

## **#22—Lessons from a Lyricist on Successfully Writing Prose**

I was a songwriter before becoming a freelance writer. I worked hard to learn my craft. I was set on writing a hit song.

After several years, the pain and defeat of failure as a commercial songwriter led me to give up my pursuit, and kept me away from writing for a while.

However, the experience taught me lessons about writing, and the challenges of writing as a business. It gave me perspective. What I learned from song writing eventually helped to make me a better prose writer when I became a freelancer.

Lessons About Writing - First, I learned that good lyric writing is not simply singable poetry. Good lyrics are smooth, rhythmic and symmetrical, yet clear, concise and conversational. The words and phrases are carefully selected to be easily sung.

This way, the artist won't sound tongue-tied, and listeners can readily (usually) sing along. Song lyrics should flow. Good lyrics employ a subtle balance of literary tools like alliteration to entice listeners and draw them in.

All these things are applicable to nonfiction writing. Enjoyable prose is made of these traits. Easy reading, clear communication, and entertainment are qualities of good nonfiction as well as good songs.

Lessons About the Business of Writing - In commercial song writing, the rejection comes always or almost always and is often more cruel. (Somehow music executives don't have a problem telling you that your work sucks.)

You have to persevere longer in song writing with less to show for it to even get anywhere, and the anywhere you get to is usually still nowhere.

Failure as a commercial songwriter gave me a perspective that has been invaluable. It is so much easier to be a truly successful, financially self-supporting freelance writer than to be a financially viable songwriter.

Don't be taken aback; freelancing isn't easy and I don't discount the work that others have done. But, songwriters number in the hundreds of millions. Many write hundreds of songs a year.

They must submit entirely on spec and with a much greater up-front expense in the form of demo recording and mailing costs. All this to have a chance at filling a space for a song on an album, a space that opens up much less often than in magazines for freelancers.