

COMPOSITION ASSIGNMENT

General ideas for starting a musical composition:

Start your composition with one of these compositional elements: melody, harmony, bass line, rhythm.

Start with whatever you imagine/hear first, or what is your first source of inspiration.

Listen to recordings you like and try to take influence from them without blatantly copying.

STEP 1) Pick a major or minor key (or mode) and acquaint yourself with the key signature and scale. Also familiarize yourself with the primary triads & 7th Chords (I or i, IV or iv, & V or V7). *More advanced composers can explore the 7th chords for primary triads and secondary chords (secondary chords are ii, iii, vi, vii etc)*

STEP 2) Choose one of the below elements to begin your composition (Melody, Harmony, Bass line, Rhythm). Go with whatever you 'hear' first.

MELODY

Intuitive Approach-

Familiarize yourself with the sound of a chosen key/mode then imagine a short melody in your mind and try hum or sing it (make sure you're humming/singing in key). Try to make your melody one that can easily be repeated and developed like a reoccurring motif (approx 3-8 notes). Then find the notes you're humming on a keyboard or other instrument. You've probably already imagined the rhythm for your melody so now try to notate that, then add your notes to it. If you're not already hearing a rhythm for your melody, imagine one now. Then write it out, and assign your notes to it. Use notes from primary chords and start and end with notes from the I or i chord at first.

OR

Theoretical Approach-

Compose a melody using the following suggestions for selecting your pitches and a simple rhythm you come up with on your own;

- After picking a key/mode use notes from its primary triads and/or 7th chords (chord tones). *Make note of where you used what triad/chord so when you harmonize your melody you know what chord you can use where.*
- Use notes from the chord scales creating passing tones in between chord tones.
- Write a melody that emphasizes chord extension tones (Tension Tones).

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Jazz Composition MUS-198

Other rules; be careful with the 4th scale degree with chords containing a major 3rd (Major or Dominant chords for example). It needs to resolve by step (not leap) to the 3rd or 5th unless you are harmonizing with the IV triad, V7, ii minor or 7 diminished chords.

Other thoughts: Try to imagine a melodic curve for your melody, for example: the contour of a hill, valley, a staircase-ascending verses descending, gradual verses-rapid incline/decline etc.

HARMONY-

Using common Jazz chord progressions (or song forms i.e. blues or rhythm changes) Create a harmonic sequence at least 12 bars long. Make the harmony modulate into a closely related key at least once and a foreign key at least once.

Or

Create your own chord progression using Primary 7th (or 6th) chords of a chosen major (or minor) key. The piece can also be modal. *More advanced composers can explore the 7th chords for secondary chords too.*

Often it's best to start and finish with the I chord.

Now using chord tones, tension tones and scale tones (as passing tones or approach tones see pg-xvi Pease book) write a melody.

BASS PART

Pick a key, mode or chord progression. Imagine a melody that emphasizes the roots and 5ths of your key/mode/chord progression. Try to establish a groove that will form a solid rhythmic and harmonic foundation for a melody. While emphasizing the root (1st degree) is key, advanced composers can explore use of the 3rd and 7th chord degrees and other scale degrees, passing tones, etc also.

RHYTHM

Imagine a rhythmical figure (for any instrument, not just drums/percussion) that could be a spring-board for you composition.

Terms:

Primary Chords I (i), IV (iv) and V (V7b9)

Secondary Chords ii (ii min7b5), iii (III), vi (VI), vii min7 b5 (vii°)

Foreign Keys are keys that have more than one accidental in difference to the original key.

Closely related keys are keys that have one or less accidentals in difference to the original key.

Chord Extension Tones or Tension Tones can be found by stacking thirds above a chords 7th degree.