

Unit 7: Composing Music

Unit code:	T/600/6908
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to enable learners to develop some of the underpinning knowledge and the skills required to compose music in a variety of contexts.

● Unit introduction

Music is a creative art – the act of musical creation being the very essence of music making. Musicians need a constant source of new music to perform and audiences need a constant source of new music to hear. In the Western world and beyond the responsibility for new music often lies with the composer.

There are ever-increasing avenues for the practising composer in the modern music industry. Writing within the classical tradition for the concert hall is one such avenue but the commercial world is also a source of employment for many working composers. The record industry needs songs; TV and radio needs jingles, theme tunes and incidental music; the theatre needs supporting scores; film and TV drama requires title music and underscoring; computer games need music; and, increasingly, the internet requires the skills of the composer.

There are more than 50 professional orchestras in the UK and many more chamber ensembles. There are countless amateur orchestras, bands, chamber groups and choirs, alongside endless rock, pop, funk, jazz and soul bands. All of these need new music – many will create their own but others will enlist the help of a practising composer. The world of the composer is, therefore, rich, diverse, challenging and hugely rewarding.

This unit looks at composition in its broadest sense. All composers deal with the same fundamental building blocks regardless of style or genre – generating musical ideas, exploring and developing those ideas, formalising them into complete pieces, and presenting the finished product in an appropriate format, whether that be a printed form or a recording.

The unit explores a range of techniques at each stage in the compositional process. Learners are free to work within a range of styles, genres and instrumental resources (both acoustic and electronic). The focus is on experimentation and the practical exploration of compositional possibilities.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Be able to originate compositional ideas
- 2 Know how to extend, develop and manipulate musical material
- 3 Be able to appreciate the role and importance of the structural elements of composition
- 4 Be able to present a portfolio of compositions in an appropriate format.

Unit content

1 Be able to originate compositional ideas

Originating extra-musical ideas: eg themes, texts, images, graphics; choosing resources and starting points appropriate to the desired effect or composition brief

Musical ideas: eg pitch sets, harmonic systems, motifs (rhythmic and melodic), chord progressions and patterns, tone rows, riffs, hooks and loops, sound palettes eg samples, synth sounds

2 Know how to extend, develop and manipulate musical material

Extending and developing: repetition (exact and loose); variation; decoration; sequence; contrasts and juxtapositions

Manipulating musical material: eg transposition, transformations (inversion, retrograde, retrograde inversion), cut and paste techniques, additive and subtractive processes, diminution and augmentation (rhythmic and pitch), displacement

Working with and manipulating layers: process techniques eg phasing, canon, instrumentation, textures eg polyphonic/homophonic, contrapuntal textures, melody and accompaniment, contrasts and juxtapositions

3 Be able to appreciate the role and importance of the structural elements of composition

Forms and structures: formal block structures eg binary, ternary, rondo, arch; developmental forms eg theme and variations, ground bass, sonata form; song structures eg 12 bar blues, verse-chorus constructions, riff-based songs; effective use of repetition and self-reference; circular/repetitive structures eg those found in some minimalism or dance music

4 Be able to present a portfolio of compositions in an appropriate format

Developing a portfolio: contrasts; range of style/genre

Appropriate presentation methods: conventions of particular styles, genres and situations; MIDI and audio files; scores; sleeve design and artwork

Types of score: selecting most appropriate format eg full score, short score, lead sheet, chord chart, guitar tablature, graphic scores, prose scores, flexible scoring, relevant computer software

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 create a range of compositional ideas and present them in an appropriate format [CT]	M1 create a range of contrasting compositional ideas and present them in an appropriate format	D1 create a range of contrasting compositional ideas demonstrating a degree of originality and innovation, and present them in an appropriate format
P2 identify the techniques used to extend, develop and manipulate a range of musical material [CT]	M2 describe the techniques used to extend, develop and manipulate a range of musical material competently	D2 explain the techniques used to extend, develop and manipulate a range of musical material competently and creatively
P3 present 'compositional exercises' that show some appreciation of the structural elements of composition [CT]	M3 present 'compositional exercises' that show a clear appreciation of the structural elements of composition	D3 present 'compositional exercises' that show a secure and detailed appreciation of the structural elements of composition
P4 create a portfolio of compositions presented in formats appropriate to the music. [CT]	M4 create a well-presented portfolio of contrasting compositions across a range of styles or genres, in formats appropriate to the music.	D4 create a well-presented portfolio of contrasting compositions across a range of styles or genres, in formats appropriate to the music, showing imagination.

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers CT – creative thinkers	RL – reflective learners TW – team workers	SM – self-managers EP – effective participators
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Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

This unit should be delivered to focus on practical exploration. Learners should be encouraged to investigate actively musical ideas and compositional techniques with instruments or with the aid of music technology. Learners should be exposed regularly to the widest range of music from different times, places, styles and genres. A degree of analysis of listening material followed by the application of compositional devices by learners may be a suitable approach, though pastiche-style work should always be balanced, allowing learners a degree of creative autonomy.

Musical creativity often needs a kick-start and imaginative ways of inspiring learners should be developed. Composition workshops from visiting artists, attending live performances and exploring specific themes are all valid starting points for composition projects. Art forms other than music can also provide inspiration and learners should be encouraged to engage with visual arts, poetry, prose, theatre and dance. While learners will need guidance and direction, an amount of creative freedom is important. The creative process necessarily takes unexpected twists and turns, and learners should be encouraged to follow an organic approach to musical creativity.

Tutors should take care to lead learners through the creative process from start to finish. It should be made apparent how each step leads naturally into the next. A range of small-scale exercises building towards increasingly autonomous project work is a worthy strategy. Learners should be encouraged to work to specific briefs. This has the advantage of introducing them to the 'real world' of composing and focusing them on a desired outcome but also allows the tutor opportunities to ensure that learners are challenged in a range of directions.

There is no reason why all composition work should be carried out individually; working in groups can be a valid experience, especially in the early stages of a composition project. Exploratory tasks could be undertaken in groups, and the nature of sharing ideas among peers should be a constant thread throughout the unit. Group work can also be an essential tool in building learners' confidence before they take up compositional activities independently. However, tutors should be aware that each learner must present individual evidence that satisfies the requirements of the grading criteria.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment
Introduction to unit.
<i>Be able to originate compositional ideas.</i>
Generating material – ongoing throughout the programme.
Types of compositional ideas.
Assignment 1: Five Original Ideas – P1, M1, D1
Assessment feedback and review learning outcome 1.
<i>Know how to extend, develop and manipulate musical material.</i>
Extending and developing an idea/techniques in manipulating musical material/working with layers.
Working to a brief.
Assignment 2: Developing Ideas – P2, M2, D2
Assessment feedback and review learning outcome 2.
<i>Be able to appreciate the role and importance of the structural elements of composition.</i>
Form and structure.
Assignment 3: Structural Techniques – P3, M3, D3
Assessment feedback and review learning outcome 3.
<i>Be able to present a portfolio of compositions in an appropriate format.</i>
Presentation methods and types of score.
Assignment 4: Composing Myself – P4, M4, D4
Assessment feedback and review learning outcome 4.

Assessment

Evidence for this unit will be generated through the development of a portfolio. This will include recordings and scores and possibly video and other media. Producing printed scores for compositions is not essential but pieces should be presented in an appropriate manner. Learners may wish to include both recordings and scores of their work and, wherever possible, performances of ideas and pieces should be encouraged.

Written accounts of work describing the process, highlighting any problems encountered and how they were overcome could also be included. The portfolio should not rely purely on fully-formed pieces; indeed it is necessary to include work in progress as the unit aims to assess the compositional process from start to finish. Learners should record, score and annotate initial musical ideas, extensions and development of those ideas and, finally, completed pieces.

For learning outcome 1, the learner should submit a portfolio containing at least five compositional ideas, all of which should be presented in an appropriate format. These should be short musical ideas from which creative explorations could be made. For P1 they do not have to be complex or developed but should have the potential to form the basis for a piece or section of a piece. For M1, learners will create a range of contrasting compositional ideas that are not confined to one style/genre of music. For D1, they should show some imagination – essentially, ideas that grab listeners' attention.

A strong portfolio will demonstrate a broad range of starting points. These could include, although not be restricted to:

- chord progressions of about 8 bars that could form the basis for a verse or chorus from a song
- melodic phrases/fragments of about 4–8 bars that could provide the basis for an instrumental study
- riffs or hook-lines
- collections of samples that could act as sound-palettes for electro-acoustic pieces or a film score
- rhythmic phrases or backbeats that could form the basis of a sequencer piece.

For learning outcome 2, learners should extend, develop and manipulate a range of musical ideas. There is no need for the musical material to be fully-formed pieces, but it should be explorations of specific development techniques. These could include, but are not restricted to: chord charts for songs; short studies for solo instruments that explore manipulation techniques; a block structure moving between contrasting riffs; a sequencer exercise exploring minimalist processes.

For P2, the learner needs to extend, develop and manipulate a range of ideas, identifying the techniques used. For M2, they should describe how the techniques have been used. For D2, they should explain the results of employing the specific techniques and the end results should display some imagination.

In learning outcome 3 the learner should provide compositional exercises or studies. P3 requires that the learner shows some (elementary) understanding of the structure of pieces. To satisfy M3, learners must show a clear and accurate understanding and application of structures. For D3, they should show that they have a secure and detailed understanding of the application of structures in compositions.

For learning outcome 4, the portfolio of compositions could be, but not restricted to: a fully-formed song, complete with lyrics and instrumental arrangement; an instrumental piece for one or more instruments; an electronic film score; an electro-acoustic piece created using a MIDI sequencer or audio editor. The focus here is on the formation of structured pieces, using original ideas and explorations. For P4, the learner needs to show that they can produce a portfolio of compositions. For M4, in addition to meeting the pass criteria, the learner needs to create contrasting compositions across a range of styles, correctly and in a structured way. In addition, the portfolio should be well presented (neat and clear). For D4, the learner needs to handle a wide range of contrasting musical elements correctly and in a structured way and the end results should display some imagination. The musical material should be presented in an appropriate manner, eg a piece for a church choir should be presented in a score form featuring soprano, alto, tenor and bass lines.

Above all, the portfolio should provide evidence of the learner's ability to work through the entire creative process, from the conception of an idea, through development and exploration, to fully-formed compositions.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Pearson assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1	Five Original Ideas	A music producer at a national television company has asked you to prepare five contrasting ideas for music to accompany a range of TV programmes.	Portfolio of evidence comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MIDI/audio recordings • project log • printouts of computer-generated material (where appropriate) • handwritten musical ideas (staff, TAB, graphic, etc).
P2, M2, D2	Developing Ideas	The music producer has asked you to select three of the five ideas you submitted to them and to develop and extend the ideas.	Portfolio of evidence comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MIDI/audio recordings • project log • printouts of computer-generated material (where appropriate) • handwritten musical ideas (staff, TAB, graphic, etc).
P3, M3, D3	Structural Techniques	In preparation for applying to a music library company to become one of their composers, you need to practise some techniques concerned with structural elements of different types of compositions.	Portfolio of evidence comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MIDI/audio recordings • project log • printouts of computer-generated material (where appropriate) • handwritten musical ideas (staff, TAB, graphic, etc).

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P4, M4, D4	Composing Myself	A music library production company has invited you to submit a portfolio of three (or more) compositions, in order to assess your potential for future project work. You should submit the pieces in an appropriate format.	Portfolio of evidence comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MIDI/audio recordings • project log • printouts of computer-generated material (where appropriate) • handwritten musical ideas (staff, TAB, graphic, etc).

Links to other BTEC units

This unit forms part of the BTEC Music and Music Technology sector suite. This unit has particular links with the following unit titles in the BTEC Music and Music Technology suite:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
		Music and Sound for the Moving Image
		Arranging Music

Essential resources

The centre should provide a wide range of recordings of different music, including Western classical music, contemporary art music, popular music, jazz music and other music from around the world. There should be adequate facilities for learners to be able to listen to this music.

There should be sufficient space for learners to be able to work in groups as appropriate. Where possible, learners will benefit from access to keyboards to be used as tools to underpin theoretical concepts.

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are ...
Creative thinkers	creating a range of musical ideas, extending them using creative techniques, presenting structured ideas and developing a portfolio of compositions.

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	exploring composition techniques of others
Creative thinkers	exploring other art forms and artistic motivations from other art forms
Reflective learners	reviewing and responding to own compositions
Team workers	working with musicians to audition own compositions
Self-managers	completing scores and parts on time to quality
Effective participators	establishing workshops, seminars and listening groups to discuss composition techniques.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Use ICT systems	
Select, interact with and use ICT systems independently for a complex task to meet a variety of needs	using ICT music composition, notation and sequencing packages to compose
Use ICT to effectively plan work and evaluate the effectiveness of the ICT system they have used	using ICT music composition, notation and sequencing packages to review compositions
Manage information storage to enable efficient retrieval	using ICT music composition, notation and sequencing packages to compose
Mathematics	
Understand routine and non-routine problems in a wide range of familiar and unfamiliar contexts and situations	editing MIDI information
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	presenting composition ideas and reviewing them
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	exploring the composition techniques of others.