All About Capitalization	90
The Sloop <i>John B</i> : All About Italics.....	92
I Hate Myself for Loving You: More Types of Pronouns	93
On Whom the Moon Doth Shine: Pronoun Case.....	100
If You Love Somebody, Set Them Free: Pronoun/Antecedent Agreement	106
Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots: Subject/Verb Agreement	108
Spill the Wine: Verb Mood	111
Fight For Your Right To Party: Verbs as Infinitives	114
Stop Draggin' My Heart Around: Verbs as Gerunds and Participles	117
I Sing, Sang, Sung a Song Sung Blue: The Three Basic Forms of Verbs	123
The Best of Times: Verb Tenses	125
Should I Stay or Should I Go: Conditional Verbs	138
You Were Loved: Active and Passive Voice.....	142
You, Me, and He: Point of View	148
The World is a Ghetto: Figures of Speech.....	152
A Touch of Grey.....	161
You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet	164
Have I the Right to Mess with Word Order.....	165
Papa, Don't Preach: Purist Rules.....	168
About the Author	172
Indices: Song Title, Singer/Band Name, Grammar/Style Topic.....	173

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Dillsburg, Pennsylvania, USA
September 2018

OPENING ACT

Welcome to the show! I'm willing to bet that you picked up this book for two reasons: first, you love Rock-'n'-Roll, and second, you want (or need) to work on grammar for work, school, or other situations in which you are expected to write and speak in a more formal style. Believe it or not, you can use Rock-'n'-Roll to do just that!

This book is not, I repeat, *not*, a critique of grammar in Rock-'n'-Roll. Rather, it's a celebration of all of the great writing that goes in to Rock-'n'-Roll song titles. All the grammar and style you need to know is right there in those titles, and we're going to use them throughout this book. I use titles rather than lyrics because under US and UK law, titles can't be copyrighted. That's why you see, for example, so many different songs with the titles "Call Me" or "I Love You."

We've had two problems with learning grammar. The first problem is the use of language that is unfamiliar to us. I don't mean unfamiliar as in eight-syllable words, but unfamiliar in the sense that many grammar books and websites use generic, random language like "Susan threw the ball" that we just don't have any kind of connection to. An explanation of a grammar rule such as, say, a run-on sentence will be followed by generic examples of run-on sentences written by the author of the grammar guide. That's all well and good, but grammar is learned much more effectively when we see it in language that we have internalized—either language that we ourselves write or speak, or language that we know well because we've got it in our heads—like the titles of our favorite Rock-'n'-Roll songs. Heck, if US Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan can drop "867-5309"—the title of Tommy Tutone's 1980s one-hit wonder—into a weighty legal opinion, as she did in June 2013, we ought to be able to use Rock-'n'-Roll to learn some grammar.

The second problem with learning grammar is a lack of context. Grammar instruction often starts with identification of parts of speech: nouns, verbs, and the rest. This approach makes sense: to learn chemistry, we learn about atoms and molecules, and to learn about music, we learn about notes, rhythms, and chords. So it's only natural to think that learning about the building blocks of language—words in the various functions they serve—would lead to an understanding of grammar. But it often doesn't work out

that way. We end up learning these parts of speech in isolation, and when they suddenly appear in sentences, it becomes hard to figure out what's what. So instead of starting with isolated parts of speech and working up to sentences, in this book, I start with song titles that are sentences and break them down. It's a much more natural approach, and you will be able to see how the parts of speech work in the context of a sentence.

A related issue is the fact that many people just hate grammar. They despise it! They have nightmarish memories of evil English teachers returning papers covered in blood-red ink that damn the writer to Grammar Hell for all eternity. When my parents were in college in the late 1950s and early 1960s, some professors (in English but in other disciplines as well) used a grading practice that involved "failing errors." The professor would begin reading the student's paper, and as soon as she or he came across a typo, sentence fragment, comma splice, run-on sentence, or some other violation of basic grammar and mechanics, the professor would stop reading and immediately flunk the paper. (I'm an English professor, and I have to say that this grading method does sound kind of awesome. I could grade a stack of student papers in a flash if I could use this failing errors method!) Seriously, though, people who have been traumatized by English teachers get understandably upset any time the word "grammar" is mentioned.

So what happened? You guessed it: this heavy-handed approach to grammar led to a backlash. By the late 1960s and into the 1970s, many people, including many English teachers and professors, began to look at grammar as a tool of oppression. Grammar is keeping you down! Fight the power! Additionally, some people began claiming that teaching grammar actually slowed down a student's linguistic development, and studies were conducted that seemed to support this idea. Even though many of these studies were somewhat suspect, grammar was dropped like a piece of radioactive kryptonite in English classes at all levels of education, from elementary school through college. The war against grammar was even supported by national organizations of English teachers and professors such as the National Council of Teachers of English in the US. Through the 1970s and 1980s, then, grammar disappeared from many English classes, with attention being focused instead on literature and personal writing in which grammar was viewed as unimportant.

As is often the case, though, the pendulum swung too far. Abandoning grammar was an overreaction. Even the people who were tortured by English teachers and professors eventually realize that grammar is important. If no one understands what you're trying to say because of poor

grammar, you've got problems. Even more important than professional considerations is the fact that an understanding of grammar also makes you intellectually smarter. The better you understand grammar, the better you understand the content of what you're reading or hearing, and the better you'll do at everything else.

Don't just take my word for it: in a 2012 blog post from the *Harvard Business Review*, iFixit and Dozuki CEO Kyle Wiens gets right to the point: "If you think an apostrophe was one of the 12 disciples of Jesus, you will never work for me. If you think a semicolon is a regular colon with an identity crisis, I will not hire you. If you scatter commas into a sentence with all the discrimination of a shotgun, you might make it to the foyer before we politely escort you from the building." Wiens adds, "If it takes someone more than 20 years to notice how to properly use 'it's,' then that's not a learning curve I'm comfortable with . . . I've found that people who make fewer mistakes on a grammar test also make fewer mistakes when they are doing something completely unrelated to writing."

An eye (or ear) for grammar, then, translates into an eye for detail in other areas of your professional and personal lives as well. And this eye for detail is noticeable.

The key to realizing the intellectual and professional benefits of grammar knowledge is to teach and learn grammar in a way that is not oppressive. I mean, come on, let's have some fun with it! Everyone is more than capable of understanding grammar, no matter what kind of learner you are. Textual learners can read it. Visual learners can see it. Aural learners can hear it. Kinetic learners can feel it.

Many people think that grammar is hard to learn, but I disagree. If you can recognize some basic patterns, you can do it. To be sure, grammar (or anything to do with language) is not an exact science. But it has some foundational building blocks that you can recognize fairly quickly. As soon as you can see them, you'll be off and running and wondering what the big deal was all about. In fact, once you learn the patterns, you may feel like you just won front-row seats to a Springsteen concert. I mean, it's exciting! But don't go overboard. The patterns are not universal. You will start seeing plenty of examples where the patterns *don't* work too. But for an introduction into how things work in language, these basic patterns can't be beat.

Like any language, English doesn’t just have one grammar; it has many. The grammar that I talk about in this book is the grammar that most of us would associate with work and professional situations, formal public situations such as a city or county council meeting, and academic situations. It’s the kind of formal grammar that we were tormented by in middle school, high school, and maybe college. As many of us have discovered, though, we need to know it. Especially in this Information Age, where our online presence in the form of e-mail messages and social media status updates is the only way that many people “know” us, knowledge of this formal grammar is essential. You have to know it to be taken seriously and understood clearly.

The Rock-‘n’-Roll Guide to Grammar and Style gives you just enough information to be sure about commas, semicolons, who vs. whom, and other fundamentals. There are not a lot of rules to memorize—just basically a few recommendations for commas—and in fact, I list a number of what I call Purist Rules, most of which are now fading into Grammar Past, that you can safely ignore at the end of the book. Also, the book is not exhaustive: I don’t cover grammatical parallelism, for instance. But I promise that you have everything you need to write and speak confidently in situations that require a formal approach.

I would never say to you that the formal grammar that I talk about in this book is the right grammar to use in all parts of your life. Nobody cares about formal grammar when you’re texting friends to meet up for Happy Hour. If they do—find new friends. Nobody cares much about many of the formal grammar guidelines when they’re reading something literary. Finally, grammar changes. But it doesn’t change very fast. Maybe someday apostrophes will be long gone. (I hope not; they help with clarity.) If they do get tossed, though, it’s not going to be in my lifetime—or yours. So you may as well get them figured out if you haven’t yet.

You may be thinking that Rock-‘n’-Roll song titles are not written in a formal grammatical style. To an extent, that’s true. But Rock-‘n’-Roll has been around long enough, and has enough variety, that there are plenty of titles to choose from. Many of them are great examples of the grammar issues we’re going to look at in this book. In fact, I use examples of Rock-‘n’-Roll from the 1940s (kind of *pre*-Rock-‘n’-Roll back then) and 1950s to today. Also, I cast a wide net: the Rock-‘n’-Roll song titles in this book represent pop, hard rock, metal, rap and hip hop, folk, ballads, ska and reggae, rhythm and blues, gospel, alternative/indie, punk—you name it. In the book, you’ll see the title of the song followed by the name of the singer

or band who recorded it and then the year of the song's release. Many songs, of course, have been recorded by more than one artist, but to keep things simple, I only list one singer or band. There's no exact science to the choice of which singer or band I name: sometimes I went with the version of the song that I know best, sometimes I went with the version that is the most popular, sometimes (especially with songs that I don't know well) I went with the version that I came across first, and sometimes I went with a version that helped me balance current hits from the 2010s and 2000s decades with earlier hits from the 1990s, 1980s, 1970s, 1960s, and further into the past.

Many of the songs I use in this book were written and recorded by the same person or group, but others were written by one person and recorded by someone else. To keep things simple and concise, I don't list songwriters in addition to the artist or band after the title. However, songwriters do amazing work with language, and when you see a title you like, I encourage you to track down the songwriter(s) and find more examples of their work.

I use American spelling except in cases where the title of the song or the name of the band uses British spelling, as with Adele's "Rumour has it." Also, some of the rules for formal English grammar differ somewhat among American, Canadian, Caribbean, Irish, British, Indian, South African, Australian, New Zealand, and other world Englishes; what you see in this book is based primarily on the American grammar and mechanics that I learned and use. So, for example, you'll see that I put periods and commas inside closing quotation marks.

Let's Rock-'n'-Roll and get started.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS BOOK

Each of the below abbreviations is also introduced later in the book at the first mention of the term that it abbreviates.

N = noun

PN = pronoun

Ant = antecedent

S = subject (always a noun or pronoun)

V = verb

DO = direct object (always a noun or pronoun)

IO = indirect object (always a noun or pronoun)

SubjComp = subject complement (always a noun or pronoun)

AdjComp = adjective complement

Pr = preposition

ObjPr = object of the preposition (always a noun or pronoun)

PrepPhrase = prepositional phrase

Int = interjection

CC = coordinating conjunction

IndClause = independent clause

DepClause = dependent clause

ConjAdv = conjunctive adverb

SC = subordinating conjunction

Inf = infinitive

ObjInf = object of the infinitive (always a noun or pronoun)

Ger = gerund

ObjGer = object of the gerund (always a noun or pronoun)

PresPart = present participle

PastPart = past participle

HV = helping verb

CV = conditional verb

LOVE HURTS: SIMPLE SENTENCES

Quick, what do Neil Diamond, Twisted Sister, and Mary J. Blige have in common? Not much, you say? Maybe not, but they all have hits entitled “I Am.” Technically, Neil Diamond’s hit is “I Am, I Said,” and Twisted Sister’s hit is “I Am (I’m Me).” For the moment, though, humor me, and let’s refer to all three of these songs simply as “I Am.”

“I am.” It’s the shortest grammatically complete sentence in the English language, tied with “I go” and “I do.” All of these short, simple sentences have a subject (always a noun) “I” and a verb (also called a predicate) “am,” “go,” and “do,” respectively, and all of the sentences express a complete thought. They are, then, grammatically sound sentences, all of which must have those three components: a subject, a verb, and a complete thought. The end of the sentence is typically signaled by a period, question mark, or exclamation point, though semicolons and colons can be used in some situations (see page 56 for more information on compound sentences).

So, let’s start with Rock-’n’-Roll songs that are short, simple sentences and that are totally fine in terms of grammar. Because they are complete sentences, here and throughout this book, I am going to lowercase the words in the sentences that you would normally lowercase, and I’m going to put a period or some other form of end punctuation at the end of the sentences even though you wouldn’t normally do that with a title. I’m also going to put the titles in quotations marks (see page 87 for an explanation). Under these title sentences, you’ll see a boldfaced “S” for subject and a “V” for verb.

“I am.” Neil Diamond (1971)

S V

“I am.” Twisted Sister (1983)

S V

“I am.” Mary J. Blige (2009)

S V

“I do.” Lisa Loeb (1998)

S V

Here are other Rock-'n'-Roll subject/verb combinations that form grammatically complete simple sentences that have subjects and verbs and express a complete thought. Again, I'll throw in the periods and the boldfaced “**S**”s and “**V**”s:

“Love grows.” Edison Lighthouse (1970)

S V

“Love hurts.” Nazareth (1975)

S V

“I wish.” Stevie Wonder (1976)

S V

“I ran.” Flock of Seagulls (1982)

S V

“Time heals.” Todd Rundgren (1983)

S V

“You are.” Lionel Ritchie (1983)

S V

“I cry.” Egyptian Lover (1984)

S V

“We belong.” Pat Benatar (1985)

S V

“Love bites.” Def Leppard (1988)

S V

“Love is.” Soul Asylum (1993)

S V

“I swear.” All-4-One (1994)

S V

“Lightning crashes.” Live (1995)

S V

“You learn.” Alanis Morissette (1996)

S V

“Simon says.” Pharoahe Monch (1999)

S V

“I try.” Macy Gray (2000)

S V

“Money talks.” Hayseed Dixie (2001)

S V

“Jesus walks.” Kanye West (2004)

S V

“You did.” Chuck Prophet (2004)

S V

“Who says?” John Mayer (2012)

S V

Short and sweet, these titles are all complete sentences showing subjects, verbs, and complete thoughts.

RAPTURE: SOLO NOUNS

Let's break down those simple sentences into their two component parts. First is a noun. In a complete sentence, this noun is called a subject. But by itself, we have to be more general and call it a noun because nouns can do other things, as we'll see later.

Any word that we look at in isolation like this we'll call a **solo** part of speech. These words are not complete sentences: rather, they are **sentence fragments**. They are missing one or two of the three required elements—a subject, a verb, and a complete thought—needed for a complete sentence. Because sentence fragments are not complete sentences, here and throughout the book, I won't put periods after them. However, note that periods and other end punctuation—question marks and exclamation points—are often used with fragments even though these groups of words do not rise to the threshold of a sentence.

Rock-'n'-Roll has tons of songs that have solo noun titles. I think many of us remember that nouns are persons, places, and things. Let's start with persons. Because they are names (even imaginary ones), they're capitalized. Nouns that are capitalized are called **proper nouns** (see page 90 for more information on capitalization).

- “Johnny B. Goode” Chuck Berry (1958)
- “Mrs. Robinson” Simon & Garfunkel (1968)
- “Lola” The Kinks (1970)
- “Beth” KISS (1976)
- “Rasputin” Boney M (1978)
- “Mickey” Toni Basil (1983)
- “Mr. Roboto” Styx (1983)
- “Luka” Suzanne Vega (1987)
- “Iris” Goo Goo Dolls (1999)
- “Superman” Five for Fighting (2001)
- “Alejandro” Lady Gaga (2009)
- “Sophia” Laura Marling (2011)
- “Houdini” Foster the People (2011)

Below are nouns that are names of places. Again, as proper nouns, these are capitalized even if the places are imaginary:

- “Chicago” Frank Sinatra (1957)
- “Kansas City” Wilbert Harrison, (1959)
- “San Francisco” Scott McKenzie (1967)
- “Massachusetts” Bee Gees (1967)
- “Ohio” Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young (1970)

The “&” symbol is called an **ampersand**. It’s typically not used in more formal situations, except for the names of law firms such as Denison, Rusniak, & Hooker. The ampersand is, however, used in the titles of song Rock-‘n’-Roll song titles and names of bands, and I use them in this book if they’re in those titles and names.

- “Waterloo” ABBA (1974)
- “Mississippi” Pussycat (1975)
- “MacArthur Park” Donna Summer (1978)
- “New York” Frank Sinatra (1979)
- “Funkytown” Lipps, Inc. (1979)
- “Heaven” Talking Heads (1979)
- “Africa” Toto (1983)
- “Allentown” Billy Joel (1983)
- “Papua New Guinea” The Future Sound of London (1991)
- “Tennessee” Arrested Development (1992)
- “Gotham City” R. Kelly (1997)
- “Hell” Squirrel Nut Zippers (1997)
- “Babylon” David Gray (2001)
- “Amsterdam” Guster (2003)
- “Portland, Oregon” Jack White and Loretta Lynn (2004)
- “Australia” The Shins (2007)
- “Paris” Grace Potter and the Nocturnals (2010)
- “Santa Fe” Beirut (2011)

Hey, both the title of the song *and* the name of the band are names of places. Wild.

- “Havana” Camila Cabello featuring Young Thug (2017)
- “Treasure Island” Azealia Banks (2018)

And here are nouns that are things. They are not capitalized unless they’re the first word of a sentence or part of a name or title. However, I’m treating

them here as a title, so I'm going with capitals (see page 90 for more information on capitalization):

- “Tequila” Champs (1958)
- “Kodachrome” Paul Simon (1973)
- “Magic” Pilot (1974)
- “Hurricane” Bob Dylan (1975)
- “Grease” Frankie Valli (1978)
- “Refugee” Tom Petty (1979)
- “Tusk” Fleetwood Mac (1979)
- “Rapture” Blondie (1980)
- “Photograph” Def Leppard (1983)
- “Sledgehammer” Peter Gabriel (1986)
- “Butterfly” Crazy Town (2001)
- “Dilemma” Nelly featuring Kelly Rowland (2002)
- “Zebra” John Butler Trio (2004)
- “Banquet” Bloc Party (2005)
- “Violin” Amos Lee (2011)

Keep in mind that nouns also refer to things—“qualities” may be a better term—that are states of being or abstract ideas:

- “Loneliness” Simon & Garfunkel (1959)
- “Respect” Aretha Franklin (1967)
- “Honesty” Billy Joel (1978)
- “Boredom” Buzzcocks (1989)
- “Liberty” Grateful Dead (1993)
- “Language” Dave Dobbyn (1994)
- “Jealousy” Natalie Merchant (1995)
- “Hedonism” Skunk Anansie (1996)
- “Beauty” Mötley Crüe (1997)
- “Fidelity” Regina Spektor (2006)
- “Composure” Warpaint (2010)
- “Mercy” Dave Matthews Band (2012)
- “Myth” Beach House (2012)
- “Happiness” Rex Orange County (2017)

ROYALS: PLURALS, COMPOUNDS, AND COORDINATES

We've looked at mostly singular solo nouns so far. But nouns are often plural, as these complete sentence song titles demonstrate:

“Girls talk.” Dave Edmunds (1979)
S V

“Voices carry.” ‘Til Tuesday (1985)
S V

“Opposites attract.” Paula Abdul (1990)
S V

“Lovers leave.” The Strypes (2015)
S V

Plural nouns are often used solo for song titles:

“Teardrops” Womack & Womack (1988)

“Peaches” Presidents of the USA (1996)

“Hands” Jewel (1998)

“Angels” Robbie Williams (1999)

“Theologians” Wilco (2004)

“Apologies” Grace Potter and the Nocturnals (2007)

“Headlines” Drake (2011)

“Stars” Grace Potter and the Nocturnals (2012)

“Submarines” The Lumineers (2012)

“Royals” Lorde (2013)

Not all plural nouns end in “s.” Consider “people,” for instance, in this grammatically complete simple sentence:

“People are strange.” The Doors (1967)
S V

I haven't labeled “strange” with a part of speech yet because we haven't covered what “strange” does in this sentence. I continue this practice

through the rest of the book; when you see a word in a title that hasn't been labeled, it just means we're not quite there yet, but it's coming.

Two nouns used together are called **compound nouns**, which can be either singular or plural:

“Diamonds and Pearls” The Paradons (1960)

“Pride and Joy” Marvin Gaye (1963)

“Needles and Pins” The Searchers (1964)

“Heroes and Villains” The Beach Boys (1967)

“Crimson and Clover” Tommy James and the Shondells (1968)

“Kings and Queens” Aerosmith (1977)

“Death or Glory” The Clash (1979)

“Shamrocks and Shenanigans” House of Pain (1993)

“Buses and Trains” Bachelor Girl (1998)

“Ball and Biscuit” The White Stripes (2003)

“Lovers & Friends” Lil' John featuring Usher and Ludacris (2005)

“Poison and Wine” The Civil Wars (2011)

“Doom and Gloom” The Rolling Stones (2013)

Three or more nouns used together are called **coordinate nouns**:

“Orphans, Brawlers, Bawlers, and Bastards” Tom Waits (2007)

Compound and coordinate nouns (and other parts of speech) are often joined by words such as “and” or “or.” These words are called **coordinating conjunctions**. We'll talk about them later, or you can find out more about them now on page 56.

Us: PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Pronouns are nouns that substitute for previously named (or implied) nouns. The previously named or implied noun for which the pronoun substitutes is called an **antecedent**.

The most commonly known pronouns are personal pronouns that substitute for people. These personal pronouns are “I,” “you,” “she,” “him,” “we,” “them,” and other similar words. Let’s look at personal pronouns, marked as boldfaced “**PN**” in grammatically complete simple sentence song titles. When the pronouns are acting as the subject of the sentence, I’ve marked them as “**S**” as well.

“You talk too much.” Joe Jones (1960)

S V
(PN)

The antecedent is not named but would be the person to whom the song is addressed. This kind of construction is what you find in many titles that contain personal pronouns.

You can use more than one pronoun in a sentence. Both of the following titles have two of them:

“Hallelujah, I love her.” Ray Charles (1961)

S V PN
(PN)

“I saw her standing there.” The Beatles (1963)

S V PN
(PN)

Although it’s being used as a pronoun here, the word “her” can also be a possessive adjective. We’ll get to that on page 29.

“You ought to be with me.” Al Green (1972)

S **PN**
(PN) Verb phrase

The verb is a phrase, “ought to be,” rather than a single word. We’ll cover phrases starting on page 14.

“She’s like the wind.” Patrick Swayze (1988)

S V N
(PN)

The verb is “is” from the contraction “She’s.” See pages 82 and 168 for more on contractions.

“It must have been love.” Roxette (1990)

S N
(PN) Verb phrase

“We didn’t start the fire.” Billy Joel (1990)

S N
(PN) Verb phrase

“[You] Kiss them for me.” Siouxsie and the Banshees (1991)

S V PN PN

The subject of this title is “You” understood to be implied before the verb “Kiss.” This type of construction is common, and I’ll add the “You” in brackets and mark it as a subject when we see titles like this one. This usage is called imperative mood, which we’ll cover on page 112.

“Off he goes.” Pearl Jam (1996)

S V
(PN)

“She took him to the lake.” Alkaline Trio (2000)

S V PN N
(PN)

“Love will tear us apart.” Joy Division (2001)

S PN
Verb phrase

“I need a girl.” P. Diddy featuring Usher & Loon (Part One, 2002)

S V N
(PN)

Here’s a title with three pronouns:

“I think they like me.” Dem Franchize Boyz featuring Jermaine Dupri,
S V PN V PN Da Brat, & Bow Wow (2006)
(PN)

Now we’re back to single pronouns in a sentence:

“He doesn’t know why.” Fleet Foxes (2008)
S
(PN) Verb phrase

“We come running.” Youngblood Hawke (2013)
S
(PN) Verb phrase

Some Rock-‘n’-Roll songs have solo personal pronouns for titles. As with regular nouns, pronouns can stand alone or be combined:

“She” KISS (1975)
 “Him” Rupert Holmes (1980)
 “You and I” Eddie Rabbit and Crystal Gale (1983)
 “Us” Regina Spektor (2004)
 “You” Lloyd featuring Lil’ Wayne (2007)

ROAM: SOLO VERBS

Let's move on to the second half of simple sentences now: verbs. Many Rock-'n'-Roll song titles are just solo verbs, as you can see below. Verbs are a popular choice for titles because they convey action, so they're the most energetic part of the sentence. The solo verbs below are not complete sentences, but I'm treating them as titles and capitalizing them:

- "Imagine" John Lennon (1971)
- "Stomp" Brothers Johnson (1980)
- "Drive" Cars (1984)
- "Shout" Tears for Fears (1985)
- "Roam" The B-52s (1990)
- "Linger" The Cranberries (1994)
- "Exhale" Whitney Houston (1996)
- "Hypnotize" Notorious B.I.G. (1997)
- "Believe" Cher (1999)
- "Breathe" Faith Hill (2000)
- "Mesmerize" Ja Rule featuring Ashanti (2003)
- "Collide" Howie Day (2003)
- "Wiggle" Jason Derulo featuring Snoop Dogg (2014)
- "Come" Jain (2015)

Verbs can't be plural like nouns can, but you can have more than one. As with nouns, these are called **compound verbs**, or, when there are more than two, **coordinate verbs**:

- "Twist and Shout" Isley Brothers (1962)
- "Search and Destroy" Iggy and The Stooges (1973)
- "Show and Tell" Al Wilson (1973)
- "Live and Learn" Joe Public (1992)
- "Crash and Burn" Savage Garden (2000)
- "Hide and Seek" Imogen Heap (2007)
- "Stop and Stare" OneRepublic (2008)
- "Live and Die" Avett Brothers (2012)
- "Rock or Bust" AC/DC (2014)
- "Hit or Miss" Ceramic Animal (2018)

“Shake, Rattle, and Roll” Big Joe Turner (1954)

“Bounce, Rock, Skate, Roll” Vaughn Mason & Crew (1979)

GUERILLA RADIO: NOUN AND VERB PHRASES

Nouns, verbs, and other parts of speech can be **phrases** rather than one word. Think of phrases as that territory between individual words and sentences. Phrases have more than one word, but they're not sentences because they're missing either a noun or a verb, and any group of words that lacks either a noun or a verb cannot be a complete thought. You can have noun phrases, verb phrases, adjective phrases, adverb phrases—the whole nine yards. And, as we'll see later (on page 48), prepositions actually must come in phrases; they don't work by themselves.

For the moment, though, let's start with noun phrases. Below are some noun phrases in complete sentence song titles. All of these examples except the last one are still considered simple sentences even though they have a noun phrase instead of a single word as a noun as the subject of the sentence.

“Rock and Roll is here to stay.” Danny & the Juniors (1958)

 S V
└─────────┘

Noun phrase

“Rock and Roll” is a three-word noun phrase.

“Saturday night's alright for fighting.” Elton John (1973)

└─────────┘ V

Noun phrase

“Saturday night” is a two-word noun phrase, and the verb is “is” that is part of the contraction “night's.”

“Thank God I'm a country boy.” John Denver (1974)

 S V └─────────┘

Noun phrase

The subject and verb, I and am, are combined here in the contraction “I'm.” “Country boy” is a two-word noun phrase that acts as a subject complement. We'll get to those later, on page 38. The same goes for “Radio Clash,” below: