

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," verse-postverse unit 1

<p>[verse] 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 /</p> <p>[postverse] 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>[remainder of song omitted]</p>	<p>← changing lyrics, spare accompaniment, tonic-based loop</p> <p>← predominant-based loop, repeated lyric ← changing lyrics</p> <p>← loop breaks off, cadential progression begins ← 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," concluding postverse section

<p>[prechorus-like] 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</p>	<p>← 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</p>
<p>[chorus-like] You're on your own, kid; yeah, you can face this You're on your own, kid; you always have been</p>	<p>← song title, melodic closure, abandoned cadences ← melodic and harmonic closure</p>

(" / " indicates end of the harmonic loop)

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Example 3. Taylor Swift, "the lakes," verse-postverse unit 1

<p>[verse] Is it romantic how all my elegies eulogize me? I'm not cut out for all these cynical clones These hunters with cell phones</p> <p>[postverse] 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</p> <p>[remainder of song omitted]</p>	<p>← modest instrumentation, chord loop and melody established</p> <p>← repeated lyric, song title, higher melody, musical layers added; but harmonically unstable, off-tonic beginning</p> <p>← no melodic closure, ends with (swelling) dominant chord</p>
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