Chord Chart Guidelines

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Chord charts for most country songs are usually quite easy to write, but you still have to follow some basic rules so that bands can read your charts efficiently.

A good chart will have the following characteristics:

- A big clear **title**
- Some **instructions** as to how to play the song, e.g. Straight/swing rhythm, fast/slow
- A metronome speed
- Clear **bold chords** correctly aligned with the right lyrics
- A suitable musical **introduction**
- **Verses** and **Choruses** separated and identified
- A suitable **ending**

Steps to creating your own chart

1. Get the Lyrics

Type out the lyrics, or look on the Internet and copy and paste lyrics into a Word document. Some song lyrics come with chords above them, which are not necessarily correct or aligned correctly with the lyrics. So remove them all.

2. Format the Lyrics

- Set the Font to "Times New Roman" size 14
- Set the Line Spacing to "Double Line Space" (under Format, Paragraph)
- Write the song Title at top in a larger **Bold** Font.
- Write the original artist's name on the right-hand side of the next line, in a smaller font.
- Leave a big enough space before the first lyric line for the Intro chords.
- Group the lyrics into Verses, Choruses, and Bridges, and label them.
- Make full use of the space available over two pages (or one page if possible). Try not to break up Verses or Choruses between pages.
- "Pretty up" e.g. with Indented and Bold choruses, extra spaces between Verses and Choruses.

3. Now <u>REALLY</u> format the actual lyric lines

- Sing the song to yourself, at the same time adding spaces between groups of lyrics for chord timing. This is probably the hardest part as the chords are not yet there (you do this later!). Most songs will usually be written allowing for 4 chords per line, so set out the words so that the chord positions will be **evenly spaced** across the line.
- You can wrap lyrics to the next line to suit the chording pattern if necessary. This might mean lyric "sentences" are wrapped, or even words hyphenated with syllables on separate lines.

4. Adding Chords

- You can use the computer to add chords, although I find they stand out better if handwritten with a felt pen onto the printed lyric sheet (I use an Artline® 2.0mm Calligraphy Pen, water based). Make sure you don't write too close to the edge of the page, otherwise it might get missed when photocopied.
- Most important - add all the chords for the Intro, Outro, and Instrumental breaks.
- Use **bar lines** "|" between the chords to help the band with timing. Sometimes there may be 2 or more chords to a bar, and sometimes the same chord is also in the next bar (indicated with a %). Finish a Verse or Chorus with a **Double-Barline** "‖".
- Add some timing marks (small slashes) as necessary within a bar, e.g. where there is more than one chord in a bar.
- Sometimes the bass guitar plays a different note to the chord, making it more 'colourful'. Write these bass notes **under** the chord like a fraction, e.g. G/D

5. Stops and Starts

Stops and **starts** should be well indicated. There are two kinds of stops:

- a **Pause** sign above a chord: "⌢•" (upper semicircle with a dot underneath) means the band pauses, then waits for the singer before continuing.

- a diamond-shaped sign "◇" (represents a **Semibreve**) beside a chord indicates a "Hold" for 4 counts, then continue rhythm again.

- There are also symbols for shorter "Holds", e.g. a **Minim** "♩" = 2 counts.

6. Add Instructions

- Add the key of the song at top left, e.g. "**C**"

- Add some "playing style" instructions at the top, e.g.
  - **STRAIGHT ROCK (4/4)**
  - **SLOW SWING (4/4)**
  - **FAST WALTZ (3/4)**

- Add a Metronome speed under the playing style instruction, e.g. ♩ **= 100**   which means 100 beats per minute.

- Add other instructions throughout the chart for "light and shade" as necessary, e.g.
  - **"Guitar only"**
  - **"Full Band"**
  - **Louder and Softer indicators using crescendo ＜ and decrescendo ＞ marks**