

MUSIC IN
THE ROUND 

STUDENT RESOURCE PACK 2025-6



WECOMPOSE (KS3)

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WELCOME

Hello and thank you for being part of We Compose, a project run by Music in the Round.

This project is all about you making new music. Through taking part in this project, we hope that you'll broaden your understanding of different styles of music, you'll learn new tips and tricks for how composers create music, you'll discover things you didn't know about instruments you may be unfamiliar with, and most importantly we hope have loads of fun throughout all of this!

Before we begin, here is a set of guidelines that together make up your composition brief:

- Your challenge is to compose a brand-new, original piece for **string quartet**. That's 2 violins, a viola and a cello, plus a clarinet.
- Your piece can be up to 3 mins in length and be in any style you like.
- Your piece will be inspired by one of the four pieces of key repertoire 'Death & the Maiden' by Franz Schubert, Quartet No.8 by Dmitri Shostakovich, Strum by Jessie Montgomery or Tuggemo by Anna Meredith. You can refresh your memory of these four pieces in the performances by the Consone Quartet at musicintheround.co.uk/resources/string-quartet-repertoire-video-playlist or follow the link on the front of this pack to watch films about the techniques used by those composers that you might like to try out.
- Your new piece will be created in small groups.

Now, we're not leaving you in the lurch with this. You'll get support creating your piece from your teacher, a bank of videos and paper resources we've created (including this pack and the things we link to here), and also a professional composer who will come and visit you in your school.

Later in the school year once your pieces are complete, you'll attend a culmination day where your final piece will be workshopped with a professional **string quartet**, performed and recorded.

We can't wait to work with you and hear what you create. So, let's get started...

P.S. You may have already noticed that some of the words are **this colour**. That means they appear in the glossary at the back of this booklet which you will find on page 30.

Choose a piece of Key Repertoire that inspires you and use these pages to make notes it while you listen to the recording.

Composer:

Title:

Date of composition:

Instruments:

1. What words would you use to describe this piece?
Does it convey a particular mood or feeling? (Write your words below)

2. Describe the musical decisions the composer has made about the **dynamics**, **harmony**, **melody** etc in this piece, writing down your thoughts in each bubble. How does each musical decision convey the mood or feeling of the piece? (Write your ideas under each heading).

RYTHM

TEMPO

MELODY

HARMONY & TONALITY

TEXTURE

DYNAMICS

FORM

What can you discover about the context of this piece?

What inspired it? What circumstances was it written in? What pieces was it written to be similar -- or different -- to?

How were the different instruments used within this piece?

What do you like about this piece?

Try to be as specific as possible

What do you dislike about this piece?

It's OK not to like it! Try to be as specific as possible

Did you notice any contrasting moments in the piece?

Overall, how does this music make you feel?

When you are composing, what could you take from this piece?

PLANNING YOUR PIECE – CHOOSING YOUR INSPIRATION PIECE

The project will launch at a presented concert, where the String Quartet will perform all of the four key string quartet pieces. Following this, your group will need to decide which piece you will use as the inspiration for your own music before they start composing. To help with this, we suggest that you listen to the pieces again and answer the following questions:

1. How did the music make you feel?

2. Were there any moments you particularly liked/disliked? Why?

3. What words would you use describe the following elements of music in the piece:

- Melody

- Rhythm

- Dynamics

- Tempo

- Tonality/ mood

- Texture

- Form

4. How did these help express the mood or feeling in the music?

5. How were the different instruments used throughout the piece?

6. Did you notice any contrasting moments in the piece? How was this music different?

7. Circle or underline any words from this page you want to explore in your piece. What are the most important ones?

8. Are there any other techniques you want to use in your piece? Please write them here.

TEMPO

One of the first decisions you can make about your piece is what **tempo** (speed) it should be. Which one of these words suits the mood or energy of the piece you want to create? Or a different word of your own choosing? You can add this information to your score or Garageband/ Logic file.

adagio (slow) ♩ = 66-76	allegro (fast) ♩ = 120-168	maestoso (majestically)	risoluto (bold, strong)
agitato (agitated)	energico (energetic)	moderato ♩ = 108-120	scherzando (playful, joking)
andante (at a walking pace) ♩ = 76-108	forza (force)	pesante (heavy)	tranquillo (calm)
animato (animated, lively)	largo (slow) ♩ = 48-56	presto (fast) ♩ = 168-200	triste, tristamente (sad, sorrowful)
	leggiero (light or nimble)	prestissimo (as fast as possible)	

RHYTHM

Composers combine different **rhythms** to make patterns or **phrases** that help them express the mood of their piece

1. In your chosen **tempo**, have a go at creating a series of 2-bar **rhythms** (or 4-bar/ 8-bar **rhythms** if you feel a longer **rhythmic** statement would suit your piece better) that suit the mood or the energy of your piece. Each time, have a go at featuring:
 - a combination of quavers and semiquavers
 - dotted **rhythms**
 - triplets
 - syncopated **rhythms**
 - repeated **rhythms**
 - a variety of different **rhythms**
 - rests
 - a combination of these
2. Which one(s) of your experiments suits your piece? Keep editing your **rhythm** until you have something that you like, or that suits the mood and energy of your piece.
3. Does this **rhythm** feel like something that would be good for a **melody**, a bass line, an inside **texture**, an **ostinato**, or something else? Choose which instrument in the **quintet** should play this **rhythm**, then **notate** it on the score (pto). You can add pitches later.
4. Consider these questions, and annotate your score accordingly:
 - What word would you use to describe the character of this **rhythm**?
 - How is this instrument playing this **rhythm**? Loudly/ softly? High in it's register/ low in it's register? If it's a string instrument is it pizzicato/ **arco**? Take a look at the Idiomatic Techniques pages, starting on p.15 for inspiration.
 - What happens at the same time as this **rhythm**? Which other instruments are playing? What role do they have? Draw this in, or describe it in words.
 - How many times do we hear this **rhythm** before a variation or something completely different?
 - Remember to put your **tempo** marking at the top of the score.

This image shows a musical score template for four instruments: Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Cello. Each instrument part is represented by a five-line staff. The Violin 1 and Violin 2 staves use a treble clef, while the Viola and Cello staves use an alto clef. The staves are arranged vertically, with Violin 1 at the top, followed by Violin 2, Viola, and Cello at the bottom. Each staff has a dashed line above it and a dotted line below it, indicating the range of the instrument. The labels 'Violin 1', 'Violin 2', 'Viola', and 'Cello' are positioned below their respective staves.

CHOOSING A SCALE

Scales and **modes** are collections of pitches that composers often use when composing melodies. It's important that the choices you make about which **scale** or mode to use reflect the mood you want to create for the listener. To help with this, take a look at the table below which provides information on some different **scales** and modes, the pitches they use and the mood they can help create:

Scale	Example	Mood
Major	C major: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, (C)	Happy, uplifting
Minor	D minor: - D, E, F, G, A, Bb, C, (D)	Sad, more reflective
Harmonic Minor	D harmonic minor - D, E, F, G, A, Bb, C#, (D)	Scary, haunting
Aeolian Mode	C, D, Eb, F, G, Ab, Bb, (C)	Melancholic, emotional. Used in rock an pop.
Whole Tone	C, D, E, F#, G#, A#	Dreamy
Blues	D, F, G, G#, A, C, (D)	Jazzy
Chromatic	All of the pitches!	Free-falling, exciting
Major Pentatonic	D, E, F#, A, B	Joyful, used a lot in folk music
Minor Pentatonic	D, E, F, A, C	Used in rock and folk music
Phrygian Mode	C, Db, Eb, F, G, Ab, Bb, (C)	Middle Eastern, Spanish, flamenco feel
Lydian Mode	C, D, E, F#, G, A, B, (C)	A more dreamy, exotic and futuristic feel

Tonal music...

...is written using a **major** or **minor scale**.

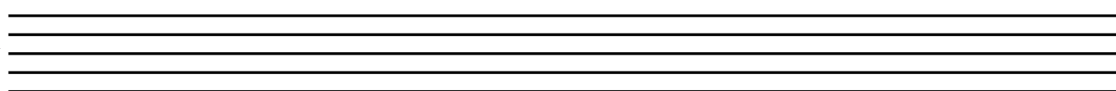
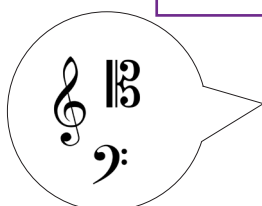
Modal music...

... is music written using a mode.

Atonal music...

...is music written outside of a particular **scale** or mode. Composers who write atonal music often choose their own set of pitches that they will use for the composition.

1. Write down the notes of your **scale** here:



2. Assign pitches from your chosen **scale** to one of the **rhythms** you notated in the previous activity.

HARMONY – BUILDING A PALETTE OF CHORDS

1. Write down each note in your chosen **scale** against the corresponding number in the ‘**Triad**’ column below. Example 1 shows one we started in C **major**.

2. Complete the ‘**Triad**’ column and write down the other letter names that make up the **triad chord** built from the starting note in each row. Example 2 shows some **triads** in C **major**.

*TIP: To build the **triad**, you take the note you have written in the grid, miss the next one in the **scale** out, take the next, miss the next one, and take the next.*

		Triad
Tonic	1	
-----	2	
-----	3	
-----	4	
Dominant	5	
-----	6	
-----	7	

Dissonance	
Dissonance	
Dissonance	

3. (Extension task) Create some **dissonant chords** for the ‘**dissonance**’ grid by either:
- Choosing a note from your **scale** and counting up one jump on a keyboard - a **semitone**
 - Choosing a note from your **scale** and counting up six jumps on a keyboard - a **tritone**
 - Playing a **triad** from an **unrelated scale**, and combining it with a **triad** from your grid. TIP There is some advice on finding **unrelated scales** in the ‘Closely **related keys**’ section of this pack. Example 5 show some **chords** created the starting point of C **major**
4. (Extension task) Finish labelling each **chord** on the dotted lines. Use “How to label **chords**...” on page 27 to help you.

BUILDING A PALETTE OF CHORDS – EXAMPLES

Example 1 in C major - completing the grid with notes from your scale

	Triad
1	C
2	D
3	E

Example 2 in C major - building triads from notes in your grid

	Triad
1	C, E, G
2	D, F, A
3	E
4	F, A, C
5	G, B, D
6	A
7	B

Example 3 in C major - creating dissonance from a starting point of C major

Dissonance	B, C
Dissonance	C, G#
Dissonance	D, F, A, B, D#, F#

HARMONY – CREATING HARMONIC PROGRESSIONS

1. Create some **chord progressions** by organising the **triads** from your grid into different orders. Your teacher can advise you on how many **chords** should be in each progression (4, 8 or another number).

Here's some prompts to pick and choose from after you've experimented yourself, too.

- Create a **chord progression** that starts on **chord 1**.
- Create a **chord progression** where the final **chords** is 5.
- Create a **chord progression** where the final **chords** are 5 and then 6.
- Create a **chord progression** where the final **chords** are 5 and then 1.
- Create a **chord progression** that includes **chord 2**.
- Create a variation on one of your progressions by changing one or more **chords**.
- Create a **chord progression** that sounds like a particular moment in your piece, e.g. tense, joyful, revelation, confrontation, etc.

Use this space to sketch out some progressions.

Your teacher can advise you how to write them out.

E.g. this progression can be written as **1 5 6 4**

or

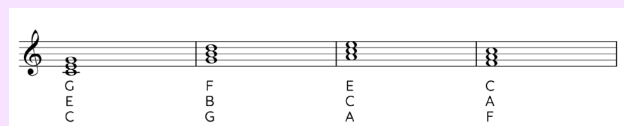
or **C - G - Am - F**

or **I V vi IV**

or **G - D - E - C**

E - B - C - A

C - G - A - F



INVERSIONS & VOICE LEADING

1. Choose at least two **chord progressions** that you like, or that suit the mood and energy of your piece. In pencil, write each progression out into a grid below, so that each **triad** fills a column. For example,

G	D	E	C
E	B	C	A
C	G	A	F

2. For each progression above, rearrange the notes in each column so that when you read across left to right, each row moves by as small a jump as possible. Aim that in two of the rows, the notes either stay the same or move by one step only. For example

G	G	A	A
E	D	E	C
C	B	C	F

Answering the following questions will help you make decisions about how your harmonic progressions will be arranged into the **ensemble**:

- Assign each row to a member of the **ensemble**. Take a look at the Idiomatic Techniques section to understand a bit more about the different roles of the **ensemble**.
- Decide how often the **chord** will change - quickly or slowly. Will this be once every bar, twice every bar, once every two bars, something else? Experiment and decide what suits the mood and energy of your piece.
- Give your accompaniment a rhythm. Perhaps this will come from your ideas on page 9, or perhaps you will create a new rhythm now.

You could notate these in the manuscript at the back of this pack, or directly into the computer.

IDIOMATIC TECHNIQUES

We have a variety of video resources. We recommend watching:

- Introducing the Instruments of a String Quartet musicintheround.co.uk/resources/composing-techniques-introducing-the-string-quartet/

There are other useful videos that you will find in the Student Resource Hub. You will find this from the QR code on the front of this pack.

A **string quartet** is made up of 2 violins, a viola and a cello.

Writing for String Quartet

The **string quartet** covers a wide range of pitches from the cello being able to play very low, the violins being able to play very high, and the viola being the filling in the middle of this musical sandwich!

There are things that all the instruments in a **string quartet** can do for example they can all play the strings with a bow (**arco**), or by plucking the strings with their fingers (**pizzicato**). Remember, each of the instruments in a **string quartet** has a unique sound quality and the decisions you make for how each of the instruments are used will affect the overall mood of the music.

Answering the following questions will help you write music that is particularly suited to this **ensemble**.

- Who will play the melodies?
- Who will play the bass lines?
- Do the melodies happen high/ low/ mid in the instruments' range?
- Are any **chords** spread out across the instruments?
- Will there be any pizzicato moments?
- Will the piece start loudly or quietly?
- Will all of the instruments start at the same time?

The diagram illustrates the pitch ranges for the four instruments in a string quartet. It shows four staves: Vln. 1, Vln. 2, Vla., and Vc. Each staff has a treble clef (except for the cello which has a bass clef). A solid purple arrow labeled 'comfortable range' points from the middle of the staff to the top line. A dotted purple arrow labeled 'extreme range' points from the top line to the top of the staff. The top of the staff is marked '8va'.

Middle C



Violin



Viola



Cello



MELODY

Once you've chosen a **scale** for your piece there are lots of ways you can start to compose a **melody**.

- You might improvise with different patterns from your chosen **scale** perhaps on your instrument or with your voice.
- Or, you could use a game or strategy to choose a limited set of pitches from your **scale** and arrange them into an order that you like.
- Or, if you have a particular idea for a **rhythm** you might try to apply different pitches from your **scale** to this **rhythm** to create a **melody**.
- Or, you could experiment with different jumps between the pitches in your **scale**. These are called melodic intervals and can help evoke a particular mood or energy for your piece. The table below might help you get started.

SEMITONES	NAME	CHARACTER	IN C	SONG EXAMPLE
0	Unison	Pure	C-C	<u>Twin-kle</u> , Twinkle, Little Star
1	Minor 2 nd	Tense	C-C#/D ^b	<i>Jaws</i> theme
2	Major 2 nd	Open	C-D	<u>Frè-re</u> Jacques
3	Augmented 2 nd / Minor 3 rd	Sad	C-D#/E ^b	<u>I'm</u> Bad (Michael Jackson)
4	Major 3 rd	Happy	C-E	<u>Oh, When</u> the Saints
5	Perfect 4 th	Strong	C-F	<u>A-mazing</u> Grace
6	Augmented 4 th / Diminished 5 th	Unsettling	C-F#/G ^b	<i>The Simpsons</i> theme
7	Perfect 5 th	Powerful	C-G	Twin- <u>kle</u> , <u>Twin-kle</u> , Little Star
8	Augmented 5 th / Minor 6 th	Melancholy	C-G#/A ^b	<u>Close</u> <u>Ev-ery</u> Door to Me (Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat)
9	Major 6 th	Bright	C-A	<u>My</u> <u>Bonnie</u> Lies over the Ocean
10	Minor 7 th	Longing	C-B ^b	Somewhere (<i>West Side Story</i>)
11	Major 7 th	Tense	C-B	Take On Me <i>opening notes</i> (A-ha)
12	Octave	Complete	C-C'	<u>Some-where</u> Over the Rainbow

1. Write out some initial ideas for your **melody** using the manuscript at the back of this pack. These might be short statements or longer ideas made up of a few **phrases**, like different clauses in a long sentence. Your **melody** should start on a note from the **tonic** column in the **Harmony** grid you created on page 11.
2. Try out a few different endings for your **melody**, ending on notes from the dominant column and other **chords** in your **Harmony** grid. Which one do you like the most, and do you think your **melody** is 'complete', or does it need an answer (as if the first part was a question), or a subclause? Keep composing until you feel like you have a completed **melody**.
3. Create 4-8 variations on your **melody** in the manuscript at the back of this pack or on your computer. For each variation, choose one of a set of transformation techniques over the page (or as an extension, create a variation or two by combining techniques from different sets).

Transformation Techniques: Set One

- Alter the original **melody** by changing some of the intervals - perhaps making the distance between two of the notes bigger or smaller. Choose whether the following notes move too or not.

Have a look at this example. A 4-bar melodic idea has been repeated, but on the 2nd time the intervals between the 1st and 2nd, and 4th and 5th notes are bigger - the **melody** is reaching upwards.



The notes following this stretch have moved too, preserving the stepwise movement downwards, before it returns to the original.



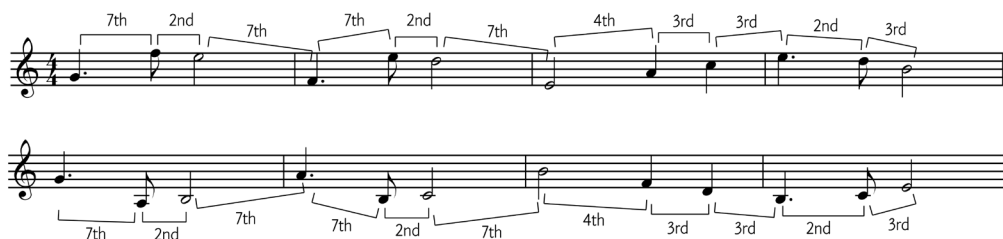
- Treat the **melody** as a **sequence**, repeating it but moving the whole **melody** up or down in pitch - how does this shift change the mood of the music?



- Use these ideas in combination - **sequence** the **melody** first, then on the second time, change some of the intervals. You could also change the **rhythm** for the moment you have changed the intervals, making it even more obvious to the listener that something has changed.

Transformation Techniques: Set Two

- You could invert some or all of the original **melody**. You could keep the **rhythms** the same (for a true **inversion**) or change them to create new material.



- Some or all of the **melody** could be played backwards (**retrograde**).
- You could use these two ideas in combination.

Transformation Techniques: Set Three

- Add some additional notes into a **motif** or melodic **phrase**, perhaps in the middle or at the end.

Cello  *ff* furious!

Anna Meredith, Tuggemo, Bar 35

Cello  *Anna Meredith, Tuggemo, Bar 36*

- Alternatively, take some notes away from a **motif** or melodic **phrase** (perhaps turning a 6-note **motif** into a 4-note **motif**).

Transformation Techniques: Set Four

- Put the whole **melody** into a different instrument.
- Imitate the **melody** in a different instrument.



Dmitri Shostakovich, Quartet No. 8 in C minor, Movement 2, Bars 62-68

- Put the **melody** in a different octave.
- Play the **melody** using a different playing technique or using different articulation.
- Use these ideas in combination.

Answering the following questions will help you decide how your **melody** will be arranged into the wider **structure** of your piece.

- The first time we hear the **melody**, does it build up or is it fully formed?
- Is the **melody** repeated exactly straight away, or will you immediately introduce a variation?
- How many versions of the **melody** will be one after the other before a new idea is introduced?
- What else could change in the **texture** if the **melody** is repeated exactly?
- In a **structure** of repeating melodies, melodic variations and change/ new ideas, will the harmonic progression repeat, be varied, or change?

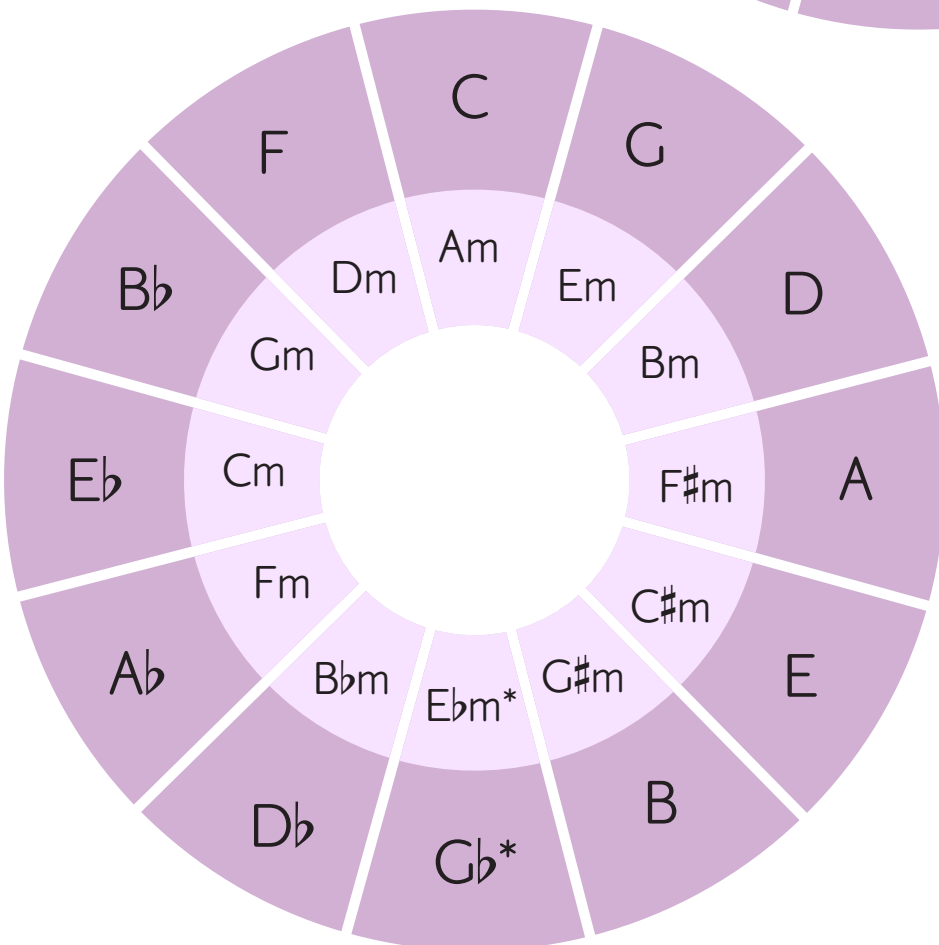
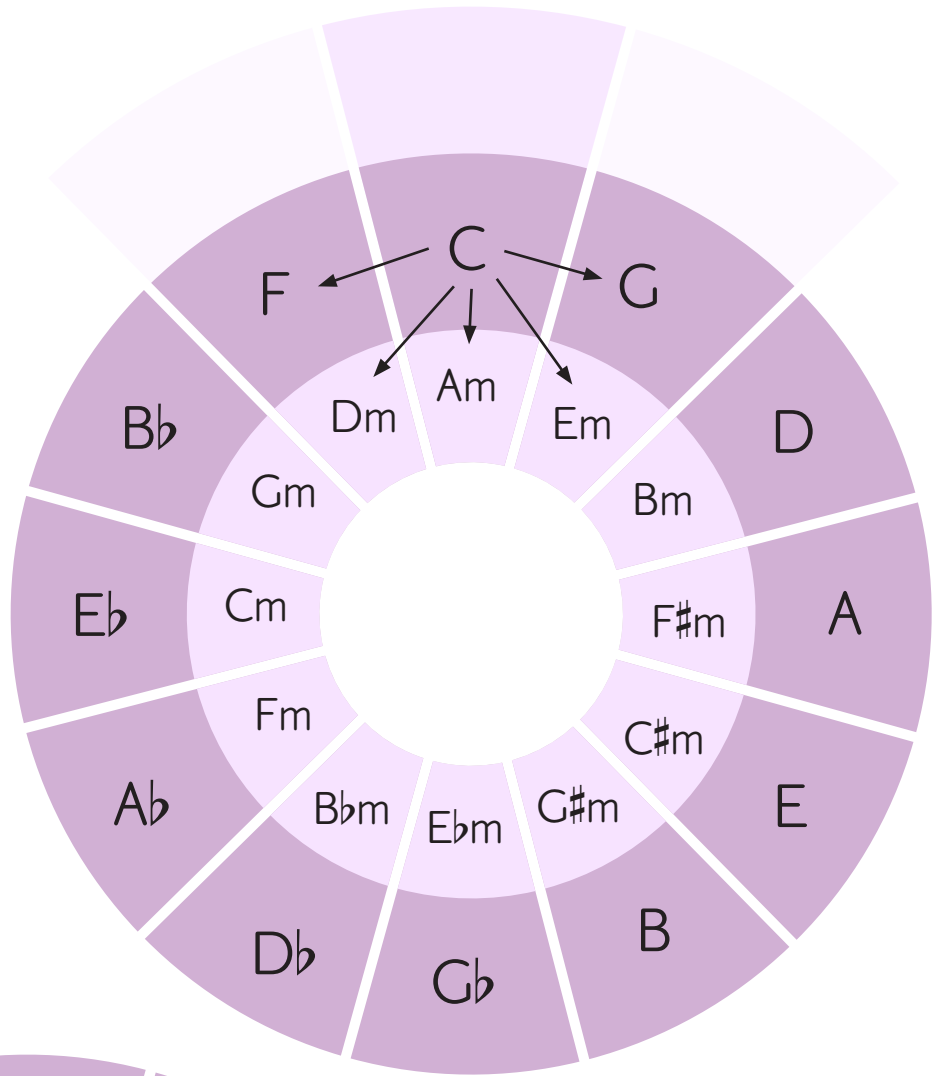
MODULATION & CLOSELY RELATED KEYS

When composers modulate from their original **key** to a new **key**, they often modulate to a closely **related key**.

You can use a diagram called the circle of fifths to help you identify the 5 closely **related keys** to your original **key**.

The closely **related keys** are always next to, or diagonally adjacent to your original **key**.

So, if your original **key** is C **major**, the 5 closely **related keys** are F **major**, D **minor**, A **minor**, G **major** and E **minor**.



1. To find your closely **related keys**:

- a) Circle your original key on the diagram
- b) Draw arrows to the **keys** directly next to, or diagonally adjacent to, your original **key**.



2. Choose one of your five closely **related keys** that would like to modulate to.

a) Write the name of this **key** here:

--

b) Write the notes of it's **scale** here (don't forget about any sharps or flats!):

--

3. Write down the **triads** of your original **key** and your modulating **key**:

a) Write each note of the **scale** in the left column. Start from the first note of the **scale** and don't forget about any sharps or flats!

b) Write each **triad** in the right column

c) Write out the **triads** on the staff

ORIGINAL KEY	MODULATION KEY

4. Identify the **triads** that are the same in the original **key** and the modulation **key** and write them in the PIVOT CHORDS table on the next page.

These are called pivot **chords** because you can use them to move fluidly between the two **keys** (as the **chords** belong to both **keys**).

5. Identify the **triads** that only belong to the modulating **key** and write them in the MODULATING CHORDS table on the next page.

These are called modulating **chords** because they establish that we have moved away from the original **key**.

PIVOT CHORDS

MODULATING CHORDS

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Cello

This image shows a musical score template for four instruments: Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Cello. Each instrument part is represented by a five-line staff. The Violin 1 and Violin 2 staves are positioned at the top of the page, while the Viola and Cello staves are positioned at the bottom. Each staff begins with a treble clef (for Violin 1 and Violin 2) or a bass clef (for Viola and Cello). The staves are connected by a horizontal line at the bottom. The page is otherwise blank, with no musical notation or notes present.

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Cello

This image shows a musical score template for four instruments: Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Cello. Each instrument part is represented by a five-line staff. The Violin 1 and Violin 2 staves are positioned at the top of the page, while the Viola and Cello staves are positioned at the bottom. Each staff begins with a clef: Violin 1 and Violin 2 use treble clefs, Viola uses an alto clef, and Cello uses a bass clef. The staves are connected by a horizontal brace at the bottom. The page is otherwise blank, with no musical notation or notes present.

Clarinet in B \flat

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

The image shows five empty musical staves for a string quartet and clarinet. From left to right, the staves are labeled: Clarinet in B \flat , Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. Each staff has a clef: the Clarinet, Violin I, and Violin II staves use treble clefs; the Viola staff uses a C-clef (alto clef); and the Cello staff uses a bass clef. A horizontal brace is positioned below the Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello staves, indicating they are part of a single section.

CLASSICAL MUSIC NOTATION

Dynamics

Don't forget to tell the musicians how loud or quiet you want your music to be, particularly at the start of the piece and in any changes of mood or energy in your piece.

Use these common words and symbols:

pp pianissimo (very quiet)

p piano (quiet)

mp mezzo-piano ("half quiet")

mf mezzo-forte ("half loud")

f forte (loud)

ff fortissimo (very loud)

crescendo (get louder)

diminuendo (get softer)

Tempo words

Composers often use words at the start of their score to help musicians know what speed to play the piece at.

Here's some **tempo** words you might want to use (but you can make up your own too):

adagio (slow)

agitato (agitated)

andante (at a walking pace)

animato (animated, lively)

allegro (fast)

energico (energetic)

forza (force)

leggiero (light or nimble)

maestoso (majestically)

pesante (heavy)

presto (fast)

prestissimo (as fast as possible)

risoluto (bold, strong)

scherzando (playful, joking)

tranquillo (calm)

triste, tristamente (sad, sorrowful)

How to label chords...

Each note of the **scale** has a special name:

1st note	Tonic
2nd note	Supertonic
3rd note	Mediant
4th note	Subdominant
5th note	Dominant
6th note	Submediant
7th note	Leading note

These names are also used to label **triads** that are built from these notes (apart from the **triad** created from the 7th note which is called the **subtonic**). Use this information to label your **chords** on page 11.

Sometimes composers use roman numerals to number their **chords**. For example a **triad** created from the 1st note of the **scale** is labelled as I or **i** and a **triad** created from the 3rd note of the **scale** is labelled **III** or **iii**. Composers use UPPERCASE ROMAN NUMERALS (e.g. I or **III**) when the **chord** is a **major triad**, and lowercase roman numbers (e.g. **i** or **iii**) when the **chord** is a **minor triad**. Here's an example of how to label **chords** with roman numerals:

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble clef staff contains seven chords: C, Dm, Em, F, G, Am, and B°. The bass clef staff contains seven notes: C, D, E, F, G, A, and B. Below the bass clef staff, the chords are labeled with Roman numerals: I, ii, iii, IV, V, vi, and vii.

NOTATING RHYTHMS & RHYTHM EXAMPLES

	1	2	3	4
Semibreve (4 beats each)	○			
Minim (2 beats each)	♪		♪	
Crotchet (1 beat each)	♪	♪	♪	♪
Quaver (1/2 beat each)	♪♪	♪♪	♪♪	♪♪
Semiquaver (1/4 beat each)	♪♪♪♪	♪♪♪♪	♪♪♪♪	♪♪♪♪

Dotted rhythms

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Triplets (and some ways to develop them)

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Syncopation

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Setting up a repeating pattern with rests

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Setting up a repeating pattern with rests

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

...but starting the pattern part-way through

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

GLOSSARY

This glossary includes all the terms used in the Composing Inspiration and Composing Techniques videos, as well as some other common musical terms which you may find useful in creating your piece and describing it, as well as including some ideas you might like to try out.

ACCELERANDO

(shortened to accel.) An instruction to gradually increase the tempo, or speed, of the music.

ADAGIO

A tempo marking indicating a slow and stately pace (literally, “at ease”).

ALLEGRO

A tempo marking indicating a fast, quick, and bright tempo.

ARCO

An instruction for a string instrument (like a violin) to play with the bow, creating a smooth, sustained sound.

ARPEGGIO

Playing the notes of a chord one after another in a sweeping motion, rather than simultaneously.

BHANGRA

A lively, upbeat style of music and dance that originated in the Punjab region of India, often featuring energetic drum rhythms.

CADENCE

A sequence of chords that brings a musical phrase to a point of rest, like a punctuation mark at the end of a sentence (e.g., a “full stop” or a “comma”).

CALL AND RESPONSE

A musical conversation where one musician or group plays a phrase (the “call”) and another musician or group answers with a direct response.

CEILIDH

(pronounced KAY-lee) A social event with traditional folk music, dancing, and storytelling, originating from Ireland and Scotland.

CELLS

In music, a cell is a very short musical idea, often just a few notes, that is used as a building block to create a larger piece.

CHORD

A group of notes played together simultaneously. Chords provide the harmony and foundation that support a melody, creating the emotional landscape of a piece of music.

CHORD PROGRESSION

A sequence of chords (groups of notes played together) that forms the foundation of a piece of music, creating a sense of movement and structure.

CHORDAL

A term describing music that is built on or features chords, where notes are played together simultaneously.

CHROMATIC

Moving by the smallest steps possible in Western music (semitones), often creating a rich, colourful, or tense sound.

CLARINET QUINTET

A standard chamber ensemble consisting of a clarinet plus a string quartet (two violins, a viola, and a cello).

COL LEGNO

(pronounced kol LEN-yo) An instruction for a string player to strike the strings with the wooden stick of the bow, rather than the hair, creating a percussive, rattling sound.

CONSONANCE

A combination of notes that sounds stable, pleasant, and harmonious to the ear.

COUNTER-MELODY

A secondary melody that is played simultaneously with the main melody, complementing it and adding depth to the music.

CRESCENDO

A gradual increase in the loudness of the music.

DIATONIC

Notes that belong to a standard major or minor scale, creating a familiar and harmonious sound.

DIMINUENDO

A gradual decrease in the loudness of the music.

DISSONANCE

A combination of notes that sounds tense, clashing, or unstable, often used to create drama that then resolves into consonance.

DOMINANT

The fifth note of a major or minor scale, and the chord built upon this note. It has a very strong pull toward the Tonic chord, creating a sense of tension that needs to resolve, which helps define the key of a piece.

DRONE

A sustained or continuously repeated note, providing a constant harmonic background for a melody (e.g., the sound of bagpipes).

DYNAMIC

Relating to how loud or soft the music is.

ENSEMBLE

A group of musicians who perform together.

FORTE

(shortend to *f*) A dynamic marking meaning to play loudly or strongly.

GRIME

A style of electronic music that emerged from London, characterized by a fast, sharp beat and aggressive, rapid-fire lyrics.

HARMONY

The sound created when multiple notes are played at the same time, supporting and enriching the main melody.

HOMOPHONIC TEXTURE

A musical texture where one clear melody is supported by chordal accompaniment, and all parts generally move together in the same rhythm. (Compare with Polyphonic and Monophonic).

IMITATION

A technique where one musician or vocal part copies a musical phrase just played by another, creating an echoing effect.

INTERWEAVING

The layering of multiple independent melodies that fit together to create a complex musical texture, like threads in a fabric.

INVERSION

Changing the order of the notes in a chord, or flipping a melody upside down so it moves in the opposite direction.

KEY

The central set of notes that a piece of music is built on, which gives it a particular mood or feeling (e.g., a “happy” major key or a “sad” minor key).

LEADING NOTE

The seventh note of a major or minor scale. It is called “leading” because it lies just a semitone below the tonic and has a powerful tendency to resolve upwards to the tonic note, “leading” the music home.

LEGATO

An instruction to play notes smoothly and connected, with no silence between them.

MAJOR

A type of key or scale that is often described as sounding bright, happy, or triumphant. It is defined by a specific pattern of intervals between its notes.

MEDIANT

The third note of a major or minor scale. This note is crucial as it determines whether the scale and its key are major or minor, giving the music its characteristic happy or sad quality.

MELODY

A sequence of single notes that form the main, recognizable tune of a song.

MINOR

A type of key or scale that is often described as sounding sad, thoughtful, or mysterious. It is defined by a specific pattern of intervals, notably a minor third above the tonic.

MONOPHONIC TEXTURE

Music that has only a single melodic line with no harmony or accompaniment.

MOTIF

A short, recurring musical phrase or pattern that is significant to a piece, like a musical signature.

MOVEMENT

A self-contained section of a larger piece of music, like a chapter in a book.

MUSICOLOGIST

A scholar who studies music as a field of research, including its history, culture, and theory.

NOTEHEAD

The oval-shaped part of a written musical note.

OSTINATO

A short musical pattern (a rhythm or melody) that is repeated persistently throughout a section or whole piece of music.

PEDAL

A sustained or repeated note, usually in the lower part, that is held while the harmonies change above it.

PHRASE

A distinct musical unit, like a clause or sentence in language, that forms a complete musical thought. Phrases are often grouped together to form a melody.

PIANO

(shortened to *p*) A dynamic marking meaning to play softly and quietly.

PITCH

How high or low a note sounds.

PIZZICATO

An instruction for a string player to pluck the strings with their finger instead of using the bow.

POLYPHONIC TEXTURE

Music that combines two or more independent melody lines at the same time. (Compare with Homophonic and Monophonic).

PRESTO

A tempo marking indicating a very fast speed.

PULSE

The steady, underlying beat in music that you naturally tap your foot to.

RAGA

A pattern of notes in Indian classical music used as a framework for improvisation and composition, often creating a specific mood or time of day.

RELATED KEY

A key that shares a strong musical connection with the original (or “home”) key, typically because they have many of the same notes or chords in common. Modulating to a related key creates a smooth and natural sense of movement. The most common related keys are the Relative Major/Minor (which share the exact same key signature) and the Dominant (the key built on the fifth note of the scale).

RELATIVE MAJOR

The major key that shares the same key signature as a minor key. For example, C Major is the relative major of A Minor; both have no sharps or flats. The relative major is always a minor third above the tonic of the minor key.

RELATIVE MINOR

The minor key that shares the same key signature as a major key. For example, A Minor is the relative minor of C Major; both have no sharps or flats. The relative minor is always a minor third below the tonic of the major key.

RETROGRADE

A melody played backwards.

RHYTHM

The pattern of long and short sounds and silences in music that fits over the steady pulse.

RITARDANDO

(shortened to rit. or ritard.) An instruction to gradually slow down the tempo.

SCALE

A set of musical notes ordered by pitch, like a ladder of notes that a piece of music is based on.

SEMITONE

The smallest distance between two notes in Western music (e.g., from C to C# on a piano).

SEQUENCE

Repeating a melodic phrase at a higher or lower pitch.

STACCATO

An instruction to play notes in a short, sharp, and detached manner.

STRING QUARTET

A standard chamber ensemble consisting of two violins, a viola, and a cello. Also refers to a piece of music written for this group.

STRING TRIO

A chamber ensemble typically consisting of a violin, a viola, and a cello.

STRUCTURE

The overall plan or organization of a piece of music, such as its verse-chorus format.

SUBDOMINANT

The fourth note of a major or minor scale, and the chord built upon this note. It provides a harmonic movement away from the tonic, often acting as a stepping stone to the dominant chord.

SUBMEDIANT

The sixth note of a major or minor scale. It serves as the relative major's tonic in a minor key, and the relative minor's tonic in a major key, making it a pivotal note for modulations.

SUL PONTICELLO

An instruction for a string player to bow very near the bridge of the instrument, creating a thin, eerie sound.

SUL TASTO

(also called sulla tastiera) An instruction for a string player to bow over the fingerboard, far from the bridge, creating a soft, muted, and flutey sound.

SUPERTONIC

The second note of a major or minor scale. It often functions harmonically as a precursor to the dominant chord, helping to build tension in a progression.

TECHNO

A style of electronic dance music characterized by a repetitive, mechanical beat, often created with synthesizers and drum machines.

TEMPO

The speed of the music, how fast or slow the pulse is.

TEXTURE

A term describing how the different layers of sound in a piece of music interact, such as thin (a single melody) or thick (many instruments).

TIMBRE

(pronounced TAM-bre) The unique quality or “colour” of a sound that distinguishes one instrument or voice from another, even when they play the same note at the same volume (e.g., the difference between a trumpet and a violin playing the same C).

TONE (INTERVAL)

A distance between two notes equal to two semitones (or two frets on a guitar).

TONE (TECHNIQUE)

The sound quality or character of a musical note, produced by an instrument or voice. Also refers to a musician’s control over the quality and color of their sound.

TONIC

The first and most important note of a major or minor scale, also called the “keynote.” The chord built on this note is the Tonic Chord, which acts as the central point of rest and resolution in a piece of music, providing a sense of “home.”

TRAP

A style of hip-hop music originating from the Southern US, characterized by crisp, rapid hi-hats, heavy bass, and layered synthesizers.

TREMOLO

The rapid repetition of a single note or the rapid alternation between two notes, creating a trembling or shimmering effect.

TRIAD

A chord consisting of three notes: a root note, a third, and a fifth. It is the most basic form of harmony in Western music.

TRITONE

An interval spanning three whole tones (or six semitones), creating one of the most dissonant and unstable sounds in Western music. Historically nicknamed “the devil in music” (*diabolus in musica*), it creates a powerful sense of tension that strongly demands resolution, making it crucial in dominant seventh chords and for creating musical drama.

UNISON

When multiple musicians or singers play or sing the same pitch or melody at the same time.

UNRELATED KEY (also called Distant Key)

A key that has a weak musical connection to the original (or “home”) key, typically because they share very few of the same notes or chords. Modulating to an unrelated key creates a striking, dramatic, or surprising shift in the mood of the music.

WIND QUINTET

A standard chamber ensemble, also known as a woodwind quintet, typically consisting of a flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and French horn.

MUSIC IN THE ROUND

Music in the Round, 4th Floor, Sheffield Central Library, Surrey Street, Sheffield S1 1XZ

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