

Introduction to Music Composition

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Key concepts, workflow, and tools for creating original music

1. What Is Music Composition?

Aspect	Description
Definition	The process of creating original musical works by organizing pitch, rhythm, harmony, timbre, and form.
Goal	Communicate an idea, emotion, or story through sound.
Roles	Composer, arranger, orchestrator, songwriter, producer.

2. Core Elements of Music

Element	What It Involves	Typical Questions
Melody	A sequence of pitches that is perceived as a single line.	What contour does the melody have?
Harmony	Vertical stacking of pitches (chords) that support the melody.	Which chord progressions create the desired tension?
Rhythm	Organization of time—beat, meter, tempo, and note values.	How does the rhythmic pattern drive the piece forward?
Form	Large-scale structure (e.g., binary, ternary, sonata, verse-chorus).	What sections will the piece contain?
Texture	How many layers of sound and how they interact (monophonic, homophonic, polyphonic, heterophonic).	Will the texture be dense or sparse?
Timbre (Tone Color)	Quality of sound that distinguishes instruments or voices.	Which instruments best convey the intended mood?
Dynamics	Loudness variations (pp ? ff) and articulation (staccato, legato).	Where should the music swell or retreat?

Introduction to Music Composition

3. The Composition Workflow

1. Inspiration & Concept

- Sketch a mood board, story, or image.
- Choose a genre or style as a reference point.

2. Idea Generation

- Hum, improvise, or use a DAW to record short motifs.
- Capture rhythmic cells, chord progressions, or melodic fragments.

3. Development

- Expand motifs: vary rhythm, invert intervals, transpose.
- Experiment with harmonic substitutions and counter-melodies.

4. Structure Planning

- Outline sections (intro, A, B, bridge, outro).
- Map repeats, transitions, and key changes.

5. Orchestration / Arrangement

- Assign material to specific instruments or voices.
- Consider register, balance, and timbral contrast.

6. Notation & Scoring

- Write parts using staff notation (Finale, Sibelius, MuseScore) or chord charts.
- Add dynamics, articulations, and performance instructions.

7. Revision & Feedback

- Play through, record, and listen critically.
- Seek peer or mentor feedback; revise as needed.

8. Production (optional)

- Record live instruments or program virtual instruments.

Introduction to Music Composition

- Mix and master for final presentation.
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4. Common Forms & Templates

Form	Typical Layout	Example Genres
Binary (AB)	Two contrasting sections, often repeated (A?A?B?B).	Baroque dances, folk tunes.
Ternary (ABA)	Statement – contrast – return.	Classical minuet, pop ballads.
Rondo (ABACA)	Recurrent refrain alternating with episodes.	Classical finales, instrumental rock.
Sonata?		
Allegro		