

## Music Introduction: Composing

# Music: Step

# 1

**COMPOSE:** to make up your own music

**WHAT:** Music doesn't need to have words, or even to be played by conventional instruments! We can compose music using virtually anything.

**HOW:** 1. There are all kinds of objects around us that can be used to make sounds, including our own bodies.

With the class, brainstorm all the different "instruments" you can think of that are available in your workspace. Write your results on a piece of chart paper.

### Sample "instruments"

Water bottle (tapped)  
Clapping hands  
Keys (jingled)  
Using your voice to say "shh"  
Water bottle (blow over opening)  
Singing

2. Brainstorm a list of **emotions**. Write the emotions on slips of paper and place them in a hat, bowl, or bag.



3. Choose an emotion from the hat. Use the Composition Worksheet to decide on the *dynamics* (volume), the *tempo* (speed), and the *orchestration* (instruments used) for your composition. Write this information on chart paper, and keep all the papers for documentation.

### PITFAL

*Avoid the temptation to use WORDS in your composition - this exercise is for instruments only! (You can use your voice, but only wordlessly.)*

4. Use information from the Composition Worksheet to compose a brief (10-20 second) composition, in which everyone plays!

5. Practice your composition, and then video record it.



6. Repeat with different emotions!

# Music: Composition Worksheet

- What kind of **DYNAMICS** (loud, quiet, medium) should be used for \_\_\_(*emotion*)\_\_\_? Should it change or stay the same? If it changes, how should it change (get louder, get quieter)?

- What kind of **TEMPO** (fast, slow, medium) should be used for \_\_\_(*emotion*)\_\_\_? Should it change or stay the same? If it changes, how should it change (get faster, get slower)?

- What kind of **ORCHESTRATION** (instruments, body or vocal sounds) should be used for \_\_\_(*emotion*)\_\_\_? Should it change or stay the same? If it changes, how should it change? Should the instruments play together, or by themselves? Should they play the same way as each other, or different ways?

## Creating Melodic Motifs

**MOTIF: A very short musical idea**

**WHAT:** Motifs are short musical ideas that have emotional impact. You can build a library of musical motifs that can be used later to aid composition.

**HOW:**

- Bells, xylophones or metallophones: students randomly select four pitches
- Piano: write note names on slips of paper; students select slips randomly and pitches are played in the order selected

1. Arrange the pitches in any order and play them. What emotion / feeling do the notes remind you of?
2. Once the class agrees on the emotion the motif reminds them of the most, you can try making the motif sound MORE like that emotion by attempting any or all of the following (but remember that a motif is SHORT; 1-4 seconds!):
  - a) playing pitches in a certain rhythm
  - b) repeating certain pitches
3. Notate and/or record your work, including the motif's name (i.e., "frustration", "lonely", "joy," etc.)
4. Repeat this process until you have built a library of motifs representing various emotions (minimum of 10 different motifs).



INSTRUMENT	PROS	CONS
Desk bells	VERY easy for students to play themselves Sets are available with all pitches (chromatic)	Sometimes the "Christmassy" sound of the instrument overrides the emotional impact of the motif
Resonator bells	Inexpensive and convenient Relatively easy for students to play by themselves (although not as easy as desk bells)	Same 'Christmassy' problem as desk bells The inexpensive sets have only 8 notes (diatonic)
Xylophone or metallophone (from which bars can be removed, leaving the 4 desired pitches)	Relatively easy for students to play by themselves (although not as easy as desk bells)	Are usually basically diatonic (having fewer notes). Children tend to play pitches primarily in ascending or descending order.
Piano or keyboard (write pitches on slips of paper; students select slips randomly)	The sound is more neutral and allows for a more accurate assessment of motif's emotional impact	Students often cannot play the motifs themselves; teacher must have basic knowledge of piano.

# Music: Step 3

## Setting Lyrics to Music

**MELODY:** The tune of the music - the way the lyrics are sung

**WHAT:** Students will create a melody for their lyrics.

**HOW:** There are many methods to create melodies, and different methods will be more successful with different classes.

**Get the Chorus and Verse 1 lyrics from the writing teacher.**

Make sure you understand where in the story the song happens, who is singing, and what the song is supposed to explain or illuminate.

### **PITFAL**

*Often, when it comes time to set the lyrics to music, students will get hung up on revising the words rather than actually composing a melody. Adopt a “no changing the lyrics in music class” policy to avoid this pitfall.*

### CREATING MELODY THROUGH SINGING

1. **Read through** the section of lyrics you wish to create a melody for (Chorus or Verse 1). Discuss meaning and mood of the lyrics. What will the *feeling* of the melody need to be in order to match the words?
2. **Sing the 1<sup>st</sup> line of the lyrics** in a number of different ways (work on only one line at a time - otherwise, it's too confusing). Have the students sing back to you, echoing each example.
3. **Experiment.** Have everyone in the class can put their fingers in their ears and try singing **only the first line** a number of different ways, trying to find the way that both sounds appealing and matches the mood of the lyrics.
4. **Share ideas.** Have students sing their ideas for the class. If students are too shy to sing alone, repeat #3 and walk around the room, listening for good ideas. When you hear one, sing it for the class and have them echo it. **Record your ideas** (see more on recording later).
5. **Choose** the idea the class likes the best, editing and improving it as desired. Repeat the process for the next line.

**REMEMBER, WE WANT THE MELODY TO MATCH THE MOOD OF THE LYRICS!**

### CREATING MELODY THROUGH INSTRUMENTS

1. Review your Motif Library (See *Music: Step 2*). Are there any motifs that match the mood of your lyrics? If not, create some.
2. Use the motifs as a springboard to create a melody. Try to sing the lyrics to the tune of a motif. Feel free to combine motifs, or to add, repeat, shorten or elongate notes in the motif. Remember, the motif is there to inspire ideas, and can be altered as desired.

**\*\*\* REMEMBER: The Chorus and Verse 1 will have DIFFERENT melodies. \*\*\***

### RECORD YOUR MUSIC

Once you have finalized the melody for the Chorus and Verse 1, record them in two ways:



1. Sing the Chorus and Verse 1 with the lyrics
2. Hum the Verse 1 melody WITHOUT the lyrics

*You can record your melodies on the computer (using GarageBand) or the tape recorder, or take a video on the camera. In a pinch, you can record them on your cell phone, but it's harder to share this with the writing teacher!*

**Send the Chorus and Verse 1 melody recordings to the writing teacher.**

The writing teacher will use the Verse 1 melody to create lyrics for Verses 2 and 3.

This process will be explained in *Writing: Step 10*.

## Vocal Accompaniment

# Music: Step

# 4

**ACCOMPANIMENT:** The instrumental music that supports the singers in a song

**WHAT:** Students will create music to accompany the singers in their song.

**HOW:**

Get the Verse 2 and 3 lyrics from the Writing teacher.

1. **Review** where in the story the song happens, which characters are singing which parts of it, and its intended mood.
2. **Review and rehearse** the chorus and all three verses with the class. Make sure everyone knows the melody and is singing it the same way.
3. **Record** the class singing the entire song in order. A great number of songs use the following basic structure:



4. Use one or more of the following methods to create accompaniment. Make sure the lyrics can always be heard!

### STUDENT-PLAYED INSTRUMENTS (including body percussion and “found sounds”)

1. **Consider your instrument choices.** This can include “real” instruments, as well as body percussion (clapping, stomping, etc.) and “found sounds” such as hitting garbage cans, jingling keys, etc.
2. **Choose 3-4 instruments.** Which sounds best fit the mood of the song?
3. **Decide when in the song each instrument should play.** Are there certain words, sections, or ideas that could be emphasized by a certain instrument? Remember, not all instruments need to play all the time - in fact, this would make your song a little boring.
4. **Decide how each instrument should play** (fast, slow, loud, quiet, etc) and in what rhythm. The rhythms will probably be different than the rhythm of the lyrics, since merely doubling the voices makes the words difficult to understand.
5. **Experiment.** Try out the plan you’ve made by playing along to the vocal recording, and then experiment to see if there are different choices you like better.

**KEYBOARD - PRE-RECORDED “BEATS” and/or “ONE-FINGER ACCOMPANIMENT”**

1. You may wish to utilize one of your keyboard’s pre-recorded “beats.” If so, the teacher should pre-select 2-4 possible “beats,” rather than going through 80 or 90 with the class. Remember, the music must match the mood of the song!
2. Add “One Finger Accompaniment” if desired. Usually, choosing the chords is a grown-up’s job, but students can learn to play the appropriate keys. Keys can be color-coded with pieces of masking tape for easier playing.

**KEYBOARD OR GUITAR ACCOMPANIMENT**

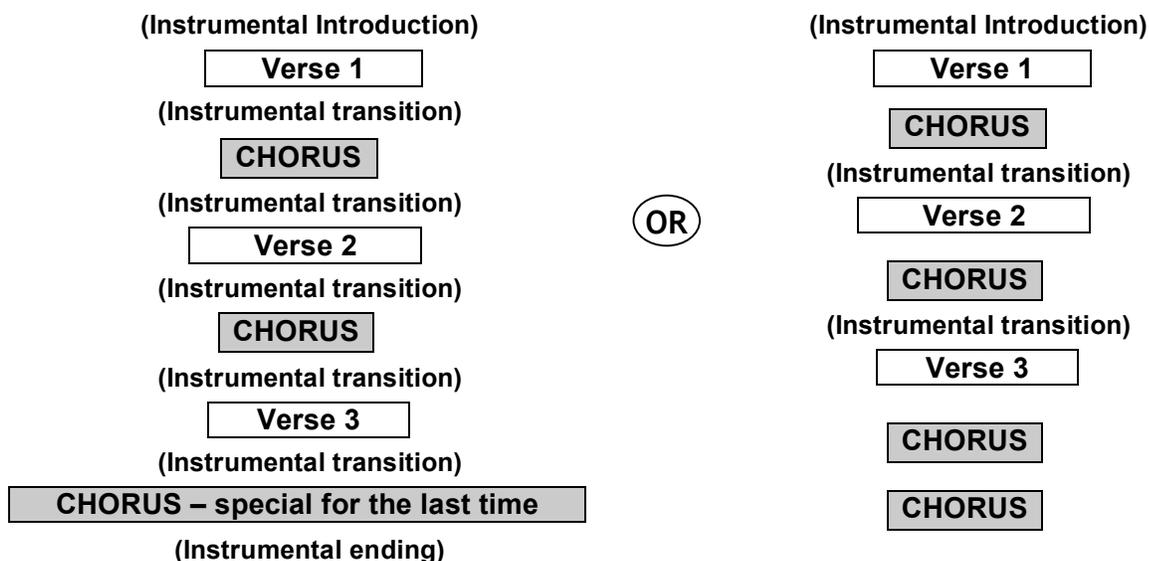
1. Usually, this is the music teacher’s job.
2. Although the teacher will probably select the appropriate chords, students can certainly provide input into how the accompaniment should go.

**Finish your song:** Once you have all the lyrics and have settled on some accompaniment ideas, make sure your song is finished!

**Considerations:**

1. Before Verse 1, between the verses and the choruses, and at the end, there may or may not be instrumental music. This must be planned.
2. Sometimes at the end, the chorus does something special, such as repeating, repeating just the last line, and/or stretching out the last line. Will yours change at the end, or remain the same?

Examples of completed song formats might be:



**\*\*\* Don’t forget to RECORD your completed song! \*\*\***

# Music: Step 5

## Instrumental Composition

**INSTRUMENTAL:** using only instruments; no words

**WHAT:** Students will compose an instrumental piece reflecting the mood(s) of the MOVEMENT MOMENT. Eventually, the movement piece will be choreographed to this music.

**HOW:** To compose this music, students will decide how to combine various musical elements. All these elements will be based on the mood(s), of the movement moment.

### 1. IDENTIFY MOOD(S)

Review what is happening in the story at the point of your movement moment. Based on what the characters are feeling at this moment, identify either one or two important moods (emotions).

- If all characters are feeling the same way at this moment, you will have one mood in your movement piece.
- If characters are feeling differently at this moment, choose the two strongest moods for your movement piece.

### 2. CHOOSE TWO MELODIC MOTIFS

- If your movement moment has one mood, make two different motifs for that mood.
- If your movement moment has two moods, each mood gets its own motif.
- Check your class's melodic motif library to see if there are any motifs that match the mood(s).
- If not, students create new motifs that match the mood(s).
- Decide which motif will be used first in your composition and which will be used second.

### 3A. TEACHER MOMENT!

AT A TIME WHEN YOU ARE NOT WITH YOUR CLASS, on your electric piano keyboard, choose 2-3 different drum patterns ("beats") you think might match *one* of the moods.

### 3B. STUDENTS CHOOSE "BEAT"

- From the 2 or 3 "beats" pre-selected by the teacher, students choose the one they think matches the mood the best.
- Students choose the tempo for that beat they think matches the mood the best.

You are ready to try some composing! Here is a basic formula:

**BEAT**

+

**1 MOTIF**

+

**OTHER  
PERCUSSION  
INSTRUMENTS**

How does it fit in with the beat?  
What instrument should it be  
played on?

Hand them out and let  
students improvise to find  
appealing ideas.

Once you have some ideas you are happy with, record and/or write down your ideas to remember them for later.

Now, it's time to compose a **CONTRASTING SECTION**.

#### CONTRASTING SECTION - USING THE SECOND MOTIF

The point of a contrasting section is to make the music more interesting by changing it. Following are questions about ways the music could **change**.

**In order to provide contrast, and to represent the mood, how will the music change?**

1. **MOTIF:** Will the second motif be by itself, or will the first motif show up as well?
2. **BEAT:** Will the beat still be heard or not?
3. **DYNAMICS:** Will the music be louder or quieter, or stay the same? Will this change?
4. **TEMPO:** Will the music be faster or slower, or stay the same? Will this change?
5. **INSTRUMENTATION:** Will the instruments change? Will there be solos (one at a time) or duets (two at a time), or will all instruments play together?
6. **SILENCES:** Will there be any times where there are silences (rests, or breaks)?
7. **SURPRISES:** Will anything happen that is a surprise?

**REMEMBER, WE WANT TO BE TRUE TO THE MOOD WE ARE TRYING TO PORTRAY!**

Once you compose your contrasting section, record it and/or write it down to remember your ideas.

Now, we need to put our piece together!

1. Decide which section should come **first** - the original or the contrasting section.

2. **How long** will you play the first section before you need to change to the second?

3. How will you **transition** from the first section to the second?

4. Do you need any **introduction** music? If so, compose that.

5. How will the piece **end**?  
NOTE - do NOT use a “fadeout” ending. This works well for CDs, but is not generally appropriate for choreography.

**WHEN MAKING THESE DECISIONS, ALWAYS THINK ABOUT THE MOOD(S) YOU ARE TRYING TO REFLECT!**

The final steps:

- NOTATE (write down) your music in some way (unconventional notation is fine) in order to remember your ideas.
- RECORD your music on the computer.
- BURN a CD of your composition.

**Send the MOOD(S) and CD recording to the movement teacher.**

The movement teacher will work with the students to create the movement piece to the music.

This process will be explained in *Movement: Steps 2 and 3*.