

“Students, Compose! Teachers, Keep Your Rehearsal Time While Meeting the National Standards”

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"My future ideas for a composition include bringing everyday moments from life and converting them into music."
-Ruth Lewis

- I. Introduction
 - a. National Standards-Time not taken away
 - A. Comfortable-
 1. NS #2-Performing on instruments
 2. NS #5-Reading & Notating
 3. NS #6-Listening, Analyzing, & Describing
 4. NS #7-Evaluating music and music performances
 - B. “New” perhaps non-traditional
 1. NS #1-Singing alone and with others-Sing scale degree in chorales; play scale, stop on dominant, sing tonic-Several times week
 2. NS#3-Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments-exercises in method book-take melody & improvise it-Few times month
 3. NS #4-Composition-Beneficial
 4. NS #8-Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts
 5. NS #9-Understanding music in relation to history and culture-program notes, have students research few facts about piece, as educator, handled in dialogue of history/story of piece, can ask what else happened that time period (Michael Story’s arrangement of Horkstow Grange-Blackboard-mood, etc.)
 - b. Curriculum
 - A. Schedule
 - B. % of time
 - C. Order-Composition Curriculum (online)
 - c. Time Spent
 - A. Beginning Band- 3-4 times each semester
 - B. Concert Band-same as Beginning Band
 - C. Symphonic Band-2-3 times first semester, 2-3 times second semester
 - D. Performing composition=time of playing celebration (playing test, individual assessment)
 - d. Composition for Dummies (Step by Step-Let’s Get Started!)**
 - A. Students attain knowledge of the first six notes via scale degree.
(Concert Bb=1, C=2, D=3, Eb=4, F=5, G=6)**
 - B. During the warm up, I will have a preset scale degree pattern written on the board
Example: 123454321, 112112321123432112345432112345654321, 53135, etc.**
 - C. Next, I take volunteers, and have them play 4 notes, and everyone has to figure out what 4 pitches they are playing.... For example a clarinetist plays 1231. I keep the time to 5 minutes per day, and explain that there are many days left.**
 - D. We talk about if that sounds good, has closure, and introduce the tonic and dominant
This takes the first week of beginning band. If you are starting with older students, you can teach this as well, or leave out the scale degree completely.
(Eventually, we move the tonic to different keys, and they transfer scale degree to other scales).**
 - E. Next I pass out the First_Six_Note_Composition (found in this handout and online)**

- e. The Magic Happens
 - A. When?
 - 1. As homework outside of class
 - 2. Pull out lessons
 - 3. In class in small groups
 - a. Like instruments
 - b. Chamber groups, (Solo &) Ensemble groups
 - B. Frequency of assignments
 - 1. Give at least 3 weeks minimum with a “draft” date to ensure students have started
 - 2. Up to each individual-nothing in stone, what a relief!

II. Composition

- a. Why compose?
 - A. National Standard #4: Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines
 - a. Select good literature from which to pull-craftsmanship, sensitivity, imagination, authenticity (Bennett Reimer)
 - b. Everyone is a composer. You are a composer.
- b. Reasons why students should compose:
 - A. Students practice more
 - B. Students have ownership and are proud
 - C. Students use music technology
 - D. Students improve on their instruments
 - E. You can assess their playing through composition. What better way to authentically assess that your students understand 6/8? If they can compose in 6/8, they’ve got it!
 - F. Kids get REALLY excited
 - G. Players that are not in the top of the section will shine, while gaining extra motivation.
 - H. Students have the “aha” moment that composers aren’t made up only of ‘old, dead white men.’
 - I. Student composition will enhance the performance of the literature.
 - J. Students will thank you. The first time I assigned 32 measures, I felt guilty about the length. On the reflection question, “What would you do differently if you could do it again?” students responded, “I would make it longer!”

III. Helpful Hints

- a. Composition Basic Training
 - A. Aim to make music, not just explore
 - B. Standard notation vs. Invented Notation
 - 1. Were you speaking in complete, grammatically correct sentences when those first words were spoken?
 - 2. Natural sequence
 - C. Students need to perform the composition
 - D. To Title.....or not to Title?
 - 1. Title gives a sense of achievement
 - 2. Can be last (if in Notepad, Finale, can pencil it in later)
 - 3. Can be first
 - 4. Takes time
 - E. Closed Assignment vs. Open Assignment
 - 1. Closed-Scale Degree Assignment, no rhythmic dictation
 - 2. Open-Family Composition, Challenge Composition-improves practice technique, Third Quarter Assignment
 - F. Help guide the students, don’t just throw them to the composition wolves
 - 1. If they get stuck, help them expand (Maud Hickey)
 - 2. Ask them questions to help lead them in the right direction, for example, “Do you want the melody to go up or down?” “What patterns exist, and how can you expand on them or continue the pattern or change the pattern, etc.”
 - 3. While in band rehearsal working on literature, ask the students, “What compositional techniques does the composer use?” “How can you incorporate that into your composition?” “What is the architecture/form of the march we are playing?” “How does that help your piece?” “How does the rhythm change later in this measure?” “What is the motive” “What would it sound like if the tuba played the clarinet part?” “How can you play it differently” Let’s hear it—volunteers play
 - G. Student Generated Compositions
 - 1. Tribute to musician
 - 2. Inspired by something going on in your life

3. Duet with harmony that includes foreign word in title
4. Write a Celtic sounding piece for the band
5. Video composition using animation software
6. Based off jazz
7. Portrays emotions of a character in a book that you have recently read
8. Drum set composition that explains why you 'comp' and show that in your piece as well as what drummer influenced your composition and how?
9. Chance/Dice Composition

H. Points

- a. A-F (0-4 point scale)
- b. Weighted grades
- c. 1-100 (where an F is heavier than A-D)

I. Reflection Questions

- a. Importance
- b. Metacognitive Thoughts
- c. Insight

J. How will it be heard?

1. Students play in class in the presence of their peers. This brings their story to life
2. Kids turn in a recording
 - a. Give them manila envelopes with their names on it
 - b. Email—the files are too big
3. Recording
 - a. Growth over the years
 - b. Meaningful
 - c. First student composition in Colorado

K. Assessment

1. First Composition-Rhythm
 - a. Relationship! Relationship! Relationship!
 - b. Very personal
 - c. Use criticism, and be sensitive, never punitive
2. Write/tell genuine comments that are thoughtful to keep it real so the student is empowered and knows you took the time
3. Rubrics

IV. Fears, Face it!

- A. Parents
- B. Students
- C. Commissions
 1. There are many great LIVE composers out there. I think it is best to commission with just your group. Grants are available, benefactors, fundraising
 2. Shards of Glass by Brett Dietz (bdietz_1@lsu.edu) National Bandmasters Association winner first place composition prize
- D. Yourself-You can do this! It makes life easier!

V. Examples of Composition Assignments

- a. Essential Elements, Accent on Achievement, method books have composing prompts for students to add as little as 2 measures
- b. Sakura by Mike Story based pentatonic scale. Students discover 5 notes, compose own solo, all successful (Julie Ski)
- c. Scenery Composition

VI. Closing

- A. Biggest benefit- enhances performers' musicianship
 1. Ownership
 2. Practice Techniques
 3. Motivation
 4. Musicianship improves
 5. Confidence, grades, self esteem
 6. Continue in music
- B. Questions & Answers

C. Resources

1. 1. Go to google, type in "audacity".
 2. Click the first, non-sponsored link, and download audacity.
 3. Hook up a microphone to your computer and record.
 4. After saving said recording, go to file, and choose "convert to WAV file".
 5. It's now a windows media player file, and assuming that you don't have a Mac, you can listen to it.
2. Assignments Website: www.psdschools.org/preston
 Click on the Bb icon (that looks like a chalkboard) in the top center or go to the bottom of the page and click under blackboard.
 Login: composition
 Password: composition
 When in the site, click under the composition tab. Follow directions from there. Modify to fit your needs.

Farrell, Susan R. (1997). Tools for Powerful Student Evaluation. Ft. Lauderdale, Florida: Meredith Music Publications.

Paynter, John (1992) Sound & Structure. Cambridge, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.

Upitis, Rena (1992). Can I Play You My Song? Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.

Honorable Mention: Maud Hickey Northwestern University mhickey@northwestern.edu

“Student composition is an adventure that leads in many unexpected directions.” John Paynter

Composition for Dummies Task Analysis for Getting Started

1. Students attain knowledge of the first six notes via scale degree.
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(Eventually, we move the tonic to different keys, and they transfer scale degree to other scales).
5. Next I pass out this rubric:

Composition One

You will compose a piece of music utilizing the 6 notes we have learned in class. Each note must be used at least twice and the composition will be at least 8 measures in length. You are welcome to use notepad (codamus.com). This will be played in class

Sept 9 & 10.

The goal is to be quite creative and out of the box. This will be fun!

Composition	Novice	Apprentice	Veteran	Master	Score
Ability to capture the audience	Unfocused: composer seems unsure of direction (.2 points)	Some focus, but lacks continuity (.6 points)	Well focused and interests audience throughout. (.8 points)	Captivates and involves audience deeply. (1 point)	
Length of piece	1-3 measures (.2 points)	4-5 measures (.4 points)	6-7 measures (.8points)	8 measures or more	

				(1 point)	
Different Pitches 1 2 3 4 5 6	1-2 pitches are used. (0 point)	3-4 pitches are used. (.2 point)	5 pitches are used at least once. (.6 point)	6 pitches are used at least twice. (1 point)	
All reflection questions answered	No reflection questions answered 0 point	1 reflection answered (.2 point)	2 reflection answered, not in complete sentences (.6 point)	2 reflections answered, in complete sentences (1 point)	

What inspiration did you have for your composition?

What was your thinking process?

1. In introducing composition, I will take volunteers, and take 4 notes, thus, 4 volunteers each may look like this on the board that day: 1234; 5342; 4332; 5422
2. We talk about how it sounds, does it have direction, closure, etc.
3. A student will say it needs to end on the tonic.

Congratulations, you are on your way to teaching composition in the classroom!