



COMPOSITION KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

'Composing is a messy business!'

STEPS

1. GENRE/MOOD (Film music? Song? Hip-hop? Fusion?)
2. KEY (Major or Minor? Chromatic? Modal?)
3. CHORD PROGRESSION or MELODY first?

STEPS - Part 2

4. Repeat! Develop! Create contrast!
5. Add layers! Minimum 4!
6. Finalise structure. Add decoration?

STEP 1 - What will I compose?

Listen to as many examples of your chosen genre/mood as possible. What can you use in your own composition? **Make a shopping list!**

STEP 2 - What is my key?



MAJOR KEY	# b	RELATIVE MINOR	# b
C major		A minor	G#
G major	F#	E minor	F# D#
F major	Bb	D minor	Bb C#

STEP 5 - LAYERS

Texture: Aim to have a range of **very thin** (1 or 2 instruments) to **thick texture** (4 or more instruments) if possible!

STEP 3 - Chords and Melody Common Chord progressions



OPTIMISTIC	I	V	vi	IV	'Hey soul sister' 'I'm yours' 'No woman no cry'
PESSIMISTIC	vi	IV	I	V	'All of me' 'River flows in you' 'Grenade' 'Poker face'
PRIMARY	I	IV	V	I	Rock, Pop, Classical, Jazz, 12 bar blues, etc etc
'JAZZY'	I	ii	V	I	The ii-V-I is used in many jazz standards, RnB, Pop

MELODY: 'A good melody has many STEPS, a few LEAPS and some repeated notes'

STEP 4 - How to develop my melody/piece

- ❑ Repeat your ideas with minor changes (Don't 'loop', that's boring!)
- ❑ Use sequences. Use imitation. Change octaves. Use inversion, augmentation, diminution.
- ❑ Create contrast! (Change dynamics, key, instruments, texture, tempo, articulation)
- ❑ Use **silence**.

STEP 6 - Does my piece sound 'complete'?

- ❑ Is there a logical structure to my piece?
- ❑ Do the start/end make sense?
- ❑ Is it unified? (Are the different sections connected in any way?)

Dynamics: Aim to have a range of **very quiet** (pp) to **very loud** (ff) if it suits your genre!



Composition is a balance between variety and repetition. Too much of either is NOT good!

Name: _____

Unit 2: Writing a Popular Song step by step




Select the instruments you are using in your band. Choose at least one from each list.

Melody (tune)	Chords	Bass Line / Riff	Solo Instrument	Rhythm Section	Others
Singer	Piano	Bass Guitar	Rapper	Drum Kit	Backing Singer
	Keyboard	Piano (left hand)	Strings (violins)	Synthesizer	
	Synthesizer	Keyboard (left hand)	Saxophone	Hand Claps	
	Guitar		Lead Guitar	Maracas	
			Keyboard / Piano	Tambourine	

Glossary: Words you will need to understand in order to complete this task

- **Appraisal**- the essay you are going to write about composing this piece
- **Bass Line**- a low part of the music usually based on the lowest note of the chord
- **Chord**- two or more notes played at one. Triad chord have three notes. Eg. G B D
- **Chord Sequence**- chords put into a pleasing order
- **Drum Fill**-when the drummer adds extra hits to mark the end of a section of music
- **Hook**- a catchy bit of music
- **Improvise**- to make up by playing as you go along
- **Melody**- main tune
- **Riff**- a repeated pattern played by a low instrument
- **Structure**- the order of different sections in a piece of music

Follow this step by step guide to writing a popular song.
Watch out for helpful hints and ways of improving your grade. 

Step 1: Decide on the structure of your song.
Most popular songs have some of the following in them:

verse chorus intro outro solo middle 8 rap bridge

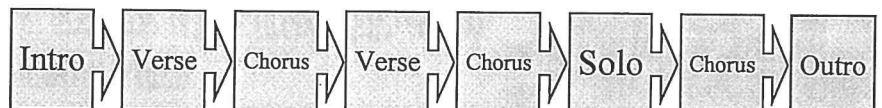
Listen to examples of songs to find out how they are structured.

SONG TITLE: <u>valerie by Amy Winehouse</u>	STRUCTURE OF SONG: _____
SONG TITLE: <u>A day in the life by The Beatles</u>	STRUCTURE OF SONG: _____
SONG TITLE: <u>Worried about Ray by The Hoosiers</u>	STRUCTURE OF SONG: _____
SONG TITLE: <u>Good Vibrations by Beach Boys</u>	STRUCTURE OF SONG: _____

Write down the structure that you have decided on in the boxes below.
If you need more boxes, then add them!

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This is an example of a regular popular song structure, ———>



And this is how it would be written out labelling the sections as A B C etc.



You can see how repetitive a popular song is, which makes it easier to compose!



Bridge sections between the verse and chorus makes the song more complex and will give you more to write about in your appraisal

Step 2:

We are starting with the **verse**.

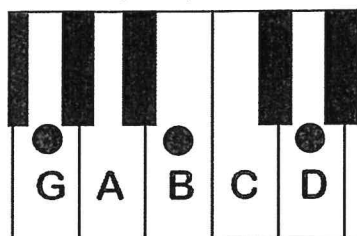
Choose the eight bar chord sequence which will form the basis of every verse.

Choose from the chords below.

Start with G major—(Although you can change this to a more suitable key if you wish)

Primary (major) Chords

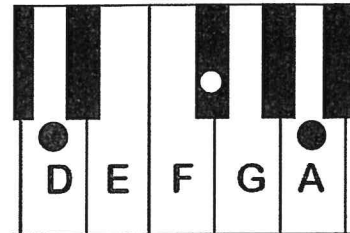
G major (Chord I)



C major (Chord IV)

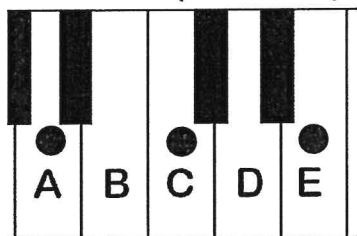


D major (Chord V)

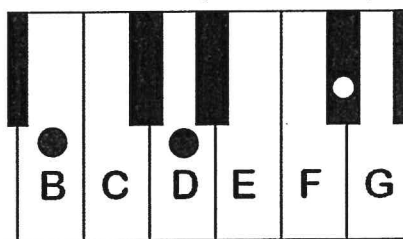


Secondary (minor) Chords

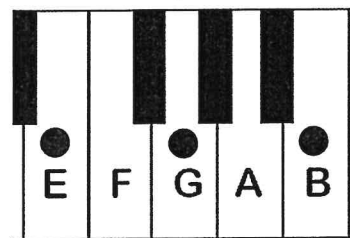
A minor (Chord II)



B minor (Chord III)

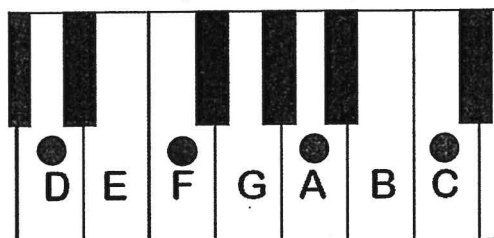


E minor (Chord VI)



Dominant 7th Chord

D₇ (Chord V₇)



Using a mixture of primary and secondary chords, and perhaps the dominant 7th chord, will sound much more complex than only using the primary chords.

Write your chosen order and ask your teacher to play it to hear if it sounds good

G major							
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An example of what you might write

G major	B minor	C major	D major	G major	A minor	C major	D ₇
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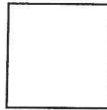


Try using a cadence in the last two bars.
 Eg. Perfect Cadence = D major ► G major
 Plagal Cadence = C major ► G major
 Interrupted Cadence = D major ► A/B/C/E
 Imperfect Cadence = G major ► D major

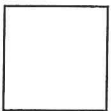
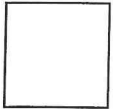
Step 3:

Write four lines of lyrics for the **verse** which will fit over the top of the chord sequence you have chosen. You will have to say or sing them out loud at the same time as playing/hearing the chord sequence to check it fits.

G
major



You will have to write the chord sequence out again in the order you have chosen in the boxes above the lines



Which lines should rhyme?

Choose your rhyming pattern



1 & 2 ?

3 & 4 ?

1 & 3 ?

2 & 4 ?

1 & 2 & 3 ?

All of them?

None of them?

An example of what the lyrics and chords might look like;

G
major

B
minor

All my life I've been waiting for you

C
major

D
major

You're in my thoughts, my words, everything I do

G
major

A
minor

I'm like a bird, you have set me free

C
major

D7

Now in the silence of night, I can't be

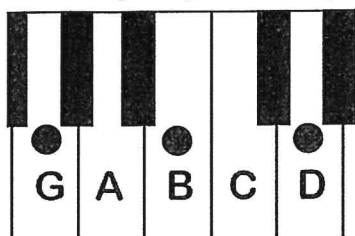
Step 4:

We are now working on the chorus.
Choose the eight bar chord sequence which will form the basis of chorus.

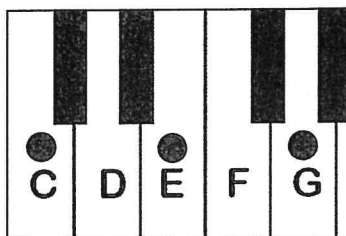
Choose from the chords below.
You can choose one of the primary chords to start the chorus with

Primary (major) Chords

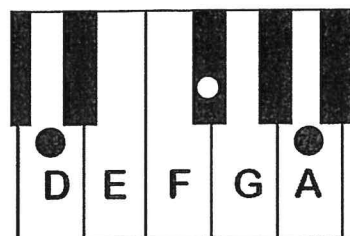
G major (Chord I)



C major (Chord IV)

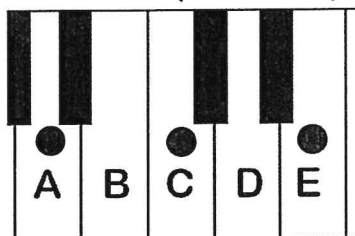


D major (Chord V)

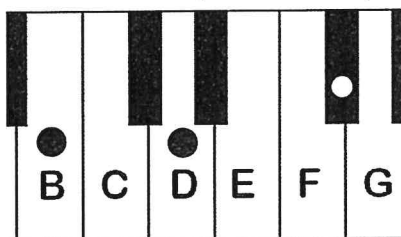


Secondary (minor) Chords

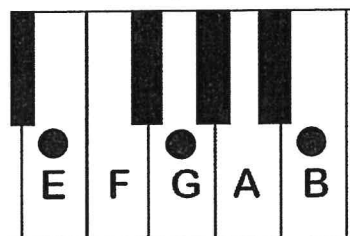
A minor (Chord II)



B minor (Chord III)

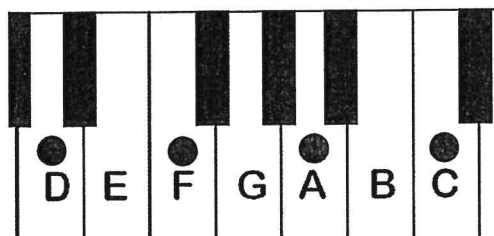


E minor (Chord VI)



Dominant 7th Chord

D7 (Chord V7)



If you are adding a bridge it needs to be between 2-4 bars long and fit in between the verse and chorus. You will need to write it before the chorus.

Write your chosen order and ask your teacher to play it to hear if it sounds good

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An example of what you might write

C major	A minor	G major	D major	G major	E minor	D7	G major
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Try using a cadence in the last two bars.
Eg. Perfect Cadence = D major ► G major
Plagal Cadence = C major ► G major
Interrupted Cadence = D major ► A/B/C/E
Imperfect Cadence = G major ► D major

Step 5:

Write four lines of lyrics for the **chorus** which will fit over the top of the chord sequence you have chosen. You will have to say or sing them out loud at the same time as playing/hearing the chord sequence to check it fits.

G
major



You will have to write the chord sequence out again in the order you have chosen in the boxes above the lines



Successful popular songs have a hook (something that's catchy).

In this example, the hook would be the words 'You've gotta be' and it would be a similar tune each time it is sung to make it memorable.

Try and add a hook to your chorus.

An example of what the lyrics and chords might look like;

C
major

A
minor

You've gotta be strong to make the grade

G
major

D
major

You've gotta be tough to stand the pace

G
major

E
minor

You've gotta be free so that you don't fade



You can add extra chords in the chorus to make it feel faster without actually getting faster!

D7

C
major

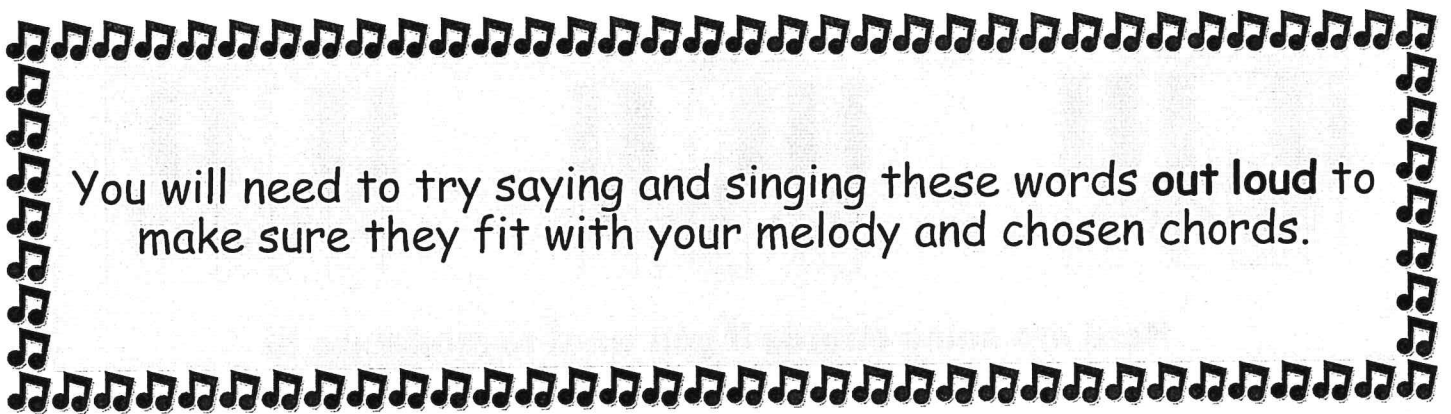
G
major

You've gotta be fast to run the race

Step 6:

Write the lyrics for verse two.

The lyrics must use the **same tune** as the first verse and ideally should have the same **rhyming pattern** as the first verse.



You will need to try saying and singing these words **out loud** to make sure they fit with your melody and chosen chords.

Step 6a:

If you are writing a third verse you will need to write more lyrics.

The lyrics must use the **same tune** as the first verse and ideally should have the same **rhyming pattern** as the first verse.

Step 7:

Choose the chord sequence for the middle 8 / solo section

You can use the chords listed for the verse and chorus, or you can modulate to another key and choose new chords.

Write your chosen order and play them to hear if it sounds good —
It is worth inputting these into Sibelius or Logic instead.

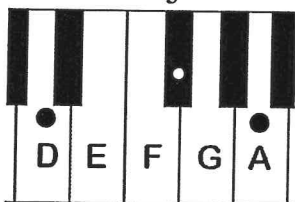
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To increase the complexity of your music, you could modulate to another key for the middle 8 / solo.

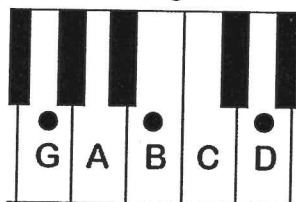


Here are some chords if you want to modulate to D major (Dominant)

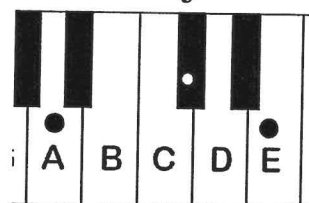
D major



G major

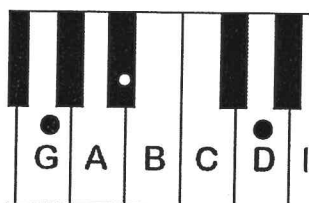


A major

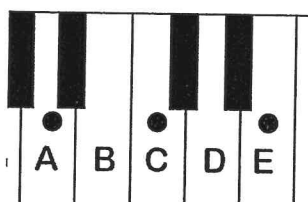


Here are some chords if you want to modulate to G minor (Relative minor)

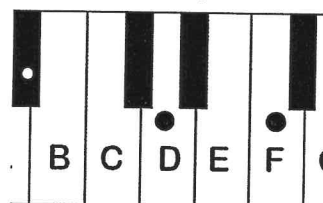
G minor



A minor



Bb major



Step 8:

A middle 8 / solo usually has a melody (tune) played over the chords

Programme the **chords** into **Sibelius** or **Logic**

and while it plays **improvise** a melody over the top. You will have to practice it over and over so that you remember the notes that fit and the ones that don't.

When you have a melody that you like, record it into **Sibelius** or **Logic** to help you write it down. You will need to decide what instrument you are going to use.

If you want a rap section in your song, you need to write the words and it should be put in the middle 8 / solo section



Step 9:

Write the intro and the outro

Intro: Intros are usually about 4 bars long. You can use some of your chosen **chord sequence** from the **verse** to make up the introduction.

Outro: Outros are usually about 4 bars long, but you can **repeat** them over and over until you **fade** out if you want. You can use some of your chosen **chord sequence** from the **chorus** to make up the outro.



As well as the chords in the introduction you can add a melody. It might be a fragment of the singers melody from later on in the song or it could be something new you have composed.



Vary the rhythm of the chords in the Intro and Outro, or vary the way the chords are played; for example by changing them to broken chords. This will keep the piece interesting.

Step 10: Create a riff or interesting bass line

Play back the chord sequences you have created in Sibelius or Logic and while it plays improvise a **bass line** or **riff** underneath (low notes). It should blend (harmonise) with the chords- not clash!

Keep it simple and repetitive. It should **not** be more interesting than the main tune!

You will have to practice it over and over so that you remember the notes that fit and the ones that don't.

When you have a bass line that you like, programme it into Sibelius or Logic to help you write it down.



To come up with a riff, compose a short pattern that just uses the notes in the chord of G major (GBD) with perhaps a couple of other notes too. Your riff will match perfectly under the chord G major.

From this point it will be very easy to move it up or down to match the other chords you have used, like C major and D major, and all the other chords too.

Here is an example of a riff for a G major chord = G B D D
Here is the same example changed to D major = D F# A A

Here is the same example changed to C major = C E G G
Here is the same example changed to A minor = A C E E

Step 11:

You now have the basic song composed, so now you need make sure it is all on the computer.

There are several ways you can do this. Choose the way that suits you best.

Start putting in all the chords first of all, then add the melody, bass line, and solos



Play the chords and solo melody into the computer using Logic



Write the chords and solo melody into the computer using Logic



Write the chords and solo melody into the computer using Sibelius

These are ways of getting the **chords** on-to the computer. You will need to either write the chords in manually or play them in using the keyboard.

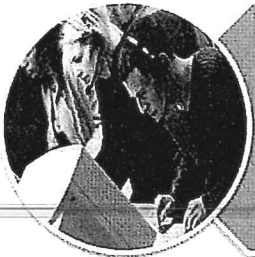


Vary the rhythm when playing the chords into the computer to make it more interesting.

These are ways of getting the **singer's melody** onto the computer



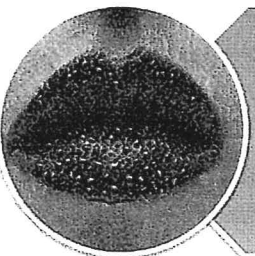
Ask a singer to sing your lyrics and tune directly into Logic



Write out each individual note that the singer sings into Sibelius and add the lyrics underneath



You can add backing singers add this point to help support the singer. They often imitate what the singer has just sung.



Sing your lyrics yourself directly into Logic . Remember, you will not be marked on your performance!

Step 13: Adding the finishing touches!

Once you have put the music onto the computer (either by inputting by hand or by playing live) you are ready to add the finishing touches!

Make sure you have added (or written onto your music) the following:

- Title
- Your name and candidate number
- Tempo marking eg. *q = 100 allegretto*
- Expression marking eg. *grazioso* or *sadly*
- Dynamics eg. *ff f mf mp p pp cresc. dim.*

Have you considered the following things:

- Balance of the instruments. Are some too loud or too quiet?
 - Delete any empty bars
- Smarten up the score so it is easy to read



Presenting the Music



You must submit a **score** (Sibelius) or **annotation** (Logic or handwritten lead sheet) to the examiner.

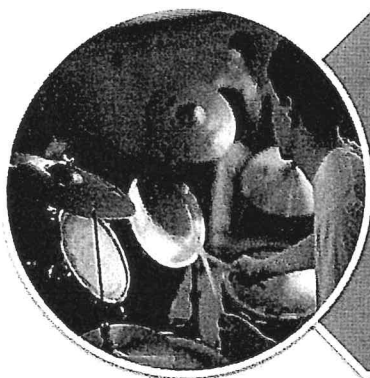


You must also submit a **recording**. This could be recorded from Sibelius or Logic, or it could be a live recording.

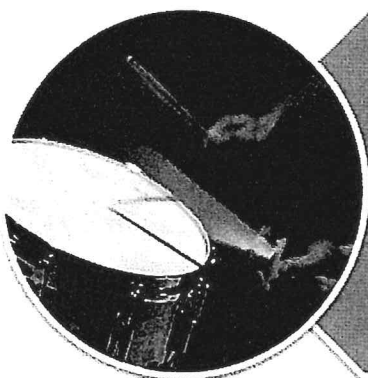
Step 12:

Add a drum pattern and fills.

There are several ways to do this. Choose the best option for you.



For the Drummers only: Compose and create your own beat and ask your **drum teacher** to help write it down during one of your lessons.



Use a standard drum beat pattern (ask if you are not sure) and input this carefully into Logic.



Use a standard drum beat pattern (ask if you are not sure) and input this carefully into Sibelius.



Drum fills should only be used at particular points in the music. Do not use them randomly!

Usual places to hear drum fills are:

- in the last bar of the intro
- in the last bar of the verse
- in the last bar of the bridge
- in the last bar of the chorus