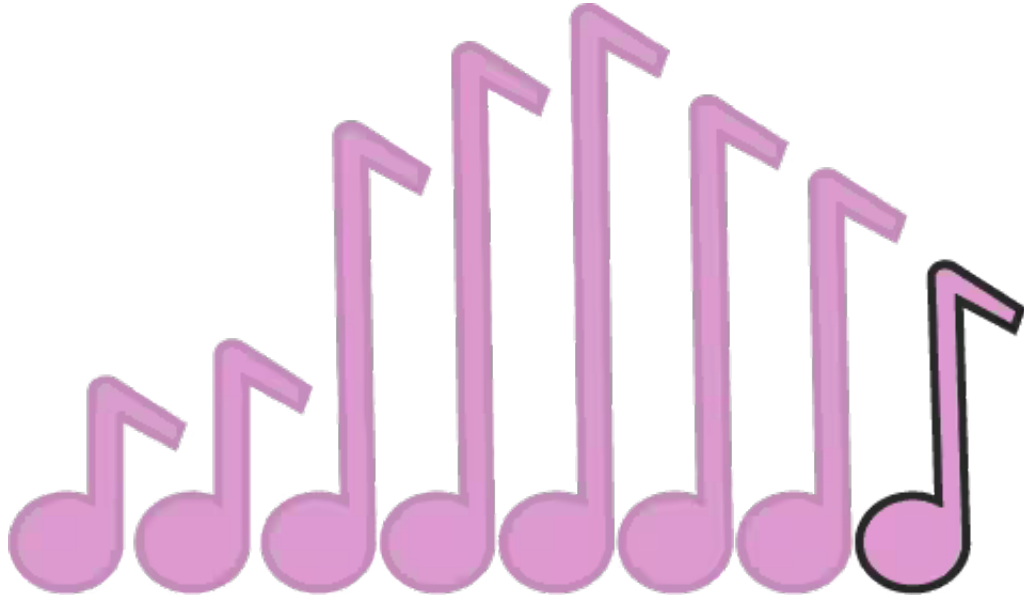
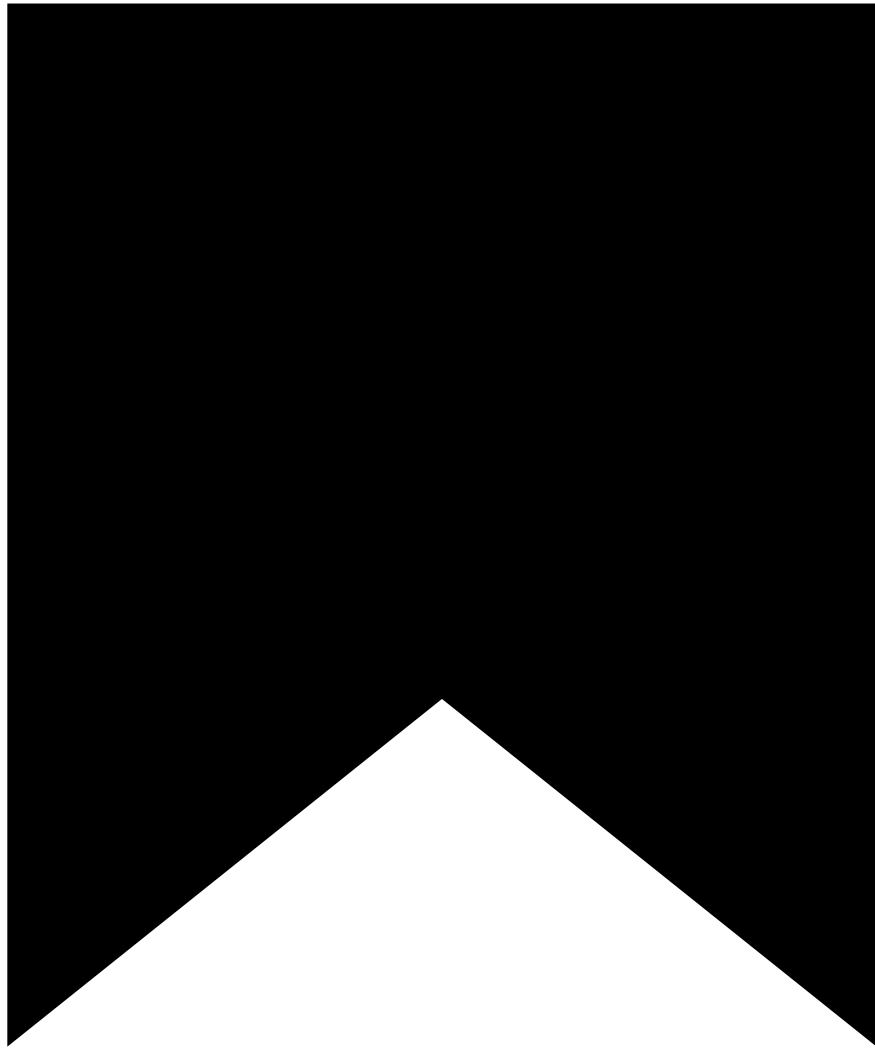


Pop songs are getting shorter in the era of streaming and TikTok

[Szu Yu Chen](#) Jan. 26 at 7:00 a.m.



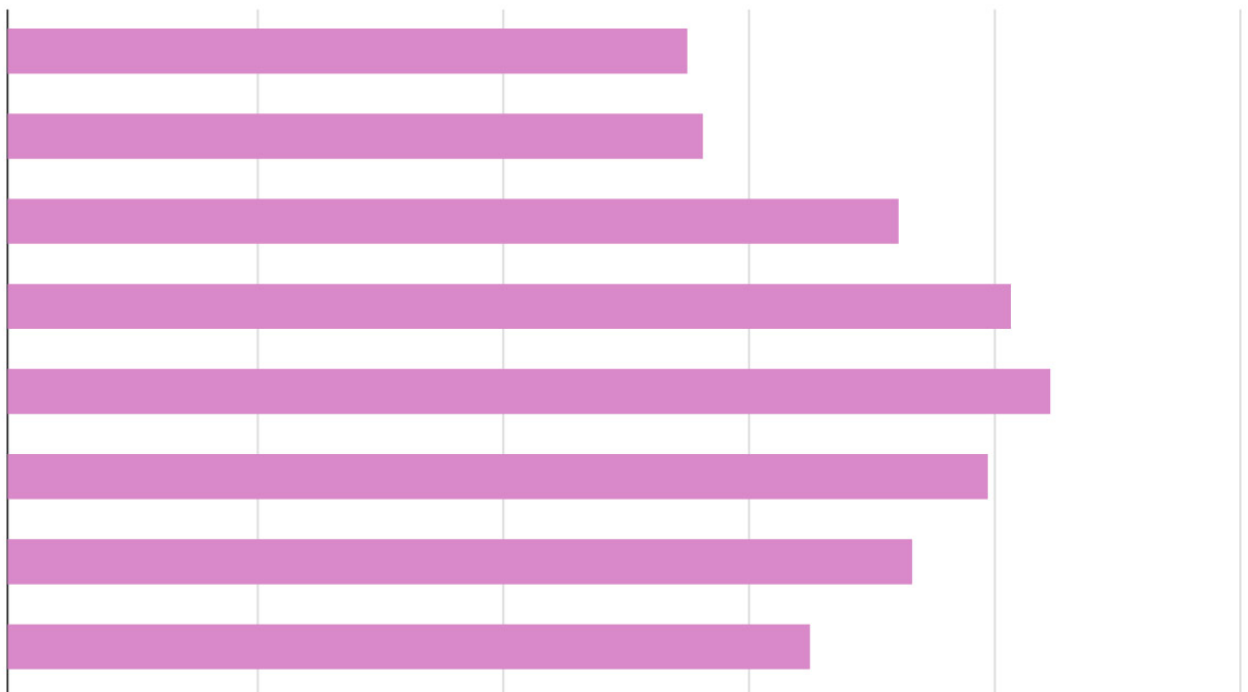


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From Taylor Swift's "Midnight Rain" to Lil Yachty's "Poland," new songs are getting shorter. One-fifth of the nominated songs in this year's Grammy Awards will clock in at under three minutes.

Midnight Rain Taylor Swift

Since 1990, the average length of a song on the Billboard Hot 100 has decreased from over four minutes to around three, regardless of genre.



Average song length on Billboard Hot 100

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Song lengths have always fluctuated with technological and cultural changes. "You've got artists and technologies working in tandem and then

artists responding to other artists. ... That's how the culture and the songwriting craft evolves," said Joe Bennett, a professor of musicology at Berklee College of Music who has been analyzing popular music since 1994.

For instance, the amount of music that would fit on one side of a vinyl record, combined with the format of traditional radio programming, established the [now-familiar](#) three-to-five-minute length. Then, musicians experimenting with new compositions introduced more variation in song forms and lengths.

[Vinyl records set early limits on song length](#). A 45-rpm single could hold only about five minutes of music. Exceeding this often meant a dip in sound quality.

Radio edits typically shortened songs to around three and a half minutes to accommodate advertising and news segments. "Writers who want to have pop hits for mainstream radio are likely to be influenced by that technological constraint," said Bennett.

But several artists in the 1960s experimented with longer compositions that stretched the limits of what was considered standard. Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone" rumbled for more than six minutes, and by the time the Beatles finished the last na-na-na, "Hey Jude" had crossed the seven-minute mark.

"They were the Beatles ... they had commercial power to get the radio stations to do what they wanted," said Bennett. Fans didn't mind the extra length — they bought the records and sang along with the heartfelt pleas — and soon other artists began to push through the vinyl ceiling.

Beginning in the 1980s, tapes and CDs didn't have the time limitations of vinyl and allowed artists more flexibility in songwriting. The average song length peaked at 4 minutes 21 seconds in 1992.

Now streaming platforms are shaping music trends. On platforms like Spotify, artists earn royalties only if a listener stays engaged for [at least 30 seconds](#), making songs with shorter intros and instantly engaging hooks dominant as it ensures that listeners don't skip on to the next.

Streaming platforms' pay-per-play model also incentivizes artists to create shorter songs. Shorter songs encourage more replays, and more replays mean more revenue.

"A lot of songs don't have bridges anymore, which is really disappointing for me because a bridge in a song is so special. It's one of my favorite parts of writing. Streaming music has definitely affected that," said Erika Nuri Taylor, a songwriter who was nominated for a 2008 Grammy for the song "When I See U," recorded by Fantasia Barrino. Shorter intros, sing the chorus upfront, don't have long, boring bits when not much happens — these are now the keys for success.

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Even social media is nudging song lengths downward. Video platforms encourage users to join dance challenges and create meme videos with short song snippets. Few people want to make — let alone watch — an eight-minute [TikTok](#).

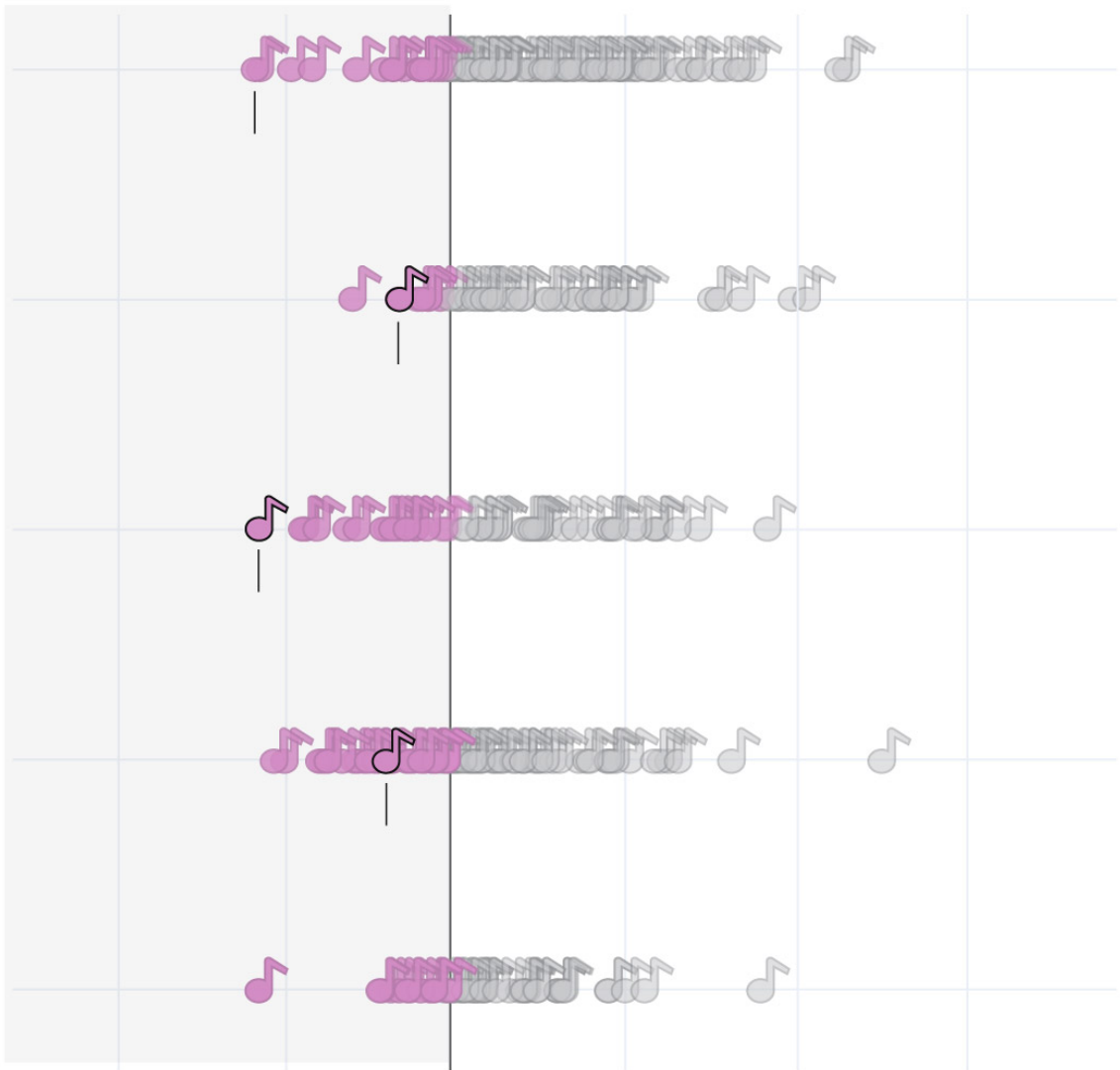
"The attention span for any entertainment has changed a lot. People are interested for two minutes and then they want to switch to the next thing — the next song, the next video, the next TikTok. It's constant scrolling and bouncing around," said Nuri Taylor.

Take Lil Yachty's "Poland." The [83-second hit](#) captivated audiences with its brevity, catchy hook and meme-friendly content. In 2022, it soared to the top half of the Billboard Hot 100 and inspired tens of thousands of TikTok creations within a week of its release.

Lil Yachty performs at Rolling Loud on July 23, 2021, in Miami Gardens, Fla. (Rich Fury/Getty Images)

The K-pop group NewJeans' hit "Super Shy" became TikTok's 2023 song of the summer in Korea. The track lasts only 2 minutes 34 seconds, but it's the longest song on the six-song mini-album "Get Up."

At the 2024 Grammy Awards, 28 of the 144 nominated songs come in under three minutes. In pop, there's SZA's "Kill Bill" (2:33), and in hip-hop, the Nicki Minaj-Ice Spice track "Barbie World" (1:49). The global music scene mirrors this trend — NewJeans' "New Jeans" is 1 minute 48 seconds.



Half of Spotify 2023 hit songs clock in under three minutes

Grammy nomination under three minutes

"Do it faster"

Militarie Gun

"The last thing on my mind"

Dolly Parton

"Barbie World"

Nicki Minaj and Ice Spice with Aqua

"Kill Bill"

SZA

"New Jeans"

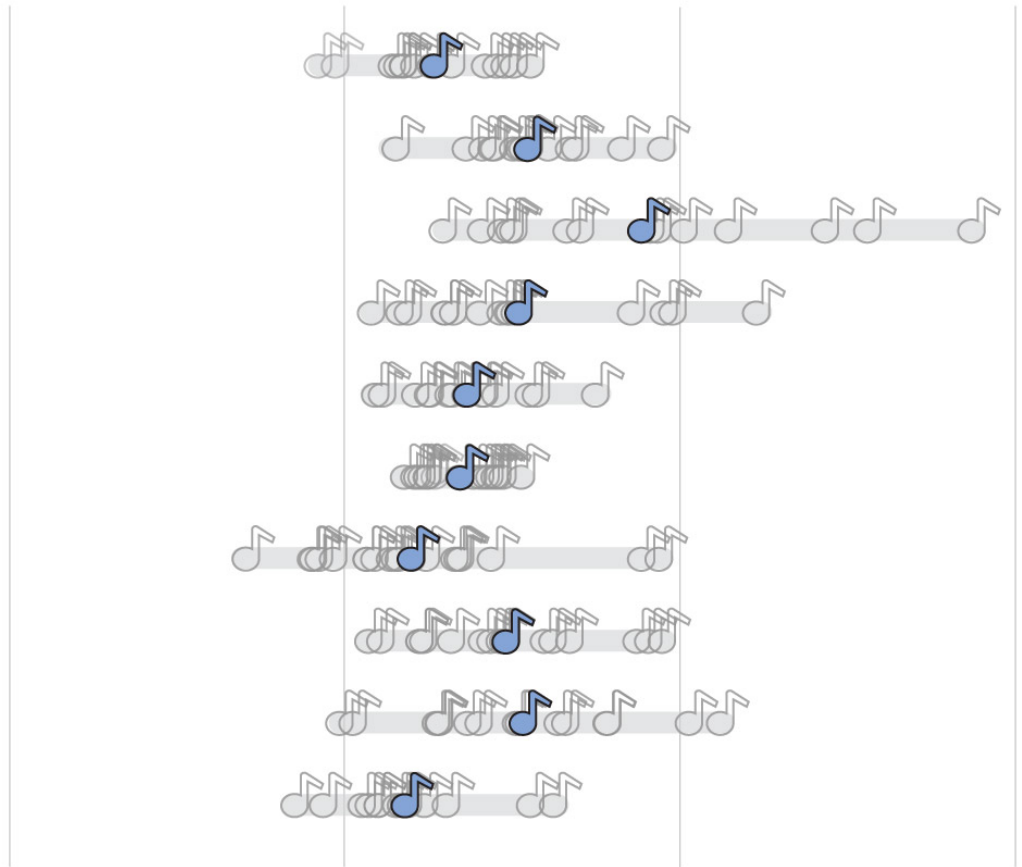
NewJeans

Note: Spotify hit songs are compiled from its year-end hit song playlists across various genres.

Even megastar Taylor Swift seems to have gotten the message.

Swift, who has six nominations this year, including for album "Midnights" and song "Anti-Hero," has reduced her average song length since 2010.

Her 2010 album, "Speak Now," has an average song length of 4:47. The shortest track on it, "Better Than Revenge," comes in at 3:37. Fast-forward nine years, and the average song on 2019's "Lover" is down to 3:26.



Taylor Swift: Song lengths by album

Average song length

Taylor Swift 2006

The music industry has always been filled with various economic incentives that can affect creative behavior among songwriters, producers and artists.

“Songwriters I talked to are aware of these economic factors but are also highly artistically motivated. They want to write the best record they can write and move somebody else’s heart,” said Bennett. He believes that because access to production technologies is easier than ever, there are going to be plenty of artists experimenting with different song lengths and

structures.

For an artist, one advantage that streaming platforms provide is to release music independently. "If an artist wants to release a six-minute song, they can. Do many people do it? No, but some people do. It's your choice. ... I really hope for the future of music that songs don't get any shorter than they already are," said Nuri Taylor.

In the four minutes it took to read this story, you could have listened to "Poland" by Lil Yachty nearly three times.

About this story

Song data used in this story was gathered using the Spotify API. Genres for each song were determined based on the categories of Spotify's playlists.

Editing by Emily M. Eng and Bonnie Berkowitz. Copy editing by Mike Cirelli.