



**California
Festival**
A Celebration
of New Music

A Guide for Young Composers

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Writing new music may seem like a daunting task, but musical composition is simply the process of forming a new work by combining the parts or elements of music. There is not one *right* way to compose, and composers do not create something out of nothing. We create music based on our past experiences and shared musical vocabulary. Musical compositions can also be quite simple or complex. It is your inspiration and the expressive qualities of the music that will bring it to life. Experiment, have fun, and check out these composition strategies to help you get started.

❑ 1. Choose Your Inspiration

Consider your inspiration for this composition:

- *Is it a person, a community, a landscape, or a moment in time?*
- *When you see or think about this, what do you notice? What images come to mind? What feelings? What sounds?*
- *What styles of music come to mind? Is there a particular song or melody that you would like to incorporate into your composition?*
- *What is the mood that will best reflect your inspiration?*
- *What important elements would you like for others to know or experience?*

❑ 2. Consider Your Musical Style(s)

- Decide on a style of music you would like to write, such as classical, rock, jazz, or folk music. Think of a corresponding **mood, tempo, rhythms, meter, and instrumentation**.
- For some ideas, listen to a few pieces in your chosen musical genre, or reflect on the musical traditions that you hear in your community.
 - *Where does this music come from?*
 - *Does it represent one style or a mix of different styles?*
 - *What musical styles or traditions inspire you?*
- Consider including a mosaic of styles. California has long been a state that brings together artists and music from around the world, blending musical styles and traditions and creating new music with a distinctive California sound.

❑ 3. Determine the Form

Most musical compositions are made up of sections that are the same (repeating sections) or different from each other (contrasting sections).

- Determine how long your composition will be? *How many sections will it have?*
- Remember that every style of music has its own set of common forms, such as a three-part sonata form, a 32-measure AABA form in jazz standards, or a 12-bar blues. You might choose one of these forms based on your style or make up your own.
- Keep it simple! You can repeat a section, alternate with contrasting sections, and create an interesting piece just by using a few measures of music and adding in some expressive qualities.



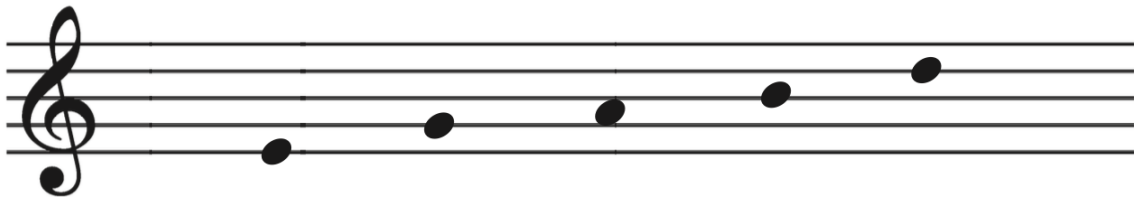
❑ 4. Brainstorm & Record Your Ideas

- Use a digital recorder, an iPad, a computer, or simply paper and pencil to record some ideas.
- Use your voice or a musical instrument to improvise some riffs (a short repeated musical phrase).
- Feel free to play or sing whatever you like—it does not have to be perfect or ready to perform at this point. No one has to hear it except for you. Have fun and experiment!

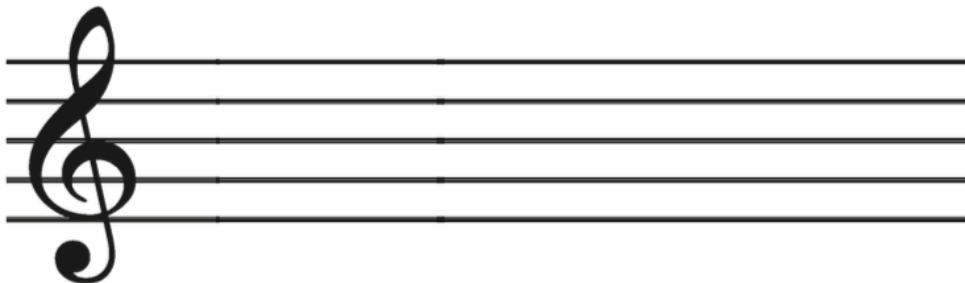
❑ 5. Create a Melodic Motif or Theme

Using your initial inspiration and your recorded ideas, start by creating a short melody (a musical phrase) that will serve as the main theme for your piece.

- Melodies move up and down, and they move by steps, leaps or stay the same.
- Melodies have a shape or contour. *What shape will your melody have?*
- You may choose to simply sing or play this melody and record it, or you may represent the melody by drawing the melodic shape or composing a score using traditional music notation.
- Experiment with a visual score using [Chrome Music Lab's Song Maker](#).
- For traditional scoring, choose from the rhythms and five pitches below (or other pitches and note values you know) and create your short melodic motif



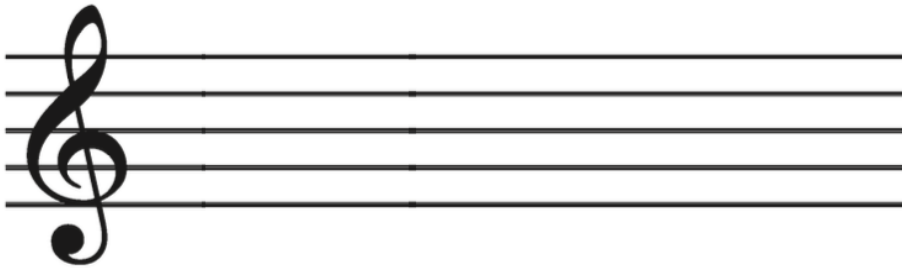
ORIGINAL MOTIF



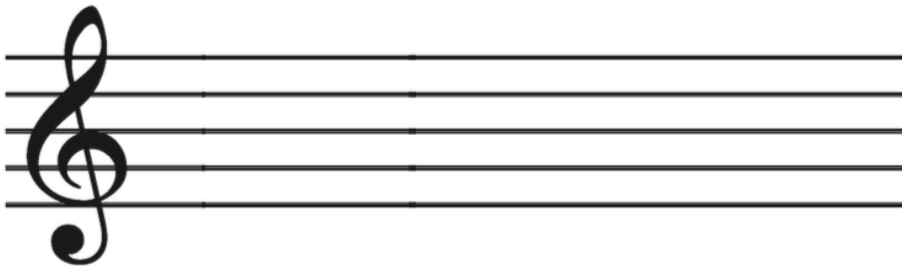
6. Develop (Alter) Your Motif

Explore ways to create variations on your musical theme.

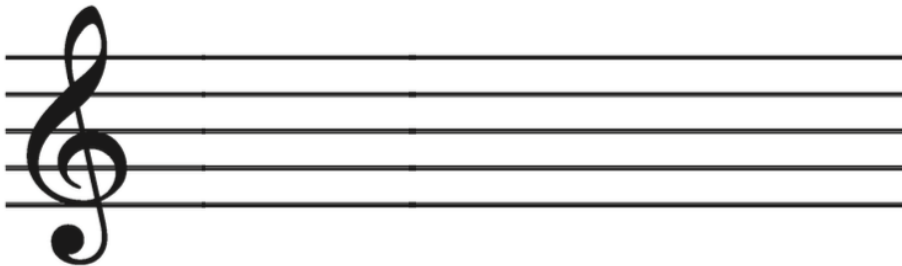
MOTIF STARTING ON A HIGHER OR LOWER PITCH



MOTIF IN REVERSE

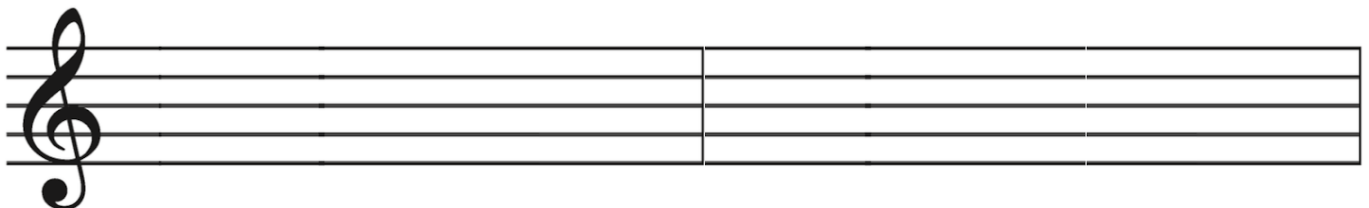


MOTIF WITH DIFFERENT RHYTHMS



7. Create a Contrasting Section

In almost all styles of music, there is a contrasting section that adds interest to the piece by presenting new material to your ear. That is one of the functions of the 'bridge' in pop or rock songs, the B section in jazz tunes, and the Development section in classical sonatas. To write a contrasting section, repeat steps four and five, trying not to play your original motif. Can you think of a different rhythm? Will your melody move by steps or skips this time? Will you use repeated pitches? Does this section have a different mood?



□ 8. Choose a Variety of Musical Elements

- **Expressive Qualities:** Experiment with different ways to change the mood of your piece by using tempo (fast/slow), dynamics (soft/loud), articulation (smooth/choppy), and different sounds or instruments.
- **Harmony:** Experiment with adding harmonies on the melody. Is this harmony played by the same instrument(s) or a different instrument?
- **Rhythmic Accompaniment:** Experiment with adding in different rhythms to accompany the melody or theme by clapping, tapping, or playing a percussion instrument.

□ 9. Add Lyrics (optional)

On its own, music can paint a vivid picture and communicate a compelling story. However, some composers choose to add lyrics to represent a particular musical style or to further tell the story. Consider if you will add lyrics to your composition, either through writing original text or by incorporating a known poem or story.

□ 10. Bring It All Together

Creating the Final Score:

- After you have created your musical theme, developments on that theme, and a couple of contrasting sections—determine how you will arrange these sections in your piece. Refer to the form you explored in step 3.
- Determine the order in when and where you will use the various musical elements outlined in step 8.
- Determine which instrument(s) will play each section.

Document your score

- Document your score using one of these methods:
 - Traditional written notation (manuscript staves provided).
 - A graphic score (click [here](#) for some examples).
 - A digital score using an app like Garage Band or [Soundtrap](#)
- You may choose to accompany your new music with images or stories of the inspiration represented in your music.

