

LIVE THE PHRASE SKY'S THE LIMIT BIGGIE

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DREAMS

Dreams are where we start. They fuel our ambition. They drive us to action. What do you dream about? Are you a fiend for multisyllable rhymes, punchlines, and captivating stories? Do you want to be the next Raekwon the Chef, Eminem, or Kendrick Lamar?

LL Cool J said *“if the mind can conceive it then the man can achieve it.”* I’m here to second that sentiment. Hip-hop has tremendous power. It’s lifted the voice of a small sub-culture in the Bronx

to a global phenomenon. It's created new fashion, technology, ways of speech, and has produced enormous wealth.

50 Cent used hip-hop to make a quarter billion dollars in seven years, and it started with a pen and a pad. The rags to riches examples of young lyricists who made a fortune are numerous: Shawn Carter, Marshall Mathers, Nasir Jones, Dwayne Carter, Christopher Wallace, Mason Betha, Kanye West, Lauryn Hill, Aubrey Graham, Andre Benjamin, and Tupac Amaru Shakur are but a few. They all started with nothing more than a dream and the will to succeed. You have the added advantage of this book.

Whether you aspire to great wealth, fame, mastery of an art form, self expression, or just simple enjoyment, hip-hop lyricism has a lot to offer. But before we delve into the technical aspects of rhyming, song structure, and flow, let's begin with you.

The First Journey is Inward

You probably have a lot to say. You have your own opinions, ideas, experiences, stories and style that you want to share. Yet, all too often, when you sit down to write, you can't figure out what to say. You might not know how to approach the track or who you are when you're recording. Or you may have great ideas that you can't quite put to paper. To move forward it's often best to begin with the basics.

Who are you? What are your dreams and why do you want to be rapper?

These can be hard questions to answer but it's important to try. It doesn't matter how you go about figuring this out. It can be through writing, thinking, or conversation. When you dig deep you gain insights that are surprising and exciting.

Keep asking the question "why?" until you can't go any further. The final answer may simply be, "I'm a rapper, and I want to rap because that's what I was put on Earth to do."

The next question is: what makes you special? What do you bring to the game that no one else does? Do you have a certain world view? Have you been through unique experiences? Do you have a great sense of humor, style, confidence, or intelligence? Actively assessing these things can help bring clarity about what you want to say when it's time to write.

The better you know yourself, the more ease you'll find in writing, and the more cohesive and compelling your lyrics will be.

Most of the positive effects of this process happen behind the scenes, and you won't necessarily see a direct result right away. More likely you'll notice an easier, more intuitive path that comes naturally the next time you sit down to write.

The Creative Unconscious

Dreams also represent the creative unconscious. This is a part of your brain that's stored everything you've ever experienced. It creates the worlds which you inhabit when you're asleep and drives many of the choices you make when you're awake. It's also the source of your creativity. When an idea comes to you out of nowhere, it's your creative unconscious at work.

Writer's Block

Writer's block occurs when we feel disconnected from this source. It occurs during times of stress, self doubt, frustration, or exhaustion. This disconnect often happens without warning and can make you feel helpless in your own artistry. The good news is that there's a way forward. In the

long term, consistently beating writer's block involves conditioning your mind so that barriers to creativity become increasingly rare. There are also short term techniques that can change your perspective and effectively harness your innate ability.

Obstacles will never go away completely, but you can achieve a degree of mastery over your own creative output. I call this mastery Lyrical Fitness.

Lyrical Fitness: Long Term

Lyrical Fitness is a measure of your ability to spontaneously generate new and compelling lyrics. Like any ability, your Lyrical Fitness can be improved over time through concentrated effort. There are four components: 1) Physical, 2) Mental, 3) Emotional, and 4) Discipline.

1) Physical

Writing requires long periods of focus and a relaxed yet energetic state. It's important to take care of your physical body because it fuels the writing process. When your body is healthy, you'll find your ability to generate new lyrics vastly improved.

The following basic nutrition tips will help you write. Eat whole grains, fresh fruit, leafy green vegetables, and lean meats like turkey and fish. These kinds of foods will give you the sustained energy you'll need to write for long periods of time. Use caffeine, and alcohol in moderation, or avoid them altogether. Too much alcohol will dull your senses and caffeine will cause an energy crash not long after you use it.

Hard drugs should be avoided completely. Not only will they destroy your health, but they'll also destroy your ability to write.

Exercise is another important component. It increases blood flow to the brain which will improve the quality and output of your writing. If you're able, I recommend a mixed regimen of strength training (weights), cardiovascular (running or swimming) and flexibility (stretching or yoga).

2) Mental

A stimulated, broad-minded brain is key to being able to write spontaneously. Besides eating healthy and exercising, there are several things you can do to improve your mental fitness.

One of the best things you can do, is to experience a wide variety of media unrelated to hip-hop. This means movies, music, video games, documentaries, books, blogs, and magazines. Fill your mind with different perspectives and ideas. They'll sharpen your intellect and give you more things to write about when the time comes.

If you're open to it, meditation is helpful, as is a connection with some form of spirituality.

Finally, fill your mind with the highest quality hip-hop lyricism you can find. There are dozens of classic albums you should have in your iTunes library or starred on Spotify. Study these with your full, active attention. Listen to where the rhymes fall, the imagery that's created, and think about why the MC made the creative choices he or she did. Read along with the lyrics at RapGenius.com and discover their hidden meaning. In the Appendix A I've listed some essential albums to absorb.

3) Emotional

This simply means knowing what's going on with your state of mind. Writer's block usually comes from some sort of emotional blockage. Processing whatever this may be will help you to flow

more spontaneously and access a greater share of your innate talent.

If you're stressed out, depressed, anxious, angry, happy, excited, or enthusiastic, it's helpful to know why. This knowledge of yourself will produce more insightful lyrics that will better connect with your listeners. A good way to improve your emotional fitness is to sit down and write about what you're feeling for 10 to 15 minutes. You'll end up discovering things about yourself you didn't know, and you'll often find inspiration for song concepts.

4) Discipline and Practice

The last component of Lyrical Fitness is simply the number of hours you spend writing. As with anything, the more you do, the better you get. Getting feedback from lyricists who are more experienced than you is helpful, as is reviewing your old work with an analytical eye. Along the way seek out and learn as many new techniques as you can. Take what works and leave behind what doesn't.

Remember, on your path, discipline is key to success. You must work hard to improve your craft in a systematic way each day. Research done by the sociologist Malcolm Gladwell indicates that it takes 10,000 hours (or around five to seven years) to master a discipline. This holds true for hip-hop lyricism. Success doesn't happen overnight. It's based on the accumulation of skill earned through practice.

My recommendation is at least three hours of writing practice a day, five days a week. It's helpful to practice at the same time each day so that you train your brain to generate lyrics spontaneously.

All of this talk of long term practice does not imply you won't improve quickly. Some of your fast-

est gains will occur in the first two months. After that you'll have periodic bursts of mastery that feel exhilarating. Using the information and techniques in this book will make sure you're on the right path. Just remember that it's a long road to greatness, and that half the fun is in the journey.

Lyrical Fitness: Short Term

Improving Lyrical Fitness is a long term process, but sometimes you just need something to get the creative juices flowing right away. Here are some short term practices that can be beneficial in quickly overcoming writer's block.

1) See Through Its Existence

Remind yourself that writer's block is something your mind created. It has no basis in reality and is not an actual blockage. Visualize the imaginary barrier dissolving and move forward as if you knew exactly what you were going to write.

Feel the anxiety, unrest, frustration, fatigue, boredom, self-doubt, fear, and distraction and start writing something, anything. Keep the words flowing even if you know it's not your best material. Your brain will trick itself into "writing mode" and you'll end up surprising yourself with what comes out.

2) Experiment with Associations

Think of a provocative, descriptive word like "scalding" and then free associate similar words. For example you might think of "hot," "lava," "volcano," "island," "adventure," "rap song about an Indiana Jones type character." You never know where the ideas will lead. You can also play with opposites. Instead of "hot" your mind might go to "freezing" "snow" "winter" "Christmas" "hip-hop Christmas story."

3) Get Perspective

Go do something else. Take a walk, call a friend, do pushups, shower, watch a movie, read, or listen to music. Sometimes you just need a little change of pace. Creativity often strikes us unexpectedly. Get fully engaged with another activity, your subconscious may end up giving you a way in to your writing.

One of my favorite techniques is to run while listening to instrumentals. I find that the combination of physical activity and beats helps me automatically think of lyrics.

4) Tap into Emotion

Focus on your most powerful feelings in the moment, and try to channel them into a topic. Think about things that excite, anger, fascinate, amuse, overjoy, disturb, or otherwise activate your brain. You'll often find a path to new content through an emotional focus.

Self-Compassion

As you're beginning to write lyrics, and committing seriously to this path, don't be too hard on yourself. Maintain discipline but allow room to experiment, mess up, and sound awkward. Above all else, don't hate on your own music. Understand that in the beginning you won't be Lupe Fiasco or Eminem. That's ok. Give yourself permission to start off wack, and enjoy what unfolds. One of the greatest predictors of lifelong success is the ability to forgive your own mistakes and feel compassion for yourself.

Overcoming Fear

Fear and self-doubt are often causes of writer's block. Here's a great exercise to overcome fears and limiting beliefs that can prevent you from writing lyrics.

- 1) Make two columns, name one No, and the other Yes.
- 2) Write down the negative thoughts that are preventing you from writing under the No column.
- 3) Evaluate what you've written. Notice how one sided and overblown much of it is.
- 4) In the Yes column, argue against each negative thought you've written down in the No column with tangible, irrefutable evidence.
- 5) Continue doing this until you've processed whatever is on your mind.

Eight Mental Foundations

The mindfulness pioneer and zen teacher Jon Kabat-Zinn writes about eight mental foundations that are helpful to cultivating a successful practice. He intended these to be used with meditation, but they can also be applied to hip-hop lyricism.

They are:

- 1) Non-Judging: As I mentioned before, don't judge yourself too harshly. Be your own best ally on this path.
- 2) Patience: Cultivate patience as you develop as a writer. Sometimes progress will be slow. Stick with it, and understand good things take time.
- 3) Beginner's Mind: When you write, try to do so with as few preconceived notions as possible. Pretend that you are a child experiencing the world for the first time. As a result, your sensitivity, creativity, and understanding will be enhanced.
- 4) Trust: Trust the process and trust yourself. Listen to your inner voice and, as best you can, block out internal and external doubt.

- 5) Wise Effort: Work with intelligence and integrate your own experiences and wisdom. Do what's best for you based on the moment and who you know yourself to be.
- 6) Acceptance: Accept what comes through your writing with a whole heart and open mind. Seek out reality as best you can and embrace it with open arms.
- 7) Letting Go - At times you may, with great intensity, want your work to sound a certain way. The desire may consume you, and block out your creativity. Practice letting go of predefined outcomes and observe what unfolds.
- 8) Sense of Humor - Be willing to laugh at yourself or your situation. Don't take things so seriously that you inhibit your own creativity. Look for opportunities to find joy in your writing.

Dream Big

Above all else, remember to dream big. Stand up for your creative inclinations and don't let anyone put you down. I know it sounds cliched, but it's incredibly important. The bigger you dream, the better. Your dreams are what move you forward on your path and what sustains you in times of difficulty. They're also the blueprint for your journey. Without a dream you're roaming around in the dark. With dreams, goals, and clearly defined milestones, you give yourself vision and a map.

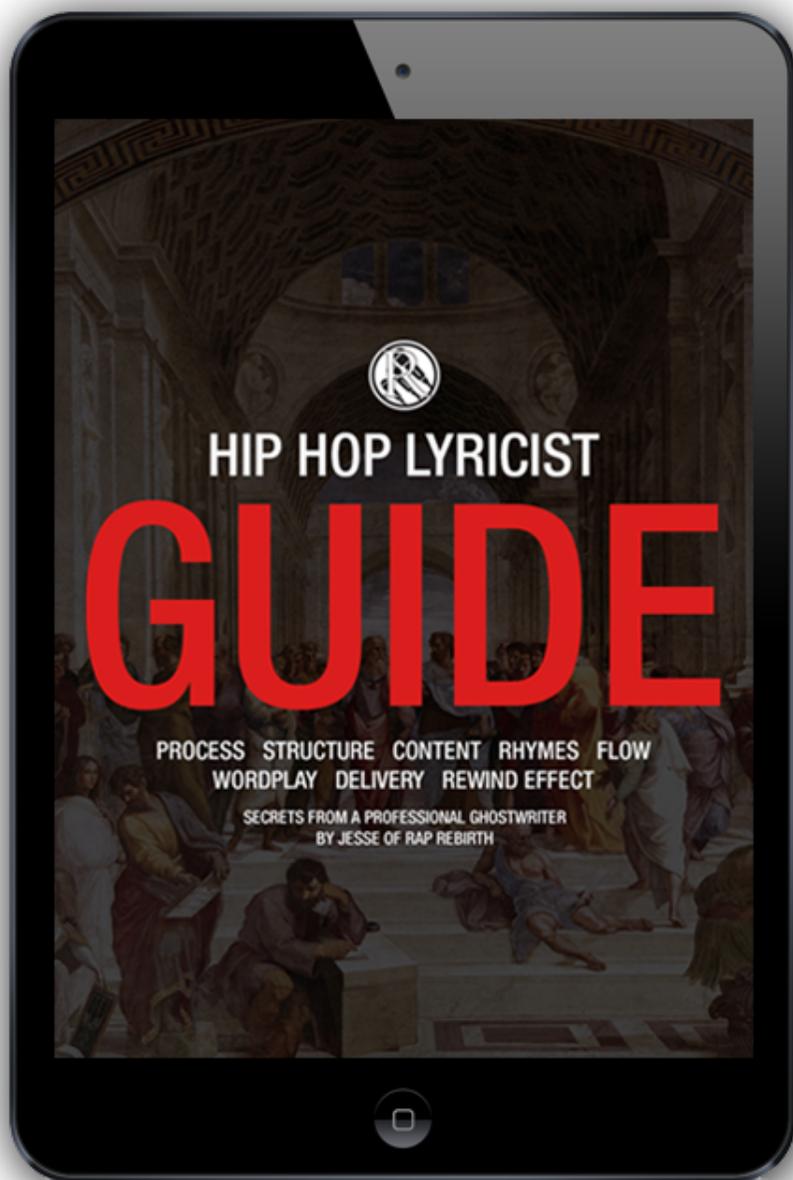
As Biggie said:

“Stay far from timid / Only make moves when your heart's in it / and live the phrase sky's the limit.”

LEARN HOW TO WRITE LYRICS FROM AN INDUSTRY EXPERT

Get the full version of our comprehensive guide to writing dope lyrics. You'll learn how to cure writer's block, and use wordplay, rhymes, and flow to keep your listeners rewinding again and again. Our guide is written by Jesse, the founder of Rap Rebirth. Jesse has written lyrics for hundreds of artists across the world and has been featured in XXL, the LA Times, and Fast Company.

Download at <http://www.rap-rebirth.com/guide>



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PASSION • FEAR

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CALIZING • MINI-BREAKS • REVISIONS • FEEDBACK

3) STRUCTURE

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BARs • PLANNING • VERSES • HOOKS • BRIDGES

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SELF CONTAINED • LEADING • LET RHYTHM GUIDE YOU

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TION • MEMORIZE • ENTERING • BREATH CONTROL • TAKES

9) THE REWIND EFFECT

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10) PAPER CHASE

YOUR ID • BRAND • GENRE THEORY • TAGLINES • TRADEMARKS
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11) GETTING HELP

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