

# Song lyrics have become simpler and more repetitive since 1980, study finds

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The lyrics of English-language songs have become simpler and more repetitive over the past 40 years, according to a study [published](#) in *Scientific Reports*.

Eva Zangerle and colleagues analyzed the lyrics of 12,000 English-language rap, country, pop, R&B, and [rock](#) songs (2,400 songs per [genre](#) ) released between 1980 and 2020.

The authors found that, in general, lyrics have become simpler and easier to understand over time and that the number of different words used within songs has decreased, particularly among rap and rock songs. However, they also found that the number of words with three or more syllables has increased in rap songs since 1980. They suggest that while the use of longer words has increased in rap songs, general increases in the repetitiveness of lyrics across multiple genres have led to lyrics becoming simpler overall.

The authors speculate that the trend towards simpler lyrics could reflect changes in music consumption, such as increases in songs being played as [background music](#).

The authors found that lyrics have tended to become more emotional and personal over time. Use of emotionally positive and negative words increased in rap songs, while the use of emotionally negative lyrics increased for R&B, pop and country songs. Additionally, all genres showed an increase in the use of anger-related words.

Additional analyses into the views of the 12,000 song lyrics on the online song lyric platform Genius revealed that the lyrics of older rock songs tend to be viewed more than those of newer rock songs but that the lyrics of newer country songs tend to be viewed more than those of older

country songs. This could indicate that rock listeners prefer lyrics from older songs, while country listeners may prefer [lyrics](#) from newer songs.

The findings provide further insight into the evolution of music over the past 40 years.

**More information:** Eva Zangerle, Song lyrics have become simpler and more repetitive over the last five decades, *Scientific Reports* (2024).

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