

Enter the Prechorus: Producing Intensification in Two Recent Taylor Swift Songs

Figure 1. Rhetorical function and musical characteristics of formal sections (after Adams 2019, 35)

Formal Unit	Function	Musical characteristics
Verse	Expository	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New lyrics in each verse• Establishes chord loop and melody• Modest instrumentation and intensity
Pre-chorus	Intensifying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Repeats (or nearly repeats) lyrics• If harmonically differentiated from verse, more unstable<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ (Often beginning off-tonic and prolonging IV–V)• Melodic center moves higher• Musical layers are added (extra percussion, background vocals)• Rhythmic activity increases
Chorus	Culminating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Repeated lyrics, often title of the song• Melodic (and occasionally harmonic) closure• Most engaging melodic material/hook• Thicker texture• Louder

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Example 1. Taylor Swift, “You’re on your Own, Kid,” opening material

<p>Summer went away, still, the yearning stays I play it cool with the best of them / I wait patiently, he's gonna notice me It's okay, we're the best of friends anyway / I hear it in your voice, you're smoking with your boys I touch my phone as if it's your face / I didn't choose this town, I dream of getting out There's just one who could make me stay all my days / From sprinkler splashes to fireplace ashes I waited ages to see you there / I search the party of better bodies Just to learn that you never cared You're on your own, kid; you always have been</p>	<p>← changing lyrics, spare accompaniment, tonic-based loop</p> <p>← predominant-based loop, repeated lyric</p> <p>← changing lyrics</p> <p>← loop breaks off, cadential progression begins</p> <p>← song title, repeated lyrics, melodic closure</p>
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(“ / ” indicates end of the harmonic loop)

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Example 2. Taylor Swift, “You’re on your Own, Kid,” material following instrumental break

From sprinkler splashes to fireplace ashes I gave my blood, sweat, and tears for this / I hosted parties and starved my body Like I'd be saved by a perfect kiss / The jokes weren't funny, I took the money My friends from home don't know what to say / I looked around in a blood-soaked gown And I saw something they can't take away / Cause there were pages turned with the bridges burned Everything you lose is a step you take / So make the friendship bracelets, take the moment and taste it You've got no reason to be afraid You're on your own, kid; yeah, you can face this You're on your own, kid; you always have been	← predominant-based loop, repeated lyric ← new lyrics ← added backing vocals ← higher melody, more backing vocals ← extra drum fill ← harmonic loop breaks off, cadential progression begins ← song title, melodic closure, abandoned cadences ← melodic and harmonic closure
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(“ / ” indicates end of the harmonic loop)

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Example 3. Taylor Swift, “the lakes,” verse-chorus unit 1

Is it romantic how all my elegies eulogize me? I'm not cut out for all these cynical clones These hunters with cell phones Take me to the Lakes, where all the poets went to die I don't belong and, my beloved, neither do you Those Windermere peaks look like a perfect place to cry I'm setting off, but not without my muse [Remainder of song omitted]	← modest instrumentation, chord loop and melody established ← repeated lyric, song title, higher melody, musical layers added; but harmonically unstable, off-tonic beginning ← no melodic closure, ends with swelling V chord
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