

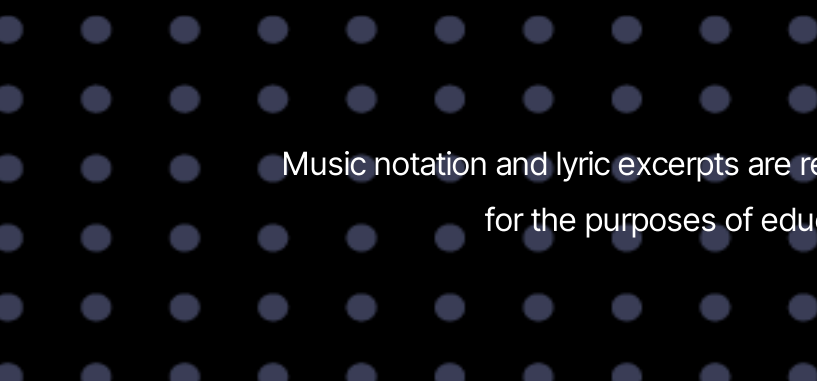


Blinding Lights

The Art of the Hook

HIT SONGS **DECONSTRUCTED**

The #1 Source for Hit Songwriting Analysis and Trends



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Introduction

"Blinding Lights," recently named Billboard's #1 Hot 100 Song of the 21st Century, holds the record as the longest-charting Hot 100 Top 10 hit in Billboard history, spending 57 weeks in the region.

The song was co-written by a slew of Top 10 veterans, including long-time collaborators and fellow Canada natives Belly ("Earned It," "Love Me Harder," "The Hills") and DaHeala ("Earned It," "Starboy"), as well as Oscar Holter and , Max Martin, both of whom co-produced the song along with The Weeknd. Together, this all-star team of writers and producers curated a perfectly nostalgic hit that draws heavily from the hitmaking handbook. At the top of the list is the song's strategic array of obvious, and not-so-obvious, catchy hooks and motifs. Together, they ensure that the song gets fully ingrained in the listener's mind while never waring out its welcome.

In this book we take a deep dive into the hooks and motifs that made "Blinding Lights" a global sensation.



Hooks



Instrumental Hook:

Lead Melodic Synth Hook

Below is the Hit Songs Deconstructed Hook Arrangement Table that shows you where each hook and/or motif appears and how many times. The hooks and motifs are in the left column and the song sections are across the top. The numbers denote the number of times the hook/motif appears within a section.

At the heart of the “Blinding Lights” is its lead melodic synth hook, making its grand entrance in the last eight bars of the intro before being strategically reinforced at the song’s midway point (instrumental break 1) and at the song’s conclusion (instrumental break 2 and outro). Its vibrant timbre easily cuts through the mix while imparting the song with a distinctive retro 1980s synthpop/new wave vibe in the spirit of ‘80s superstars a-ha, Eurythmics, and others.

Structurally, the hook is built upon the premise of simplicity and repetition: bars 1-2 and 3-4 are composed of two similar, mainly ascending phrases, while bars 5 and 6 contrast with two similar descending phrases. Together, these disparate phrases create an engaging, easy-to-follow hook melody that’s primed to stick in the listener’s mind.

SONG SECTIONS	I	A1	PC1	B1	IB1	A2	PC2	B2	C	B3	IB2	O
Lead Melodic Synth Hook	1				1						2	1
I=Intro A=Verse PC=Pre-Chorus B=Chorus IB=Instrumental Break C=Bridge O=Outro												

Vocal Hook: Song Title Hook

“Blinding Lights” song title hook is impactfully introduced at the top of the chorus. It features an engaging three-part structure with a combination of proper and nonsense lyrics that come together to form a memorable, song-defining moment.

Melodically, the song title hook consists of three distinct segments: “I said,” which functions as an attention-grabbing pickup coming out of the pre-chorus; “ooh,” which is sustained for nearly two full bars and provides engaging contrast against the more vibrant melodies that precede and follow; and “I’m blinded by the lights,” which is the most melodically active and catchy segment.

SONG SECTIONS	I	A1	PC1	B1	IB1	A2	PC2	B2	C	B3	IB2	O
Song Title Hook ("I said, ooh, I'm blinded by the lights")				1				1		1		1
Song Title Hook Melodic Reinforcement ("I said, ooh, I'm drowning in the night")				1				1				
I=Intro A=Verse PC=Pre-Chorus B=Chorus IB=Instrumental Break C=Bridge O=Outro												

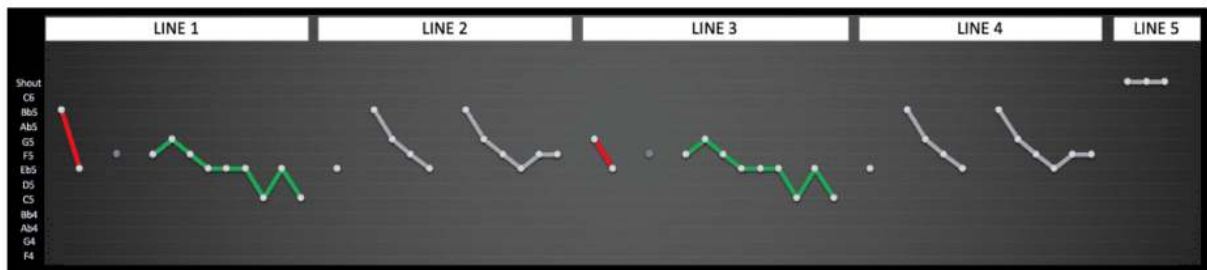
Lyrally, the hook features a variation of the song title, “I’m blinded by the lights” (note that the proper song title never appears in the song, which is quite atypical of recent pop hits), and is preceded by two lyrical lead-ins: the last line of the pre-chorus, “I can’t see clearly when you’re gone,” which lyrically ties in with the “blinding” aspect of the song title, and the first two segments of the hook, “I said, ooh,” which lyrically substantiate who is communicating the song title hook summation.

The full melody is then repeated in a near verbatim manner in line 3, albeit with slight melodic changeups and differentiated lyrics. This helps to reinforce the song title hook in the listener’s mind while simultaneously keeping things interesting with the additional lyrical information.

This Hit Songs Deconstructed Melodic Parts Table illustrates the chorus’s melodic structure, with the song title hook melodies appearing in lines 1 and 3.

LINE	MAIN STR.	SUB STRUCTURE			LYRICS	SYL	RH
STANZA 1							
1	A	a1	b	c1	I said, / ooh, / I'm blind-ed by the lights	9 (2/1/6)	A
2	B	a2	d1	d2	No, / I can't sleep un- / til I feel your touch	10 (1/4/5)	B
STANZA 2							
3	A	a3	b	c1	I said, / ooh, / I'm drown-ing in the night	9 (2/1/6)	A
4	B	a2	d1	d2	Oh, / when I'm like this, / you're the one I trust	10 (1/4/5)	B
5	C	e			Hey, hey, hey	3	X
Main Structure (uppercase - greyscale): Lines with the same letter have the same or highly similar melody Sub-Structure (lowercase - color): Subpart letters followed by a different number (i.e., b1, b2, b3) are melodically related but not exact. Sub-parts with the same letter (i.e., c) or same letter and number (i.e., b1) are melodically identical in each iteration. Syllable Count: Top number represents the total number of syllables within a line. Numbers in parentheses represent segmented syllable counts put into effect by melodic and rhythmic changeups. Rhyme Scheme: Each line with the same letter shares the same sounding end-of-line rhyme.							

This Hit Songs Deconstructed melodic graph visualizes the melodic patterns throughout the section.



Lines: Represent melodic patterns

Colors: Correspond to melodic sub-structures as shown in the table (lines 1 and 3 only)



Motifs: Clever Common Threads

In this section we explore “Blinding Lights”’ clever use of motifs and how they’re used to creatively foreshadow and reinforce key hooks and melodies throughout the song.

Synth Hook & Chorus Vocal Commonalities

When looking at the last two phrases in the lead melodic synth hook, not only does it hook the listener in and heighten the song’s catchiness, but it also foreshadows The Weeknd’s lead vocal melody in lines 2 and 4 of the chorus.

SONG SECTIONS	I	A1	PC1	B1	IB1	A2	PC2	B2	C	B3	IB2	O
Synth Hook Vocal Motif (Chorus)(<i>"I can't sleep until I feel your touch" / ("When I'm like this, you're the one I trust")</i>)				2				2		1		1

I=Intro | A=Verse | PC=Pre-Chorus | B=Chorus | IB=Instrumental Break | C=Bridge | O=Outro

Though the listener does not yet realize it when the hook is first introduced in the intro, this enables the first chorus to already sound familiar by the time it arrives and more easily connect with the listener as a result.

The motif is then subsequently recycled vocally in each subsequent chorus as well as instrumentally in the instrumental break sections. Its last appearance is in the outro, where both the instrumental and vocal iterations are cleverly joined for the first and only time to ride the listener out on a highly catchy and memorable note.

Lead Melodic Synth Hook (Last Two Phrases)

Chorus Vocal Melody (Line 4)

Synth Hook & Pre-Chorus Vocal Commonalities

In addition to foreshadowing the chorus, the first two phrases of the synth hook hint at the vocal melody in lines 2, 3, and 4 of the pre-chorus.

SONG SECTIONS	I	A1	PC1	B1	IB1	A2	PC2	B2	C	B3	IB2	O
Synth Hook Vocal Motif (Pre-Chorus) ("City's cold and empty" / "-one's around to judge me" / "can't see clearly when you're")			3				3					

I=Intro | A=Verse | PC=Pre-Chorus | B=Chorus | IB=Instrumental Break | C=Bridge | O=Outro

While the synth hook features a slightly changed rhythm compared to the pre-chorus, the otherwise identical melodic fragment helps to make the pre-chorus vocal already familiar to the listener when they first hear it, whether they consciously realize it or not.

Lead Melodic Synth Hook (First Two Phrases)

Musical notation for the Lead Melodic Synth Hook (First Two Phrases) in F major (Fm) and C minor (Cm).

The notation shows two phrases of the melody, each highlighted by a red box. The first phrase is in F major (Fm) and the second phrase is in C minor (Cm).

Phrase 1 (Fm): 4 4 3 4 5 1 3 4

Phrase 2 (Cm): 4 3 4 5 1 3

Pre-Chorus Vocal Melody (Lines 2, 3 and 4)

Fm

1

3 4 5 1 3 4

Sin Cit - y's cold and emp - ty

Cm

1

3 4 5 1 3 4

No one's a - round to judge me

E♭

1

3 4 5 1 1 3 4 2

I can't see clear - ly when you're go - o -

B♭

2 1

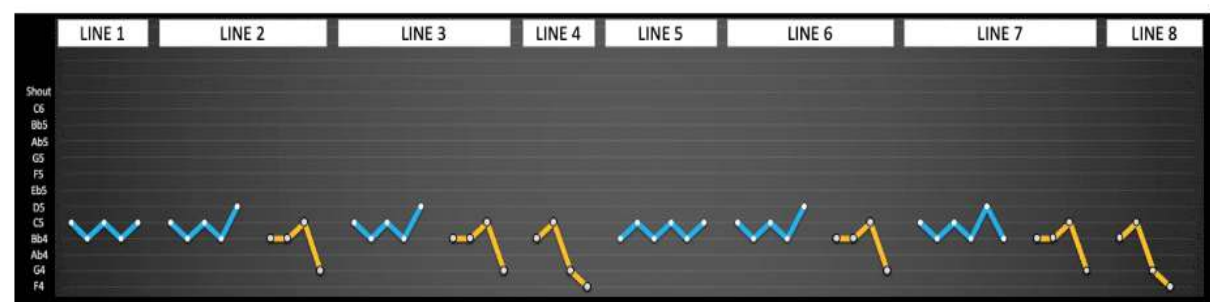
A.M.P. (Alternating Melodic Pattern) Motif

"Blinding Lights" also makes ample use of what Hit Songs Deconstructed calls the A.M.P. motif, which is an acronym for alternating melodic pattern. This is a highly common type of motif seen across the Hot 100 Top 10 in which the melody alternates between two nearby pitches to create a catchy, easy-to-sing and remember pattern. In the case of "Blinding Lights", A.M.P.s can be found in both verse sections, the first pre-chorus and the bridge.

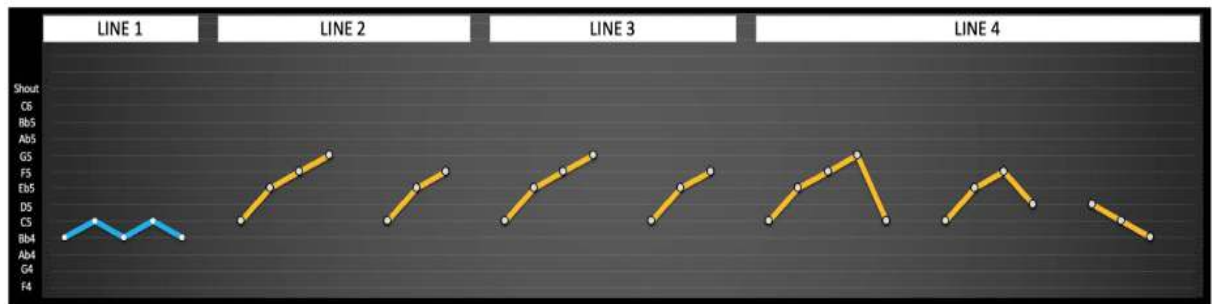
SONG SECTIONS	I	A1	PC1	B1	IB1	A2	PC2	B2	C	B3	IB2	O
A.M.P (Alternating Melodic Pattern) Motif		6	1			3			2			
I=Intro A=Verse PC=Pre-Chorus B=Chorus IB=Instrumental Break C=Bridge O=Outro												

In addition to making the song more cohesive and memorable, the use of the A.M.P. motif primes the song to more easily connect with mainstream audiences due to their widespread use. A few other notable Top 10 hits around the same time as "Blinding Lights" that included A.M.P.s are "Without Me," "Say So," "Dance Monkey," and "Sucker," among many others.

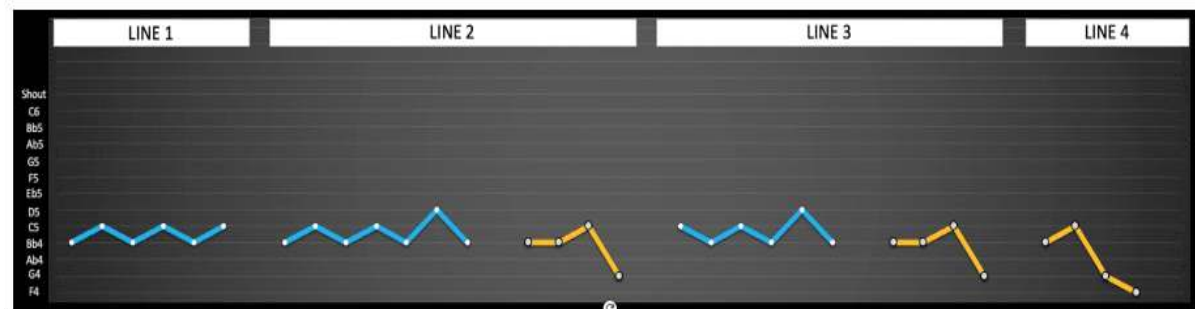
Verse 1 A.M.P. Motifs



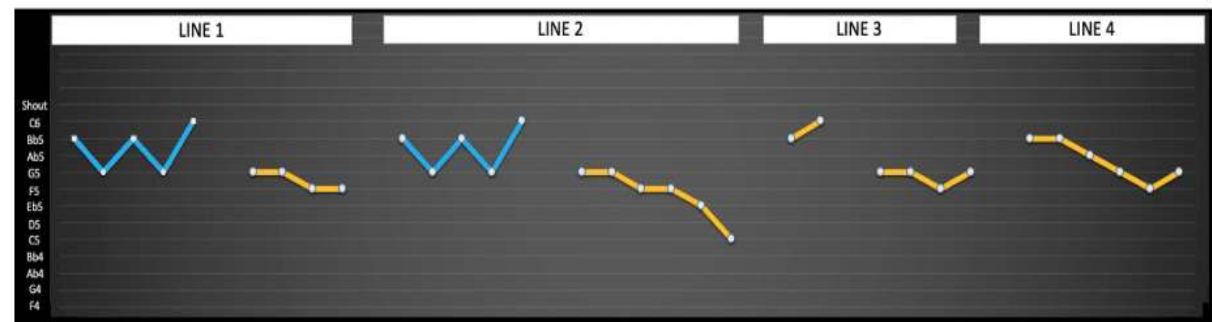
Verse 2 A.M.P. Motifs



Pre-Chorus 1 A.M.P. Motifs



Bridge A.M.P. Motifs



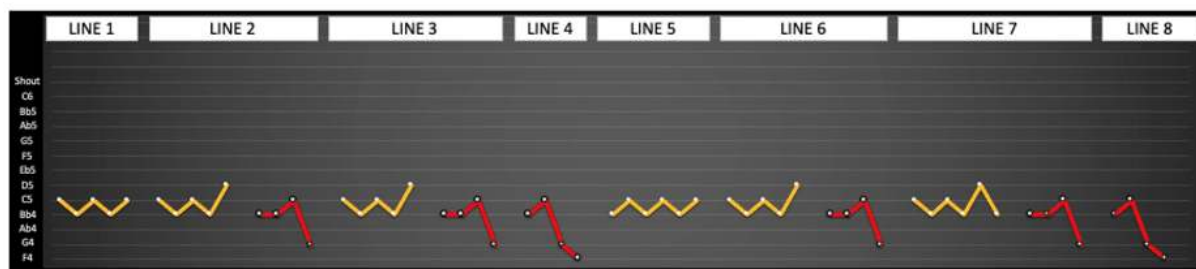
E.O.L.A. (End-Of-Line Accentuator) Motif

Another notable vocal motif in “Blinding Lights” is the E.O.L.A., which is the Hit Songs Deconstructed acronym for end-of-line accentuator. This is a melodic changeup at the end of a line that contrasts the preceding melody and serves to heighten infectiousness, memorability, and rhyme connection.

SONG SECTIONS	I	A1	PC1	B1	IB1	A2	PC2	B2	C	B3	IB2	O
E.O.L.A. (End-of-Line Accentuator) Motif		4				2						
I=Intro A=Verse PC=Pre-Chorus B=Chorus IB=Instrumental Break C=Bridge O=Outro												

In “Blinding Lights,” the E.O.L.A. motif is first introduced at the end of lines 2, 3, 6 and 7 of the first verse where it serves as a melodic commonality across all four lines while strengthening the end-of-line rhyme connection (“-nough,” “love,” “much,” and “touch”). The motif is also heard in lines 4 and 8, heightening the connection value of the lyric “baby.”

Verse 1 E.O.L.A. Motifs



The same motif is then recycled in verse 2, where it appears at the end of lines 2 and 3 and similarly bolsters the connection of their end-of-line rhymes, "sky" and "-drive."

Verse 2 E.O.L.A. Motifs



Rhythmic Motif

The E.O.L.A. motif in the verses also serves as an alternating quarter-eighth note rhythmic motif, fostering unity across verses.

SONG SECTIONS	I	A1	PC1	B1	IB1	A2	PC2	B2	C	B3	IB2	O
Rhythmic Motif (End-of-line Quarter – Eighth Rhythm)		4		2		2		2		1		1
I=Intro A=Verse PC=Pre-Chorus B=Chorus IB=Instrumental Break C=Bridge O=Outro												

While the melodies differ, this rhythmic motif is also heard in the choruses and outro, where it appears in lines 1 and 3 in the lyrics “blinded by the lights” and “drowning in the night,” as well as the bridge in lines 1, 2 and 3 in the lyrics “back to let you know,” “say it on the phone,” and “never let you go.” The recycling of this motif helps to make the song sound more cohesive across sections in an under-the-radar manner, while the changed-up melody prevents it from becoming overly redundant.

Verse 1 Rhythmic Motif (Line 3)

5

Part B

1717

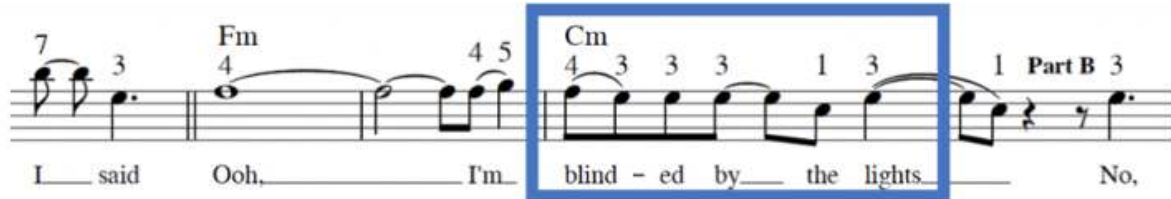
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E♭

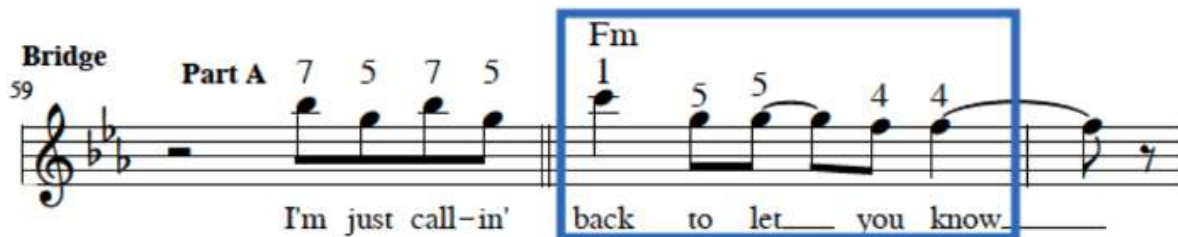
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May-be you can show me how to love

Chorus Rhythmic Motif (Line 1)



Bridge Rhythmic Motif (Line 1)



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Full Song Hook and Motif Arrangement

In conclusion, "Blinding Lights" isn't just a hit; it's a masterclass in utilizing hooks and motifs to create an impactful musical experience.

HOOKS & MOTIFS	I	A1	PC1	B1	IB1	A2	PC2	B2	C	B3	IB2	O
HOOKS: INSTRUMENTAL												
Lead Melodic Synth Hook	1				1						2	1
HOOKS: VOCAL												
Song Title Hook (<i>"I said, ooh, I'm blinded by the lights"</i>)				1				1		1		1
Song Title Hook Melodic Reinforcement (<i>"I said, ooh, I'm drowning in the night"</i>)				1				1				
MOTIFS: INSTRUMENTAL												
Lead Melodic Synth Hook Motif #1 (Last Four Bars)	1				1						2	1
Lead Melodic Synth Hook Motif #2 (First Four Bars Fragment)	1				1						2	1
MOTIFS: VOCAL												
Synth Hook Vocal Motif (Chorus) (<i>"I can't sleep until I feel your touch" / "When I'm like this, you're the one I trust"</i>)				2				2		1		1
Synth Hook Vocal Motif (Pre-Chorus) (<i>"City's cold and empty" / "-one's around to judge me" / "can't see clearly when you're"</i>)			3				3					
A.M.P (Alternating Melodic Pattern) Motif		6	1			3			2			
E.O.L.A. (End-of-Line Accentuator) Motif		4				2						
Rhythmic Motif (End-of-line Quarter – Eighth Rhythm)		4		2		2		2		1		1
I=Intro A=Verse PC=Pre-Chorus B=Chorus IB=Instrumental Break C=Bridge O=Outro												