

Basic Melody Writing

Why write melodies? I'm not in composition class! -- well, first of all, it's fun. You can write a little song to help your little cousin remember how to spell their name, or make a sandwich, or their address - just like you can't say the ABC's without singing the song. (Admit it.) Plus, it's part of the AP test, and most theory classes....

REAL LIFE:

Catchy rhythm.

Not NONE, but very few of these things ->

Resolve leading tones at the ends of phrases: Ti->Do.
Don't leave 'em hanging.

Pick a key to make the range of your song singable, but do try to keep it within an octave and a third if you want anyone to be able to sing it and sound good. (Example of NOT doing that: "The Star-Spangled Banner")

Do what sounds cool. A little crunch is nice!

AP TEST:

Boring rhythm.

NO augmented intervals, NO 7th or 8ve skips, most skips stay a 5th or smaller.

Same, but also resolve Fa->Mi/Me.

Follow these ranges:

Soprano: C4 - G5

Alto: G3 - C5

Tenor: C3 - G4

Bass: G2 - C4

No NCT's - all notes should be part of the chord used at that moment.

EVERYWHERE:

Move mostly in steps, with less than 40% skips. This is called "contour" - if you connect-the-dots with the noteheads in the melody, the contour should be a nice gentle hilly landscape, NOT a wild craggy mountain range or a flat plain. (Note: good bass parts are often wild craggy mountains, and good alto and tenor lines are often flat plains, if writing in common-practice "chorale" style... sorry.)

Never 2 skips in a row, UNLESS they outline a chord. (Ex. "Taps")

At the end of the song (not necessarily the end of each phrase), finish your melody on Do, and on a long note that starts on a strong beat.

Please note, if your college professor uses certain textbooks, there might be many more rules about melody writing, but honestly - these are enough for 99% of what you will need.