

THE TAYLOR SWIFT EVOLUTION

HIT SONGS **DECONSTRUCTED**

The #1 Source for Hit Songwriting Analysis and Trends



SONG STRUCTURE

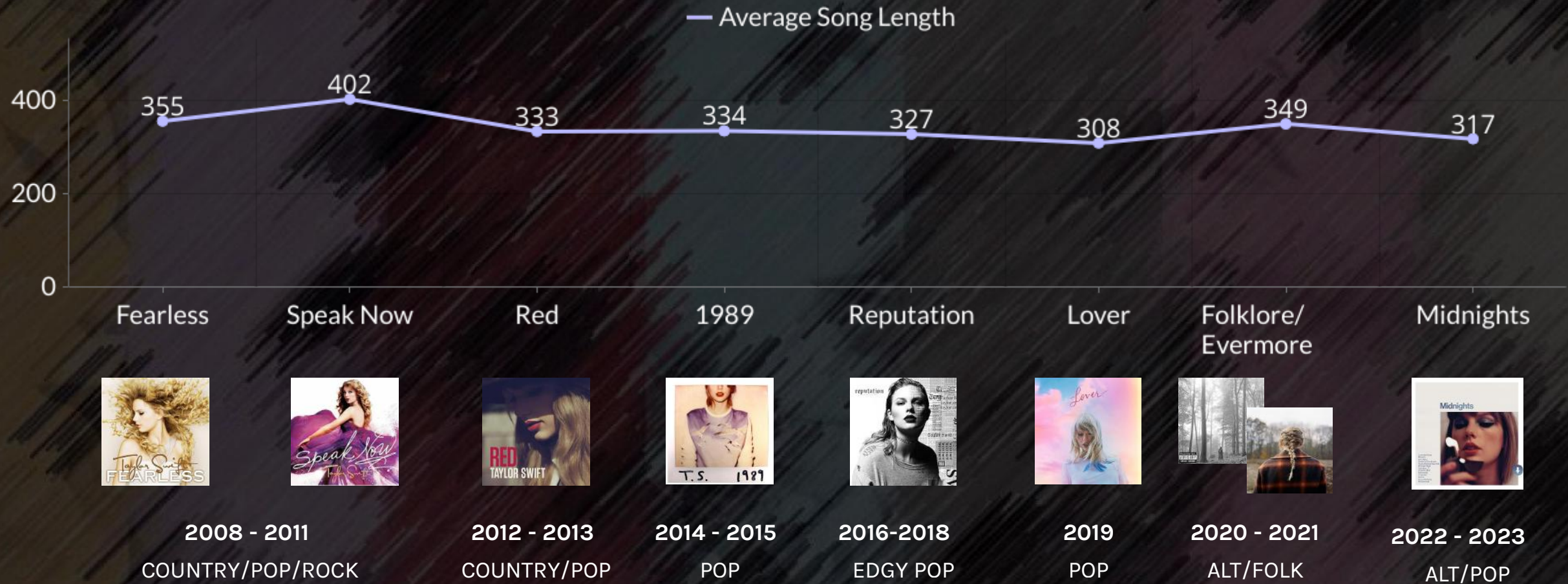




A Shift Towards Shorter Songs

With the exception of hits on the singer-songwriter/folk-leaning *folklore* and *evermore* albums, the average length of Taylor Swift's Hot 100 top 10 body of work has generally gotten shorter over time. This is in-line with Hot 100 top 10 trends, including four hits that land under three-minutes in length. The first two, "You Need To Calm Down" and "Cruel Summer," appear on 2019's *Lover*, the year that the under three-minute trend tripled in prominence.

Evolution by Album: Song Length



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A Variety of Forms

While many of Taylor Swift's hits possess structural commonalities, sharing the same exact form is not one of them. From *Fearless* through *Midnights*, only four forms were used more than once. However, most share the commonality of a core A-B-A-B-C-B structure (verse-chorus-verse-chorus-bridge-chorus).

A Variety of Forms

All the forms used in Taylor Swift's Hot 100 top 10 hits:

A-B-A-B-C-A-B
A-B-A-B-C-O
A-B-T-A-B-IB-B-O
B-A-PC-B-A-PC-B-C-B
B-IB-A-B-A-B-C-O
I-A-B-A-B-C-B
I-A-B-A-B-IB-C-B-C-B-O
I-A-B-IB-A-B-IB-C-B-O
I-A-B-T-A-B-C-B-O
I-A-B-T-A-B-IB-C-B-O
I-A-B-T-A-B-T-C-A-B-O
I-A-B-VB-A-B-C-B-O
I-A-B-VB-A-B-VB-C-B-VB-O
I-A-B-VB-A-B-VB-C-IB-B-VB-O
I-A-PC-B-A-B-C-B-B-O
I-A-PC-B-A-PC-B-C-B
I-A-PC-B-A-PC-B-C-C-B-O
I-A-PC-B-A-PC-B-C-O
I-A-PC-B-T-A-PC-B-IB-C-B-O
I-A-PC-B-VB-A-PC-B-VB-C-B-VB-O
I-A-B-T-A-B-C-B

I-A-PC-B-T-A-PC-B-C-B
I-A-PC-B-A-PC-B-T-C-B-O
I-A-PC-B-A-PC-B-VB-C-B-O
I-A-PC-B-T-A-C-PC-B-IB-C-O
I-A-PC-B-T-A-PC-B-C-B-C-O
I-A-PC-B-T-A-PC-B-C-B-O
I-A-PC-B-T-A-PC-B-IB-C-A-B
I-A-PC-B-T-A-PC-B-IB-C-B-VB-O
I-A-PC-B-T-A-PC-B-T-A-VB-B-O
I-A-PC-B-T-A-PC-B-T-C-B-O
I-A-PC-B-T-A-PC-B-T-C-PC-B-O
I-A-PC-B-T-A-PC-B-VB-C-B-O
I-A-PC-B-VB-A-PC-B-VB-C-B-O
I-A-PC-B-VB-A-PC-B-VB-C-VB-B-O
I-A-T-A-B-C-B-O
I-A-T-A-B-T-A-B-IB-C-B-O
I-A-T-A-B-T-A-B-IB-C-T-B-O
I-A-T-A-PC-B-A-PC-B-IB-C-B-O
I-A-T-A-PC-B-A-PC-B-IB-C-T-A-B-A-O
I-T-A-PC-B-A-PC-B-IB-C-B-O

Forms used in two or more Taylor Swift hits:

I // A-PC-B-VB / A-PC-B-VB / C-B-VB-O

I Don't Wanna Live Forever, I Knew You Were Trouble,
Say Don't Go (Taylor's Version) {From The Vault}

I // A-B / T / A-B / C-B

Blank Space, Lover

I // A-PC-B / T / A-PC-B / C-B

Wildest Dreams, You Need To Calm Down

I // A-PC-B / T / A-PC-B-IB / C-B-O

Back To December, Love Story

I=Intro | A=Verse | PC=Pre-Chorus | B=Chorus | C=Bridge | IB=Instrumental Break | VB=Vocal Break | T=Turnaround | O=Outro | PST=Post-Chorus

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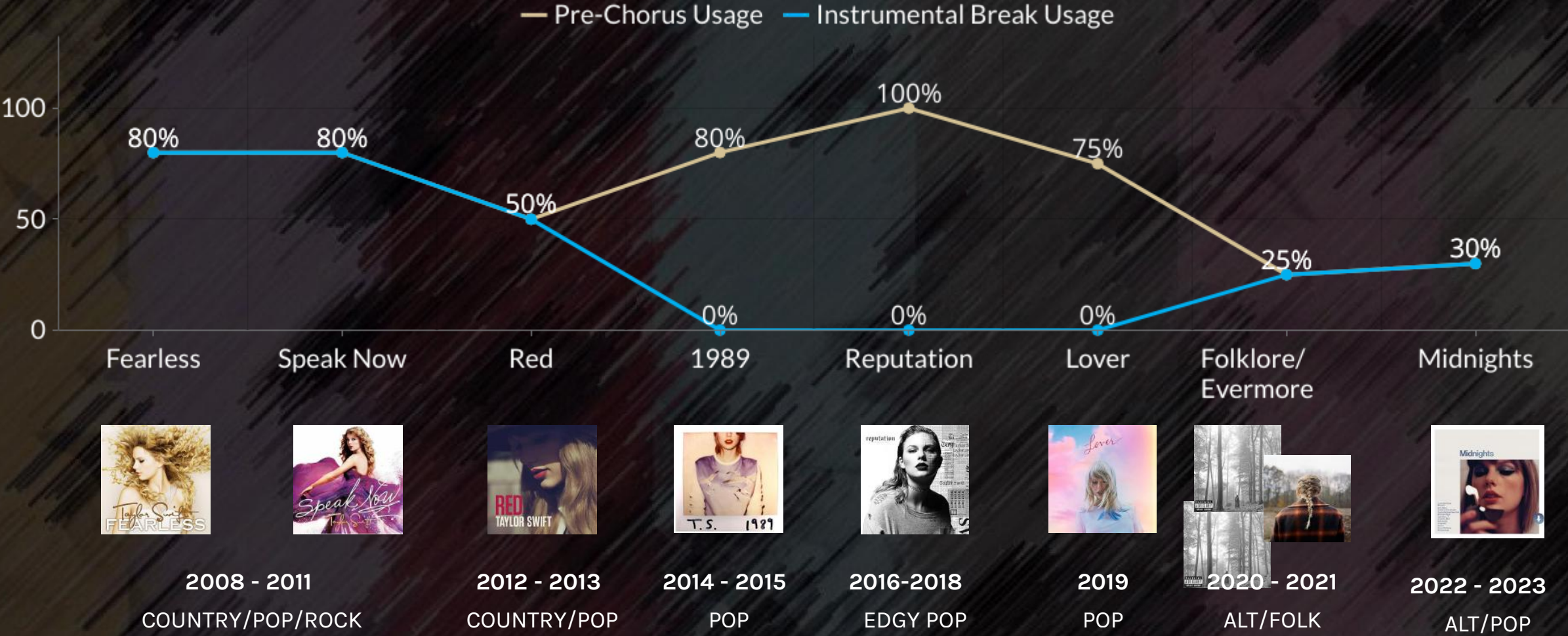
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Dwindling Instrumental Breaks & Pre-Choruses

The use of instrumental breaks and pre-choruses in Swift's body of work has become sparser in recent years. Instrumental breaks, mainly driven by guitars, were very common in her early country and rock-influenced hits, but faded as she moved in a more overt pop direction. Pre-choruses fell out of favor on *folklore*, *evermore*, and *Midnights*, the latter being in-tune with top 10 trends to help cut down on runtime.

Evolution by Album: Instrumental Breaks & Pre-Choruses



2008 - 2011
COUNTRY/POP/ROCK



2012 - 2013
COUNTRY/POP



2014 - 2015
POP



2016-2018
EDGY POP



2019
POP



2020 - 2021
ALT/FOLK



2022 - 2023
ALT/POP

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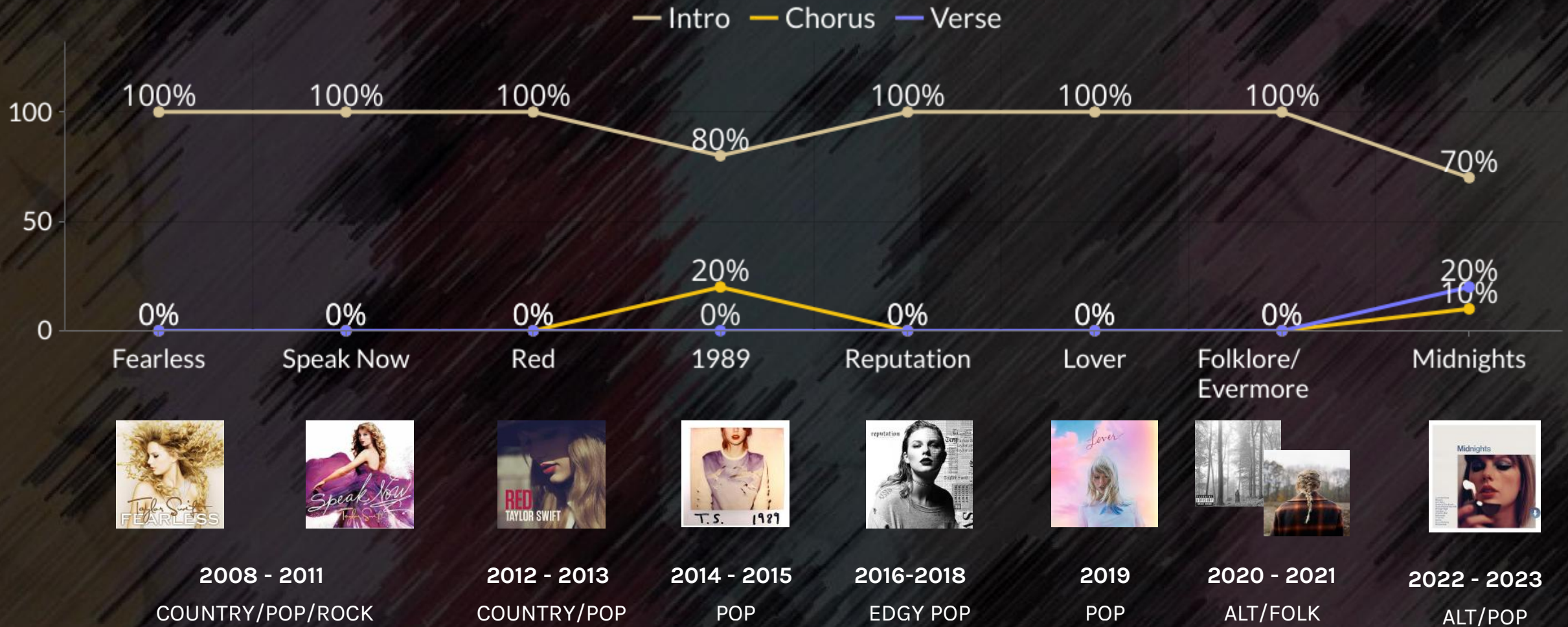
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Kicking Off with the Intro

Like the overall Hot 100 top 10, the vast majority of Swift's hits kick off with an intro. Of those that don't, two begin with the chorus ("Bad Blood" and "Midnight Rain") and two start off with the verse ("Vigilante Sh*t" and "You're On Your Own Kid").

Evolution by Album: First Section



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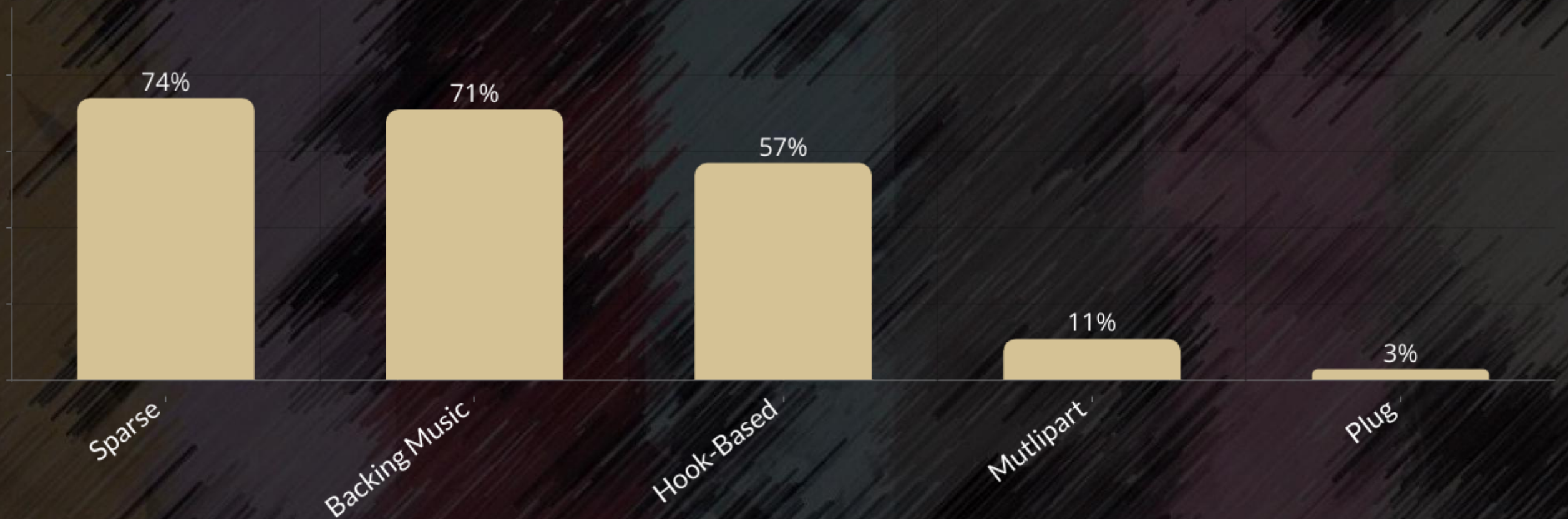
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Sparse Arrangement, Backing Music, & Hook-Based Intros

The three most common intro characteristics in Taylor Swift's hits are: a sparse arrangement, which provides room for growth in subsequent sections; backing music, which establishes the instrumental accompaniment of the ensuing section to put the listener's full attention on the first installment of the story; and hook-based, which showcases one or more of the song's key hooks.

Sparse Arrangement, Backing Music, & Hook-Based Intros: 2008 - 2023



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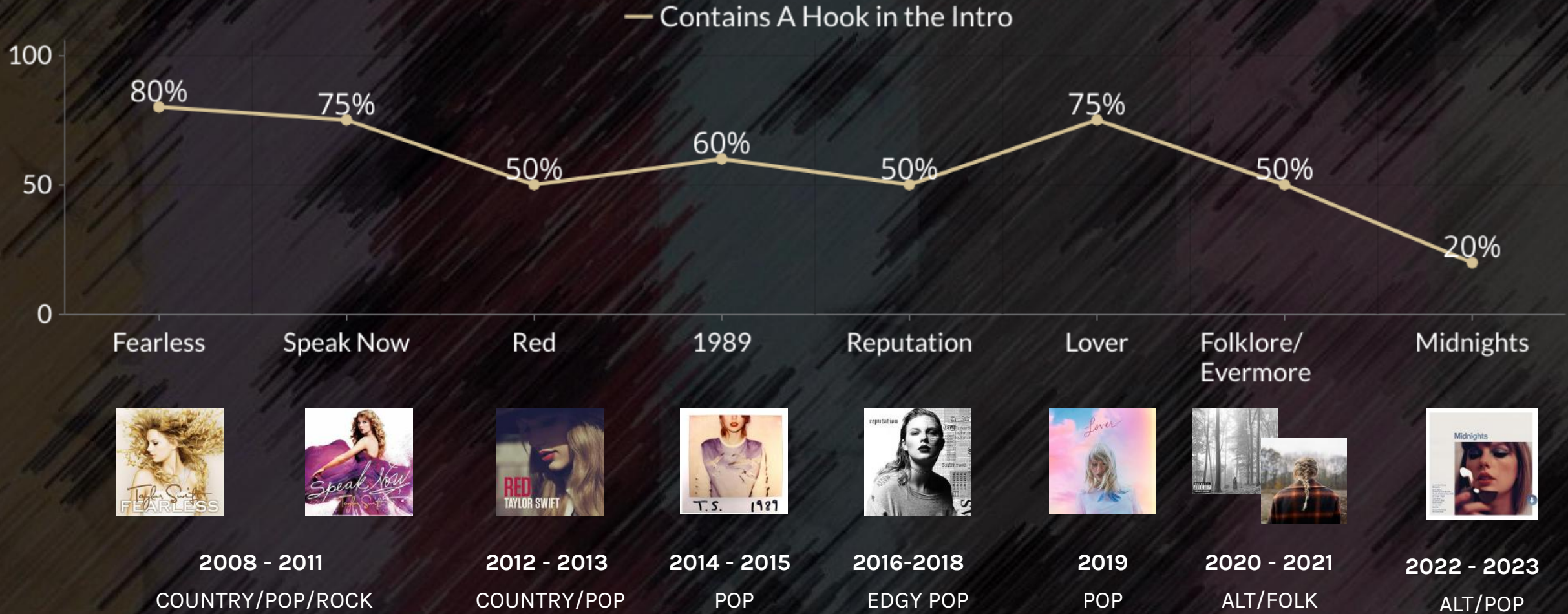
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Hooky Intros, Except for *Midnights*

Over half of songs in Swift's body of work establish a key hook in the intro except for those on *Midnights*. Of those that don't, three do not contain an intro ("Vigilante Sh*t," "You're On Your Own Kid," "Midnight Rain"), two establish a non-hook drum pattern ("Anti-Hero," "Question"), one establishes a non-hook-based groove ("Maroon"), and two feature attention-grabbing embellishments ("Bejeweled," "Karma").

Evolution by Album: Hook-Based Intros



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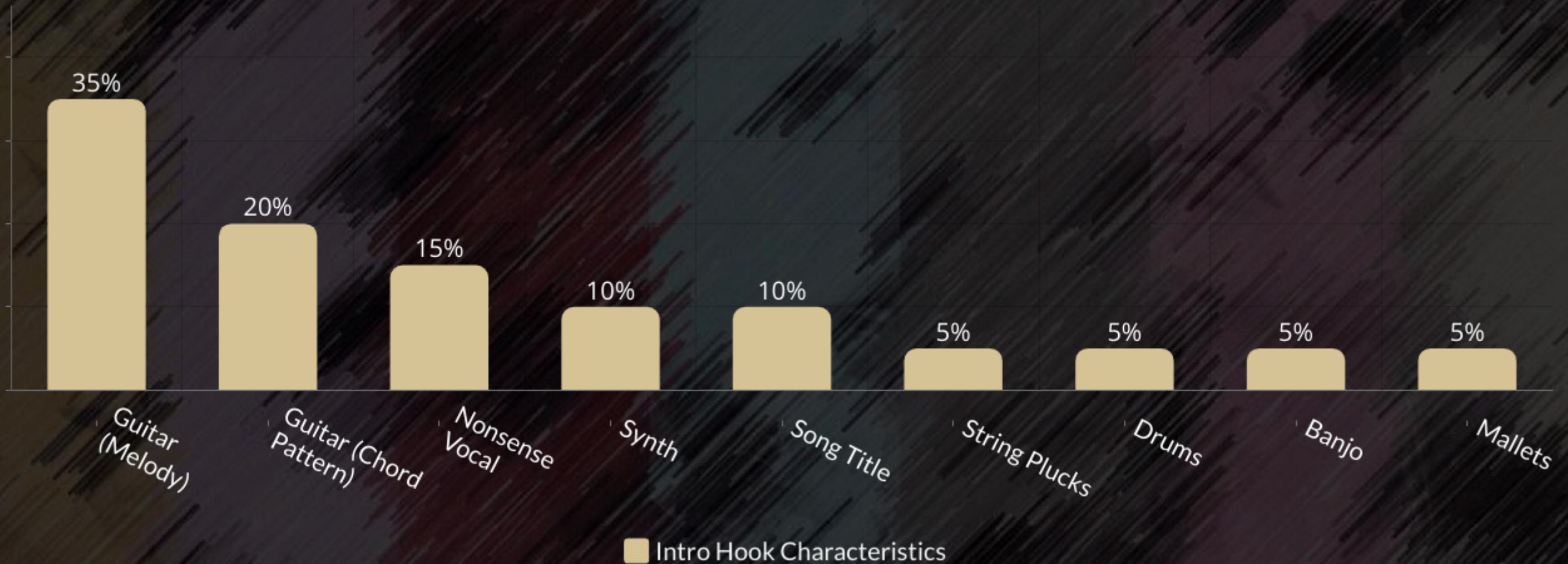
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Instrumental Hooks Far Outweigh Vocal Hooks

Of Swift's hook-based intros, 80% feature an instrumental hook, 15% a vocal hook, and 5% both ("Mine"). While guitar is the most common hook delivery method, it fell out of favor after *Red* and was used sparingly since. Some of the more atypical and attention-grabbing intro hook qualities include solo drums ("Shake It Off"), mallets ("Blank Space"), and string plucks ("Snow On The Beach").

Intro Hook Delivery Methods: 2008 - 2023



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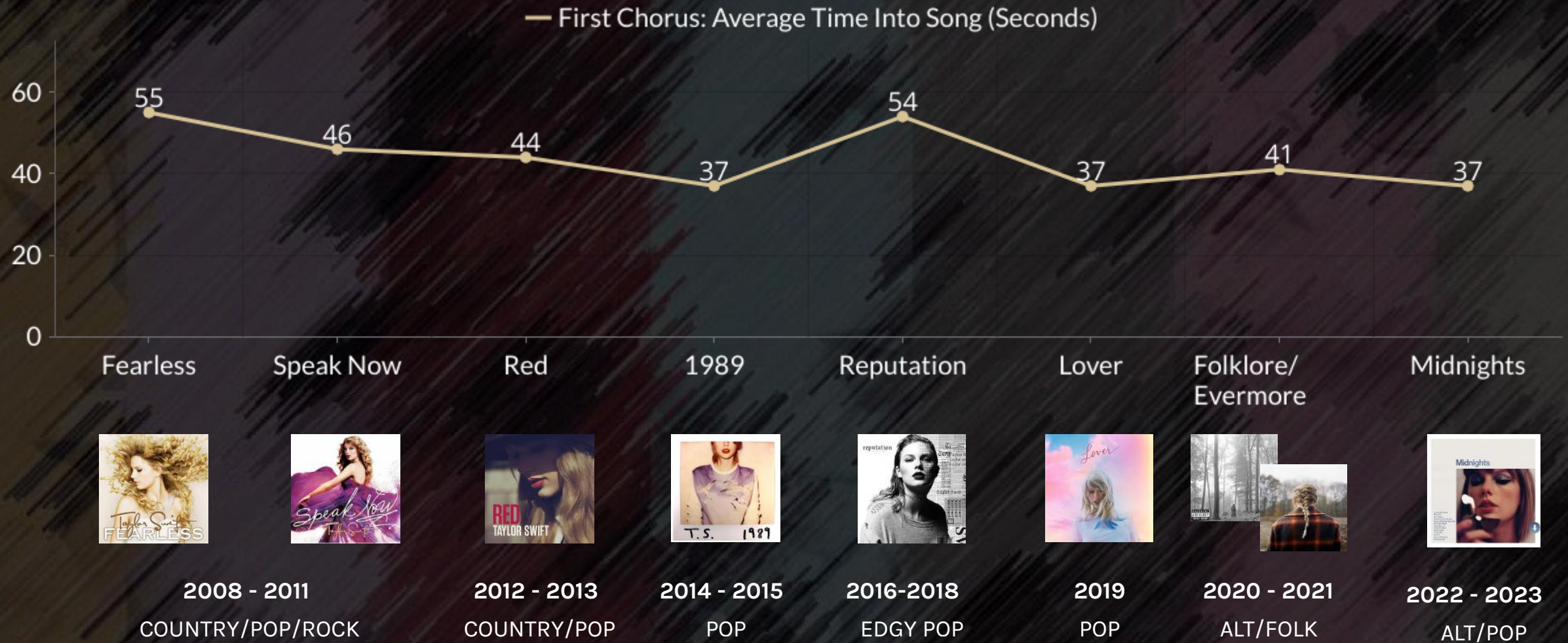
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Progression Towards Earlier Hitting Choruses

The average amount of time that it takes a Taylor Swift hit to get to the first chorus is 42 seconds. It got progressively shorter from *Fearless* through 1989 as her songs started to become more pop-centric, and remained relatively constant except for a brief bump on *Reputation*.

Evolution by Album: First Chorus Occurrence



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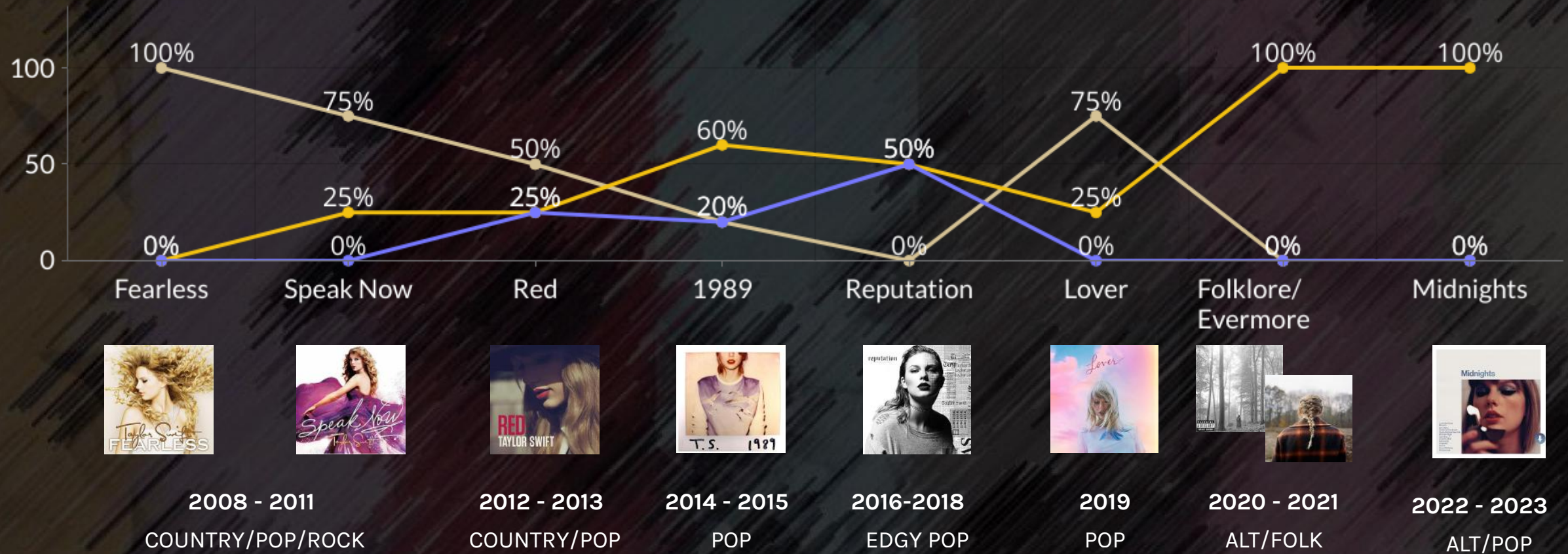
Smaller Use of "Big" First Choruses

Big sounding, high-energy first choruses are highly common in Swift's early body of work. However, over time their use diminished and were completely gone after 1989 save for a brief resurgence on *Lover*. Instead, Swift shifted to a more linear first chorus energy that is on par with the preceding section. This both served her more groove-based compositions and put them in-line with Hot 100 top 10 trends.

Evolution by Album: First Chorus

Chorus Length Uniformity

— High-Energy (Big Chorus) — Linear (On par) — Low-Energy (Breakdown Chorus)



2008 - 2011

COUNTRY/POP/ROCK



2012 - 2013

COUNTRY/POP



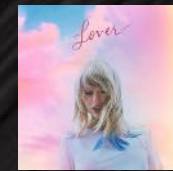
2014 - 2015

POP



2016-2018

EDGY POP



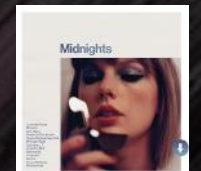
2019

POP



2020 - 2021

ALT/FOLK



2022 - 2023

ALT/POP

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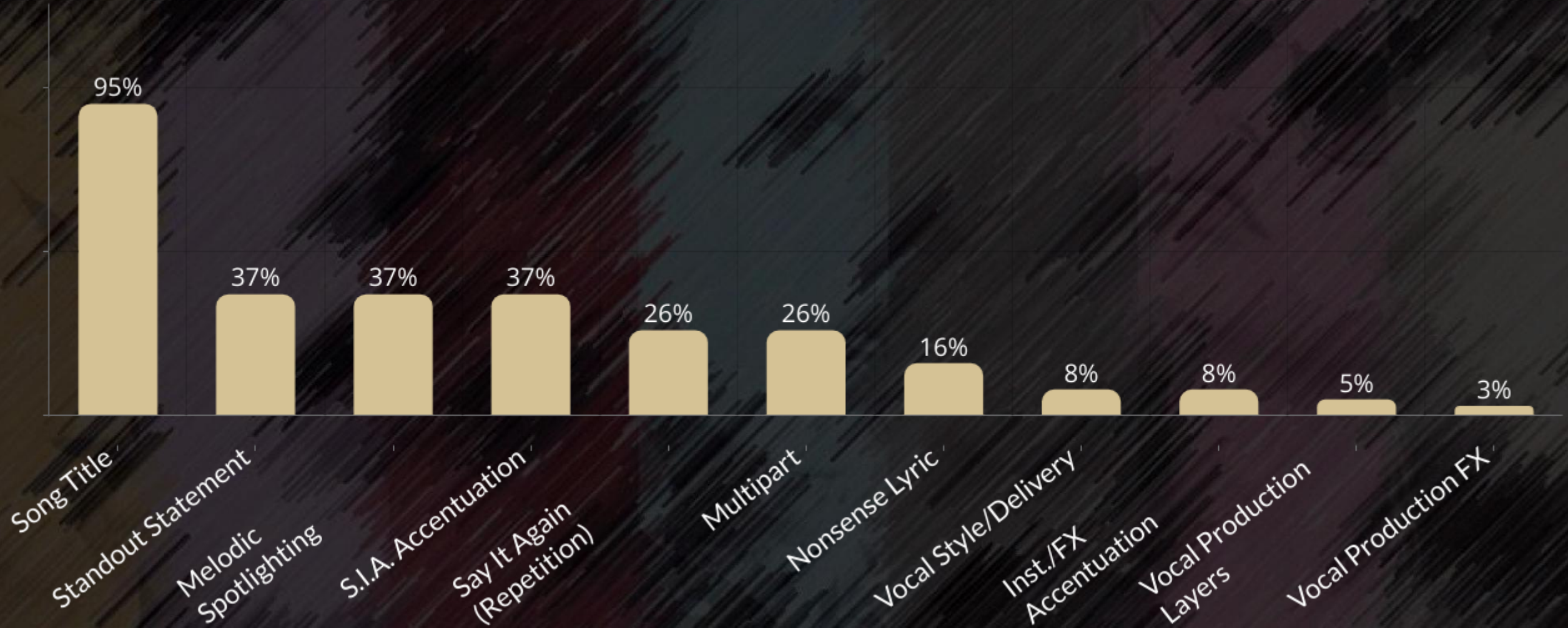
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Wide Array of Chorus "Hook Dressing" Techniques

Eleven different "hook dressing" techniques were used to transform Swift's catchy melodies into song-defining hooks. The most common by far is the song title, which is typically part of the chorus' lyrical summation and payoff.

Chorus "Hook Dressing" Techniques: 2008 - 2023



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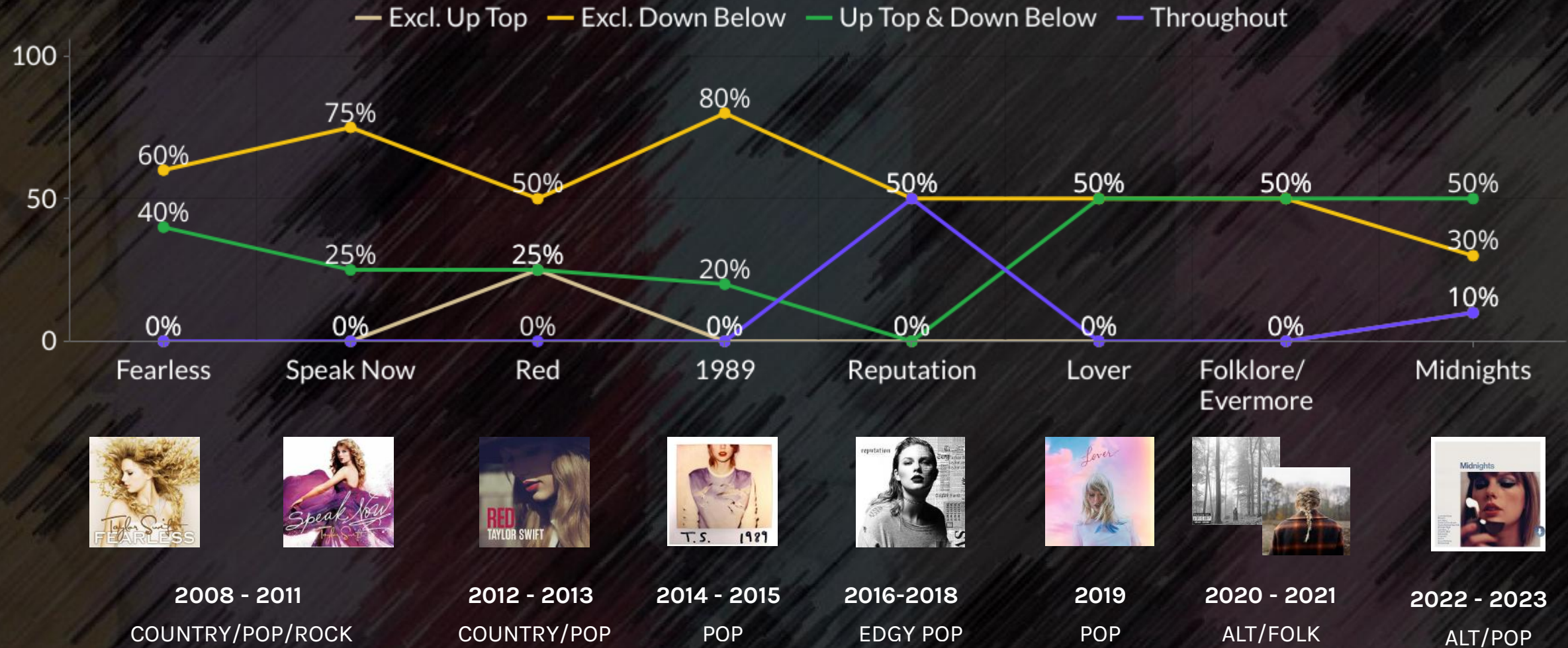
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"Up Top" & "Down Below" Chorus Hook Placement

From *Fearless* through 1989, the most common spot to find a key hook in the chorus was at the end of the section. However, from *Reputation* onward, hitting the listener with a hook at both the beginning and end of the chorus became more prevalent. In addition, only a small handful of songs repeated hooks throughout the entirety of the chorus, with two notable examples being "Look What You Made Me Do" and "Karma."

Evolution by Album: Chorus Hook Placement



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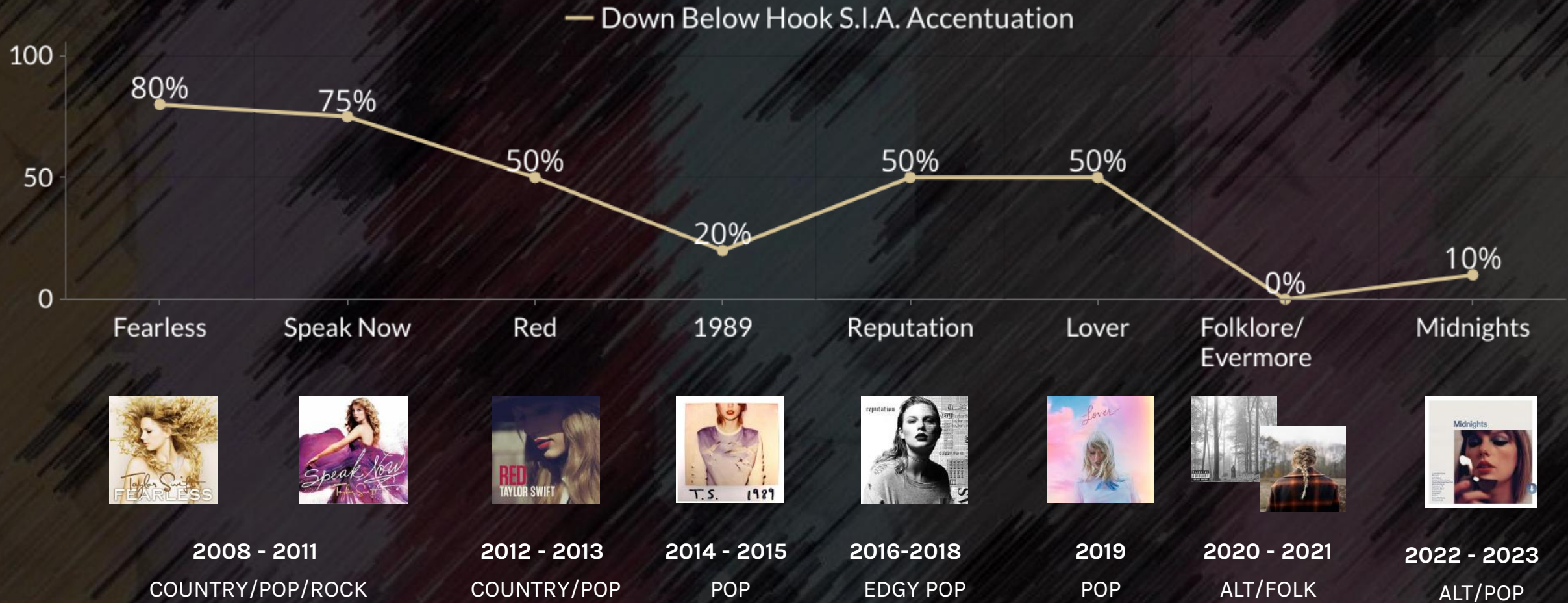
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S.I.A. Hook Accentuation

A key method used to amplify the impact of Swift's down below hooks is the S.I.A. technique, which is the Hit Songs Deconstructed acronym for section impact accentuator. This is where the full or partial accompaniment is pulled to spotlight the hook. While this technique is part of Swift's early signature sound, it became more scarce as time went on. Two possible reasons are avoiding predictability and not being stylistically relevant. Notable examples include "Love Story," "You Belong With Me," "Ready For It," and "Lover."

Evolution by Album: S.I.A. Hook Accentuation



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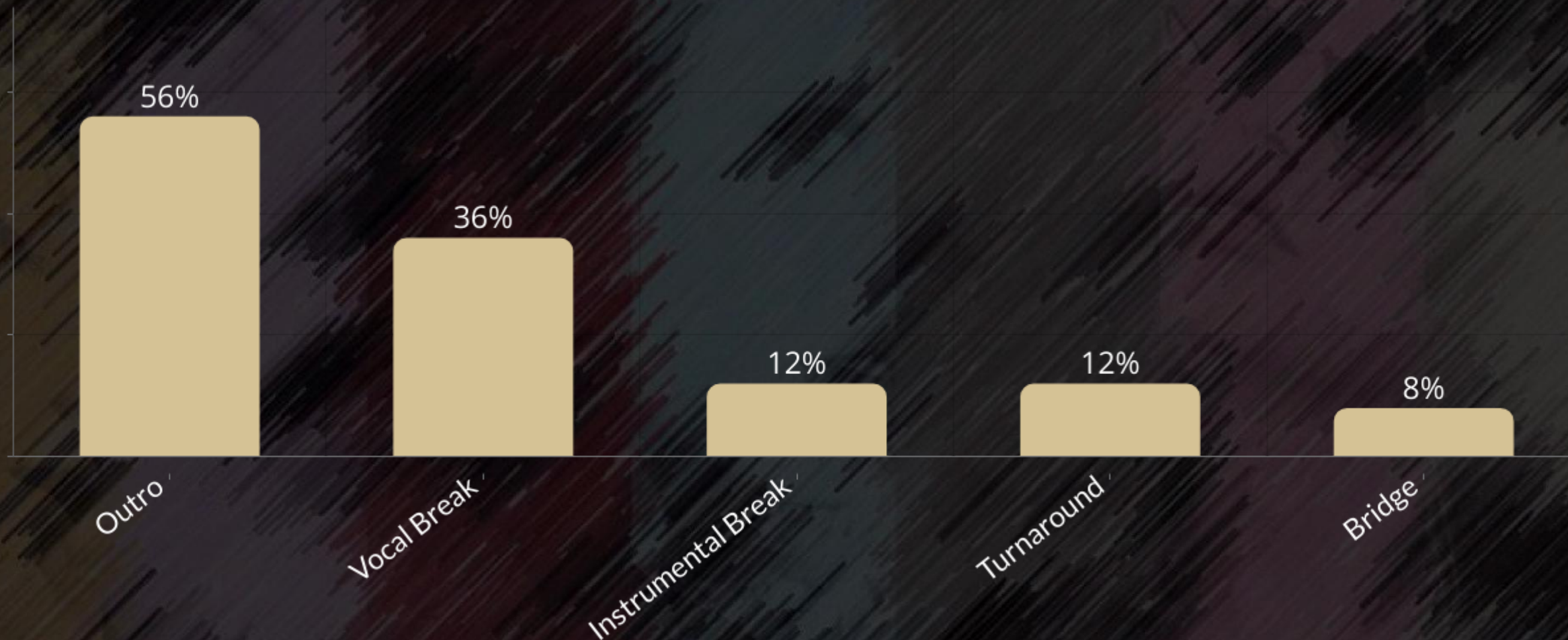
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Outro Post-Choruses Are Most Common

In addition to the chorus, nearly two-thirds of Taylor Swift's hits include a post-chorus "hook center" in their framework. The most common type of post-chorus is the outro, which commonly recycles hooks from other song sections to conclude the song on a catchy and memorable note. The vocal break post-chorus is second in prominence, which features a notable vocal hook at its core.

Post-Chorus Sections: 2008 - 2023

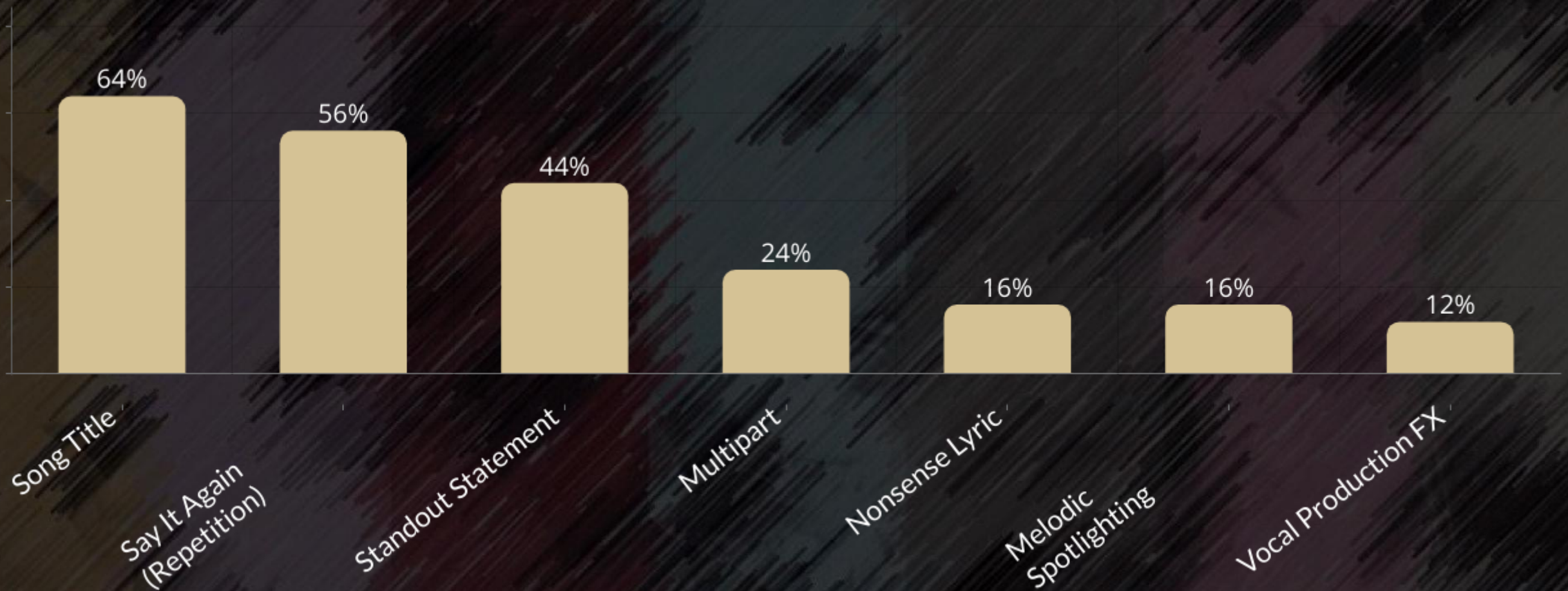




A Variety of Post-Chorus "Hook Dressing" Techniques

Like the chorus, the most popular post-chorus "hook dressing" technique is the song title, which is commonly recycled from the chorus. The next most popular is what Hit Songs Deconstructed calls the "say it again" technique, which is where the hook melody and lyric are repeated in a back-to-back manner. A couple of notable examples include "I Knew You Were Trouble" and "Shake It Off."

Post-Chorus "Hook Dressing" Techniques: 2008 - 2023



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