

Knowledge organiser AoS5: Conventions of Pop

Key ingredients of a pop song		Key terms	
1. Layers: melody, chords, bass line, and beat	The melody is the main tune, usually sung by the lead singer . The lead guitar may also play melodies. Chords are played by the rhythm guitar , or perhaps added on piano or synthesiser, or even sung by backing singers . The bass line is usually played by a bass guitar . The beat is usually played on drum kit .	1. A cappella	Voices, without instrumental accompaniment
		2. Backbeat	Emphasis on 2 nd and 4 th beats of the bar.
		3. Bridge	A section that links the verse and chorus. Sometimes called a pre-chorus .
2. Optional layers	There may be countermelodies played by the lead guitar, sung by backing singers, or put in on extra instruments such as synth, strings, or anything else.	4. Broken chord	Each note played separately. On guitar, usually done with finger-picking .
3. Structure	Verse-chorus structure is the most common. There is likely to be an intro , a coda , and a middle 8 or instrumental break .	5. Call & response	Often used between the lead vocalist and the backing singers, who repeat or answer what the lead singer has sung.
4. Other ingredients	The bass line or guitar part might feature riffs . There may be a particularly catchy part: this is the hook . Some songs also have a modulation .	6. Coda	The end section of a song.
		7. Distortion	An effect used on guitars: a dirty, fuzzy sound.
Instruments/voices and what they might do		8. Fill	At the end of a phrase, the drummer plays a more complex part to fill in.
1. Singers	1. Vibrato , where the note wobbles in pitch slightly. Makes the sound warmer and more expressive.	9. Flanger	A guitar effect that makes a whooshing sound
	2. Portamento is a slide between notes.	10. Glissando	A slide between two notes, where separate, quick, individual notes can be heard, i.e. on piano
	3. Falsetto is when a man sings very high. Michael Jackson, Sam Smith and Freddie Mercury all sing falsetto some of the time.	11. Harmonic pace	How often the chords change, i.e. one chord per bar, two chords per bar
	4. Rubato , expressive speeding up and slowing down.	12. Hook	The catchy part of the song, often in the chorus
	5. A cappella – singing with no instrumental accompaniment.	13. Instrumental break	A section where the singing stops and there is a solo on an instrument
	6. Scat is when singers sing nonsense syllables like 'doo'.		14. Looping
	7. Riffing is when a singer ornaments the melody with a lot of extra notes, usually at the end of a phrase. Mariah Carey.	15. Melisma (melismatic)	Lots of notes sung to a single syllable
	8. Vocals may be multi-tracked , or may have effects such as autotune or vocoder applied to them.	16. Middle 8	The section of a song where there is a new, different tune.
2. Guitars	1. The lead guitar plays melodies. These might be solos or riffs , or perhaps countermelodies over the singer's tune. Sometimes effects such as distortion , chorus or flanger are used.	17. Modulation	A key change.
	2. Rhythm guitar can be acoustic or electric, and plays chords . These might be strummed or picked (to make broken chords).	18. Multitracking	Nearly all pop songs are recorded like this: each part is recorded separately and then put together
	3. Bass guitar plays the bass line – the lowest notes. Bass guitar does not play chords. Sometimes adds glissandos .	19. Panning	Putting more or less sound through each speaker, so that a sound comes from the left, or right.
3. Drum kit	1. A drum kit is made up of snare , hi-hat , bass (or kick) drum , tom-toms and ride and crash cymbals.	20. Picking (fingerpicking)	On guitar, playing one note at a time (as opposed to strumming)
	2. Often the snare emphasises the backbeat .	21. Portamento	When a singer slides between notes
	3. At the end of phrases, the kit may play fills .	22. Reverb	Adds a sense of space to a sound.
	4. Drum pads or drum machines are digital alternatives to an acoustic kit.	23. Riff	A repeating melodic or rhythmic idea
4. Keyboards	1. Piano or synthesizers are the main kinds of keyboards found in pop, although electric organs may be used too.	24. Riffing	Highly decorated singing
		25. Rubato	Expressive slight changes of tempo
	2. Piano is often used in ballads . It can play chords , bass lines and melodies . Some artists, i.e. Elton John, make a real feature of the piano part.	26. Sampling	When a short extract of another recording (a sample) is used in a song
		27. Strumming	Playing all the strings of a guitar at once to play chords
	3. Synthesizers (synths) are electronic keyboards capable of playing any kind of sound. Because of this they are very adaptable, and can imitate the sound of anything else or make unique timbres.	28. Syllabic	Each syllable is sung with one single note
		29. Unison	Everyone singing/playing the same notes.

