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## ‘No Pen, No Pad’: The Unlikely Way Rap Is Written Today

Fifty years into hip-hop’s constant evolution, many of today’s rappers don’t write down their lyrics at all. Here’s how they make songs now.



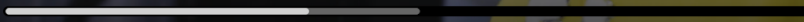
Why Rappers Stopped Writing: The Punch-In Method  
By Noah Throop



Veeze rapper



2:07



5:36



Picture a rapper writing a song — but now forget about the pen and paper. In fact, in a recording studio these days, there may be no actual writing happening at all.

While many fans and listeners might still have that outdated, old-school image of an artist scribbling furiously in a notepad — think Tupac, Nas or Eminem — many younger hip-hop artists grew up idolizing stars like Jay-Z, Lil Wayne, Future and Young Thug, all of whom have boasted about never putting their lyrics to paper, or even a phone screen.

Instead, using technological advances in digital recording, much of modern rap music is composed via a strange, improvisational studio technique known as “punching in” — a mumbling, nonsensical-at-first, freestyle approach to every line, one at a time, until a song is fully formed.

Is this good for the music? The jury is out, even within hip-hop. But in this behind-the-scenes video — the latest entry in our Diary of a Song series, which documents how popular music is created — we track the generational shift through exclusive studio footage of young rappers like Doechii, Veeze and Lil Gotit, plus interviews with genre veterans including the artist Killer Mike and the producer Just Blaze, to track this creative shift and its effects on the still-experimental genre of hip-hop, 50 years after its birth.