

Composing Assignments Set 1

Teacher's notes

Aims

- To develop the techniques used in 'Composing Tasks' in the composition of a longer piece of music.
- To understand important musical terms such as *ostinato*, *counter melody*, *arpeggio*, *question & answer*, *imitation*, *unison* etc. within the context of musical composition.

How to use the assignments

Ideally, the *Composing Tasks* should have been tackled before logically moving on to these Assignments. The tasks give the pupils a taster and equip them with a 'toolbox' of skills they can later use in a variety of compositions. Most of the musical vocabulary included here has already been introduced in the tasks.

The four tasks require the use of different resources, therefore by dividing pupils up, you can maximise the use of the departmental resources. Alternatively, if you have plenty of instruments and computers, then you are able to give the choice to the pupils.

All tasks require pupils to record the music. The use of a portable minidisc recorder is recommended for this. Computer recordings can be directly injected into the minidisc recorder and others will use a microphone. Do show the pupils how to record, so that they are able to take this pressure off the teacher.

The four week time limit is a suggestion. Trials with classes of 24-26 pupils have shown that this is a reasonable time limit based on 10 hours work, and keeps the pupils well on task for the duration of the projects. Pupils should be in the habit of filling in a composing log to evaluate what they have done in each lesson. Blank logs are available separately for each UK exam board.

Composing Assignments

You have **four** weeks to complete your assignment

Choose **one** assignment to do A B C or D and make sure you fill in a composing log after each lesson. Write the brief on the front of your composing log.

Assignment A : Computer based (sequencer)

BRIEF : To use a given chord sequence to develop a piece of music. The music should last at least 3 minutes

The image shows two musical staves in 4/4 time, each with eight measures. The first staff has chords C, F, G, C, C, F, G, C. The second staff has chords C, Dm, G, C, Am, Dm, G, C. Each measure shows the chord structure in both the treble and bass clefs.

Use Arpeggios, counter melodies, interesting bass lines, harmony parts, question and answer phrases, dialogues between instruments etc. to make the music interesting.

ALWAYS stick to the chords or the music will not sound right.

Assignment B : Guitar/Bass/Drums based

BRIEF : To use riffs on guitar or bass guitar to compose a piece of music in AT LEAST 3 sections.

Using a guitar and rhythm machine (this could be on a keyboard) you should compose a piece of music using repetitive riffs.

The riffs should be interesting rhythmically and can be varied in speed.

You should give a lot of thought to the **STRUCTURE** of your piece. For example, you may decide to have a verse-chorus-verse-chorus-middle8-chorus-chorus structure.

Also give some thought to the rhythm section and where the fills should come, what kind of rhythm you want etc, since you may decide to have a **LIVE** drummer for your recording.

Assignment C : Untuned Percussion based (some computer work)

BRIEF : To write a percussion ensemble piece lasting around 32 bars in at least 4 parts.

You can use any rhythms you know and ask your teachers for more ideas with rhythm to make your piece interesting.

Make a rough copy of the score first, then do a neat one using a score writer on a computer.

Try to use imitation between parts, unison parts, changes in dynamics, accents etc. to make your music interesting.

If you wish, you can make the music a palindrome but this is not essential.

In your recording, you will get 3 other players to play along with you, so you will need 4 copies of your music.

Assignment D : Melody instrument based

BRIEF : To use 2 instruments OR voices in harmony in a piece of music lasting around 3 minutes. The music should be in at least two sections.

Your music may use unison notes, solos, harmony in 3rds, 6ths, or any other interval that works for you.

It should be in at least two sections. The 2nd section may be in a different key (minor?) or could have a different mood. The 1st section can come back at the end.

You should write out your music using manuscript paper if you can but it should be very clear for the person who is playing it with you. You could multi-track record the music, so that YOU are playing both the parts, but you will need to attend some recording sessions to do this. See your teachers if you want to do this.

You could also write a song with some simple chord backing and sing with harmonies on top of the chord sequence. Again, you could multi-track record the music.