Billboard "*Hot 100*" Corpus Transcription Instructions

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Our goal for this project is to create precise and detailed transcriptions of this music. We *are not* trying to make jazz-style "lead sheets," which are much simplified versions of the way the melodies are actually played. However, we cannot take this too far—our transcriptions should still be musical. We *are not* trying to measure every note's duration in terms of milliseconds, or exact frequency. We are using music notation, and the result should be readable music notation.

Generally, think of it like this: you would like a musician to be able to read your transcription and play along exactly with the recording.

Songs

You should transcribe the songs assigned to you on the `SongAssignments.xlsx` spreadsheet (in the Dropbox folder). You will have to look for audio recordings of all the songs online (YouTube, Spotify, whatever). Don't transcribe the songs in chronological order—jump around. If you finish the 34 songs assigned to you but still have hours left, we can assign you more songs.

If the `MIDI` column for each song says "`TRUE`," you should find a preexisting MIDI version of the song in the `MIDI` folder, in the appropriate year. These MIDI files are *sometimes* a useful starting point, but not always!

When you have finished a transcription, mark the date in the `Completed` column of our spreadsheet.

Version

All the songs we are transcribing were hit singles on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. Thus, we are transcribing the studio-recorded, "single" version of each song. Some songs may have other live versions, or "album versions"—avoid these! When you look for the audio to listen to online, try to double check that you are listening to the studio single version.

Measures/Sections

Your transcription should be the same length as the actual song. If there are 32 measures of instrumental introduction at the beginning of the song, or 32-measures of guitar solo in the middle, then your transcription should have 32 blank measures in each of these spots.

To make things easier to read, you should put double bar lines at major section boundaries (for instance, the beginning of each verse and each chorus).

Repetition

Many pieces you transcribe will be highly repetitive. All repetitions should be written out, with no repeat bars or anything. Be **careful**! Many times things are repeated *almost* exactly the same, with slight variations, and we want to capture the "slight variations." Look out for rhythms changing slightly with each verse in a song.

Parts

For this project, we are only transcribing vocal parts, specifically the "main" voice in each song. Think of the "main voice" as being the tune that people would get stuck in their head or sing along to. In most songs, it is easy to tell what the "main" voice is. In other cases, it can be hard/subjective. Use your judgement, but be logical: for instance, if the first verse has only one voice but the second adds a second voice, the melody sung in the first verse is probably the "main" melody, while the other part is a harmony; If the band has one lead singer and several back up singers, the part sung by the lead singer is probably the "main voice."

Call and Response

Some times the "main voice" might jump around between two singers, creating a call and response. In these cases, the call *and* the response are really essential parts of the music's "main voice." (When we sing along to these songs, we often sing both parts). If the call and responses never overlap in time, you should just transcribe them both on the same staff. However, if they *do* overlap in time, you should create a separate staff and transcribe each part separately.

Rhythm

Rhythm's should be annotated as accurately as possible, "within reason." Generally, most transcriptions will have 16th-notes or 8th-notes as the smallest division. At slower tempos there may be some 32nd-notes.

Micro-Timing

Rock/pop singers often sing a little "before/behind the beat." You should only notate these little shifts as syncopations if you really think they are essential parts of the music. Again, you probably shouldn't include any 32nd-note syncopations unless the tempo is quite slow.

Durations

We want to encode note durations (how long they are), not just where they start. Thus, listen closely to how long notes are held for before stopping. Unfortunately, the offsets of notes are often even less clear/precise than the onsets. Don't go crazy trying to capture 32nd-note rests in between 8th-notes etc.

One thing in particular to look out for is how long notes are held at the ends of phrases. Singers are often very inconsistent here... they might hold a note for a dotted-half-note the first time, then only a quarter the second time, then a whole-note the last time, etc.

Time Signatures

Put the appropriate time signature(s) in your transcriptions. In some songs, the meter may change, and you will need to change time signature(s). For simple-duple music, use `4/4`, not `2/4` or `2/2`.

Swing /Shuffle

If a song is swung or shuffled, just write the piece using straight-eighths, but include text somewhere saying that it is really shuffled.

Pitch

Try to use accidentals that make sense in the key. For instance, C# is in the key of E major, not Db.

Range

Notate your transcription in the actual range it is sung—i.e., don't notate male voices an octave higher than they really sing, as is common practice. This means that many male vocal parts (in pop/rock) are best notated in bass clef. It doesn't really matter what clef you use, so long as you get the octave right.

It can be difficult to get the octave right sometimes. Remember that for male singers, notes on the treble clef (i.e., above middle C) are quite high—male singers will (almost) never hit the top of the treble clef.

Key Signature

Include the appropriate key signature for all parts of the song. If the key changes, your key signature should change.

Modes

For you key signatures, only use major or minor, no other modes. Some songs might be in a different mode, like mixolydian, but you should still use a major/minor key signature, with accidentals in the music to get the mode right. For instance, many pieces might be in E mixolydian—you should still put four sharps on your transcription, even though there will be a lot of D-naturals in the music.

Glides

It's very common that pop/rock singers "glide" between notes. Generally, we are not bothering with trying to notate these glides. Just notate the "main" note(s) of the glide as if the glide is not there. In some cases, it might make sense to notate the start and end point of a glide using a melisma (i.e., one syllable over two notes). If there is a *really* clear or dramatic glide, that you think is essential to the melody, you can use a glissando line to indicate it.

Out-Of-Time or Unpitched Singing

In vocal music, there is a continuum between "pure" singing—perfectly in time and in tune—and "speaking"—not in time to meter and not pitched, with many gradiations in between (think of rap, or some heavy metal singing). We want our transcriptions to capture all the "main" vocal parts, even when they aren't perfectly "pure" singing. For all sung/spoken syllables, you should still put some kind of pitch and rhythmic value, but you will use different noteheads and colors to mark where pitch *and/or* rhythm is funky.

We consider three different levels of pitch "purity" and three levels of rhythmic "purity." There are thus nine possibilities in total! You will still transcribe all syllables with a pitch and rhythmic duration on the staff, but use different noteheads and note colors to indicate pitch precision and rhythm precision respectively.

Pitch Levels

For pitch, most of the transcriptions are "purely" pitched—there is a single clear, in-tune pitch: we call this **Pitched**. There may be other sections where the singer speaks, shouts, or declaims, and there is no identifiable pitch: we call this **Unpitched**. In between these two extremes, sometimes the voice has audible pitch, but the pitch is very vague or unstable, and it is not meaningful to say "that is a C#": we call this **Approximate**.

Thus, our three pitch categories, and their different noteheads are:

- **Pitched** — Normal notehead
- **Approximate** — X notehead
- **Unpitched** — Square notehead

Remember, most transcriptions are going to be **Pitched**. **Approximate** and **Unpitched** should be fairly rare.

Rhythm Levels

For rhythm, most of the transcriptions are clearly in time—i.e., synchronized with the meter: we call this **In Time**. However, some sections may be spoken or declaimed in a manner that is completely "out-of-time"—not in sync with the meter and not rhythmic in any musical sense: we call this **Freely**. In between these two extremes, there may be passages which are musically rhythmic, but which get "fuzzy" in relation to the meter: we call this **Loosely**. For instance, sometimes a singer manages to squeeze five syllables into one beat, but they aren't *really* singing five even quintuplets.

Thus, our three rhythm categories, and their different colors are:

- **In Time** — Black
- **Loosely** — Blue
- **Freely** — Red

Remember, most transcriptions are going to be **In Time**. **Loosely** and **Freely** rhythms should be fairly rare.

Lyrics

All the lyrics should be included along with the melody you transcribe. Punctuation and capitalization doesn't matter. As is standard in music notation, syllables within multisyllable words are separated by "-," while melismas are indicated using "_." ("Melisma is when one syllable is held through multiple notes.") Lyrics should look like

`Hey Jude don't make it bad`
`take a sad song and make it be-tter _ _`
`re-mem-ber to let her in-to your heart` etc.
It doesn't matter how you split words into syllables ("bet-ter" vs "be-tter").

Problems

If you are unsure about a passage *make note of it*! In fact, write down what the problem is, what measure number and time-stamp (in the recording) it occurs at, and put this in the google docs spreadsheet in the `Comments` column.