MUSIC IN THE ROUND

WECOMPOSE KS4 STRING QUARTET RESOURCE PACK

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The Commission Brief (KS4)

Welcome and thank you for being part of Music In The Round's 'We Compose' project for 2026/2027!

This project brings professional musicians and composers into your classroom to support your KS4 students as they develop composition skills with you.

The Commission

This year's commission is for your students to compose a brand-new piece of music for string quartet. We are anticipating that most students would like to use this as one of their GCSE composition pieces and therefore will need to work independently. Each piece can be up to 3 minutes in length and be written in any style that the students like.

A professional string quartet will launch the project with a presented concert, where they will perform four different pieces for this ensemble (2 violins, viola, cello), which could be used as inspiration for the student's own pieces.

Professional composers will also visit your school throughout the project to help support your students in their composition work. At the end of the project, a professional quartet will workshop your students' pieces and record them for use in their portfolios.

Timeline of the project

October 2026 Teachers' INSET session

Led by Patrick Bailey, Ellen Sargen and John Webb, this one-day training session is designed to bring teachers together for a practical workshop on teaching composition with KS4. Expect new ideas that will help you engage students of mixed abilities.

November 2026 Introductory concert

The Consone Quartet or the Phaedra Ensemble will perform an introductory concert for your students, introducing them to the instruments and key repertoire.

November 2026 - March 2027 Workshops with composers

Your school will be partnered with a professional composer. Over the course of three in-school visits, they will support your students to write pieces for string quartet. In between visits, we expect your students will keep working on their compositions in class.

March-April 2027 Deadline for scores

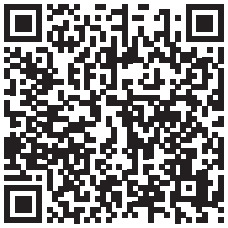
Send us your scores or DAW files and we will make these up into a set of parts for the string quartet. Please send notated scores as mxml files and DAW files as midi and mxml files by the deadline.

April-July 2027 Culmination day

At the end of the project, a professional string quartet will workshop then record your students' compositions in a culmination event at a local venue in your region. We will record each composition during the event.

Video resources linked in this pack

Composing Inspiration: Franz Schubert's String Quartet 'Death & the Maiden'
Composing Inspiration: Dmitri Shostakovich's 'String Quartet No. 8'
Composing Inspiration: Jessie Montgomery's 'Strum'
Composing Inspiration: Anna Meredith's 'Tuggemo'
Composition Techniques: Melody
Composition Techniques: Harmony
Composition Techniques: Texture
Composition Techniques: Rhythm & Metre
Composition Techniques: Modulation
Composition Techniques: Writing for String Quartet



Planning the project – progress checklist

After the INSET session

Please fill in the online Student Resource Pack with the students' first names and any accessibility requirements. This is an important tool for the project to run sucessfully. Please request this in an alternative format if needed.

Before the Introductory Concert

Introduce some tools for composition using our Melody and Harmony videos (with supporting resources in the Student Resource Pack). Develop our 'Starter Melody', composed by students last year, using Techniques in this pack. This is a chance to practice ways of composing, before students begin their WeCompose piece. We will show you how we would develop this melody in the Introductory Concert.

After the Introductory Concert

We recommend spending at least two more lessons as a class getting familiar with the Key Repertoire and the string quartet through our video resources:

- Use our Listening Guide on page 46 to revisit the Key Repertoire pieces so that students can take ownership of similar composition techniques in their own pieces. Watch our short videos about each of the Key Repertoire videos to learn more about these pieces and the techniques used.
- Watch our video on writing for string quartet. There are also videos on 'Melody' 'Harmony' 'Texture' 'Rhythm & Metre' and 'Modulation'. Remember that you and the students should come back to these films to help at different points in the project.

Before the first composer visit

- It is important that your students define a mood/ story/ energy for their piece before they start. You will have been thinking about these in relation to the Key Repertoire. Start thinking about this now and ask each student to fill out the 'Initial Questionnaire' in their 'Student Resource Pack' (see page 5) and make a plan for their piece using the activities in this pack. This will help your students make musical decisions throughout their entire project!
- Choose a route into the composition process (see next page) and aim to have spent a lesson on one of

these activities. It is unlikely the whole class will use the same route as their starting point as this will be dictated by their ideas for the mood/ energy or story of their piece.

- Students should use the 'Student Resource Pack' to help them keep track of the decisions they make.

Start with writing melodies/ ostinatos, on page 11

Start with Rhythm and Texture, on page 36

Start with harmony, on page 23

By the second visit...

Students have chosen a title or an emotion/mood for their piece, which has informed how their melody/harmonies have developed. Progress could look like:

- Students have developed melodic ideas that have a distinctive mood/ energy/ story. They have used techniques to develop their melody. They have a short section completed. They have also filled out the Harmony pages in their Student Resource Pack.
- Or, students have developed a strong melodic idea and have harmonised it, informed by the mood/ energy/ story they planned for their piece. They have started to think about the accommpaniment which has a defined rhythmic character and the student has started to organise this into the quartet texture or has filled out the texture pages in their Student Resource Pack.

- Having started composing harmonic progressions informed by the mood/ energy/story for their piece, students have now created a melody from their initial progressions. Their melody and harmony has been organised into a defined texture which enhances their mood/energy/story, or the student has filled out the Texture pages in their Student Resource Pack.
- Students have planned the harmonic progression for a large portion of their piece (necessarily thinking about structure and form). This is inspired by the mood/ energy/ story for their piece and they have begun organising their harmonic ideas into the quartet texture with a defined rhythmic character.

Before the third composer visit

Aim that all students are well underway with developing their melodic, harmonic and textural ideas. Start using the Checklist to review your work. All sections should be roughly sketched out and students have started to think more about writing idiomatically. Use our 'Idiomatic Writing Tips' - are the parts in the correct range for the instruments? Can the students write some dynamics, or indications about techniques? How do these additions enhance the mood/ energy of the piece? Does the piece reflect the mood and genre they are writing in? If they chose a title, does it still fit the piece?

After the third composer visit

Make a plan for what will be workshopped on the culmination day. If students will be ready to submit their full piece (1 minute to 3 minutes) that's great. If not, perhaps you could submit a single section or discuss with us what would be

most beneficial. Review the Checklist in your final lessons.

At the score deadline

Upload your scores, or other materials (such as DAW files) to the Submission Folder. Please send any scores in mxml format, so we can open them in Musescore or Sibelius. Please send any DAW files with their midi and mp3 exports, in case we have different software to you! Guides will be supplied for this process.

Before the 1st composer visit: Initial Questionnaire

Below are a series of questions for your students to consider before they start composing their piece. Spending time answering these questions will help provide content for your students' GCSE composition programme notes/ commentaries should they need to provide one. More importantly, it will help them to plan their piece and focus their ideas before they start composing.

When your students are composing, they can also reflect on their answers to these questions. This will help them determine whether the musical choices they are making fit their original intentions or not, and ultimately help them to create a more cohesive composition.

ACTION

Please ask your students to fill these questions out in the 'Initial Questionnaire' in the online Student Resource Pack.

1. What is the inspiration for your piece?

E.g. a memory or experience, a painting, the walk of a prisoner through a crowd of angry, fearsome onlookers…

2. Who is the intended audience and/or occasion for your piece?

E.g. a wedding ceremony, audience for contemporary music, children's concert

3. What mood/genre would best describe your idea?

E.g. sadness, anger, horror, romance/romantic, pop, classical, contemporary

4. What are your musical aims for the piece?

E.g. to write a tuneful piece that grows to a climax, to try composing in different time signatures, to explore use of dissonant harmony…

5. Did any of the set works inspire you? What was it about that piece you particularly liked?

6. What other pieces of music are you going to listen to, to help inform your piece?

7. How do you intend to compose for this piece?

E.g. compose ideas on your instrument and then translate these onto Sibelius, use Garageband or another DAW, try ideas out with other musicians in class…

A note on...
...pitch

Students will need to choose a collection of pitches for their composition. The pitches they choose should reflect the mood they want to express with their music.

Students might want to choose a particular major/ minor scale (tonal music), a particular mode (modal music), or they may want to make up their own pitch sets (atonal music).

Encourage them to explore the different soundworlds in various scales/ modes/ pitch sets. The table below gives some examples that the students might consider using. This table is also in their Student Resource Pack.

You can also download our Common Major/ Minor scales sheet to help students quickly identify the triads associated with these keys: https://musicintheround.co.uk/teacher-key-stage-4-string-quartet-resource-hub-wecompose

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
Phyrgian 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

...tempo

Watch our video on Rhythm & Metre to start off classroom conversations about tempo. One of the first decisions your students can make about their piece is what tempo it should be. The tempo of a piece is directly related to the expression of the piece and composers often use descriptive words, along with a bpm marking, to give musicians a really clear idea about what the music is about. The words below are found in the Student Resource Pack, but you can encourage students to come up with their own words to express the feeling or energy in their music.

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)

...rhythm
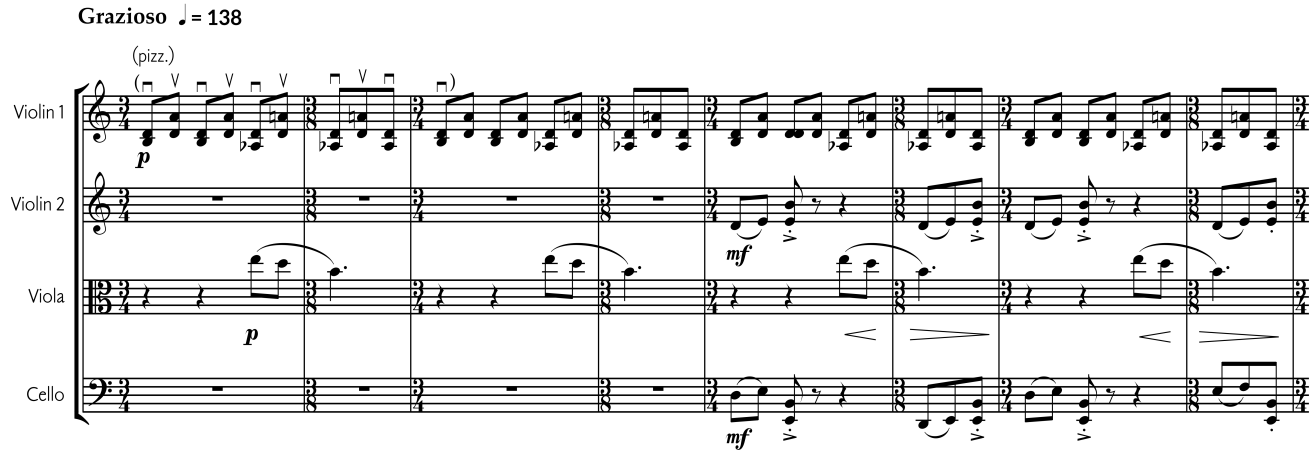
Challenge your students to think about what sorts of rhythms express the mood they want to create with their music and experiment with creating different rhythms and metres together as a class.

Explore the Key Repertoire in these films to learn about how these composers use rhythm (amongst other musical elements) to achieve particular moods or a particular energy in their music: https://musicintheround.co.uk/

Here's some different ways in which composers use rhythm:

- Create lilting or dance-like figures using dotted rhythms
- Blur the sense of strict pulse using crochet triplets or syncopation
- Create the feeling that energy is building by using rhythms that divide the beat further and further (e.g. quaver rhythms might develop into triplet or semiquaver rhythms).
- Create the feeling that energy is decreasing by using rhythms that gradually use fewer and fewer subdivisions (e.g. semiquaver rhythms might develop into quaver or crochet rhythms).
- Compose patterns of repeating rhythms and ostinatos to create a driving energy
- Make a feature of silence and rest!
- Use similar rhythms across a texture to create a sense of landscape or mass.
- Use distinctive rhythms with a solo instrument to the rest of the ensemble to emphasise a statement from an instrument.

You might like to use this excerpt from Jessie Montgomery's Strum as an example:



Challenge

Why not start the whole composition process with rhythm? Pick 3 different moments from your Composition Plan and compose a 16-20 beat rhythm that expresses the mood or energy in this section. Use the ideas above as stimuli and the rhythm pages in the Student Resource Pack. Afterwards, use the activities in 'Texture: Composing for String Quartet' on page 36 to develop these ideas.

Planning the piece

For your students, having a sense of what they want to do with their compositions, (e.g. trying to convey a message, idea or feeling) will really help them organise their thoughts and give purpose to their musical choices.

We're not suggesting the students should plan every bar or few seconds of their piece, but instead create a good framework that they can return to throughout their composition process. This framework will then be the basis for a more coherent process when experimenting and composing in the future.

ACTION

Students can find the questions below in their Student Resource Pack and this piece of work is something you should encourage them to come back to every time they compose. Importantly though, students should not think of this as a set of rules. Students can edit their answers at any time in the composing process (as their music may take them somewhere they didn't expect). Additionally, you may want to teach intervention lessons at various points in the process (for example on 'Rhythm & Metre' or 'Modulation') and students may edit their answers at this point, too.

Ask your students to consider the following questions and write down their initial thoughts and ideas.

1. How many sections will your piece have?

E.g. think about whether something changes in the story, mood, or expression of your piece and whether each of these is a different section.

2. Describe each section using one sentence.

E.g. what happens in this section or what words describe the mood/ energy in this section?

3. In bullet points, what musical elements will you use to help you achieve the imagery, mood or expression in each section? NB: Here's some things for your students to think about before they write anything down:

- What tempo (speed) will each section be? E.g. extremely fast, lethargic, peaceful
- What kind of rhythms will this section use? Will all of the sections be using similar rhythms?
- What kind of texture will this section have? E.g. will all instruments be playing at all times, how will instruments support each other through accompaniment, imitation, conversation, etc?
- Will each section use the same home key or will there be a modulation?
- What sort of chords will you use to make this section? E.g. Triads, extended chords, dissonant chords?

ACTION

Use our Composition Cards to aid conversations about musical elements. These give some prompts for thinking through different choices composers can make about texture and the way different ideas interact, harmony, and some initial ways ideas might map onto different instruments.



Below is an example of how a student might answer these questions. Let's imagine they are planning to create a piece of music inspired by the image below.



1. How many sections will your piece have?

E.g. think about whether something changes in the story, mood, or expression of your piece and whether each of these is a different section.

2. Describe each section using one sentence. (Add more rows if you need).

E.g. what happens in this section or what words describe the mood/ energy in this section? **Looking at this image, we see elements of mystery, danger and adventure. That immediately informs the mood of the music we are going to write. From looking at this image, the story we'd like to tell is:**

SECTION 1) A perilous ocean, full of danger…

SECTION 2) A fleet of Viking ships, battle against the waves throughout the night…

SECTION 3) Until a glimmer of light appears as the sun rises to calm the ocean at the start of a new day.

3. For each section, what musical elements will you use to help you achieve the imagery, mood or expression?

ACTION

Remember, here's some things to think about before you write anything down....

- What tempo (speed) will each section be?
- What kind of rhythms will this section use?
- What kind of texture will this section have?
- Will this section use a particular scale?
- What sort of chords will you use to make this section?

In these 3 sections, you can see that our musical story has a start, middle and end. You can even imagine how each of those 3 sections would sound different. Now, we're able to go into more detail for each section, thinking musically about how they might sound.

1. A perilous ocean, full of danger…
   - The music is loud and fast from the start.
   - Dotted rhythms convey the lurching of the waves.
   - Perhaps use the Lydian mode because of its dissonant quality and ambiguity.
   - Dissonant chordal clashes to represent the waves crashing.
   - Diminished scales.
   - Harmonies based on minor chords.

2. A fleet of Viking ships…
   - A main theme, heroic and bold to represent the ships.
   - Uses different rhythms to the sea, with longer durations to convey the size of the ship.
   - Use imitation to represent there being more than one ship.
   - Experiment with dynamics as ships get closer.
   - Keep the dissonant chordal clashes as waves crash onto the ships.

3. Until a glimmer of light appears…
   - A short motif to represent sunlight.
   - Experiment with this in a sequence, rising to represent the sun rising.
   - Dissonance becomes less and less as the ocean calms.
   - There is a modulation into a brighter, warmer key.
   - Dynamics are softer and rhythms less frantic.
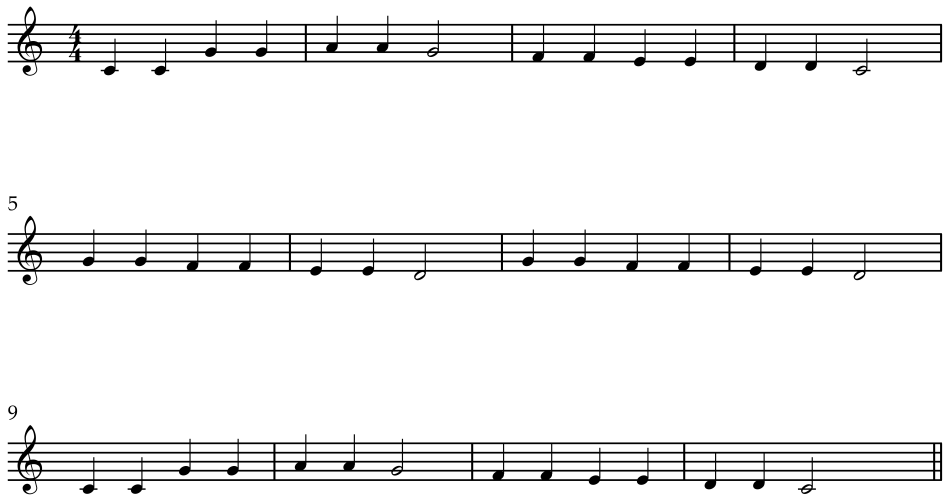
Of course, none of this is set in stone, but it does provide a starting point to experiment with musical ideas. We could now start composing for some of these ideas above using the instruments we play and sketch the notation on paper before thinking about how this can be applied to the string quartet.

As we continue the composition process and experiment with different musical ideas, we can constantly refer back to this planning document and ensure our choices are within the framework we have created.
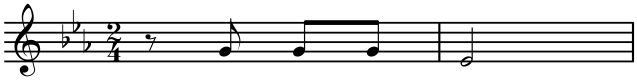
Now challenge your students to create a planning document/framework for their piece.

ACTIVITIES FOR MELODY

Melodic ideas can be presented in several different ways in a piece of music. For example, there are long melodies made up of several different phrases:



Or very short melodic motifs, that can be experimented with throughout a piece, for example:



In the next section our activities focus on starting with rhythm. Check out our videos on Melody and Harmony to see some other ways you might come up with ideas for melody, including by exploring different musical intervals, devising games or strategies to decide on a pitch set, improvising using a scale and so on.

Video resource: Composing Melody
There are so many ways you might come up with the initial ideas for a melody, particularly after choosing a scale for your piece. Watch this film with your class and choose how you will create your melody, whether by beginning with rhythm, using chance procedures, improvising with a scale, or another method explored in the video!
https://musicintheround.co.uk/resources/writing-melody/

Activity

This is one way you might start writing a melody, using a rhythm-first approach. This activity is suitable for students who might struggle to improvise rhythmically on their instrument.

Step 1:

Ask your students to write a short sentence (max 10 words) to describe what their piece is going to be about. For example:

A viking's journey across a perilous ocean through the night

Prisoners marching towards freedom

A dance anthem for strings

Teacher Tip:
Using words is just one way of generating interesting rhythms, and this activity can be a playful way to explore this. Of course, there are a myriad of other ways you can generate rhythms, including through different clapping games. You can then use Step 5 onwards of this activity to complete your melody.

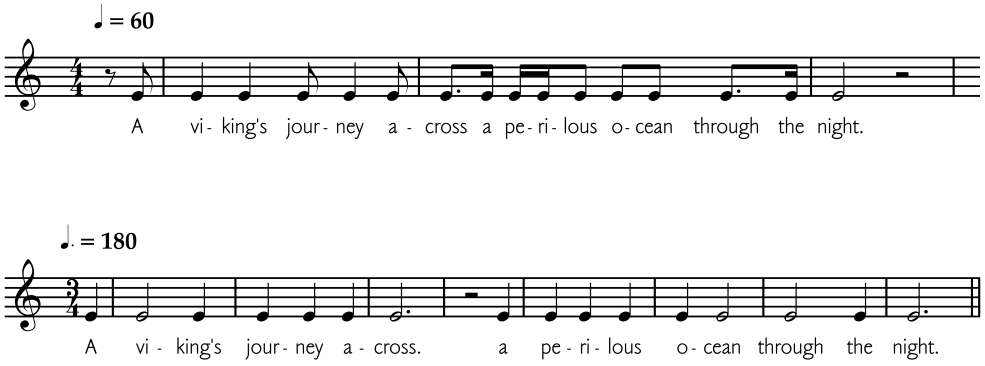
Step 2:

Now decide on the tempo for your melody. When choosing this, remember to think about the mood you're trying to create through your music. For example, do you want a fast, frantic melody, or one that is slower, more melancholic.

Step 3:

Now, students should try saying their sentence in rhythm, over a pulse at the tempo they previously decided. When doing this, encourage the students to experiment with the time signature for their sentence too. For example, is the rhythm for the sentence they are creating going to fit over a regular 4 beats per bar pattern, or have a more flowing 3 beats feel to it?

Here are 2 example rhythms using the same sentence:



Teacher Tip:

Students often place every word or syllable on a crotchet or quaver in this exercise. Try to avoid this if possible and encourage your students to experiment with rests, long notes for different syllables and dotted rhythms. You can lead a quick clapping game to create these new variations, ensuring your students practice the versions they particularly like, so that they will remember them. Ask your students to clap variations on their rhythms that:

- contain silence or rests
- use syncopation
- use dotted rhythm(s)
- use triplets
- use semiquavers
- use minims
- etc...

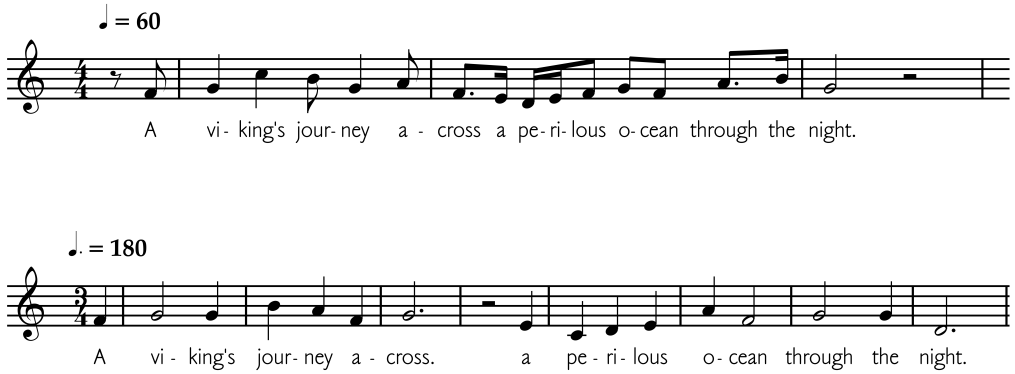
Step 4:

Once the student has decided on their rhythm, they now need to add pitches to the notes in order to create a melody. **Scales** and **modes** are collections of pitches that composers often use when composing melodies. Again, it's important that the choices the students make reflect the mood they want to create for the listener. To help with this, take a look at the table on page 6 which provides information on some different scales and modes, the pitches they use and the mood they can help create.

Teacher Tip:

You may find that students apply just one pitch to each of the notes in their rhythmic sentence. This is fine, but it's also possible to apply more than one pitch to a syllable, especially for notes of longer durations to create a melisma effect.
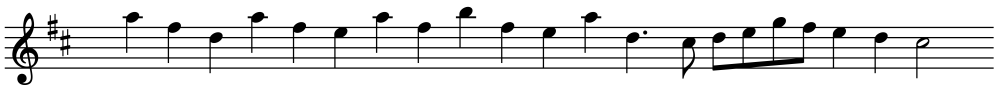
Here are 2 examples applying pitches from the aeolian mode to the rhythms above:



More on metre...
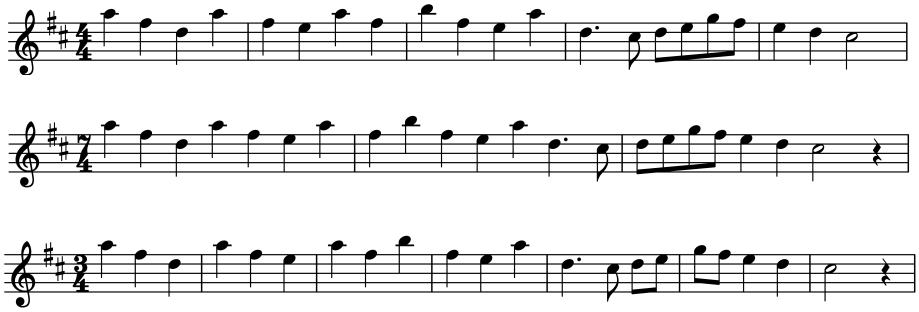
- If your students want to experiment with time signature, but they are struggling with the activities above, try this experiment. Perhaps watch our video on this exercise here first:

- As invited in the video, ask you students to create a rhythm or melody that lasts for 16 to 20 beats (perhaps using the words they have written down in Step 1). However, ask them to do this without putting a time signature in. For example:



- Then, challenge students to copy their rhythm or melody out, applying 2 or 3 different time signatures to the rhythm they have created.

E.g.



- Listen back to each example (you may need to play this to them). How does that change in metre and time signature change the overall feel of the music?

- Extension: Students could try changing the time signature within the melody too. E.g. why not try alternating between 3/4 and 4/4? How does that change the feel of the music?

- NB When challenged to create an entire phrase worth of rhythm to a regular pulse, some students will create rhythms that do not adhere to regular metres. Their rhythms might be made up of 7 beats, or 11 beats, for example. If the students are happy with their rhythm, support them to find a metre that supports this rhythm. Perhaps an 11 beat rhythm alternates between a pattern of 4/4 - 3/4 - 4/4 for example. This can be incredibly exciting and could become a feature of the composition (though try to stick to this pattern if it's been set up!). Be warned though - this is difficult to manage on DAWs - let your visiting composer know if this has become a barrier in a student piece.

PHRASING

This section explains how 'phrases' and 'melody' relate to one another. There's an activity where your students can compose one long melody made up of several shorter phrases. This approach will help students who struggle to compose an initial idea that is longer than a short motif or cell. It will also guide students to make phrasing decisions based on harmony and cadence.

Step 1:

It's important for your students to understand what a 'phrase' means in relation to a melody. We like to describe musical phrases in comparison to words and grammar; imagine individual words as individual musical notes, and a complete sentence as a complete melody.

A phrase in a sentence (for example "under the crashing waves of the ocean" or "through the wind and rain") is a group of words that make sense together and express a definite idea, but is not a complete sentence on its own. So in music, a melodic phrase is a group of notes that make sense together and express a definite musical idea, but will take more than one phrase to complete the entire melody.

From here, we're going to complete an extension to the Melody activity following my examples. Once students have got to grips with the tasks, they can apply the steps to their own melodies.

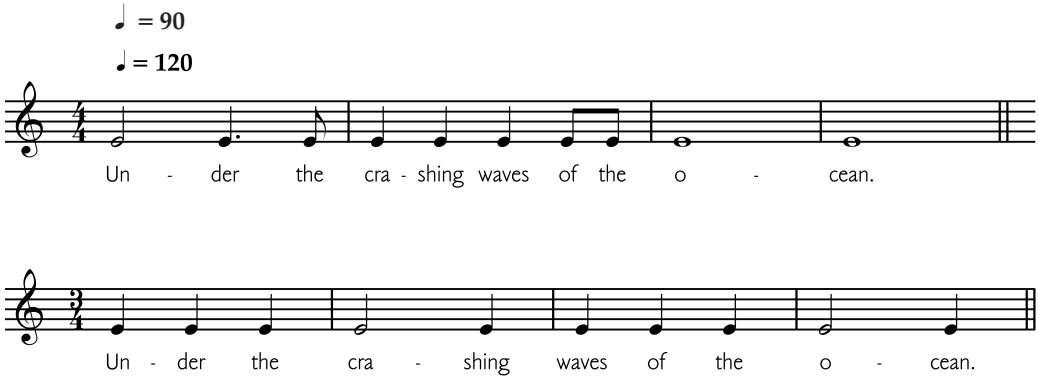
Step 2:

Take a look at this sentence made up of 4 different phrases:

Under the crashing waves of the ocean,
Where creatures and corals lie,
There's a world of awe and wonder,
For everyone to discover.

Teacher Tip:

Using words is just one way of generating interesting rhythms and using this activity can lead to some really interesting phrasing and metric structures. It might be a good activity to try if you are looking to get out of ABAC phrasing structures, or question and answer structures. Of course, there are a myriad of ways you can generate interesting rhythms, including through different clapping games. You can the use Step 5 onwards of this activity to complete your melody.



Step 3:

a) Ask students to write down the notes in their chosen scale/ mode

> Students can document their work in the Student Resource Pack .

b) Ask students to copy the note names into the left hand column of the table below

c) Ask students to work out the triads for each degree of their chosen scale and write these in the table.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Each note of the scale/mode 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

d) Challenge your students to label their chords with the correct name on the dotted lies.

Here's a completed example using the Aeolian mode:

C	C, E♭, G
D	D, F, A♭
E♭	E♭, G, B♭
F	F, A♭, C
G	G, B♭, D
A♭	A♭, C, E♭
B♭	B♭, D, F

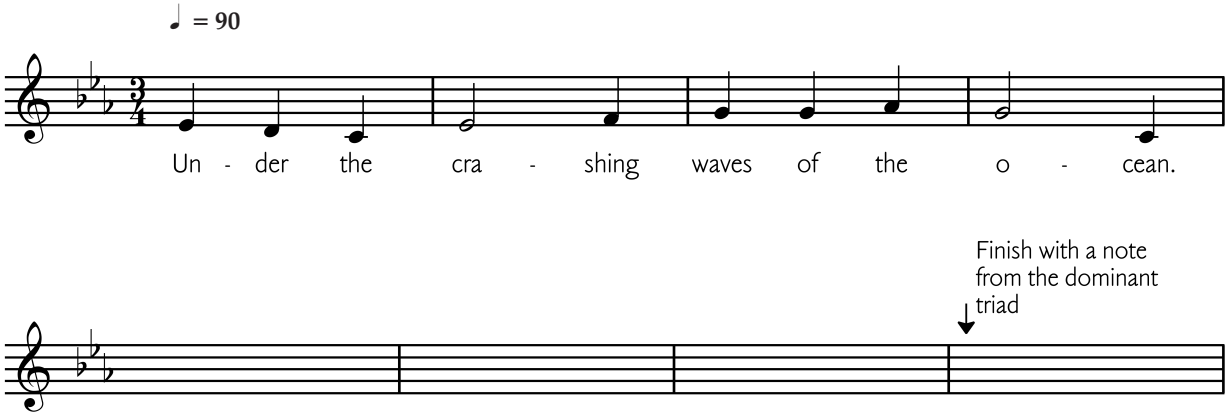
1. Tonic _____
2. Supertonic _____
3. Mediant _____
4. Subdominant _____
5. Dominant _____
6. Submediant _____
7. Leading note _____

Step 5:

This table is a useful aid for the student when they are composing different phrases for their melody because the notes they choose to start and end each phrase can establish the key and make the melody sound 'finished' or like it 'wants to go on'. For example, starting a melody using a note from the tonic triad will help establish the 'home' key. Similarly finishing the phrase using a note from the dominant triad will make the phrase sound 'unfinished'.

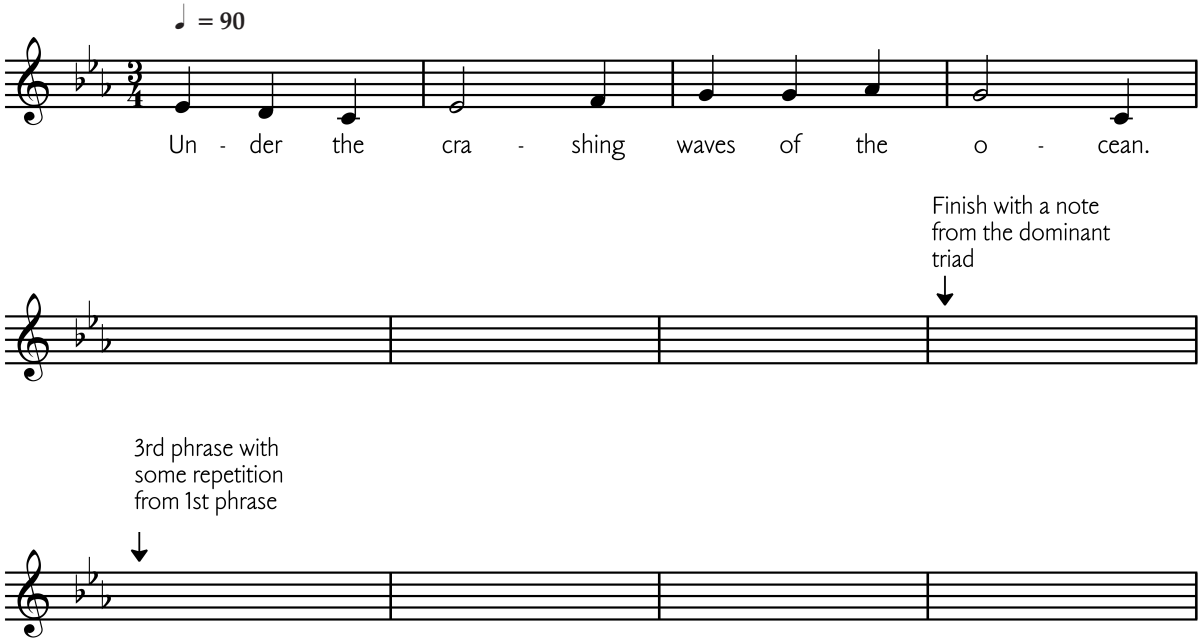
In the below example, we've composed the first phrase by applying notes from the aeolian mode to one of the rhythms we composed above. Notice that we started the phrase on an Eb, which is taken from the tonic triad (C, Eb, G). This help establishes the home key for the melody.

Ask your students to compose the second phrase to this melody, again using notes from the aeolian mode. The melody still isn't finished though, so can they make sure the phrase ends using a note from the dominant triad?
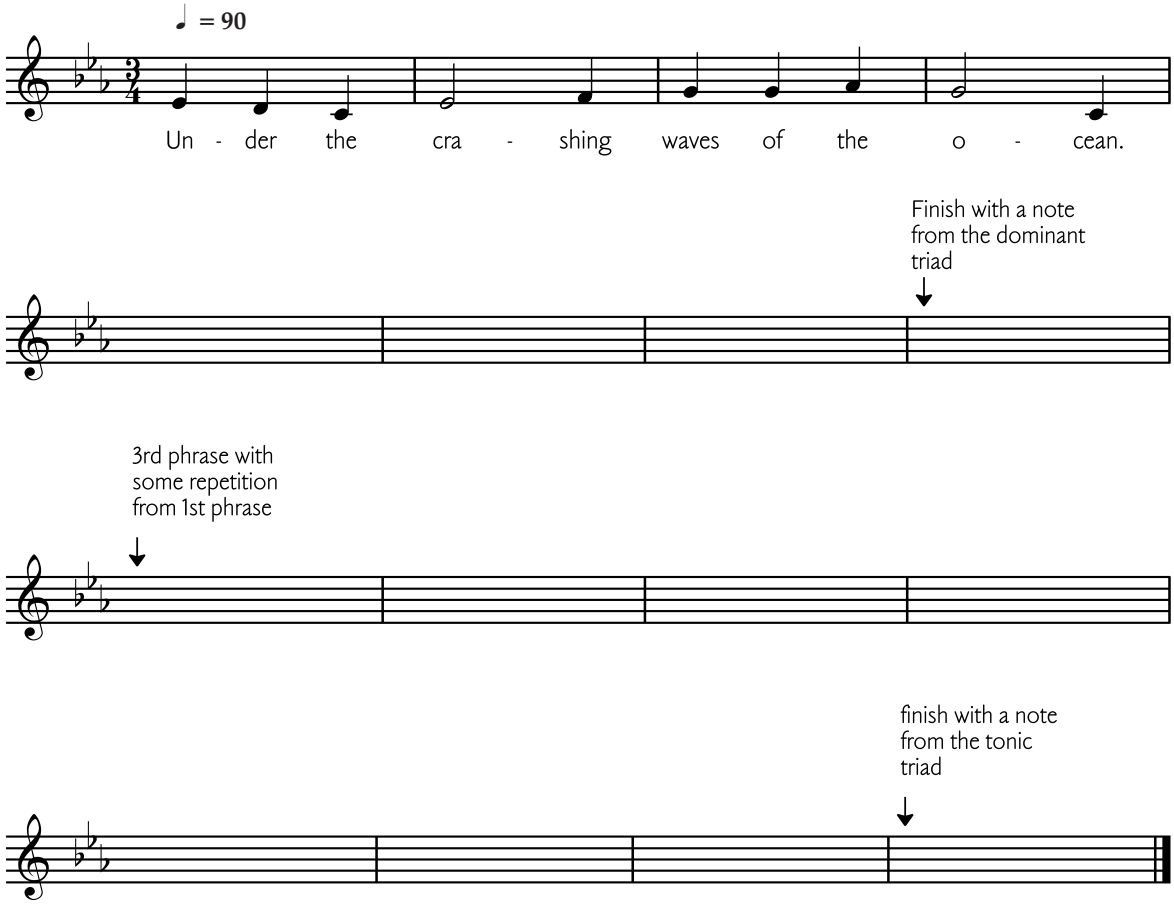


Step 6:

You often find repetition of phrases or interval patterns in longer melodies. So now, ask your students to compose the 3rd phrase for my melody, but with some repetition from the first phrase:



Step 7:

Finally, ask your students to complete the melody by composing the 4th phrase. Remember that the melody ought to feel 'finished' here, so ending on a note from the tonic triad (C, Eb, G) will help achieve this.



Step 8:

Following the steps from this activity, ask your students to create a longer melody made up of several different musical phrases for their own composition. As a class you could:

- Use this harmonic structure or create your own.
- Analyse the phrasing structures in the Key Repertoire as inspiration.
- Create several sentences relating to their piece in order to generate rhythms and ideas for longer ideas.
- Find a piece of poetry related to their piece that includes a sentence made up of several different phrases.

Teacher Tip:

This doesn't have to rhyme, it's a method of being able to create rhythms for our melodies in the following step.

Composing Melodies From Chords

Preparation (in advance or as a class)

In this activity students will work from chords to create melodies. We recommend that they have already done some work on harmony (see page 23).

Step 1:

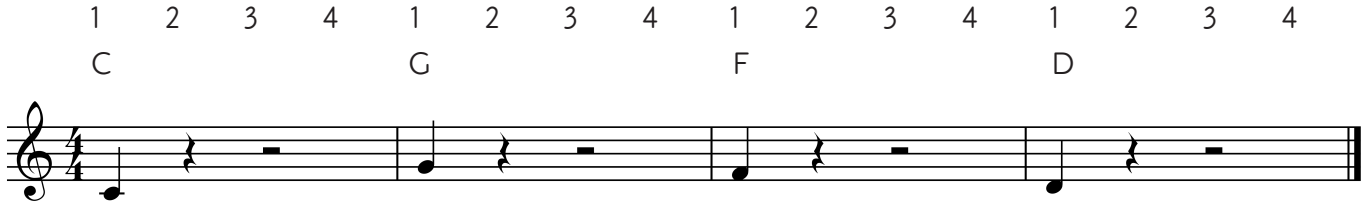
Pick 4 chords and ask each student to write down the single notes that make up those chords. As always, the chords they choose should reflect the mood they want to create for their overall piece. For example:

Chord:	Am	C	F	G
Notes:	A, C, E	C, E, G	F, A, C	G, B, D

Step 2:

Ask students to pick one note from each of their chords. For example using the chords above, we have chosen the notes C, G, F and D.

Ask each student to play (or write down) each of their chosen notes on the first beat of their chosen metre. For example, in this example in 4/4:



These will be the starting notes to the student's melody.
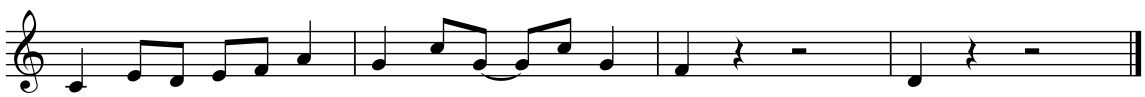
Step 3:

Ask students to add some passing notes to get from their 1st note to their 2nd note. For example:
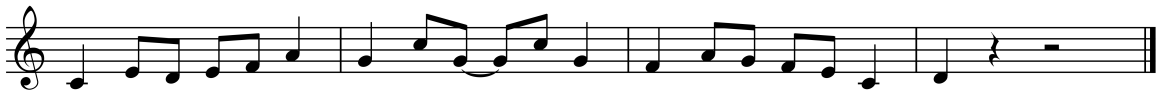


Step 4:

Now ask students to add some passing notes to get from their 2nd note to their 3rd note. For example:
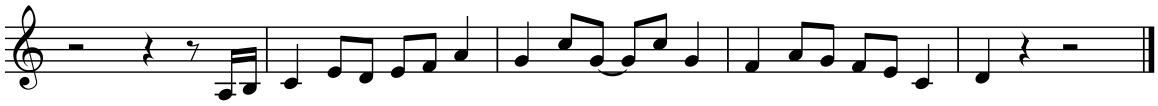


Step 5:

Lastly, ask students to finish their melody off with some passing notes from their 3rd note to their 4th note. For example:



Step 6:

One final idea your students could try is to add an 'anacrusis' to their melodies. This is a one or a few notes that come just before the first beat at the start of your melody. For example:



Developing your melody
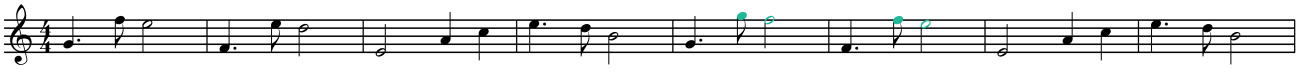
Hopefully your students have now been able to compose a melody using some of the exercises above. This might be a long melody made up of several phrases or a short melodic idea.

Below are a list of examples that students can experiment with in order to develop their melody. These can be used to develop a single phrase (perhaps extending a short melodic idea like the one above into something longer), or to make new phrases and variations based on the original (which can be heard afterwards, or at a different moment in the piece).
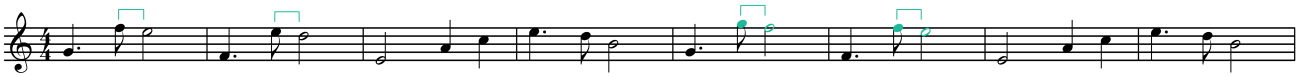
Set One

- Alter the original melody by changing some of the intervals - perhaps making the distance between two of the notes bigger or smaller. Students will then have to choose whether the following notes move too or not.
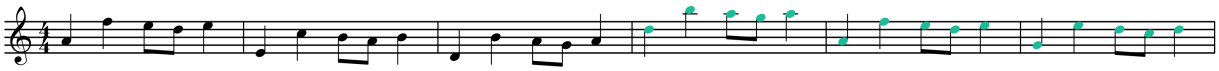
Have a look at this example. A 4-bar melodic idea has been repeated, but on the 2nd time the intervals between the 1st and 2nd, and 4th and 5th notes are bigger - the melody is reaching upwards.



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



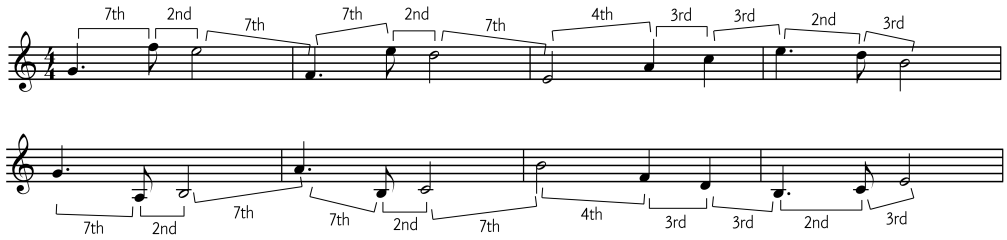
- Treat the melody as a sequence, repeating it but moving the whole melody up or down in pitch - how does this shift change the mood of the music?
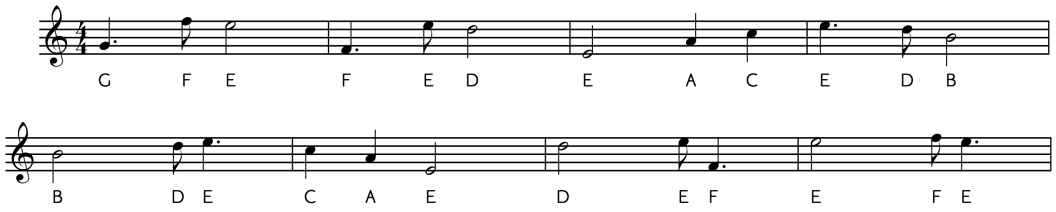


- Use these ideas in combination - sequence the melody first , then on the second time, change some of the intervals. You could also change the rhythm for the moment you have changed the intervals, making it even more obvious to the listener that something has changed.

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.
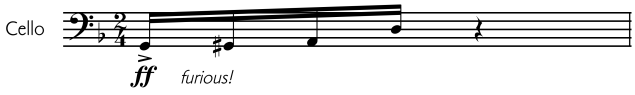


- Some or all of the melody could be played backwards (retrograde).
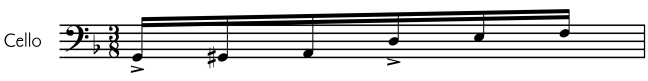


- You could use these two ideas in combination.

Set Three

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



Anna Meredith, Tuggemo, Bar 35
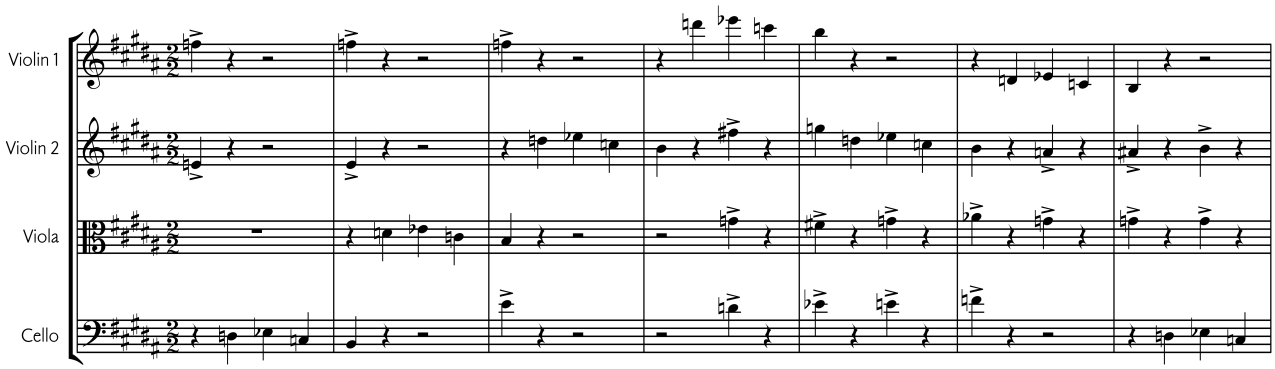


Anna Meredith, Tuggemo, Bar 36

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

Set Four

- Put the whole melody into a different instument.
- 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.

Activity

Spend a lesson using the pages in the Student Resource Pack to create a 'bank of transformations' - either focusing on one set or picking and choosing bewteen sets. Aim for each student to have created between 4-8 transformations before challenging them to combine techniques from different sets. Which ones do they like/not like? Which ones are appropriate for their piece? Refer back to their plan to see if there are other ways they could continue working on their transformations.

Creating Contrast

Once your students have enough building blocks in place that their music has a distinctive character, you could use the listening guide to reflect on the musical features that give the music its character. Using this analysis, create a word bank or a list of words that describe the section. Then, challange your students to write down (in another list or wordbank) how they could contrast each of these features. Ask them to plan a contrasting section - which features do they want to stay the same, and which do they want to contrast.

Preparation

Our Video Resource: Harmony & Tonality unpacks some of the vocabulary and theory in this section.

Composing and extending progressions: Creating Chords using Triads (beginners)
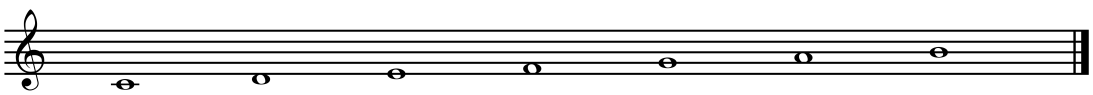
The video discusses consonant and dissonant harmony. Consonant harmonies have a more pleasing sound to the ear, where chords relate to a specific key or tonal centre. Dissonant harmonies have a harsher, clashing sound made up of chords that don't relate to a specific key. One way to create chords that produces a consonant sounding harmony is by triads that are related to a specific scale or mode.

Step 1:

First, make sure your students know what the key of their piece is. Write the numbers 1-7 in the left column of a grid. Next to each number, write the corresponding note for that scale, like this example in C major:

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

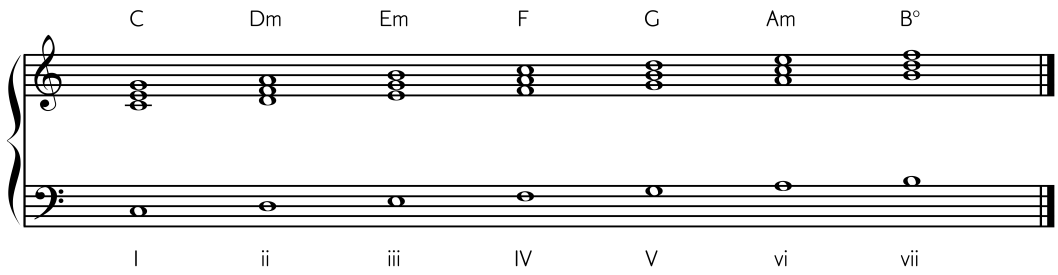
Students could also notate their scale on manuscript paper, or input it into notation software:



Step 2:

Now ask your students to build triads for each note in the scale and write them in the grid. Students could also note this on manuscript paper, and some students might be able to name the triads using chord symbols. There is support for labelling chords on page 16 of this pack.

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

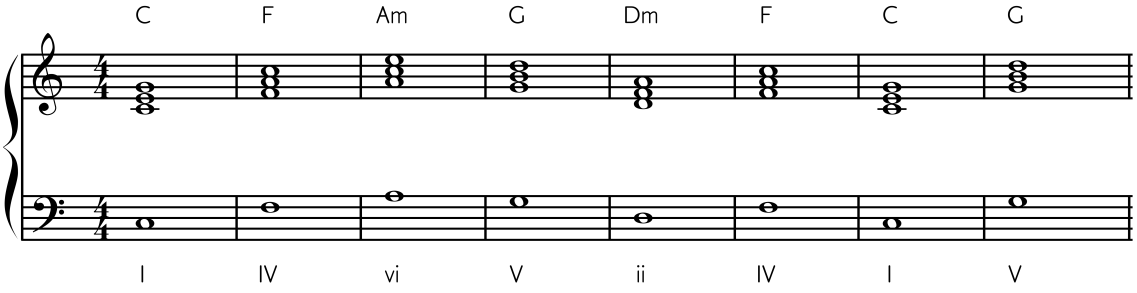


Additional resources

There is a template for students to complete this activity in the Student Resource Pack. If you need to save some lesson time, you may find giving students a copy of our Common Major/ Minor scales sheet which you'll find in the Resource Hub linked from the front of this pack.

Step 3:

Treating the grid like a painter treats a pallete of paint, ask your students to organise their triads into chord progressions. Challenge each student to create 4-8 progressions each, documenting these in their Student Composer Pack.



There isn't a rule on the order in which the chords should go, it's about experimenting, and the composer using their

ears to decide what they like the sound of. Some prompts however, might help in the classroom, including:

- Create a chord progression with 4 chords that starts on chord 1.
- Create a chord progression with 4 chords that ends on chord 5.
- Create a chord progression that ends on chord 6.
- Create a chord progression that includes chord 7 and chord 1.
- Create a chord progression that includes chord 2.
- Create a chord progression with 4 chords where no chords are repeated.
- Create a chord progression with 4 chords that sounds sombre/heroic/excited/hopeful/peaceful etc.

Teacher Tip:
Google Experiments have an arpeggio maker which could be useful for students to hear different progressions quickly: musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/Arpeggios/

Step 4:

It is important to move the notes in the chord around to 're-voice' it. What this means is that instead of playing a triad in the order written above, we might move certain notes up or down an octave to ensure the music sounds smooth and doesn't jump around all the time.

To do this, ask your students to write their chord progressions in a new grid, like this:

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

Step 5:

Now get them to rearrange the notes in each triad so that the middle row only repeats notes, or moves by a step, like this:

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

Step 6:

Finally, choose either the top or bottom row and apply the same process, keeping the middle row as they've just made it, like this:

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

Step 7:

Once students have created a chord progression they are happy with, they now need to think about how this will be arranged or the string quartet, assigning each row to an instrument. **By the end of this activity, students should aim to have individual instruments (particularly the inner parts) contain as few jumps as possible. Our 'Writing for String Quartet' video has some advice on this.** Next, students can think about the accompaniment rhythm - are the instruments holding long sustained notes, or applying a rhythm to them?
Take a look at the 'Texture' section on page 36 for more guidance on this.

A note on harmonic planning

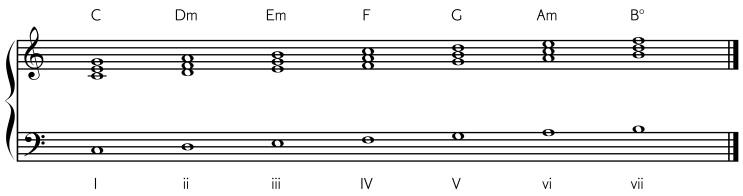
Encourage students to refer back to their Composition Plan. Can they compose a harmonic progression that expresses the mood in each section of their composition? Students may need further techniques to achieve this, including those documented below.

If your students are struggling...

If your students are struggling to understand the theory behind chords (including building and extending triads), but you would like them to use their ears to make decisions about harmonic progressions, we have found this activity successful in previous years:

Step 1:

In the student's DAW or notation software, the teacher enters the triads built from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd degrees of the students' chosen scale. Make sure to set up any key signatures in file before handing it over. E.g.



Step 2:

Ask the students to "continue the pattern" you started on their computer to create a total of 7 chords. They will now have a set of triads in their key.

Step 3:

Ask the students to make progressions of 4 or 8 chords by listening to different combinations on the computer one after the other, then copying and pasting these chords into a new order.
NB This method can be used for 7th and added 9th chords, too.

More on experimenting with harmony... (further beginner activities)

Sometimes we find students who have composed some quite consonant sounding harmony (perhaps just using triads built from their Tonic scale), but want to add some colour or tension to this. If the intermediate and advanced activities on harmony are too challenging, encourage them to explore through these alternative activities.

IDEA ONE

If your students have sketched out one or more harmonic progressions and are looking to add some harmonic colour...

Ask the student to choose a progression they have already sketched out. Next, in any of the middle chords (not the first or last chord in the progression) challenge the student to add a note to an existing triad. This note could:

- be a step higher or a step lower than one of the notes in the chord
- be a step higher or a step lower than one of the notes in the following chord
- belong to the scale or be a note from outside the scale

Remind your students to experiment with different sounds until they find something that they feel fits with a particular mood or expression they want to create in their piece.

IDEA TWO

If your students want to add some harmonic colour to a melody they have not yet harmonised...

Challenge the student to compose a drone by choosing just one note from the melody that they like the sound of when played along with the melody. Once the students have found a drone they are happy with, ask them to move to another pitch at some point during the melody. After moving to their second pitch, students can make one of three choices:

- Stay on this new pitch for the duration of the melody
- Move back to their original pitch (students must decide when this should happen)
- Make a further move to another new pitch

IDEA THREE

If your students want to add some more harmonic colour to a consonant melody they have already harmonised, they could try editing their progression in the following ways...

- Suspend one (or more) of their chords into the next bar for a couple of beats.
- Suspend a note from one chord into the beginning of the next chord
- Change one (or more) of their chords so that it is built from the note above the melody note (e.g. if the chosen melody note is C, build a triad on D: DFA). This melody note will become the 7th in the chord.
- Find a drone on one pitch that can be held underneath the entire phrase.

Remember to experiment and if they don't like it, change it!

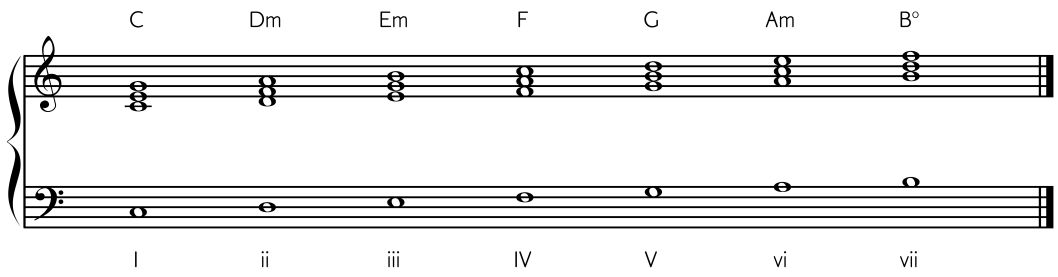
Extending the harmonic palette: extended chords

In order to make chords sound more interesting, composers add extra notes to them to create 'extended chords.' In the exercise below, students are going to build 7th and 9th chords based on the triads from the previous activity. Students might want to add these to their harmonic grids in the Student Composer Pack, treating these as options within their palette of chords to make harmonic progressions from.

Step 1:

Revisit the triads created for a specific scale or mode from the previous activity, for example:

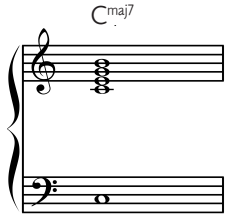
1	C, E, G
2	D, F, A
3	E, G, B
4	F, A, C
5	G, B, D
6	A, C, E
7	B, D, F



Step 2:

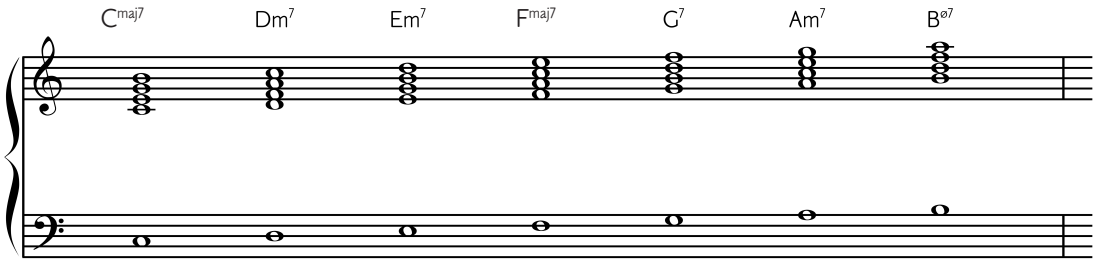
In order to create a 7th chord, the student needs to:

- Choose a chord from their series of triads.
- Know the notes that make up the associated scale for that chord. For example, if the chord is C major, the notes in a C major scale are C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. If the chord is E minor, the notes in an E minor scale are E, F#, G, A, B, C, D, E.
- Add a note to the chord that is 7 notes up from the root (lowest pitch) note of the associated scale. For example, if our chord is C major, the root note for the scale is C and the 7th note up in the scale is B. That 7th chord with the added B now looks like this:



Ask your students to create 7th chords for every triad from the previous activity, for example:

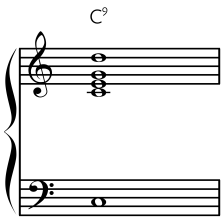
	Triad	7th
1	C, E, G	B
2	D, F, A	C
3	E, G, B	D
4	F, A, C	E
5	G, B, D	F
6	A, C, E	G
7	B, D, F	A



Step 3:

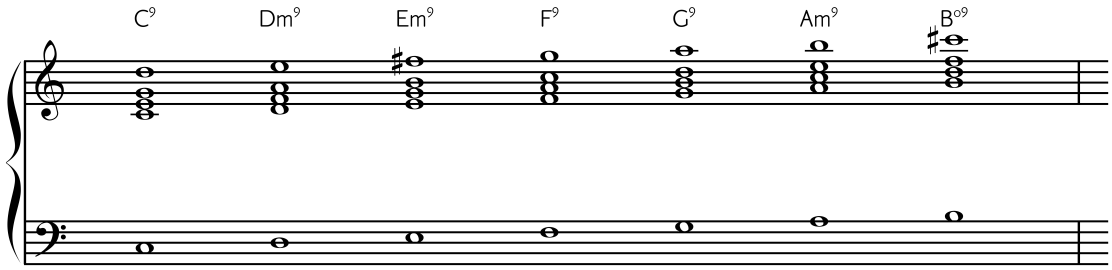
Similarly, to create a 9th chord students need to:

- Choose a chord from their series of triads.
- Know the notes that make up the associated scale for that chord. For example, if the chord is C major, the notes in a C major scale are C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. If the chord is E minor, the notes in an E minor scale are E, F#, G, A, B, C, D, E.
- Add a note to the chord that is 9 notes up from the root (lowest pitch) note of the associated scale. For example, if our chord is C major, the root note for the scale is C and the 9th note up in the scale is D.



Ask your students to create 9th chords for every triad from the previous activity, for example:

	Triad	7th	9th
1	C, E, G	B	D
2	D, F, A	C	E
3	E, G, B	D	F#
4	F, A, C	E	G
5	G, B, D	F	A
6	A, C, E	G	B
7	B, D, F	A	C#



More on 9th chords (and further harmonic colour)

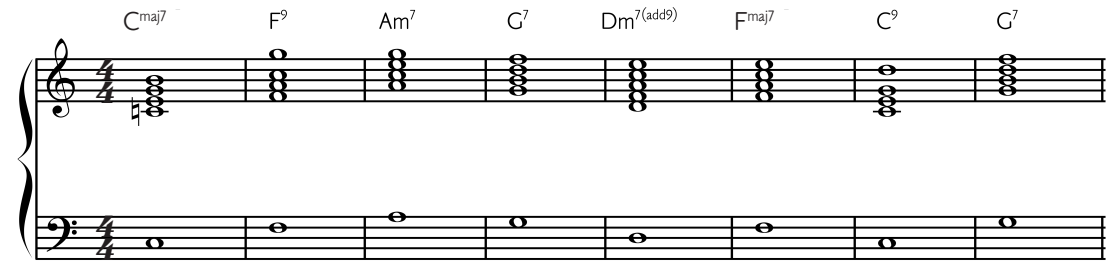
This technique might help students start exploring non-diatonic harmony and is a great way to explore the different moods and colours that are possible in an extended progression. Notice that in a major key, the iii^{9} and the vii^{o9} use notes from outside of the tonic key (in a minor key, the same will be true of ii^{9} and v^{9}). Students could alternatively restore the 9th on these chords to a diatonic degree of the tonic scale, to see if that better fits the mood they are after. This will become an added **minor** 9th (instead of a major 9th) and will create dissonance between the root and the 9th (which the students could further explore by inverting the chord so this interval becomes a minor second).

Teacher Tip:

Sometimes composers put 7ths and 9ths together in one chord, like in the Dm7add9 chord in the 5th bar of the above example.

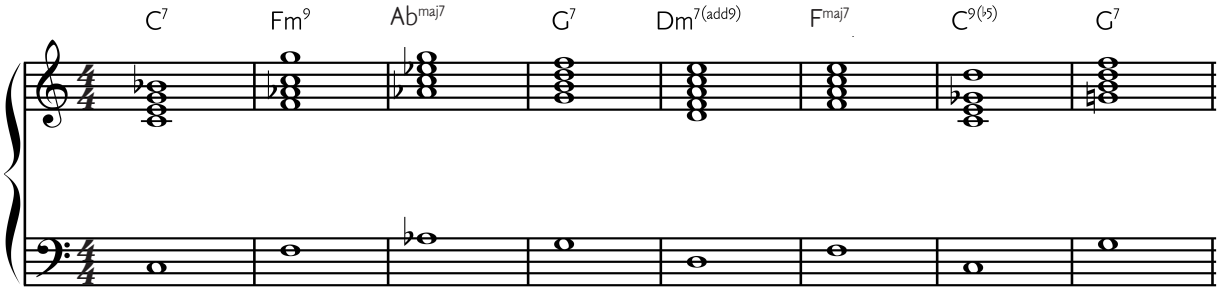
Step 4:

Challenge your students to create an 8-bar chord progression that features 7th and/or 9th chords. Adding extra notes into chords like this helps make chords sound more interesting. As in the previous activity, this is about experimenting and the composer working out what sounds good to them. Here's an example chord progression using extended chords:



Step 5:

To experiment further, ask the students to try adding a few accidental to some of their chords to see how that sounds. Some might work, some won't but again it's an opportunity to experiment and see what sounds good to the composer. Here's an example where we've applied a few accidentals to some of the notes in the above chord progression:



Teacher Tip:

If encouraging Step 5 in diatonic music, it makes most sense to ask for this experiment at the point where the student has already composed a harmonic progression. This is because adding accidentals in this way will introduce tensions in the harmony, which could be resolved or not on the next chord.

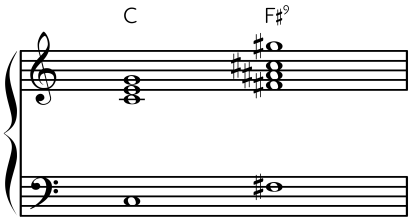
Think carefully about how to voice the chords so that tensions are resolved within the same instrument.

Dissonant Harmony (advanced)

For this activity we're going to look at how composers can create a dissonant sounding harmony by combining unrelated chords on top of one another.

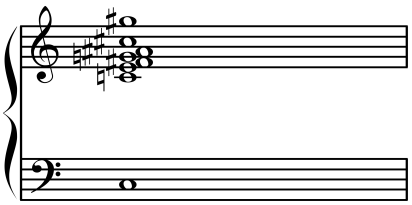
Step 1:

Choose two different chords that a unrelated to one another in terms of scale or key. For example a C chord and an F#9 chord:



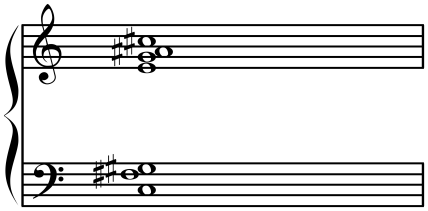
Step 2:

Now combine those 2 chords by playing them together:



Step 3:

Next, ask the students to re-arrange the chord experimenting with different voicings, for example:



You can create some really interesting chords experimenting in this way. Like with previous activities it's about being experimental and composers using their ears to create and decide upon harmonies that they like and work for the piece as a whole.

> **Teacher Tip:**
> Encourage students to be experimental but not for the sake of being experimental. Encourage them to use their ears, if they don't like the harmonies they're creating, change it.

Step 4:

The last step is for the student to consider how this harmony is presented in the music, for example as long notes, through rhythmic motifs or a combination of the two. Composers can create some really interesting chords and harmonies experimenting in this way.

> **Teacher Tip:**
> Take a listen to the opening of 'Dances Of The Young Girls' section in Stravinsky's 'Rite Of Spring'. The dissonant harmony you can hear is created by combining two unrelated chords, E major and Eb7.

Modulation

These activities support our video on Modulation, which gives practical tips to help your students modulate keys in their composition. This won't be for everyone, but we hope this makes the process a little bit easier for students who want to modulate.

Step 1

Make sure your students know what the original key of their piece is. If they haven't done so already, make sure they have written out the pitches of this scale, and the triads that are built from those pitches. This activity is found on page 23 of this pack, and in the Student Resource Pack. Your students should have a completed table, like this:

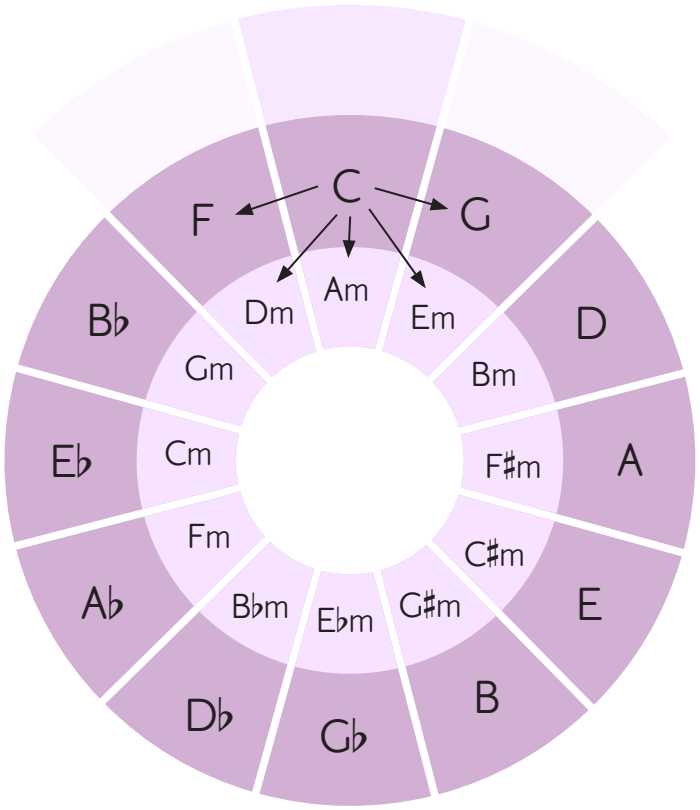
C	C, E, G
D	D, F, A
E	E, G, B
F	F, A, C
G	G, B, D
A	A, C, E
B	B, D, F

NB There is support for labelling chords on on page 16 of this pack, and in the Student Resource Pack, if you like.

Step 2

Students now need to choose which key they are going to modulate to. It's common to modulate from the original key to one of it's 5 closely related keys. On the circle of fifths, these can be found directly next to, or diagonally to, the original key (like in the diagram).

Support your students to identify which five keys are closely related to their original key. Students can draw arrows on their own Circle of Fifths diagram in the Student Composer Pack.



Step 3

Support your students to listen to the soundworld of the five closely related keys, so they can make an informed decision about which one to modulate to. Their new key should reflect the mood they would like to express with their music.

Step 4:

Once your students have decided where they will modulate to, ask them to write down the names of the scale of their new key. If modulating to a minor key, write the note names of the natural minor (i.e. without the raised 7th) but don't forget about any other sharps or flats in the new scale. As before, ask your students to work out the triads from each note of the **new scale**. Put this into a table like the one below (which gives an example of C major modulating to E minor). Students can do this in the Student Resource Pack.

ORIGINAL KEY

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

MODULATION KEY

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

Step 5:

Ask your students to label the PIVOT chords. This means students need to identify the chords that are found in both the original key and the modulation key. Students could circle these in one colour or write them into a PIVOT CHORD table, like the one found in the Student Resource Pack.

Step 6:

Now ask your students to label the MODULATING CHORDS. This means students need to identify the chords that are only found within the modulation key. Students could circle these in a different colour or write them into a MODULATING CHORDS table, like the one found in the Student Resource Pack.

Your students should now have identified all of the PIVOT and MODULATING chords. For example:

PIVOT CHORDS

C, E, G
E, G, B
G, B, D
A, C, E

MODULATING CHORDS

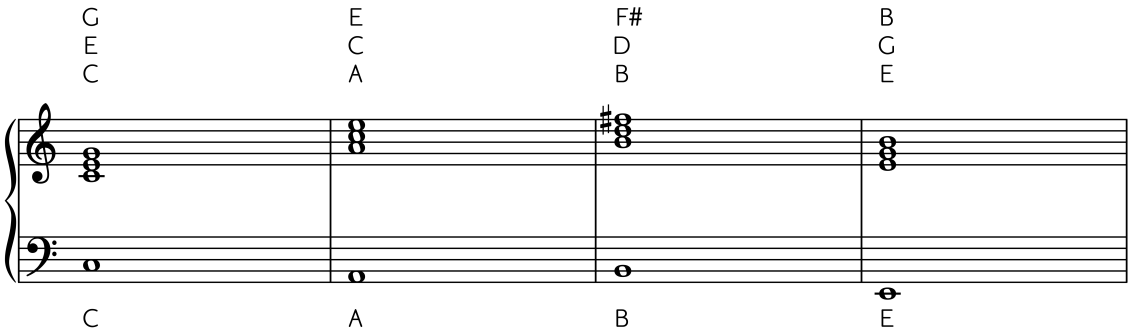
F#, A, C
B, D, F#
D, F#, A

Step 7:

Now it's time to modulate. Ask your students to compose a 4-chord progression where:

1. the first chord is the TONIC of the original key
2. the second chord is a PIVOT chord
3. the third chord is a MODULATING chord
4. the fourth chord is the TONIC of the new key

E.g. here is an example of a modulation from C major to E minor



Step 8

Students can now compose melodies and harmonic progressions using the notes of the new key!

Step 9

Students should re-voice the progressions they make, then arrange their chords into the string quartet texture. If your students are working with triads, be aware that they may need to choose a note to double in the texture. We recommend doubling the tonic or the 5th of the chord, rather than the 3rd.

Texture: Composing for String Quartet

Watch our video on composing for String Quartet to get familiar with the ways you can think about texture within this ensemble.

Students could refer back to their Inspiration Piece when deciding how their musical ideas should be arranged into the string quartet texture. This will help them decide what kind of textures they are interested in. We recommend the following class activity if you're starting the composition process with Texture:

Step 1

Assuming the students have started their planning process, ask them to choose one section of their piece (perhaps the opening) and think of as many words as they can that relate to that section, then write them down. For example, this could be how they want to listener to feel, or any particular characteristics of the music. E.g. here's some words about a piece we want to write:

sighing swarm direction hypnotic

repetitive layers glissando dancing

uplifting club people movement

beat weave flying electronic

Step 2

Inspired by these words, choose a tempo and metre - clap this out or set up a metronome in your DAW/ notation software.

Step 3

Either clapping out loud, or inputting midi into the computer using a keyboard (for this Step, choose 1 note to play only), devise a 2-bar rhythm inspired by your word bank. Keep experimenting until you have something that reflects the mood and energy you want to create.

Step 4

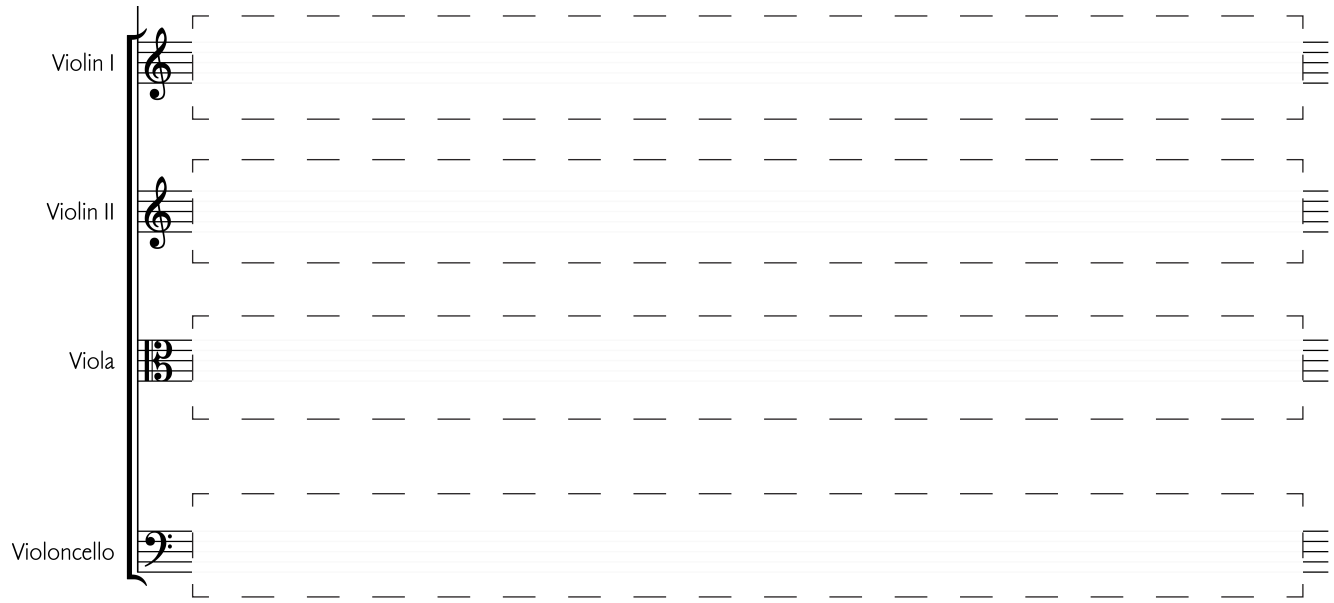
Ask your students the following questions:

- Which instrument plays this rhythm?
- Does it have a particular role - e.g. is it suited to a melody or bass line? Perhaps it's part of a denser, more complicated texture?
- How many bars does the same instrument play this rhythm for? A whole phrase? Longer?
- What happens at the same time as this rhythm? Which other instruments are playing? What role do they have?
- How is this instrument playing this rhythm? Loudly/ softly? High in it's register/ low in it's register? Pizzicato/ arco?

While considering these questions, students can draw their ideas for texture (graphically or using music notation) onto this template (which is also enlarged in the Student Resource Pack, as well as given in full stave notation) or copy and paste/ move things around in the DAW/ notation software. Students may want to devise other rhythms as they answer some of the questions, and make sure they annotate decisions around playing technique.

Teacher Tip:

Use our Composition Cards to aid conversations about musical elements. These give some prompts for thinking through different choices composers can make about texture and the way different ideas interact, harmony, and some initial ways ideas might map onto different instruments.



Step 5

Give your students the following texture words, and ask them to label their work with any appropriate terms.

- Monophonic texture
- Harmonic texture
- Polyphonic texture
- Melody and accompaniment
- Solo
- Soli (two or three instruments play the solo line)
- Accompaniment
- Polyrhythms

Step 6

Assign pitches to each rhythm based on the scale/mode/pitch set you have chosen. Continue to compose out the texture using the activities below. Experimenting with different textures can make music more interesting to listen to. In the following exercises we shall explore some different types of texture including practical example for your students.

Composing Monophonic Textures

A monophonic texture is one single melody played by all instruments in unison/at the same time. A monophonic texture has no harmonic or rhythmic accompaniment, it's just one melody.
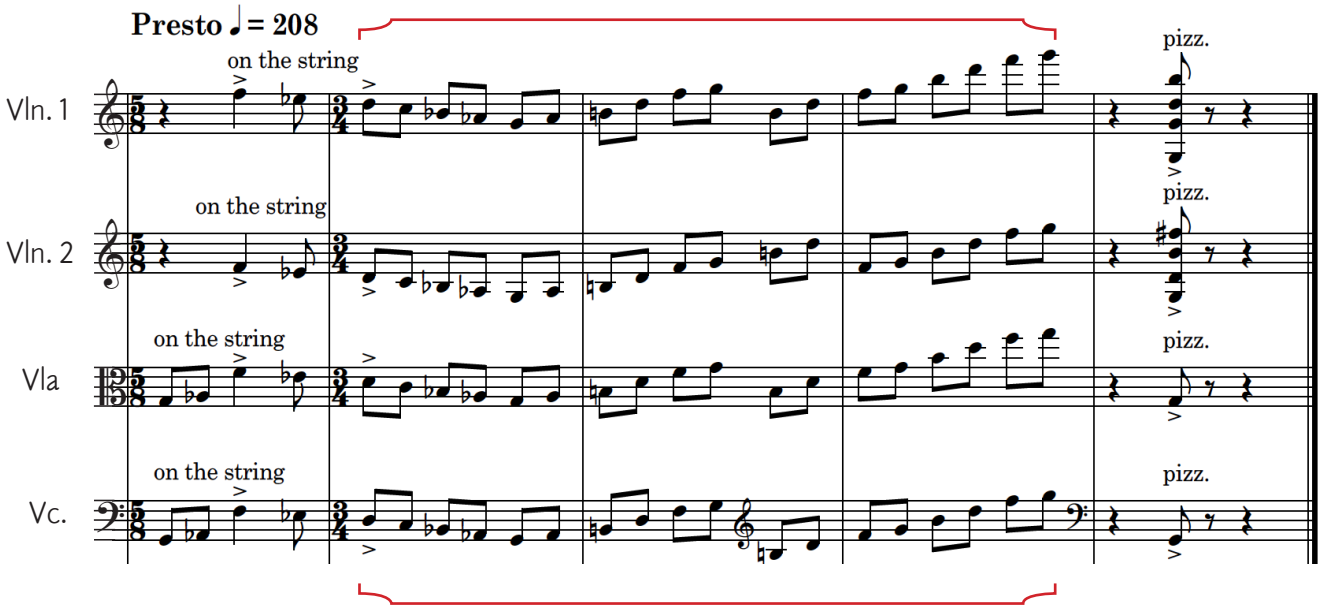
Step 1:

Ask your student groups to pick a memorable tune or emotive musical moment in something they have already composed.

Step 2:

Distribute this melody to all instruments in the string quartet. The melody can be played in different octaves, this is still a monophonic texture.

Jessie Montgomery uses a monophonic texture at the end of Strum to give the piece a distinctive ending:



excerpt from MONTGOMERY, Jessie, 'Strum' bars 262-266.

Melody & Accompaniment Textures
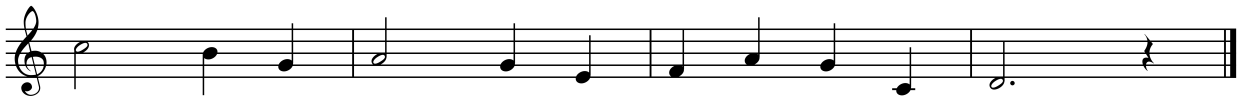
This is the video chapter related to Melody & Accompaniment.

Composing Homophonic Textures

In a homophonic texture, the instruments play different notes that move together at the same time. The combination of notes played together at any time creates a chord, and homophonic textures are based on chords moving together at the same speed. So, to create homophonic textures in your music, you need to have a melody and then build harmonic accompaniments that complement it.

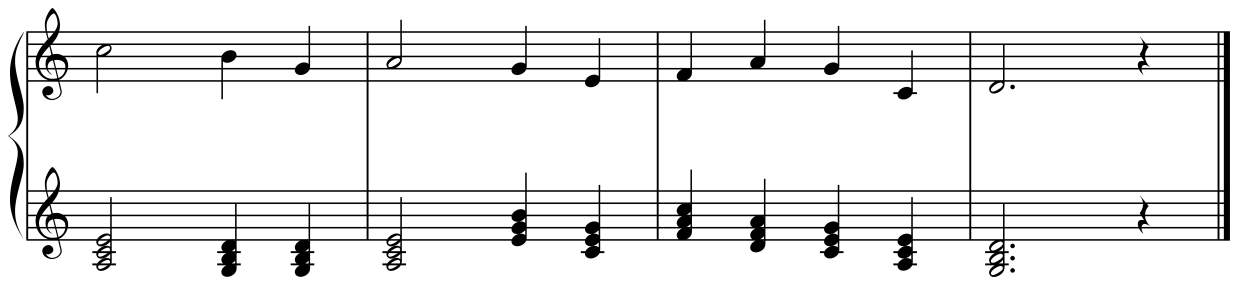
Step 1:

Choose one of the melodies you have already composed and give this part to the first violin. For example:
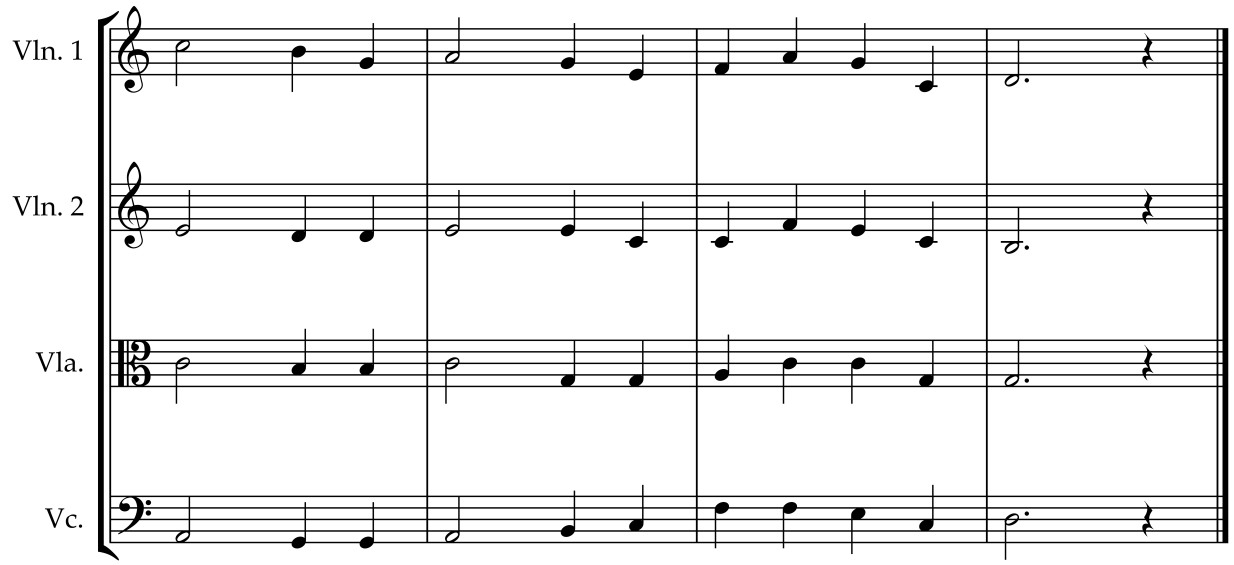


Step 2:

Now experiment by adding accompanying notes to each note in the melody, to build the harmony. One way of doing this is to compose triads to accompany each note in the melody. For example:



Step 3:

Distribute these accompanying notes to the rest of the instruments in the quartet. The instruments don't have to play these notes at the octaves written above, in fact encourage the students to experiment with the different ranges of the instruments in the quartet. For example:
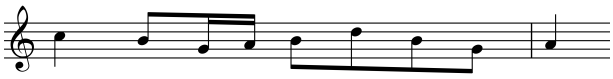


As you can see, the first violin plays the melody, but the other instruments play different notes that help build the harmony.

Composing Polyphonic Textures

In polyphonic music, each of the instruments has a melodic line which is equally important. The notes constantly weave in between one another. Follow these steps to compose a short section of polyphonic music:
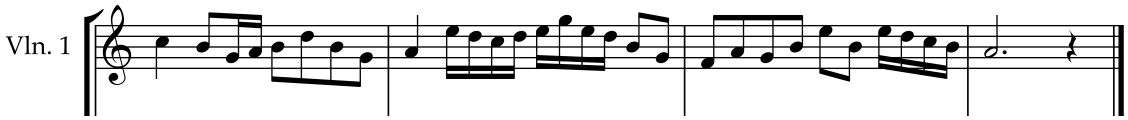
Step 1:

Ask your student groups to compose a short 1 or 2 bar melody. You could use the 'Composing Melodies Using Words' exercise above to do this. Here's an example:



Step 2:

Develop this short melody into a 4 bar melodic passage for one of the instruments in the quartet. You could use composition techniques explained in the 'Developing Your Melodies' exercise above to do this. For example:
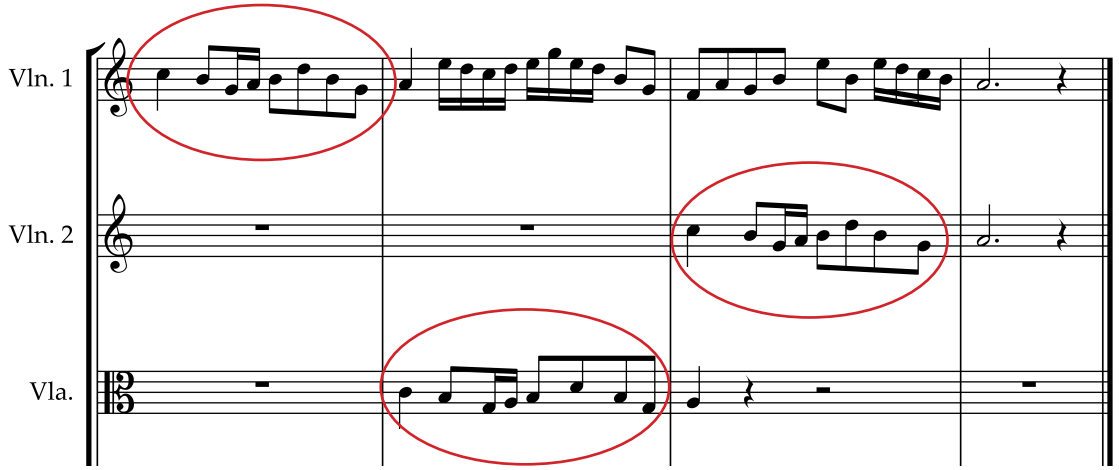


Step 3:

To create polyphonic textures, we need to have two or more independent melodies being played at the same time. However, they can't be two random melodies together, it's important that they work together harmonically. A little trick composers often use in polyphonic music is imitation. This is where one instrument copies something that has just been played by another instrument.

To make the music more interesting, the imitations can have slight changes. For example, they could:

- Be played in a different octave.
- Have ornamentation to create a fancy, decorated version of the original melody.
- Use the same pitches as the original melody, but use notes that are different durations.
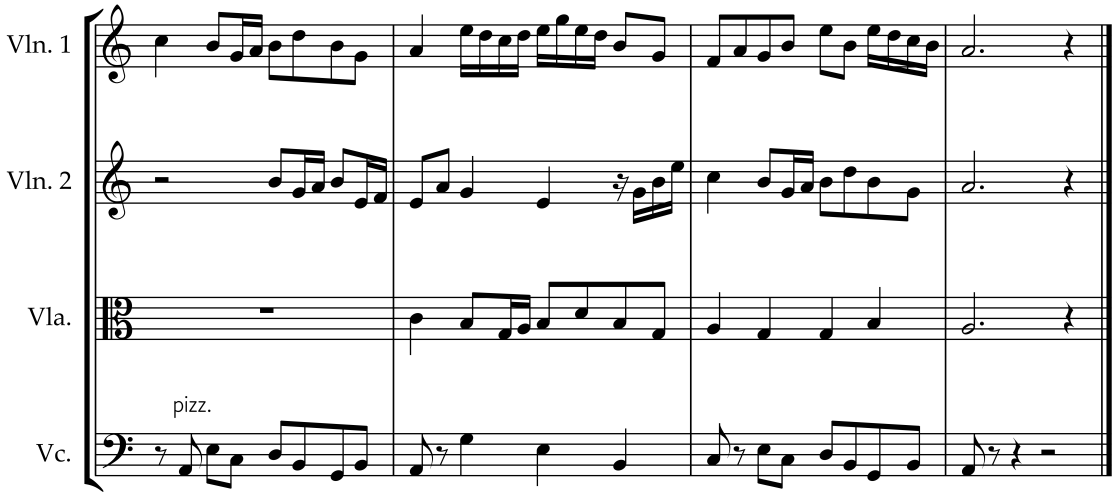
Ask your students to experiment using imitation in one or more of the other instrument parts based on something in the 4 bar melodic passage they composed in the previous step. For example:



Students may find that in order for the imitations to work harmonically, they may need to change some of the pitches in the original melody.

Step 4:

Now the students need to fill in the gaps, making sure that each instrument has their own melodic line independent of one another. No single melody should take over the overall sound. For example:



Try this with your class

Learning objectives: to transform/to evaluate

Activities

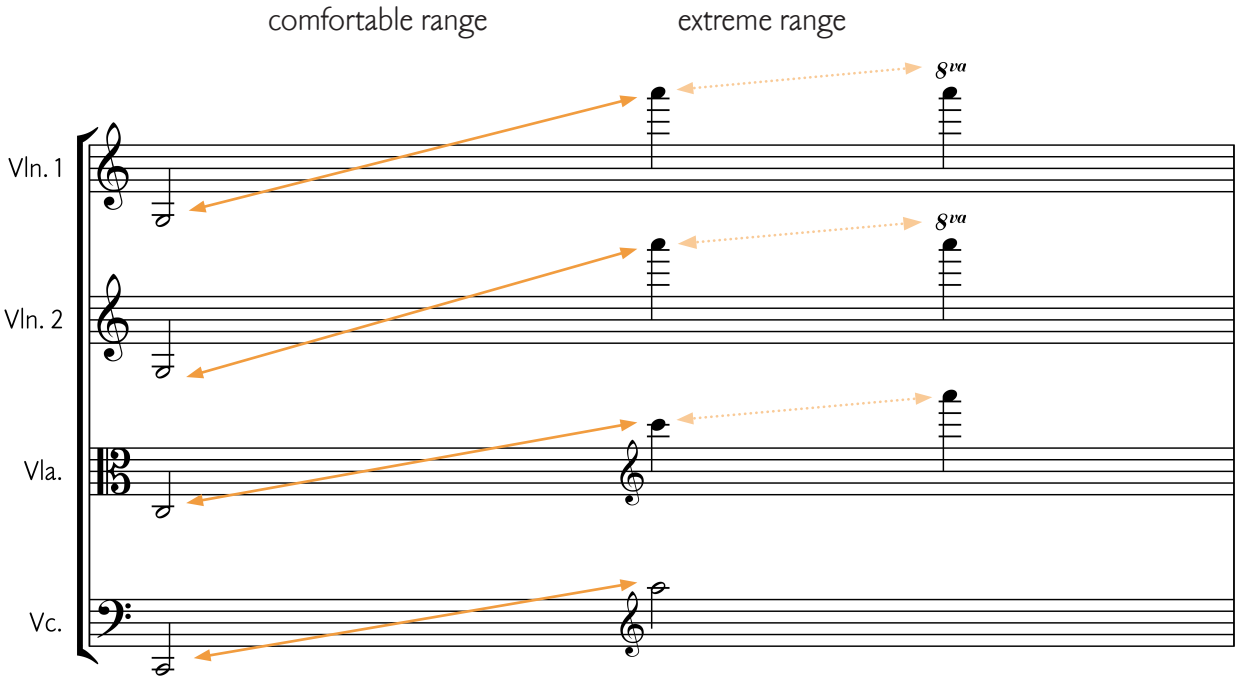
This activity will work best in a DAW or notation software.

- Support the group to copy one bar of their original melody, and paste it into a different instrument 1 or 2 bars later. NB many KS3 students do not know how to use copy and paste functions on these softwares, so they may need some help with this.
- Ask the whole group to listen back to this. Do they like it? Are there any crunches or clashes in the harmony that they do not like? Make changes based on this evaluation.
- (Optional) Repeat this process into a third/ fourth instrument.
- When asking students to 'fill in the gaps', first ask students to fill in the gaps by writing harmony notes in minims or crotchets, then start to think about passing notes between these points. The passing notes may use similar rhythms to the original melodies.
- When listening back as a group, each pair could be responsible for 'listening out' for something different in the music. One pair could be responsible for listening to whether the 'mood' or 'emotion' is in keeping with their ideas for the piece and another pair could be responsible for listening to whether the independent lines are balanced well (no line should take over).

Idiomatic Writing Tips
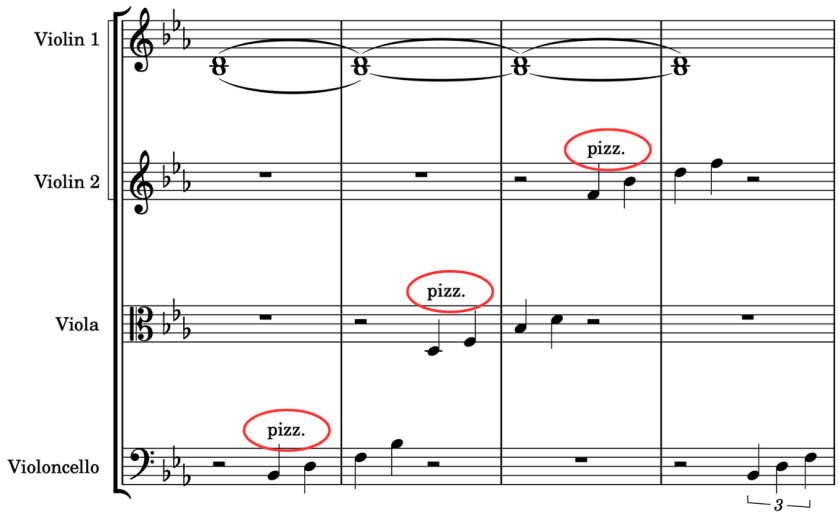
Exploring a String Quartet

A string quartet is made up of 2 violins, a viola and a cello. Together they cover 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!
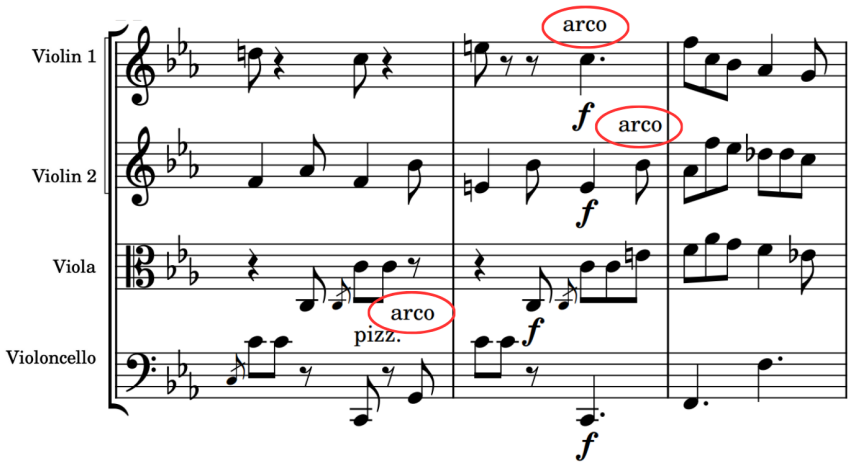


There are things that all the instruments in a string quartet can do for example they can all play the strings with a bow (arco), or by plucking the strings with their fingers (pizzicato). Remember, each of the instruments in a string quartet has a unique sound quality and the decisions you make for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

Pizzicato example:



excerpt from BEETHOVEN Ludvig Van, String Quartet in E-flat Major Op.74 "Harp", First movement (Poco adagio – Allegro), bars 125-128

Arco example:



excerpt from MENDELSSOHN Fanny, String Quartet in E-flat Major HelH227, Second movement (Allegretto), bars 14-16

The role(s) of each instrument in a string quartet often change as a piece develops, and could include any of the Following ideas:

- Playing a melody
- Playing a counter melody
- Providing harmonic accompaniment
- Providing a more rhythmic accompaniment
- Playing a motif
- Playing a bass line
- Playing extended techniques to provide certain effects

All of these roles contribute to the overall texture of the music. When we create music, we combine, mix and layer sounds together. Texture is the word we use to describe the way we do this. Different musical textures can depend on:

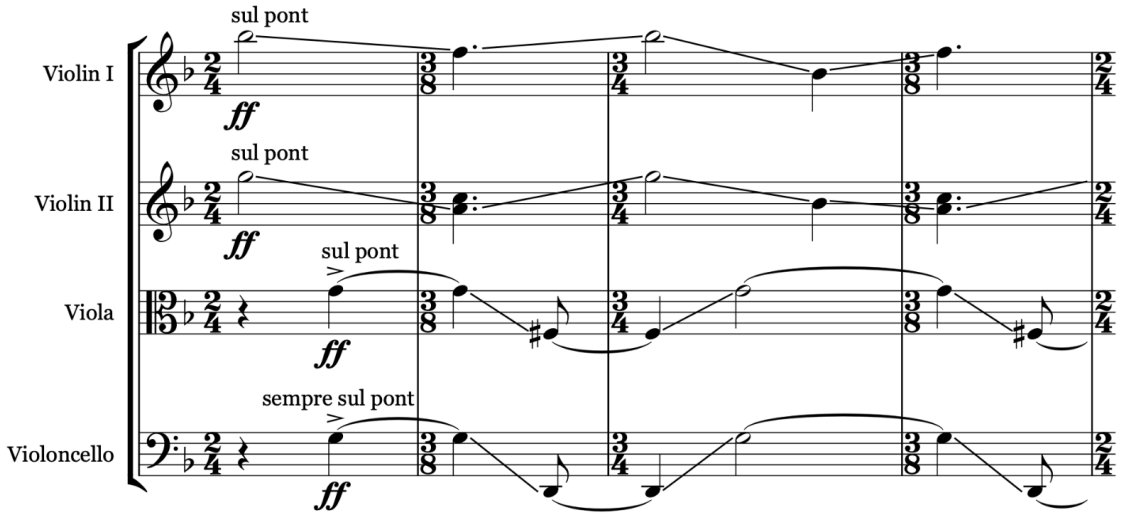
- How many instruments are playing at a particular time
- The timbre of the instruments that are playing
- What the instruments are actually playing

Try this!
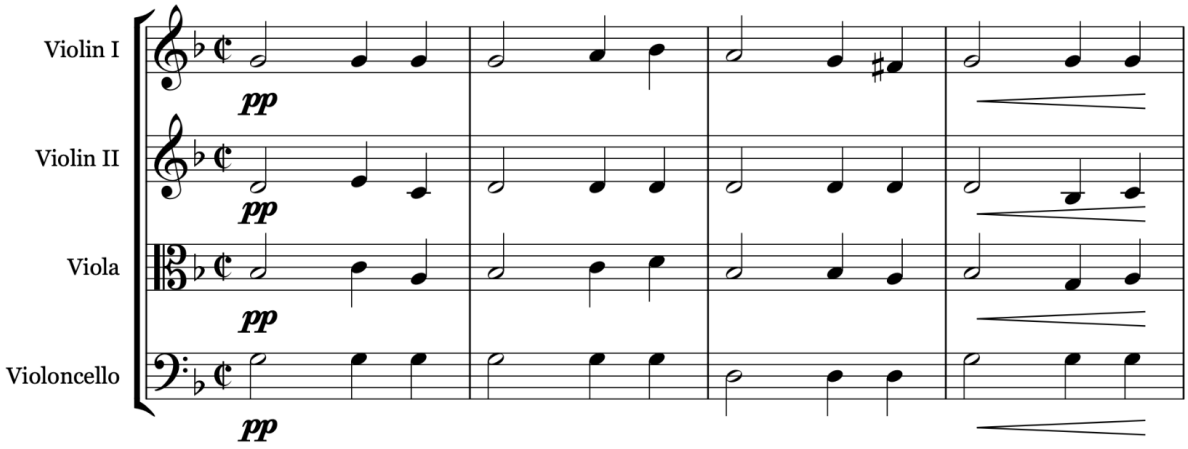
Learning objectives: identify/analyse

Task: match each label to the correct texture:

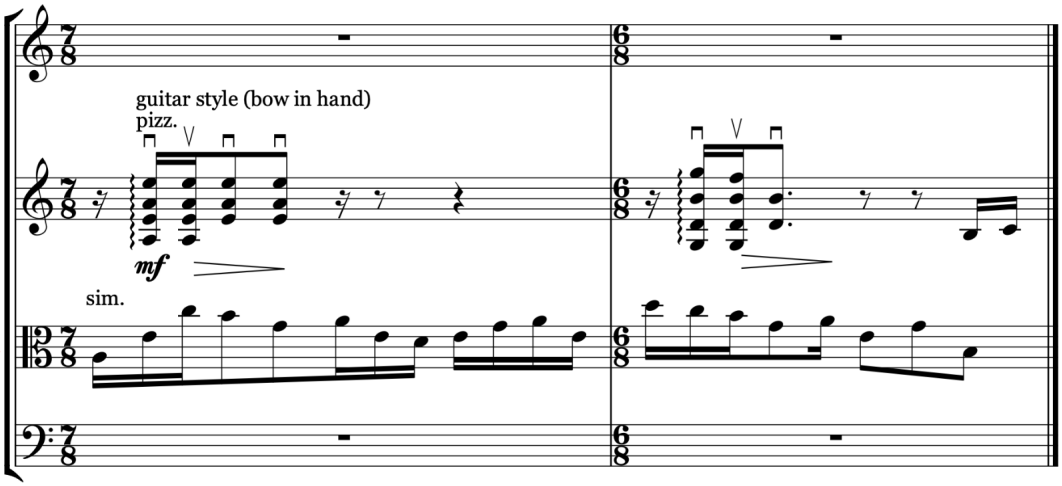
- Homophonic texture
- Polyphonic texture
- Melody and accompaniment



excerpt from MEREDITH, Anna, 'Tuggemo', bars 89-92



excerpt from SCHUBERT. Franz. 'Death and the Maiden'. Movement Two (Andante con moto) bars 1-4



excerpt from MONTGOMERY, Jessie. 'Strum', bars 3-4

Revisiting Your Piece

As students begin to complete the first draft of their pieces, it may be beneficial for them to go back to their planning document they made at the start of this resource and consider the following questions:

- Does the piece represent what they originally wanted it to be about?
- Is it suitable for the intended audience?
- Did the student meet their musical aims? If so, how? And if not, why not? There may be a perfectly good reason as to why not, but we think it's good practice for student's to explain why their musical decisions have gone away from how they originally planned.

Sometimes students can compose pieces that present a few problems or challenges. Below is a list of some of the most common ones we've found when visiting schools:

- Too many ideas: Encourage students to make the most of the material they compose and develop their ideas rather than have a collection of unconnected ideas in one piece.
- Too much cut and paste: Repetition of musical ideas is a common composition technique and should be encouraged. However, composers often develop something in the music when returning to a musical idea. For example, this could be playing the same section of music but with different instrumentation, voicing or dynamics.
- Not playable: This could be because students have selected notes out of the range of the instrument or it is unplayable because to the technical demands, for example playing melodies with extremely wide intervals at a very fast tempo or impossible chords in a string part.
- Noodling melodies with no phrase structure: Encourage students to give their melodies shape and direction, see the section on 'Melodies' (page 11) to help with this.
- Not enough harmonic planning: students should understand how to create different harmonies and chords in their piece, and which ones create different musical punctuation marks.
- Underdeveloped accompaniment: Encourage students to give their accompaniment a distinctive character using rhythms they devised themselves or common accompaniment patterns.
- Overdeveloped accompaniment: Ensure that distinctive melodies don't get lost in the texture, particularly where there are too many ideas within a single texture. Make sure accompaniments don't overlap the range of the melody too much and that inner parts don't contain too many jumps.
- Use of Instruments: For this project the students are composing for string quartet. However, this doesn't mean that every member of the quartet has to play throughout the whole piece.
- Dynamics & Articulation: Encourage students to think about the dynamics and articulation of the music they create. Providing detail for the musicians will greatly help their performance.
- Transitioning between sections: Encourage students to think about how they can transition from one section to the next, through modulations for example.

Your name:

Composer:
Title:
Date of composition:
Instruments:

Start in the circle below. As you listen, note down any words that you would use to describe the music.

Then, think about the seven elements of music in the coloured circles. How do each of these elements help express the mood, or feeling of the music? If you're stuck, start by mapping your words from the circle below onto the different elements.

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

2. How do these elements (tonality/ tempo etc.) convey the mood or feeling of the piece? (Write your ideas under each heading)



Your name:

Composer: Title:
Date of composition: Instruments:

Start in the middle on the other side of the sheet. As you listen, note down any words that you would use to describe each of the eight elements of music in the coloured circles.

Work your way out. How do each of the features you note down help express the mood, or feeling of the music? You can then come back to this side and note down anything that feels important to you under each of these headings.

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?

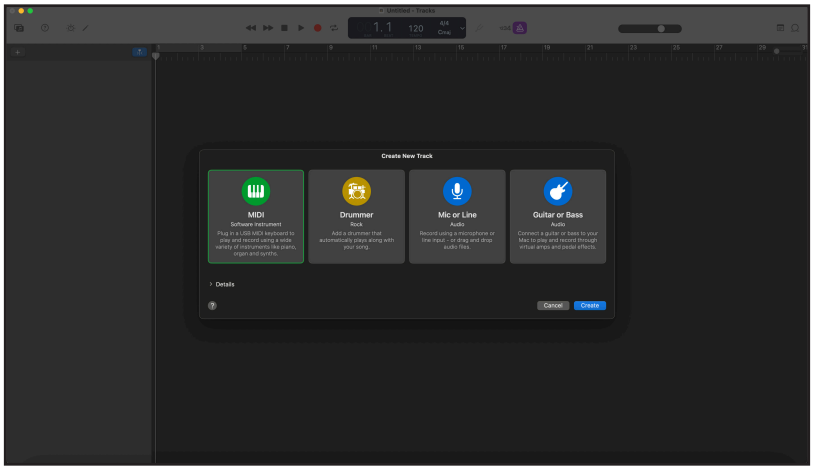
Digital Audio Workstation Guide

A Digital Audio Workstation (or DAW) is a brilliant tool for students to create music that doesn't require prior knowledge on how to read or write music. Common DAWs include BandLab, Garageband, Logic and Mixcraft. This guide uses GarageBand as it's main example, but most DAWs are laid out in similar ways. It will help students break down the process of inputting music into a DAW so that they can get onto the important part more easily - creating the music!

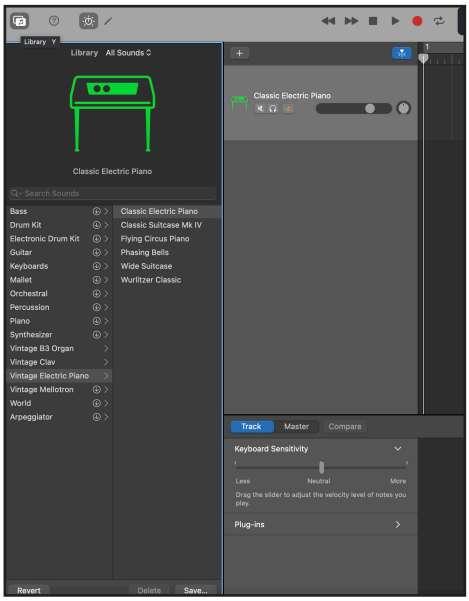
Setup

Adding instruments

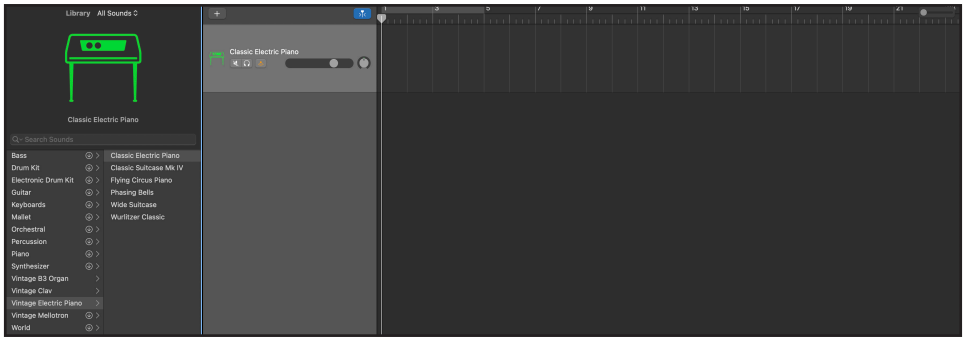
When first opening GarageBand and beginning a new project, a box will appear asking you what you would like to add first to the project. For our purposes, select 'MIDI software instrument'. This will load a new track with a MIDI instrument on. The instrument loaded will appear to the left of your project timeline.



To change the instrument, you can look through the library of sounds contained within the list on the left of the screen and select your desired sound. If you do not see the the list of sounds to choose from, you can either press 'Y' or click the leftmost button on the grey bar at the top of the project (using either of these functions again will hide the library from view).

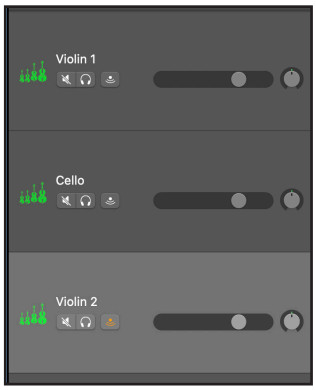


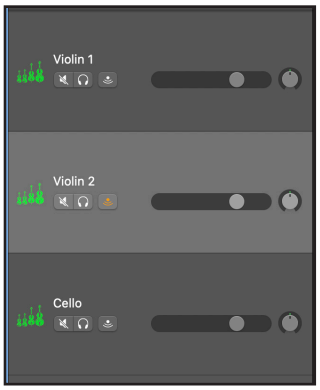
To add a second track (and other further tracks), navigate to the '+' button at the top left of the timeline (to the right of the instrument library if you have that open) or you can hold down 'option(⌥)-command(⌘)-N' to bring up the new track dialogue box.



A quick way to add another track with the same settings (to duplicate a track) is to simply right click on the instrument you wish to copy and select 'New Track with Duplicate Settings' or alternatively, select the instrument you wish to copy and hold down 'command(⌘)-D'. This is useful for when using multiples of the same instrument, two violins for instance.

To move the instruments up and down on your project, simply select the instrument with your mouse and drag to move up/down.

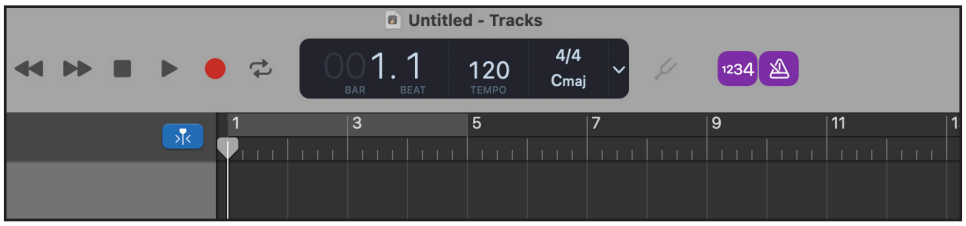




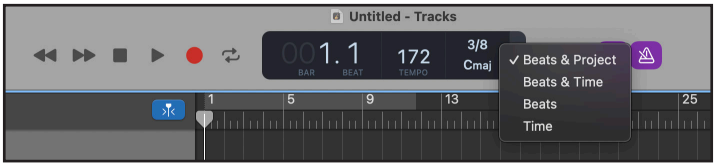
To change the name of your instrument, double click on the instrument name and type in whatever you wish. Note, that if you change the name of an instrument, it will stay changed even if you change the sound you are using for the instrument. You can also hold down 'shift(⇧)-enter(↵)'.

Setting time signatures

Time signature, tempo, and bar/beat number information is all contained within a black box in the middle of the grey bar at the top of any project. This is where you will need to look to change or reference these things.



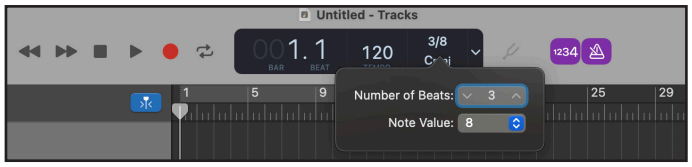
By default, it will present bar and beat number on the left, the tempo in the middle, and then time signature on the right above a key signature. If you do not see these things, click on the dropdown arrow at the end of the box and select 'beats and project'.



The default time signature for a new project will be 4/4. To change this click on the the time signature. This will bring up a list of time signatures to choose from. Choose one of these or choose custom for a time signature that is not

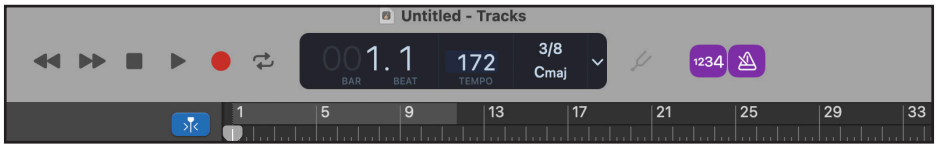
displayed in the box.





Tempo

The default tempo when starting a new project will be 120bpm. To change this, you can either click and hold on the number and drag up or down, or click and type in the desired tempo.



Adding in material

Turning on/off the metronome and count in

When playing in material, it is a good idea to use a metronome. This will help keep you in time.

The button to turn the metronome on/off can be found within the grey bar at the top of the project, just to the right of the box containing tempo/time signature information, it is a picture of a metronome. When highlighted purple it is on, it can also be turned on/off by pressing 'K'.

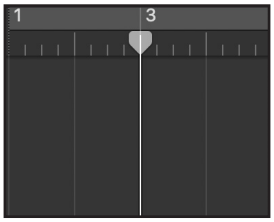
When recording in, you will also, most likely, prefer for the count in function to be on. This simply gives you a count-in of 4 beats before recording and gives you time to prepare for playing. It can be found to the left of the metronome and appears as a '1 2 3 4' button.

Playing in material

To record material into your project, first check that your keyboard is plugged in, you should be able to play a note on the keyboard and hear the sound of the instrument selected on your project.

Steps to record:

- Select the instrument you wish to record, it should be highlighted a lighter grey than the other instruments in your project.
- Then choose where you wish to record from in the project using the 'playhead', this is the white line that moves across your project in playback. See the example picture where I have moved it to bar 3.

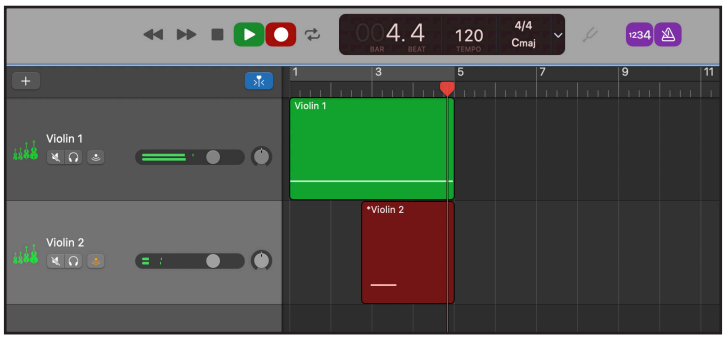


- Then navigate to the playback buttons within the grey bar at top of the project and click the red circle ' ' or

record button. Alternatively you can click ‘R’ on your keyboard to begin recording.



- Play into the project and when finished either hit the space bar or click the stop button found within the playback buttons.



Note, that if you have the loop playback function on while recording, it will playback the section you have selected over and over with the recordings all being layered on top of each other.





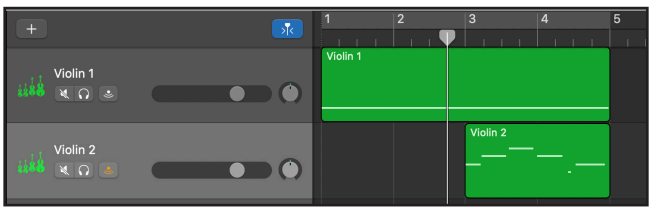
Quantising choices

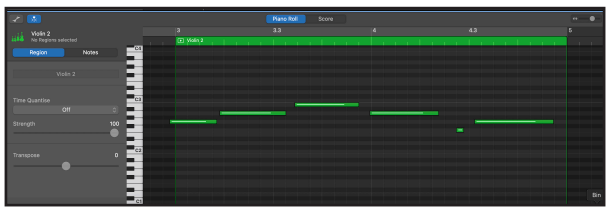
Once you have played in material, you will want to look at quantising your performance, this is very important for when it comes to exporting your track and creating a score for musicians to read.

Quantising is simply when you slightly adjust the position of notes to align with a division of the beat. For example, if we quantise to 1/8 (quaver) notes, all the notes will be moved to the nearest 1/8 note.

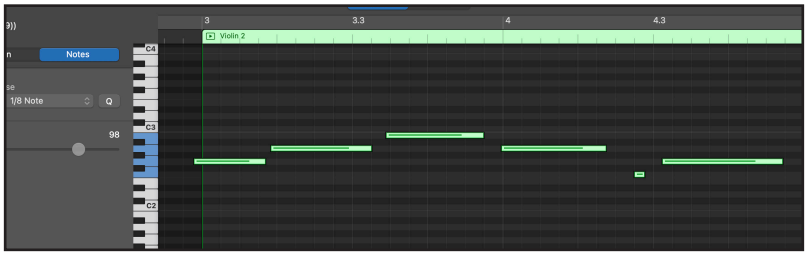
Steps to quantise:

- Double click on the clip of material you wish to quantise. This will bring up the piano roll. If you look closely at the example, you will see that the notes do not align with the vertical grid.



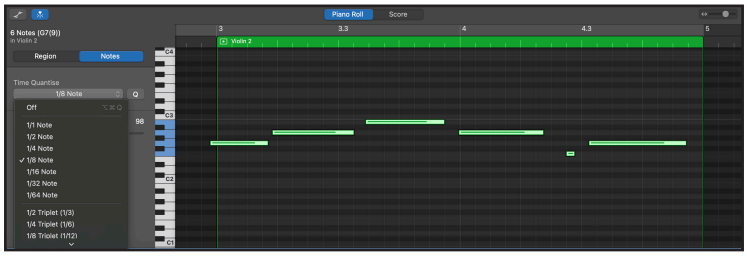


- Highlight the material you wish to quantise by clicking and dragging around the notes.

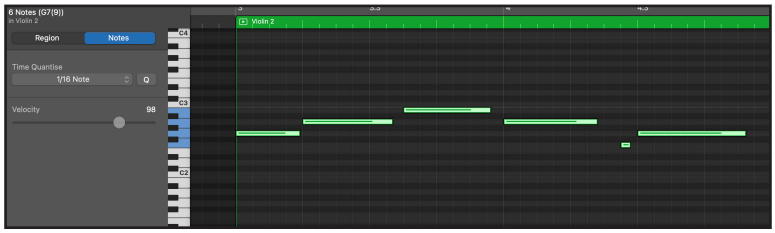


Alternatively, you can hold shift(⇧) and click on notes to select/unselect them.

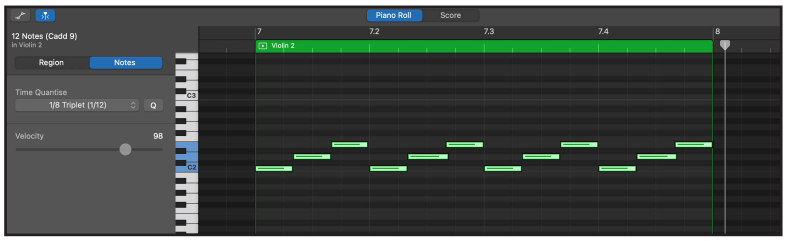
- Once highlighted, move over to the 'Time Quantise' drop-down list and click. Then select the division of the beat you would like to quantise up to.



The notes will automatically move once you select an option from the quantise list. Check that it looks right to you and also listen back to check that it sounds like what you intended. You will see in my example that the notes are now aligned with the vertical grid. Undo (edit-undo or command(⌘)-z) if it is not right and try again.



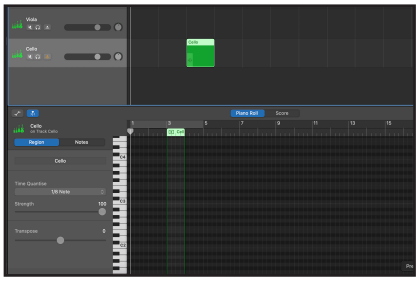
Note, if using triplets, these will not align with the grid, this is just something to be aware of.



Manually entering material

To manually enter notes, right-click on your project timeline where you wish to create the material and select 'Create MIDI Region'. This will create a blank green box where you can enter notes using the piano roll at the bottom of the project (press 'P' to close or open the piano roll).

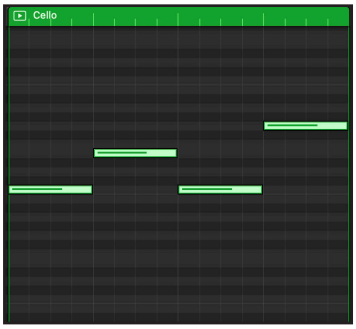




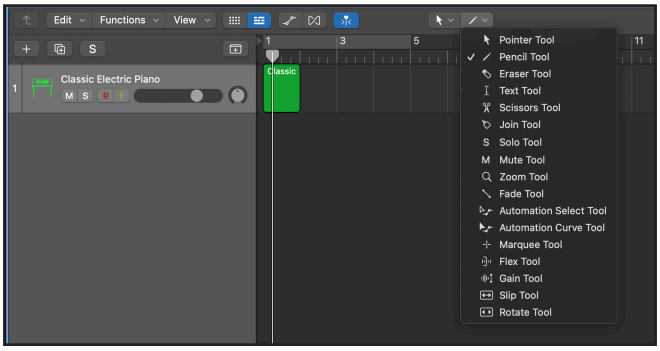
Holding command (⌘) will turn your cursor into a pencil tool. You can now enter notes where you wish. Adjust the

the notes duration by dragging it horizontally or adjust its pitch by dragging vertically.





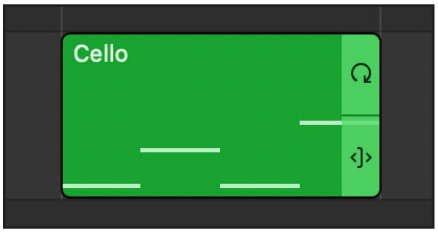
In Logic, you must select the pencil tool from the drop down box before holding command (⌘) and entering notes.

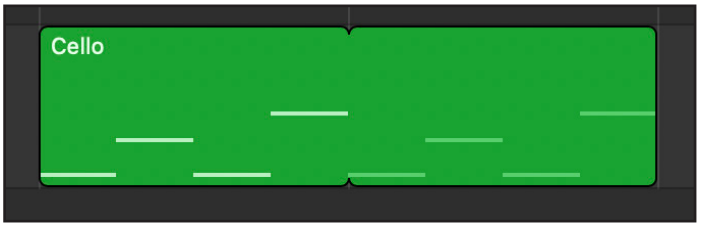


Editing Material

Looping material

To loop a MIDI clip, hover your cursor at the top right of the box until a circle with an arrow appears. Click and drag to loop the MIDI clip.

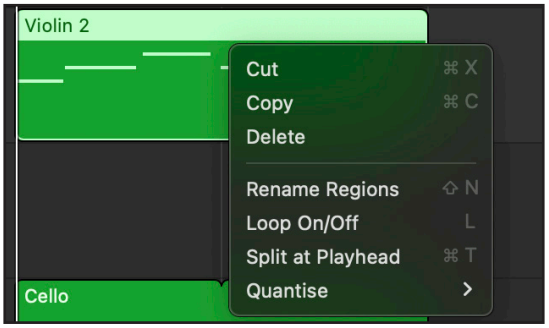




Alternatively, click on the midi clip and then either right click and select 'Loop On/Off' or press 'L'. Then adjust how long you wish the clip to loop for by dragging from the end of the looped clip.

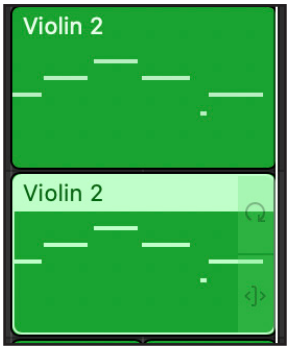
Copy and paste (on timeline, between parts, on piano roll)

To copy a clip, select the clip you wish to copy and either type command (⌘)-C or right click and select 'Copy'
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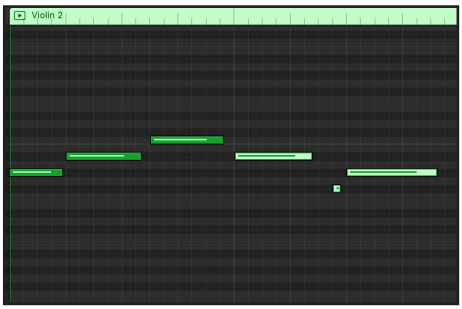
To paste the clip, move the playhead to the position at which you wish the clip to start, select the instrument you wish

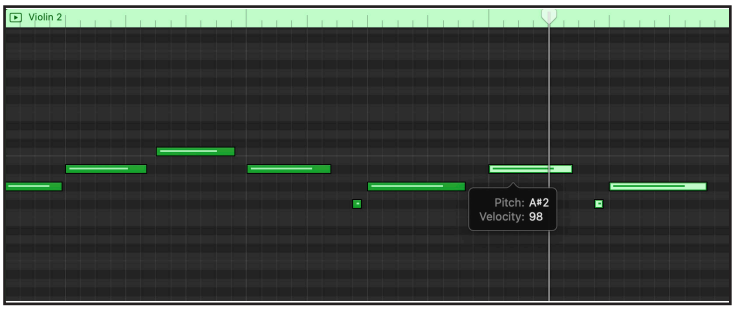
to copy into, and either right click and select 'Paste' or type command (⌘)-V.



A quick alternative to this process is to hold down option(⌥) and click and drag the midi clip to copy to a new location.

The process works similarly for copying material within a midi clip. Simply highlight the material you wish to copy then either right click and select copy or type command (⌘)-C, then move the playhead to where you wish to copy and right click and select paste or type command (⌘)-V.



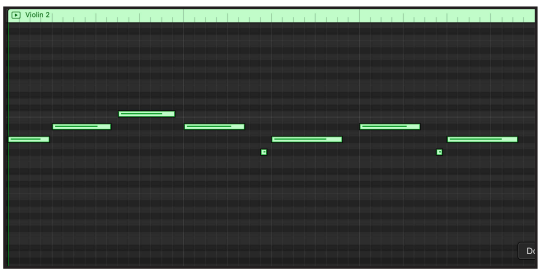


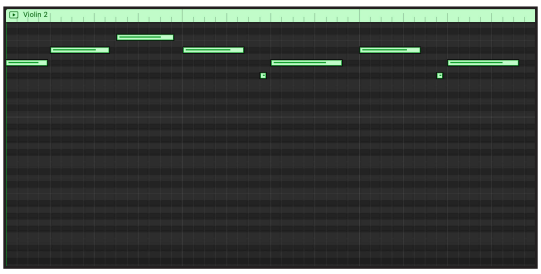
You can also copy from one midi clip (same process as above) and paste into another by selecting the desired destination and pasting within.

Like when copying and pasting entire midi clips, you can also highlight notes on the piano roll, hold down option(⌥), and drag the notes to copy and paste.

Quickly move up/down octave (and other intervals)

To change the pitch of notes within a midi clip, select the clip and in the piano roll highlight the note or notes you wish to change. Then hold down option(⌥) and use your arrow keys to move up or down by semitones. Alternatively, shift the pitch in octaves by holding option(⌥)-shift(⇧) and using the arrow keys to move up or down.

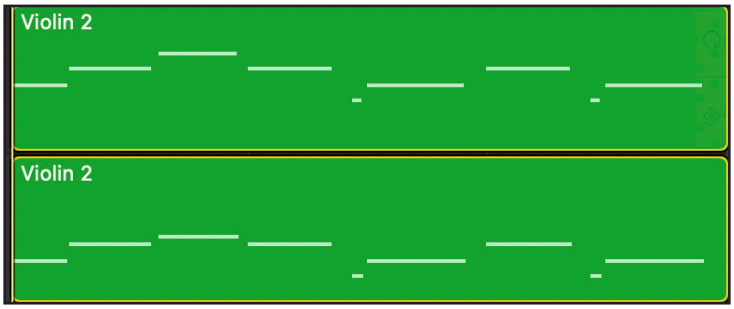




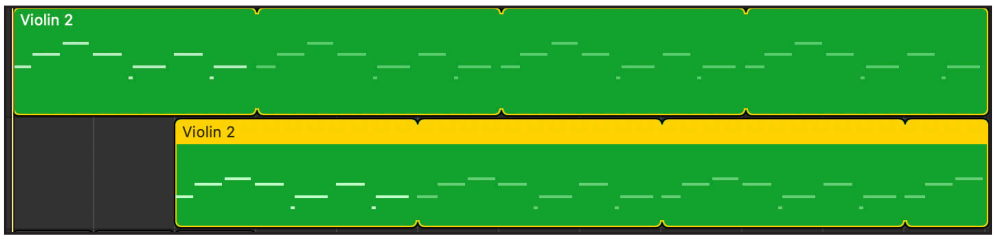
Homophonic Texture, Canonic Texture, Imitation

The methods above can be used to create various different musical textures.
Homophonic texture would be where you copy a midi clip to another instrument at exactly the same position in time

and adjust the pitches so that they are harmonising.

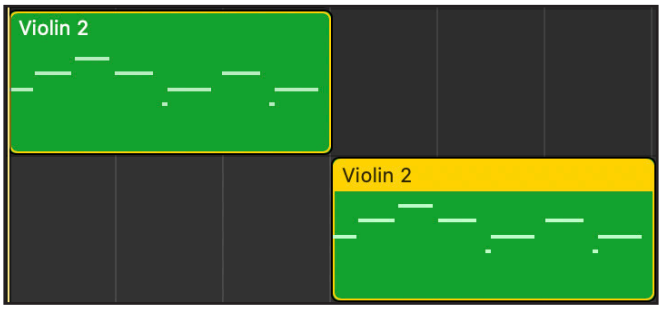


A canonic texture happens when a melody is copied and repeated after a delay.



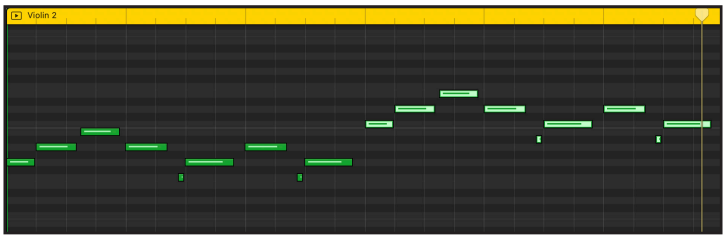
Usually, the repeated melody stays at the same pitch, but sometimes composers shift it up or down (often by a fifth or fourth). In a canon, the rhythm and intervals remain the same, even if the overall pitch moves up or down. If the melodies begin the same but then start to differ, it's no longer a canon—it becomes a fugue.

If one instrument plays something and another instrument copies it afterwards, we call this imitation.

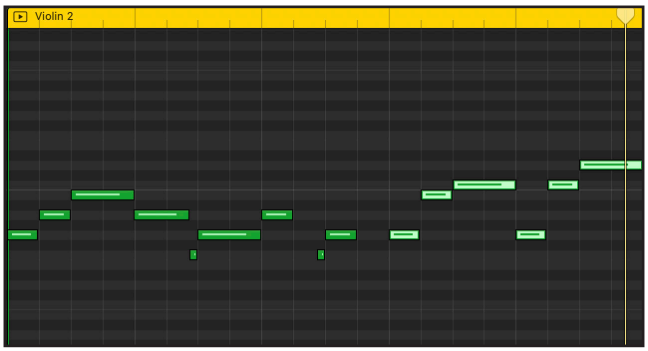


Copying and pasting to create a sequence or melodic development

A sequence is a section of melody or entire melody copied and then stated again at a higher or lower pitch. When doing this you might want to check that the copied notes, once moved to a higher or lower pitch, are still within your key.



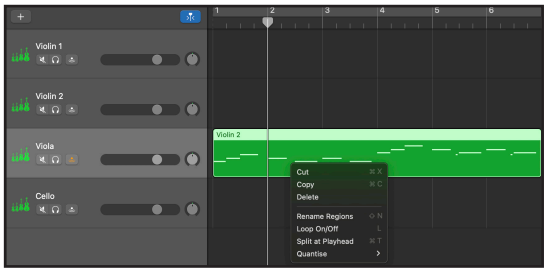
To quickly create melodic development from your initial material, you might copy and paste your melody or portions of your melody and then alter some of the intervals. In the picture below, the first three notes of the melody have been copied and pasted twice at the end, one after another (highlighted material). The interval between the first and second notes of the 3 note motif has been expanded. Note, the stepwise motion upwards between the second and third notes has been preserved.

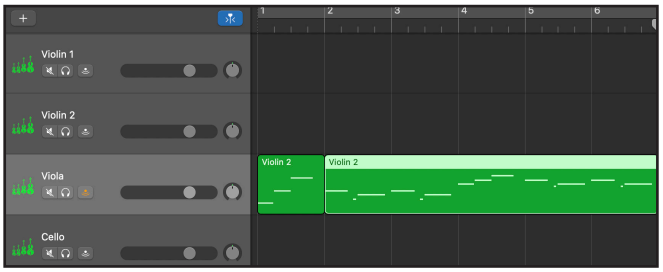


Once following these steps, you may then choose to use them again to adapt your entire melody to create different but related melodic ideas.

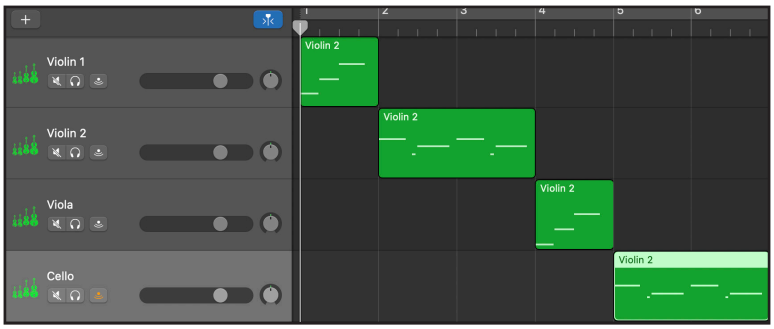
Split and reorganising

Another useful tool is the split feature, this chops MIDI clips into parts. Place the playhead where you wish to input the split, then right click on the MIDI clip and select 'Split at Playhead' or use command (⌘)-T.

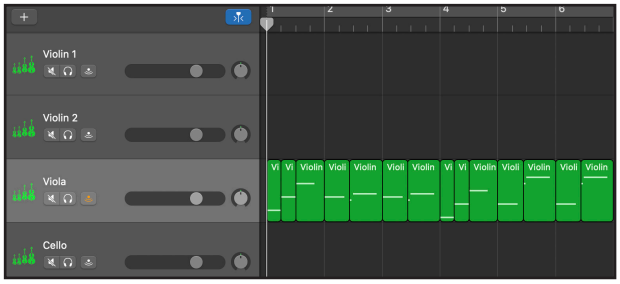


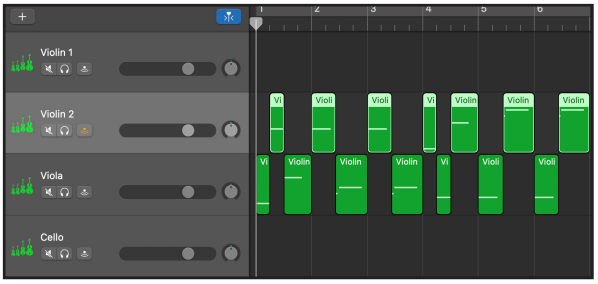


You may then choose to split the different parts of the melody across the different instruments in your ensemble—you may also choose to use the octave transpose feature to make it more idiomatic (well-suited) to the instrument or any of the other techniques discussed. This is a really great way to start thinking about arranging your basic materials.



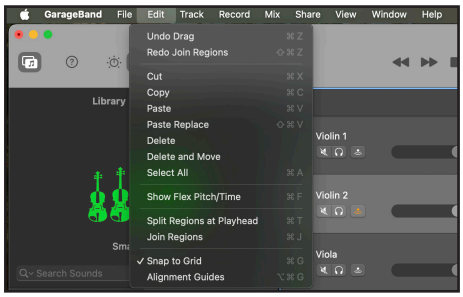
An interesting technique that can be explore here is what's called a hocket. This is where the melody bounces between instruments quite quickly, often every note. See in the examples how the MIDI clip has been split for almost every note. By holding shift(⌘) I can then highlight multiple clips and move them to another instrument.

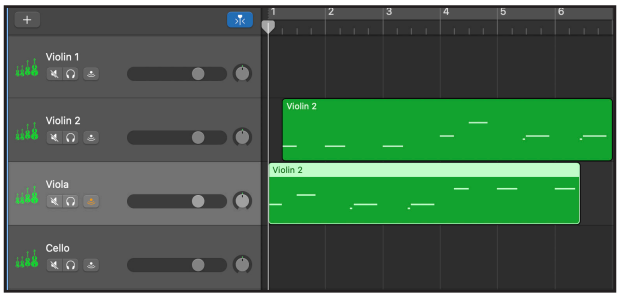




You can then use the join feature (edit-Join Regions or command (⌘)-J) to combine the different MIDI clips in one

instrument into one clip.





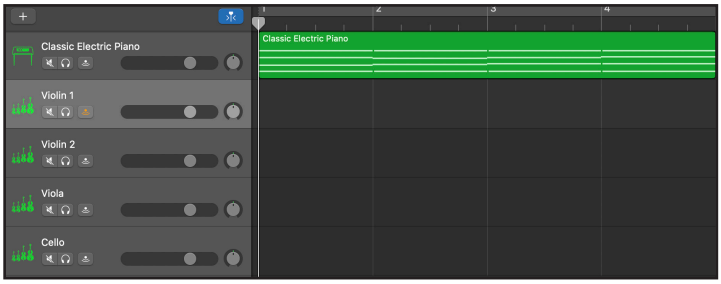
You may then choose to further edit each melody individually, for instance, extending the notes so that the two instruments overlap —this can be a great way to experiment with different textures and create new ideas and material from small initial ideas.



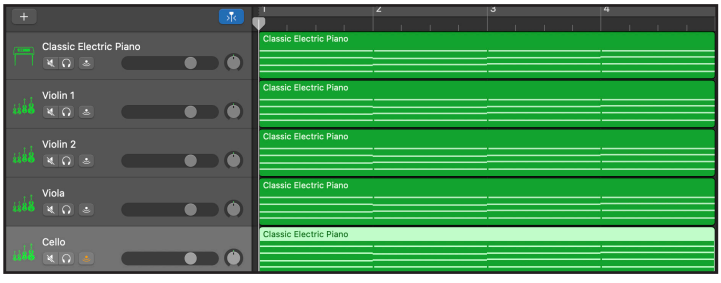
Logic features the 'scissors' tool that can be used to split midi clips, as well as the above explained features.

Distribute chords from keyboard part to other instruments

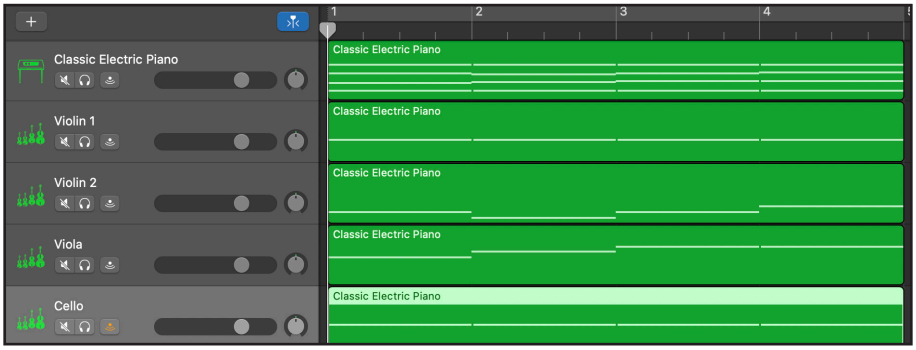
You might have made a chord progression on a keyboard (by entering notes manually or recording a performance) and now want to share the notes from those chords across different instruments.



To do this, copy the MIDI clip from the keyboard to the instruments you want to use (option(⌥) + click and drag is the fastest way, but any copy-paste method works).



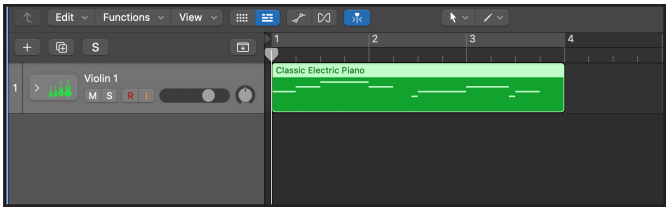
Then, choose which note of each chord each instrument should play, and delete the other notes from their MIDI clips.

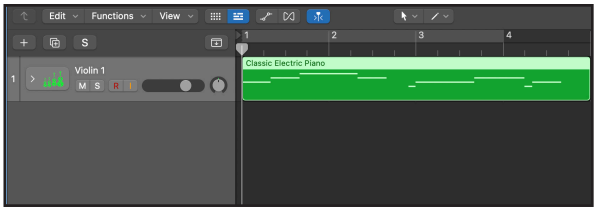


Extra techniques in Logic Pro (not featured in GarageBand)

Stretching/Time Handles

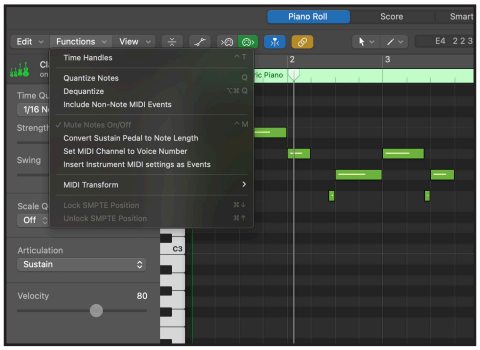
Logic offers an interesting method of transforming material via stretching MIDI clips. This can be achieved by hovering your cursor at the end of a MIDI clip, holding down option (⌥), waiting until the cursor turns into the time stretching symbol, and then dragging the clip longer or shorter. This will stretch the MIDI, or notes, within to be longer or shorter. See in the example how the melody goes from being 3 bars long to 4 bars.



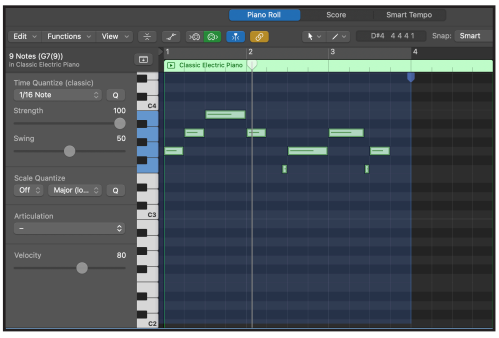


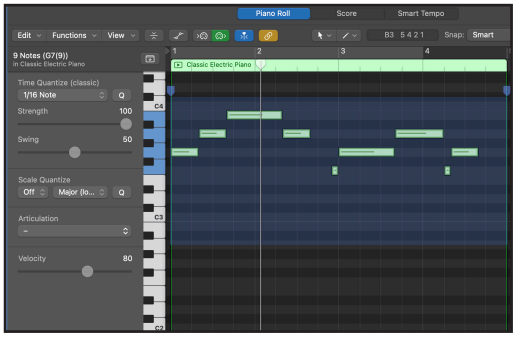
Use cautiously, as if making longer or shorter, your material may no longer be in time and may need quantising.

Another way to do this, when in piano roll, navigate to 'Functions' and turn on 'Time Handles'.



Then highlight the material you wish to stretch and drag.





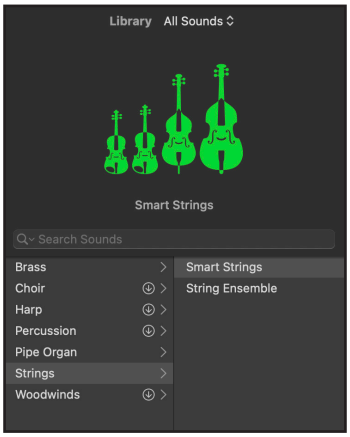
MIDI transform

Logic has a bunch of ways to transform MIDI. Highlight the MIDI you want to transform, navigate to 'Functions', hover over MIDI Transform which will bring up a list of options, then select whichever you would like to use. In the pictured example, 'Reverse Position' has been used to create a version of the original melody that is backwards.

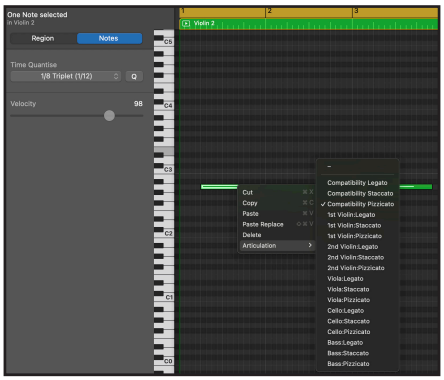
Techniques/Dynamics

Change playing techniques e.g. pizzicato

Some virtual instruments offer the option to change the playing technique of the instrument, such as 'Smart Strings'.

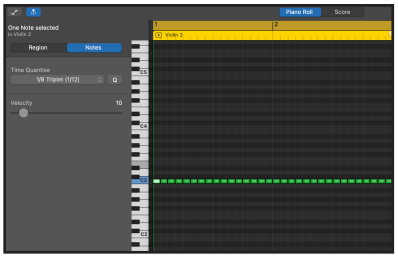


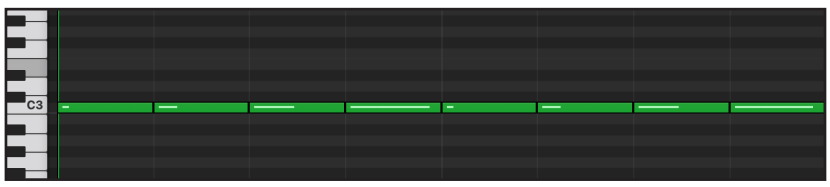
To change the playing technique of a note (or notes), simply navigate to the piano roll of the MIDI clip in which you wish to change the technique. Highlight the note you wish to change, then right click and hover over Articulation, which will bring up a list of techniques, then select which one you would like to implement.



Dynamics

To change the dynamics of a note, select the note you wish to change in the piano roll, navigate to the left hand side where it says 'Velocity' and bring the scroller down to make it quieter or up to make it louder. Changes in velocity are displayed with white lines inside each note, see in the example the notes go from quiet to loud.





In Logic, changes to velocity (dynamics) change the colour of the note.

Playback

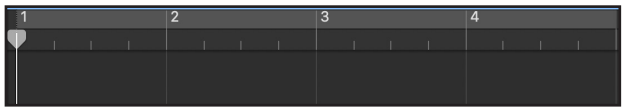
Play/pause

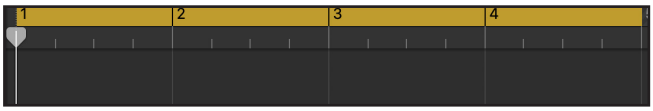
To playback your project, you can either press spacebar or navigate to the playback icons at the top of the screen and press the play button. It will playback from where the playhead currently is. Move your playhead to playback from another location in your project. Press the stop button or space bar again to stop playback.



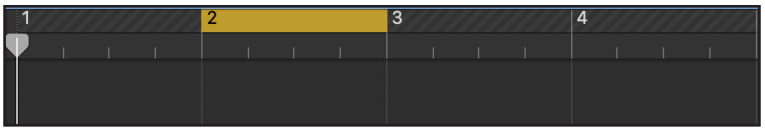
Looping or Cycle

To loop a section and have it playback over and over again, GarageBand calls this cycle, navigate to the top of the project timeline where there will be a light grey bar, clicking this will highlight it yellow and enable cycle.





To adjust where in the project you want to loop playback, drag either side of the highlighted yellow bar or move the entire bar.

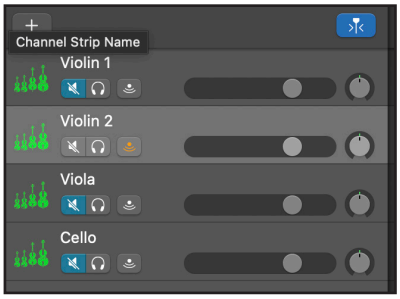


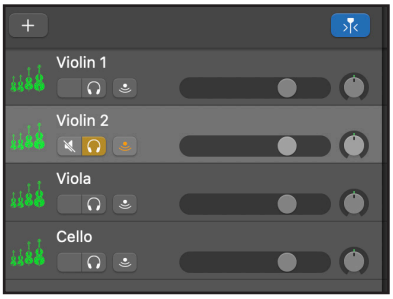
Note, that when cycle mode is enabled, you will only be able to playback the portion of the project which is included in the cycle.

You may find cycle useful for playing back material you already have, such as a chord progression, and improvising new material over the top, such as a melody.

Solo/mute

To solo or mute the playback of instruments, use the buttons to the left of the instrument name. The button resembling a speaker is for mute and the button with headphones is the solo button.





In Logic, solo/mute buttons can be found in the same place, but are simply labelled with 'S' and 'M'.

Contact details

If you'd like to be in touch with us about the contents of this pack or the project in general, please email us at wecompose@musicintheround.co.uk or call our office on 0114 2814660.

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

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Further resources

All of the resources for this project can be found at musicintheround.co.uk/wecompose-2024-2025-key-stage-3-resource-hub or on our website www.musicintheround.co.uk.

To browse further resources relating to KS3 (or other Key Stages) please go to our website www.musicintheround.co.uk

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MUSIC IN THE ROUND