

# Composing and Arranging with Web-Based Tools in the Performance Music Classroom

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## Why web-based?

While many schools are increasing their level of technology, not all tech options allow programs to be downloaded to computers. Chromebooks, for instance, center around the use of the Chrome web browser. By choosing a web-based tool for music-composing, students will have access to the tool in shared computer labs, personal devices (laptop, Chromebook, iPad), or on shared home computers.

## Composing Tools

- **Noteflight**
  - <https://www.noteflight.com>
  - Pros: Template creation, ease of sharing, large community of content creators, keyboard shortcuts allow quickest entry
- **Flat**
  - <https://flat.io/en>
  - Pros: More intuitive interface than Noteflight, very easy to collaborate, syncs with Google Classroom
- **Note:** Both teams are incredibly responsive to feedback, and continue to regularly update their product
- **Disclaimer:** I am not professionally affiliated with either tool, but have spoken with members of both companies via conference calls prior to this presentation

## Useful Features

- Walled garden
  - Teachers can set up school-specific sites
  - Students/teachers can share work with each other that is inaccessible from the outside
  - Students gain access to all Noteflight features (expanded instrumentation, extended techniques, etc.)
- Templates
  - Allows each student to have their own copy of a blank assignment
  - Makes for easy grading
  - Can use to create assignments of varying difficulty
- Sharing
  - Students can share scores with one another or publicly
  - Allows exceptional students to share work and inspire others
  - Comments may need to be managed

- Different notations
  - Can be used to translate from notation to tablature
  - Support for a variety of percussion staves
  - “For fun” instruments (Star Wars, cat meows) can be engaging, especially for younger students
- Google Classroom synchronization (Flat)
  - Makes turning in work much easier
  - If school is “all-in” for Google Classroom, students have a much easier time navigating the interface

## Coaching Students

- Balancing composing time
  - Coaching is best done individually
  - Float around and try to see all students’ screens
  - Potential for wasted time if not careful
- Create sample work to go along with templates
- Model critique process explicitly before allowing students to peer-critique
  - Some students may be completely clueless about how to help each other
  - Others may be overly critical
- Checklists vs. Rubrics vs. Open-ended
  - Checklists allow freedom for students who want to go above and beyond, but may lead to mindless notation for students afraid to take risks
  - Rubrics give students specific targets to reach
  - Open-ended assignments allow students to explore features and sounds, but may be unproductive
  - Different students will respond differently, so think about your student characteristics when designing assignments
- Don’t be afraid to critique, but be very clear about the why
  - Use as an opportunity to talk about dissonance and texture
  - ex. “Beat two sounds very ‘crunchy’ here because your flute voice is playing a B while the clarinet is playing C. Do you want that sound, or would you prefer a smoother sound?”
- When first implementing, your star performers may resist if they are anxious about their ability (less class time spent on something they are good at)

## Contact me

I’m super excited to talk more about what I’m doing and to hear about other exciting things other teachers are doing. Reach me at [nconner@fairview.k12.il.us](mailto:nconner@fairview.k12.il.us) with questions or to share your exciting new ideas!