

4 Composing Tasks for GCSE

Teacher's notes

Each sheet contains a composing task which pupils can be set. These can be treated as short exercises in musical composition or, as longer term projects.

You may, depending on your space and resourcing, decide to set your class to work on all four tasks at once. For example, a class of 24 pupils can be divided up into four groups of six pupils, rotating after 2 lessons on a task. This would be a sensible approach if access to computers and tuned percussion are limited.

All schools are different, so no one approach can be recommended above another, but wherever possible, all the tasks should be attempted by the pupils since they will gain a variety of different composing skills in these diverse tasks.

TASK A

This is a sequencer based task. You should load the provided MIDI file beforehand, since this contains the ground bass to be used in the composition. There is also a short example as a MIDI file provided. Any sequencer program will be suitable for this exercise.

TASK B

Guitars and a drum machine/keyboard auto rhythm are required for this task. This task will make pupils think about riffs on instruments other than the keyboard! Even pupils who have little or no knowledge of the guitar should be able to compose a simple riff starting on the E string.

Many different listening excerpts of commercial pop music are suitable for demonstrating guitar riffs.

This project would lend itself well to a group approach to composing.

TASK C

This is an untuned percussion composition exercise. Pupils should be encouraged to write a score using rhythmic elements appropriate to their ability. The rhythm flashcards in the teacher support materials are useful for revising these.

TASK D

This is a tuned percussion composition exercise, but keyboards may be used. This teaches pupils about harmonic composition using the interval of the 3rd and the 6th.

Task A

In this task, you will learn how to develop music from a simple theme.
For this task you will need a sequencer program on a computer.

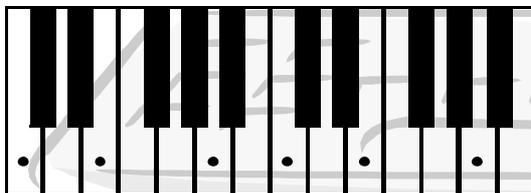
1. Load the file called *taskA*. This is a pattern of notes set to a drum beat.
It has 3 beats in the bar.

The chords used in this pattern are :

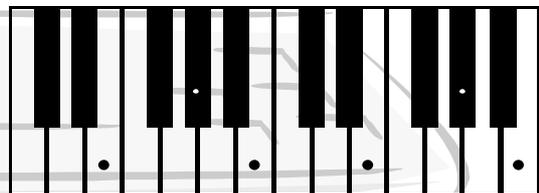
Am // | E // | Am // | G // | C // | G // | Am // | E // |

2. Using the sequencer, develop this idea using **ONLY THESE CHORDS**. Here are some ideas :

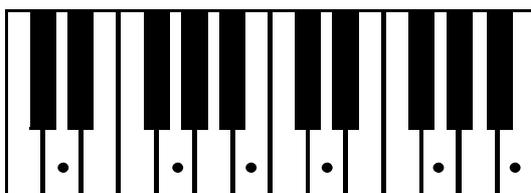
- a) Start with just the bass part
- b) Develop the rhythm part a little– don't make it too unsubtle though!
- c) Stretch each chord out so they last for **two** bars each
- d) Experiment with a melody. This **can** use notes not in the chord.



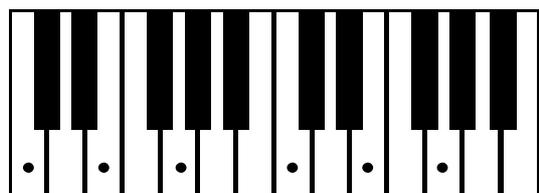
Am chord



E chord



G chord



C chord

Task B

In this task, you will learn how to compose riff based music on guitars and bass guitar.

For this task, you will need a guitar and a drum machine, or automatic rhythm on a keyboard.

1. Make up a short pattern of notes starting with the bottom (low sounding) E string. Don't think about rhythm for now, just concentrate on the notes.
2. Now make your pattern more interesting by repeating some notes and thinking more about the rhythm.
3. Now you have a 1st section for your music. Decide how many times you are going to repeat this. Try to play it in time to the drum beat.
4. Repeat the whole process and make up a 2nd section. This time, you don't have to start on the bottom E.
5. Finally, organise the sections of music you have. Maybe you will decide to play the 1st section again at the end, and put a special ending to the music.

Task C

In this task, you will learn how to compose music for a percussion group. You will use proper notation for this task.

Firstly, look at the example score provided below and play the 4 different parts one at a time. This is a *rhythm palindrome*. This means it is a mirror image after the 4th bar.

In your own music, you can use any rhythms you like, including syncopations if you want to put them in.

Your music should be 32 (bars long and should be a palindrome (16 bars then a palindrome of those 16 bars)). Write out your score in full and perform it with others in your class. Don't forget dynamics!

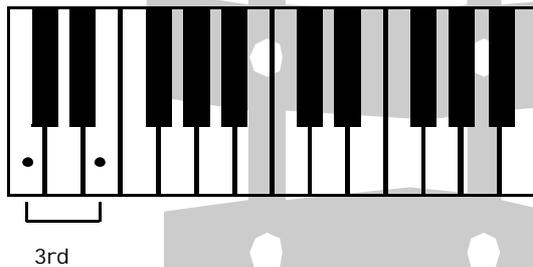
The musical score is presented in two systems, each with four staves. The first system contains 4 bars, and the second system contains 4 bars, with a measure rest in the first bar of the second system. The notation uses percussion-specific symbols: vertical lines for accents, horizontal lines for rolls, and various note values (quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes) with stems. Dynamics are indicated by *f* (forte) and *p* (piano). The score is a rhythm palindrome, meaning the second system is a mirror image of the first system around the 4th bar.

Task D

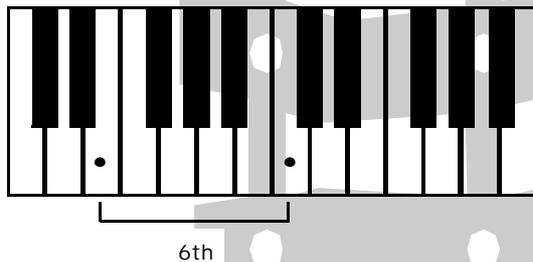
In this task you will learn about composing melodies in harmony, using 3rds and 6ths.

For this task you will need a tuned percussion instrument or a keyboard.

Try playing some notes in 3rds. This means you play two notes with a gap between them. Look at this example :



Now do the same with 6ths. This means you play two notes which have a gap of 6 notes between them. Look at this example :



Compose a melody using a mixture of 3rds and 6ths which has two sections. The 2nd section should contrast with the 1st.

Try to write down the notes you use.