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OER Fundamentals of Music Creation

Julia Slovarp

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OER Fundamentals of Music Creation

Julia Slovarp

2025

Foreword

For Students:

This text is written as an overview of form, music theory, and fundamentals of the musical process. Examples and compositions are focused on the piano for the following reasons: first, the piano keyboard is laid out in a clear way to discuss and demonstrate concepts. Second, it is helpful to have a common instrument for the class, and piano avoids conversations about transposition (needed for many winds and brass). All concepts discussed in this text can be transferred to the instrument of your choice, and I encourage you to use your primary instrument to learn concepts if you play or sing.

Concepts are introduced using a wide variety of genres and time periods. While I have my musical preferences (and you surely do as well), I find I often fall in love with music unexpectedly after spending some time with it. I hope that is your experience, and that you come away with an appreciation and knowledge about how intertwined the musical world is.

A note regarding playlist examples: I include Spotify links that worked at the time of writing. I also include the information to find the songs in any platform; you may copy and paste the link or the information.

A note on musical scores and written examples: this text falls under a Creative Commons license. All musical examples are either in the public domain or fall under Educational Fair Use. They are not intended to give access to the entire song or lyrics if copyrighted, but instead to clarify concepts and inspire you to purchase the song or lyrics should you want to see more.

Sincerely,

Julia Slovarp, DMA

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Playlist

Drukzs/Avril 14th (Aphex Twin)
Prelude from Suite No. 1 (J.S. Bach)
Hungarian Dance No. 5 (Johannes Brahms)
Saturdays (Broken Bells)
The Story (Brandi Carlile)
Escape (Deadmau5)
Hotel California (Eagles)
Humility (Gorillaz)
Titanium (David Guetta)
Golden (My Morning Jacket)
(Sittin' On) the Dock of the Bay (Otis Redding)
Finally Moving (Pretty Lights)

Finale: Allegro con Fuoco from *Symphony No. 4* (Pyotr Tchaikovsky)

Midnight in Harlem (Tedeschi Trucks)

Hunnybee (Unknown Mortal Orchestra)

Cowpoke (Colter Wall)

Chapter One

Introduction

This text introduces a fair amount of music theory and yes, gets technical. It's important to remember throughout the journey that you already know a lot about music. Here you will learn terminology and notation to discuss, compose and share it. Remember it's always based on principles and ideas that are familiar to you. Music comes first, theory follows.

Start by examining the following songs using the Guided Listening page below for each. Use the given Spotify links or any platform you prefer.

1. *Cowpoke* (Colter Wall)
<https://open.spotify.com/track/0QJKUh0ga2ubfuVs8DM7bq?si=5be3a44b999244ee>
2. *Escape* (Deadmau5)
<https://open.spotify.com/track/3KAExCnsrlAw9uglcA1QDH?si=e22882c8c2074743>
3. *Hungarian Dance No. 5* (Johannes Brahms)
<https://open.spotify.com/track/1PKtuxuLUbXeJNa05bfAOT?si=83a2d87590ca4b8e>
4. *Immigrant Song*
<https://open.spotify.com/track/78lgmZwycJ3nzsdkmPPGNx?si=d23c3259c0364951>

Guided Listening:

Listen a few times. On the first listen or two, simply enjoy the song. Listen actively (put devices away, no multitasking) and notice your impressions. Afterwards, write them down on a separate piece of paper:

Do your thoughts go anywhere in particular? Maybe the song prompts a memory or some specific imagery. How does the song make you feel?

On the next few listens, be more analytical. Let's start by examining what you already know about music from a lifetime of listening.

Describe the song in as much detail as you can, using whatever terminology you have. You do not have to use technical musical terms; anything you have to say to describe it is valid. Below are prompts. Write something in every category.

1. Character (happy, sad, nostalgic, energetic, etc.):
2. Instrumentation (can you identify specific instruments, including voice?):
3. Melody:
 - a. What is the contour? Does it go up and down or stay the same? Does it sound smooth or angular?
 - b. What is the range? Does it go from very low to very high, or stay within a few notes?
4. Rhythm and Meter: Is there a strong beat? Is the song fast or slow? Can you identify how many beats are grouped together? There will be a strong or heavier beat followed by lighter ones. How many between each strong beat?
5. Form: do you hear repetition? Can you identify any sort of organization or structure?
6. Lyrics and Story: If there are lyrics, what are they about? How do you relate to them?
7. What else do you notice about the song? What makes it work?

Chapter 2

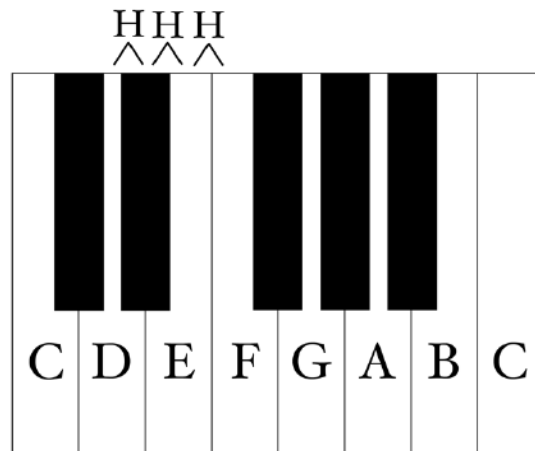
Pitch Notation

Western music is made up of twelve different sounds called **pitches**. Pitches are measured in hertz, or sound waves per second.

On the piano, each key is a different pitch. On a fretted instrument like a guitar, each fret is a different pitch. The distance between two consecutive keys (or frets) is a **half-step**. This includes keys that go white to black, black to white, or white to white, as shown below. Half steps are the smallest recognized **interval**, or distance between notes, in Western music.

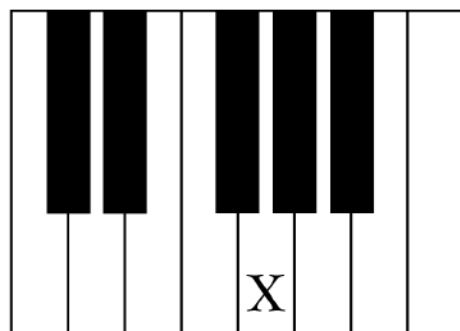
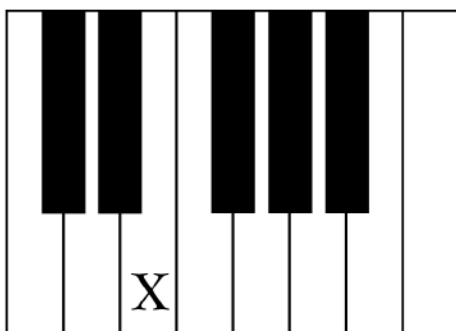
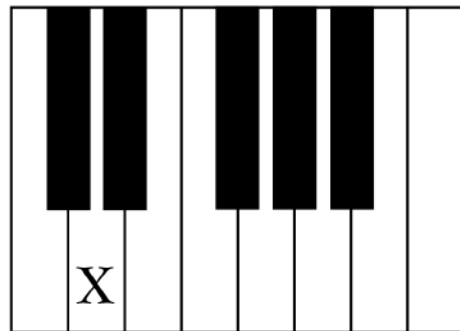
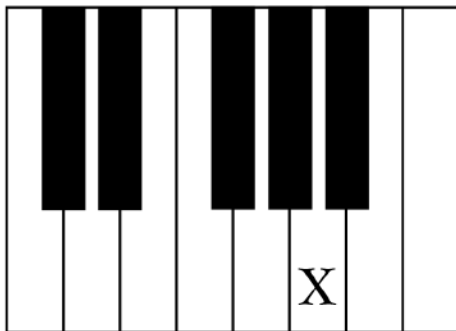
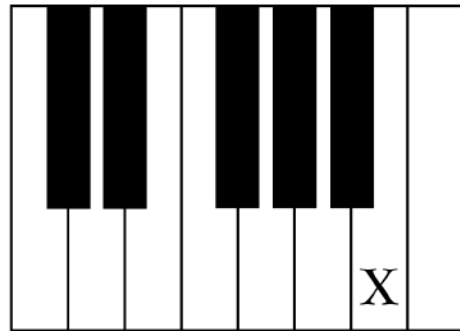
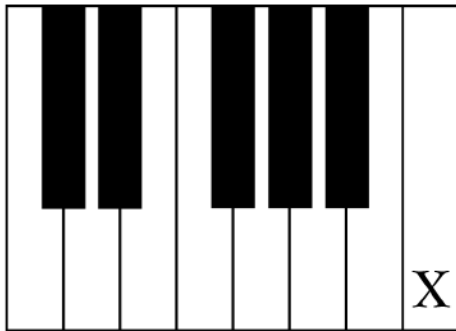
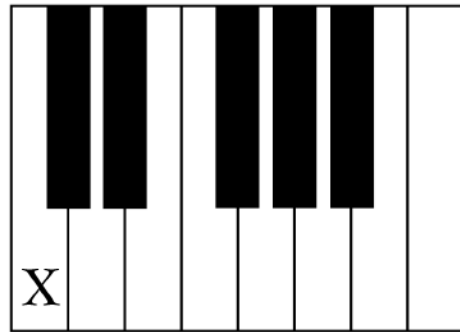
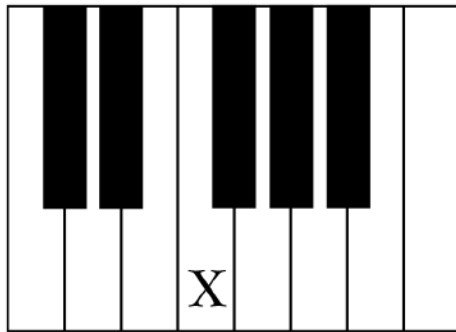
The Western musical language is based on the first seven letters of the alphabet: A B C D E F G. The lowest pitch (farthest key to the left) on the piano is an A, and every white key as you ascend in pitch (move to the right) is the next note name. After G, the musical alphabet starts over on A. You'll notice in the example below that the black keys are laid out in a group of two and a group of three. This is repeated up the keyboard.

We'll use the piano keyboard throughout this text to discuss concepts. Therefore, it's important to memorize the layout.

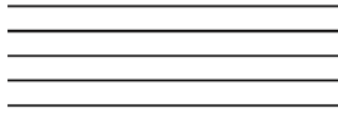


Piano Key Naming Practice:

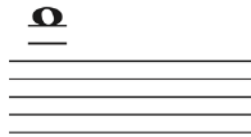
Name each key that holds an X, under the X.



Traditional music notation places pitches on a **staff**. The modern staff has five lines and four spaces.



On the staff, each line or space represents a letter name. The staff can be extended either higher or lower with **ledger lines**.



Clefs

A **clef** is used to designate register (high or low sounds), as well as defining which letter name goes on each line or in each space. The **treble clef** is used for higher pitches like those of a flute and violin (a shorter length of string or column of air).



The **bass clef** is used for lower sounds like the trombone and double bass.



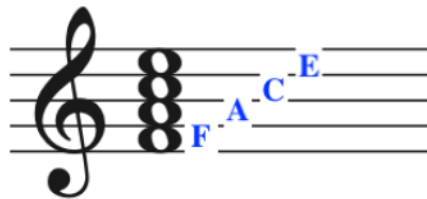
The piano uses a **grand staff**, comprised of a treble clef for right hand and bass clef for left hand. Music is organized into measures, notated by vertical lines.



The treble clef is nicknamed the G clef because the inner swirl circles the line that houses G. From bottom to top, the letters on the treble clef lines can be remembered with the sentence, “Every Good Bird Does Fly.”



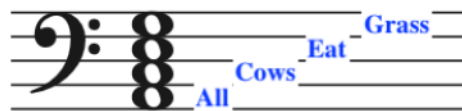
From bottom to top, the letters in the treble clef spaces spell FACE. Since every line and space gets a note (A through G), one can count forwards to go up from those space notes or backwards to go down. For example, if you know the bottom space is F and you want to find the bottom line, go backwards in the alphabet one letter. The bottom line is E.



The bass clef is nicknamed the F clef because the two dots on the right-hand side of the symbol are just above and below the F line. The line notes from bottom to top outline the sentence, “Good Burritos Don’t Fall Apart.”



The space notes from bottom to top outline the sentence, “All Cows Eat Grass.”



It is important to note that the lines and spaces in bass and treble clef do not house the same note names respectively (they are not just the higher and lower versions). The lowest line in treble clef is E, whereas the lowest line in bass clef is G. Spend a fair amount of time drilling and practicing note names in these two clefs. Just as your primary language requires fluency with the alphabet and we learn the written symbols for these sounds, so does music.

Timed Note Naming Drills

Moving as quickly as you can, write the letter name under each note (print this page, or write the note names on a separate piece of paper).





Key Ideas and Terms to Know

- **Pitches in Western Music:**
Western music uses the letter names A through G.
- **Half and Whole Steps:**
A half step is the smallest distance measured in Western music. It is one key to the next on the piano. A whole step is made up of two half steps.
- **Layout of Piano Keys:**
Memorize the pattern of white and black keys. White keys are note names A-G.
- **Staff:** Pitches are notated on a staff, made of five lines and four spaces.
- **Treble and Bass Clefs:**
Treble clef houses higher pitched notes and bass clef houses lower pitched notes.
- **Ledger Lines** can extend the staff either up or down.
- **Practice identifying notes on the staff in treble and bass clefs.**

Chapter 3

Rhythm and Meter

Rhythm is what moves music forward through time.

Music has a pulse or beat. This is what makes you want to dance or tap your toe. These beats are organized into groups called measures or bars.

Simple Meters

Beats can be divided equally into two parts (**simple meter**), or into three parts (**compound meter**).

Time Signatures

Time signatures define how many beats are in each measure and which duration equals one beat. They are placed at the beginning of a piece after the clef and key signature. They may also be placed in the body of the piece if the time signature changes.

In simple time signatures, the top number gives the number of beats in the measure and the bottom number determines what kind of note gets the beat.

Common simple meters include $\frac{2}{4}$ (two beats in the measure, and the quarter note gets the beat, also known as a simple duple meter), $\frac{3}{4}$ (three beats, also known as a simple triple meter), and $\frac{4}{4}$ (four beats, also known as a simple quadruple meter).

The most frequently used time signature has four quarter note beats in the measure, labeled $\frac{4}{4}$. It is so common, in fact, that it is nicknamed **common time**.

Musical notation defines not only which pitch to play but also how long to hold them. The following chart shows the commonly used durations and their relationship to each other. Essentially, if you can multiply and divide by two, you can do most music math!

Note/Symbol	Name	Duration (beats) in $\frac{4}{4}$	Number of notes per measure of $\frac{4}{4}$
	Whole Note	4 beats	
	Half Note	2 beats	

	Quarter Note	1 beat	
	Eighth note	½ beat	
single eighth notes have a flag			Multiple eighth notes are beamed together to show each beat (four beats in this example)

Most of these durations can be counted simply by using the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4. It's important to also be able to count the divisions of the beat. Two eighth notes fit inside one quarter note. To count them, use the syllables ONE and TWO and THREE and FOUR and in $\frac{4}{4}$ time.

***Yesterday* (Paul McCartney):**

This song is in $\frac{4}{4}$ time: four beats in each measure, and the quarter note gets the beat. Below are lyrics for the first verse, with the beat written above the word where it occurs.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/4E5rL7YL0hVUPqeMSpjEF2?si=5011d702f0584530>

Listen to the guitar for rhythm. It is playing eighth notes throughout (two eighth notes per quarter note). You'll notice with most songs that the lyrics don't always fall exactly on the beat...it would be very square and boring if they did. Instead, they very often fall ever so slightly ahead. There is a two-measure intro in the guitar before the voice comes in.

Intro:

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

Yesterday

1 2 3 4

All my troubles seemed so far away

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Now it looks as though they're here to stay. Oh

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

I believe in yesterday.

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Listen to the following, and track the beat.

(Sittin' On) the Dock of the Bay (Otis Redding)

<https://open.spotify.com/track/3zBhYUHBmGd2bcQIobrF?si=8f1bca8cb39c47d6>

Rhythm Practice 1: Write 1 + 2+ 3+ 4 under each measure, lined up with where the divisions of the beat fall. The first measure has been done as an example.

①



②



③



④

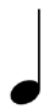


⑤



Rests

For each symbol that shows duration of sound, there is a corresponding symbol that shows duration of silence, called a rest.

Note Symbol	Beats in common time 4 4	Corresponding Rest
	4	
	2	
	1	
	1/2	

Rhythm Practice 2:

Complete using 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +. The first measure has been finished as an example.

①



②



③



④



⑤



Notice in the exercises above that when eighth notes are beamed together, it's always to show a beat and the beat's division. Notate rhythms to show the beat as clearly as possible. A trained musician will always accent based on these beams unless other accents are marked (ONE and TWO and THREE and FOUR and). Beaming in a way that hides the beat will tell the performer to create other accent patterns and/or cause confusion.

Practice: Correcting Beaming Errors

Each line below has a beaming error. Rewrite them to correctly show the beats.

①



②



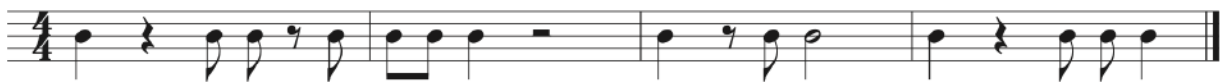
③



④

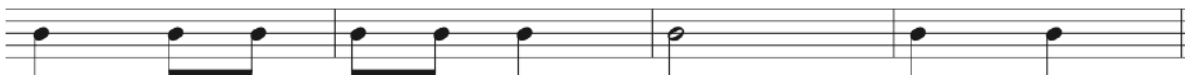
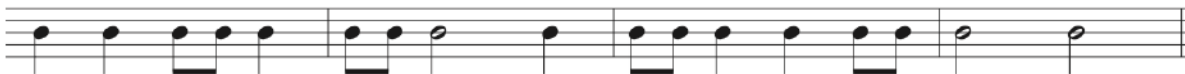


⑤



Rhythm Practice: Identifying The Time Signature

Identify and write in the simple time signature for each exercise below.



Cowpoke (Colter Wall)

<https://open.spotify.com/track/0QJKUh0ga2ubfuVs8DM7bq?si=2295c7bf9edb4495>

Cowpoke is in $\frac{3}{4}$ time: there are three beats in the measure and the quarter note gets the beat. As you listen, count a quick **1 2 3 1 2 3**.

1 2 3
"I'm lonesome, but happy

1 2 3

1 2 3 1 2 3
Rich, but I'm broke

And the good Lord knows the reason

I'm just a cowpoke."

The Dot

Adding a dot to the lower right of any note head adds half the value of the note to the duration. For example: a quarter note typically gets one beat. Half of one is $\frac{1}{2}$. 1 plus $\frac{1}{2}$ = $1\frac{1}{2}$, so a dotted quarter note equals $1\frac{1}{2}$ beats. Example two: a half note is typically worth two beats. Half of that is one. Therefore, a dotted half note equals 3 beats.

Notice that in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, a dotted half note is the note value that fills an entire measure (the half note is 2 beats, the dot is half of that, for a total of 3 beats). Analyze the excerpt below. This is the *La Follia* theme, one of the earliest notated melodies that has survived.

The recording is highly decorated, but you'll hear the melody as written below.

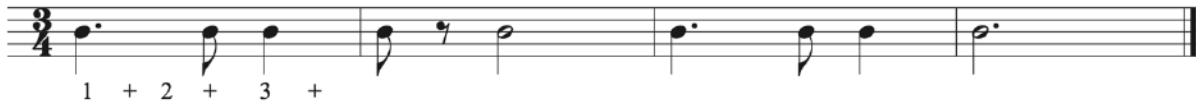
<https://open.spotify.com/track/3tx73Skfb355YiFkViM4Q1?si=783ba31a50034291>



$\frac{3}{4}$ Rhythm Practice

Write 1 + 2 + 3 + lined up with where the divisions of the beat fall. The first measure has been done as an example.

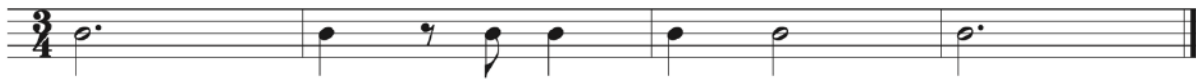
①



②



③



④



⑤



Key Ideas and Terms to Know

- Music has a beat.
- Simple meters divide beats into two parts.
- Common simple meters are $\frac{2}{4}$ (duple), $\frac{3}{4}$ (triple), and $\frac{4}{4}$ (quadruple).
- Time signatures in music show the performer how the beats are grouped.
- Music is beamed according to the time signature.
- A dot after the note adds half the value to the note.

Chapter 4

Melody

Melody is the musical line or tune: the horizontal component of music.

Melodies can be defined by their **contour** (how they move up, down, or stay the same over time) as well as their **range** (the lowest to the highest note). Contour is also used to examine the way pitches are moving: if notes move primarily in stepwise motion they are labeled **conjunct**. If they include several skips or leaps we call the motion **disjunct**.

Ode to Joy from *Symphony No. 9, Movement IV* by Ludwig van Beethoven

<https://open.spotify.com/track/7p8UZ2zaQzMn3uxLmFZf79?si=f768cb5cc01c4d5a>

Notice the **wavelike** contour. It moves up and down by step (line to the next space or space to the next line). Another label for mostly stepwise motion is **conjunct**. As you play the recording, notice that some pauses happen before the musical thought has finished, and some happen after the thought has finished. Music is written in **phrases** just as English is, and these phrases are usually combined into larger units called **periods**. Phrases end in **cadences**. They act as commas, question marks, periods, or exclamation points in the music.



Compare the conjunct motion of *Ode to Joy* with the **disjunct** motion (jumps around, including many intervals larger than a step) of *The Star-Spangled Banner*

<https://open.spotify.com/track/733H5CMPe61EZQhcZ3TDf8?si=3aa9655c17604323>



Melodies are written for the instrument on which they are played or sung. Each instrument has patterns that are played easily and patterns that are more challenging. For example, it is easier to sing in steps than in leaps. It is easiest to play piano in five-note patterns. The guitar hand frame has four fingers. Understanding the patterns for the instrument you're composing for allows them to be played easily and fluently. Your music can be more virtuosic, or just more fun for the performer.

Key Ideas and Terms to Know

- **Melodies can be defined by their contour and range, as well as whether they are conjunct or disjunct.**
- **Melodies are written in phrases, which are typically combined to create periods. Phrases end with cadences.**

Chapter 5

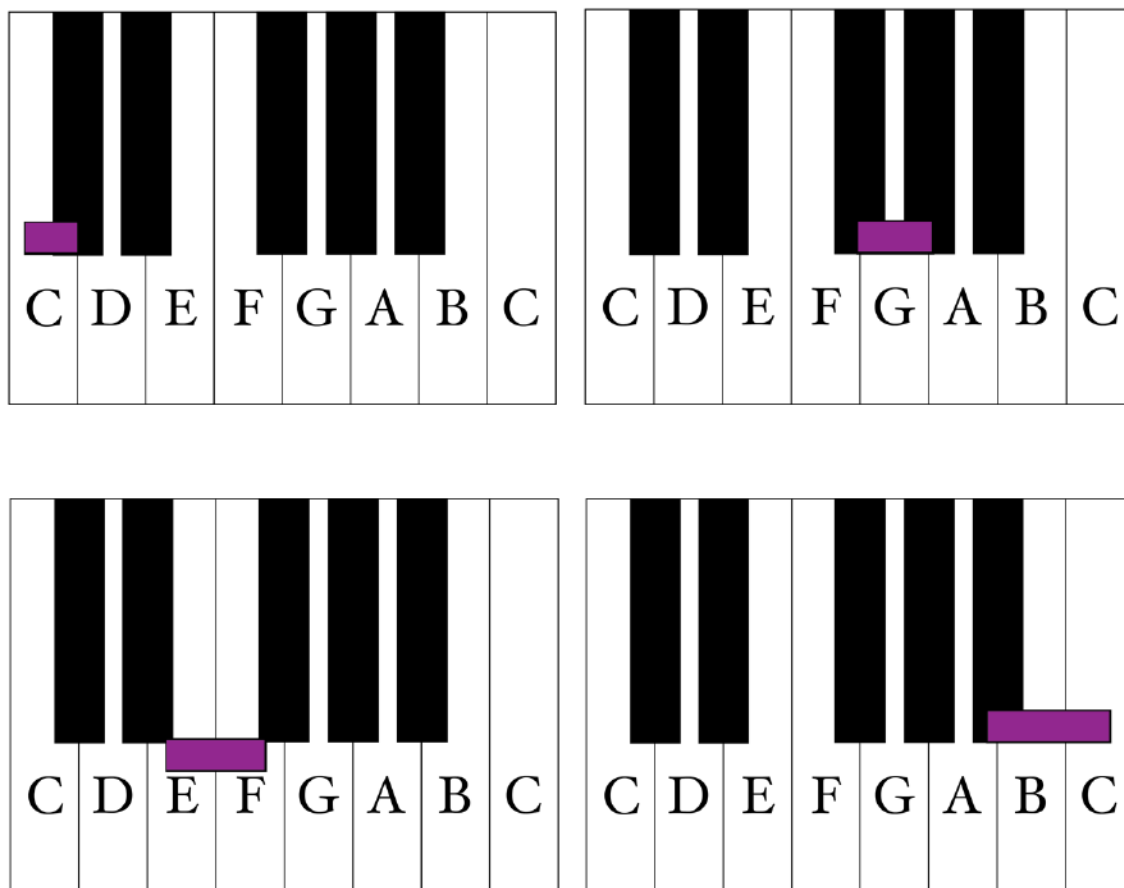
Tonality and Organization of Musical Sounds

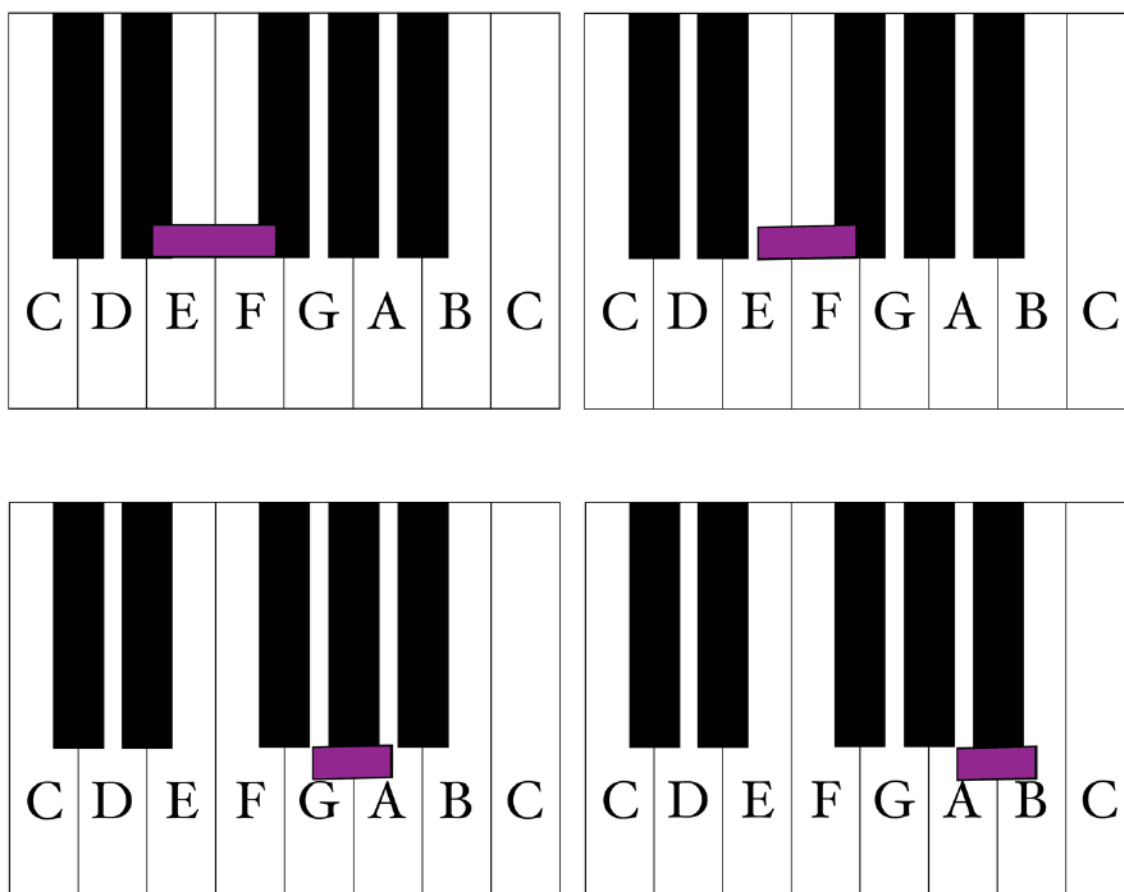
The smallest recognized interval (distance) between notes in Western music is a half-step. One key to the next on the piano is a half-step, whether it is white to black or white to white. Some cultures recognize smaller intervals, but most Western ears would hear this as a bending of the pitch instead of a distinct note.

It should make some sense that two half steps added together equals one whole step. Note that there are two places on the piano that do not have a black key between the white. They are E to F and B to C. These are half steps, whereas every other white to white key is a whole step. This is important to memorize, because it is not information you are given when looking at notes on the staff.

Practice: Labeling Whole and Half Steps on the Piano

Write a W (Whole), H(Half) or N (neither) under each purple mark or on a separate piece of paper. Include the left hand to right hand notes the purple touches.





Pitches are organized into collections called **scales**. The two scales used most in Western music are **major** (commonly characterized as bright and happy):

<https://open.spotify.com/track/4MuxsoMWAtAxeKo1r6Enj8?si=74f211fab26411b>

and **minor** (commonly characterized as dark and sad):

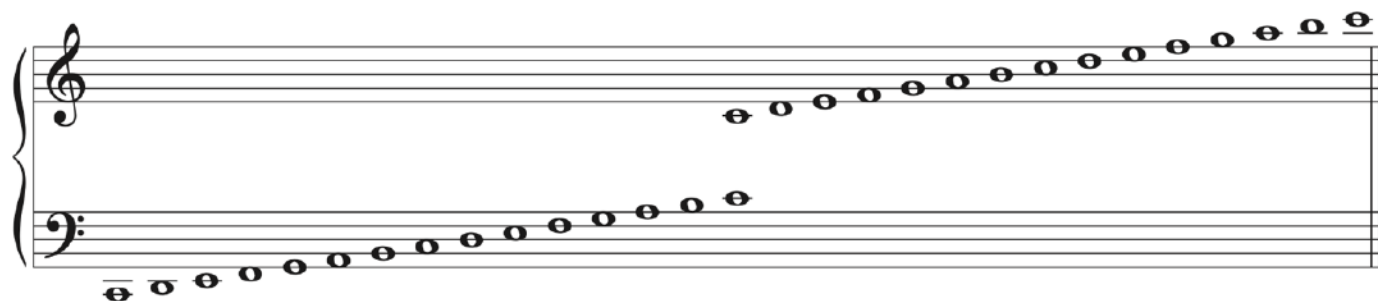
<https://open.spotify.com/track/2T1dlvPx2PECnHLPiZSwne?si=26d49248dfa74b6b>

Scales may start on any of the 12 pitches (black or white keys). On the piano, C Major uses consecutive white keys and is the easiest place to start. It starts and ends on C and has one of every note name in between.

Major scales are defined by the pattern Whole Whole Half Whole Whole Whole Half. It's easiest to learn this by speaking it in two halves: WWH WWH. This concept is called **chaining**, and it's the reason you can easily memorize a phone number or a lock combination. It's extremely useful for any pattern, including musical ones.

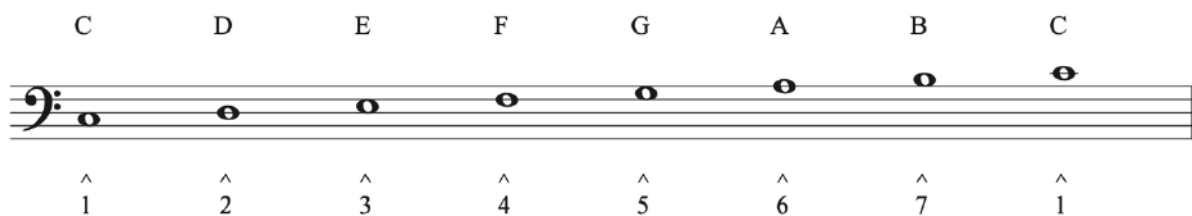
Scale Practice: Write letter names under each note. Bracket the four C Major scales. On top of the staff, write the intervals in between each pitch (W or H). Remember that each line

and space get a note, including when using ledger lines. The first note below (left side) is C, two ledger lines below the bass clef.



Scale Degrees

Once we have organized pitches into a scale and have created a “home” (in this case C), we can discuss how these pitches relate to each other. To do this, we assign **scale degrees**, or Arabic numbers, to each note of the scale. The caret over each number means, “scale degree.”



Scale Degree Practice:

Water Is Wide is a traditional piece, written here in the key of C Major. Under each note, write the scale degree. Use the chart above as a reference (C = 1).

The musical score for "Water Is Wide" is presented in three staves, each with a vocal line and a blank line for scale degree notation. The lyrics are: "The water is wide I cannot cross o'er and neither have I wings to fly give me a boat that can carry two and both shall row, my love and I."

Staff 1 (Measures 1-5):
The wat- er is wide I can- not cross o'er and nei- ther

Staff 2 (Measures 6-10):
have I wings to fly give me a boat that can car- ry two

Staff 3 (Measures 11-13):
and both shall row, my love and I.

Key Ideas and Terms to Know

- In Western music, pitches are organized into major and minor scales.
- Scale degrees are numbers assigned to each pitch in the scale.

Chapter 6

Harmony

Harmony is the vertical component of music, adding depth. It is a combination of notes played simultaneously to create a pleasing sound.

These combinations of notes are called **chords** and are intimately tied to scales. The three-note **triad** is the foundation of all chords and is based on the notes of a given scale. Like scales, triads can be major (bright and happy) or minor (dark and sad).

Chords are built on a **root**, or a note of the scale. On top of this sits the **third**, or middle. The third skips the next note higher in the scale (space to the next space or line to the next line). On top of that is the **fifth**, or top of the triad, another skip away. We'll use a root of C for an example. The C Major chord includes the notes C, E, and G. The middle is called a third because it is the third note from the bottom (C, D, **E**). The fifth is the fifth note from the bottom (C, D, E, F, **G**). Triads always have this snowman shape when the root is on the bottom: space - space - space or line - line - line.

Below is the *Star-Spangled Banner* shown in Chapter 6, but written in a grand staff, with chords written in the bass clef and chord symbols over each changing chord. The first note of this piece is called a “**pickup**” or “**anacrusis**.” These words are interchangeable. Music has strong and weak beats: ones that get more or less weight. The first beat of the bar is the strongest. The fourth beat of the bar here propels us forward into the strong beat one. If you consider the emphasis of the syllables, this is exactly what we want: “Oh SAY can you see.”

The image displays a musical score for the first system of the *Star-Spangled Banner*. It is written in a grand staff with a 3/4 time signature. The melody is in the treble clef, and the harmony is in the bass clef. Chord symbols (C, E, a, D, G) are placed above the melody line, and the same symbols are written in the bass clef to indicate the chords. The lyrics are written below the melody line. The first system consists of two measures. The first measure contains the lyrics "Oh say can you see," and the second measure contains "by the dawn's ear-ly light? What so". The second system consists of two measures. The first measure contains the lyrics "proud-ly we hailed at the twi-light's last gleam-ing." and the second measure contains "ing.".

C E D G

Oh say can you see, by the dawn's ear-ly light? What so

C G

5 proud-ly we hailed at the twi-light's last gleam-ing.

The following notes are either the root (bottom), third (middle), or fifth (top) of a triad. Complete the chords on this or a separate piece of paper by notating the other two pitches. Each triad should be either three space notes stacked or three line notes stacked. Over the chord, write the letter of the root. The first three have been completed for you.

Key Ideas and Terms to Know

- **Triads are chords made up of a root, third, and fifth.**
- **Chords are built on the notes of the scale.**

Chapter 7

Introduction to Form

Form is the way in which music is organized into a cohesive story. Much of the music heard on popular radio channels has verses and choruses, or contrasting sections that are repeated. This repetition and predictability provide a way for the audience to understand and engage with the music.

In essence, a composer has something to say (we will call it “A”). Then, they either repeat it (A A) or say something contrasting (call the contrasting part “B”). Form can become sophisticated and complex, but keep in mind that it all begins with these very simple ideas.

Strophic Form

Strophic form is a series of verses (“A” sections) that repeat for the duration of the song. Hymns are typically written in strophic form, as are blues songs. The music tends to be simple so the lyrics can tell a more complex story.

Amazing Grace is a strophic hymn (a song of praise or devotion) written in 1772 and performed for the first time on New Year’s Day 1773. Englishman John Newton wrote the lyrics, and it was set to music in its current form to the song *New Britain*, by James P. Carrell and David L. Clayton. It has become an iconic folk song, performed millions of times per year and quoted by composers in all genres. Newton was an unlikely source with an interesting story. He was by all accounts an unsavory character: a slave trafficker who was known to torture them. During one voyage he encountered a terrible storm but somehow, they made it through. Afterwards, he gave up the slave trade, became a parish rector and wrote this among other songs.

A - ma - zing grace, how sweet the sound That

5 saved a wretch like me! I

9 once was lost, but now I'm found Was

13 blind but now I see.

Listen <https://open.spotify.com/track/0i67q5f6SBh6QvDgJV4f1v?si=fb533606e31b4b90>

while you read the score above. The melody is easy to sing and easy to remember, with a clear message. There are not any particularly difficult leaps. This excerpt is the first verse. Each verse has the same music, enabling an audience to easily memorize the music and pay attention to the lyrics. The verse is 16 measures long, broken into two eight measure sections, and each of these eight measures is broken into four measure phrases. It is symmetrical, allows time for the singer to breathe, and is predictable in a pleasant way. Organizing music in this manner is by far the most common, across almost all genres.

Below, Amazing Grace is supported by triads (three-note chords). The letters above the measures give you the root of the chord (the note on which it is built). This is called a lead sheet. The chords don't move very smoothly (it's not great part-writing), but it is the easiest way to see these chords as we start out. Carrie Underwood's version (above) uses the same chord progression but broken apart on the guitar. Notice the emotional impact of each chord as you listen again, and how they move the story forward.

Notice that the melody uses only notes of the chords. Additionally, there are only four chords used. These are the same four chords used in many a pop and rock song (the chord built on the first note of the scale, fourth, fifth, and sixth).

C G a F C
 A-ma-zing grace, how sweet the sound That
 5 saved a wretch like me! I
 9 once was lost, but now I'm found Was
 13 a C G C
 blind but now I see.

Verse/Chorus Form

Many other popular songs are written with verses and choruses. Verses move the story forward, while the chorus allows the audience to sit with the main message of the song.

Verses use the same or similar music each time, but the lyrics change. The music and lyrics to the chorus stay the same, with variation.

Listen to *Hotel California* (Eagles) and notice this structure. The first verse and chorus are below for a reference.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/40riOy7x9W7GXjyGp4pjAv?si=4c59c33f40db42d0>

First Verse:

On a dark desert highway, cool wind in my hair
Warm smell of colitas rising up through the air
Up ahead in the distance, I saw a shimmering light
My head grew heavy and my sight grew dim, I had to stop for the night
There she stood in the doorway, I heard the mission bell
And I was thinkin' to myself, "This could be heaven or this could be hell"
Then she lit up a candle and she showed me the way
There were voices down the corridor, I thought I heard them say

Chorus:

"Welcome to the Hotel California
Such a lovely place (such a lovely place)
Such a lovely face
Plenty of room at the Hotel California
Any time of year (any time of year)
You can find it here"

Key Ideas and Terms to Know

- **Music has structure and form.**
- **Strophic form repeats verses over the same music.**
- **Verse/Chorus form alternates verses that change lyrics each time with choruses that use the same lyrics.**

Chapter Eight

Lyrics and Story

Music is powerful because of how strongly we relate to it. A song can bring back a memory you forgot you had. It can remind you of a specific person, place, or time. Stories are personal – we all find different meaning in the songs we love. Whether or not music has lyrics, it has a story. There is always some sort of inspiration on the part of the artist; a place, an event, or maybe nothing specific but just the whole of their environment and their mental space as they were writing.

Lyrics can tell a very clear story or be incredibly vague.

Consider *Yesterday* (Paul McCartney).

<https://open.spotify.com/track/3BQHpfGAp4l80e1XsljNI?si=d7124b53971a4c0d>

This song was originally called *Scrambled Eggs*. The story as told in *The Beatles Anthology* goes, “My dad used to know a lot of old jazz tunes; I thought maybe I’d just remembered it from the past. I went to the piano and found the chords to it, made sure I remembered it and then hawked it round to all my friends, asking what it was: ‘Do you know this? It’s a good little tune, but I couldn’t have written it because I dreamt it.’”

The original lyrics go as such:

“Scrambled Eggs

Oh my baby how I love your legs.”

You can hear it fleshed out and performed by Jimmy Fallon and Paul McCartney on the 2012 album *Blow Your Pants Off* (Jimmy Fallon):

<https://open.spotify.com/track/4tjMa8XQd7CsVICXmNSP8f?si=40c883d2daa94f45>

Eventually McCartney wrote the lyrics for *Yesterday* and the rest is history – as well as a great lesson in composition. If you have part of a melody, a lyric, a storyline, hang onto it. Songs don’t often materialize as a shiny, finished package. They can be pieced together over time and come to mean very different things.

Notice a couple of things about the finished lyrics:

1. Most phrases after “Yesterday” start on beat 2.
2. Most strong words fall on the next strongest beat after 1 (3, in $\frac{4}{4}$ time): “troubles,” “looks,” “believe.”
3. The end of each phrase rhymes.

These are not set rules for songwriting, but one of many ways to do it.

Intro:

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

Yesterday

1 2 3 4

All my troubles seemed so far away

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Now it looks as though they're here to stay. Oh

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

I believe in yes terday.

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Key Ideas and Terms to Know

- Music tells a story with or without lyrics.
- Strong syllables fall on strong beats in the music.
- Lyrics often use rhyme.

Chapter 9

Texture and Timbre

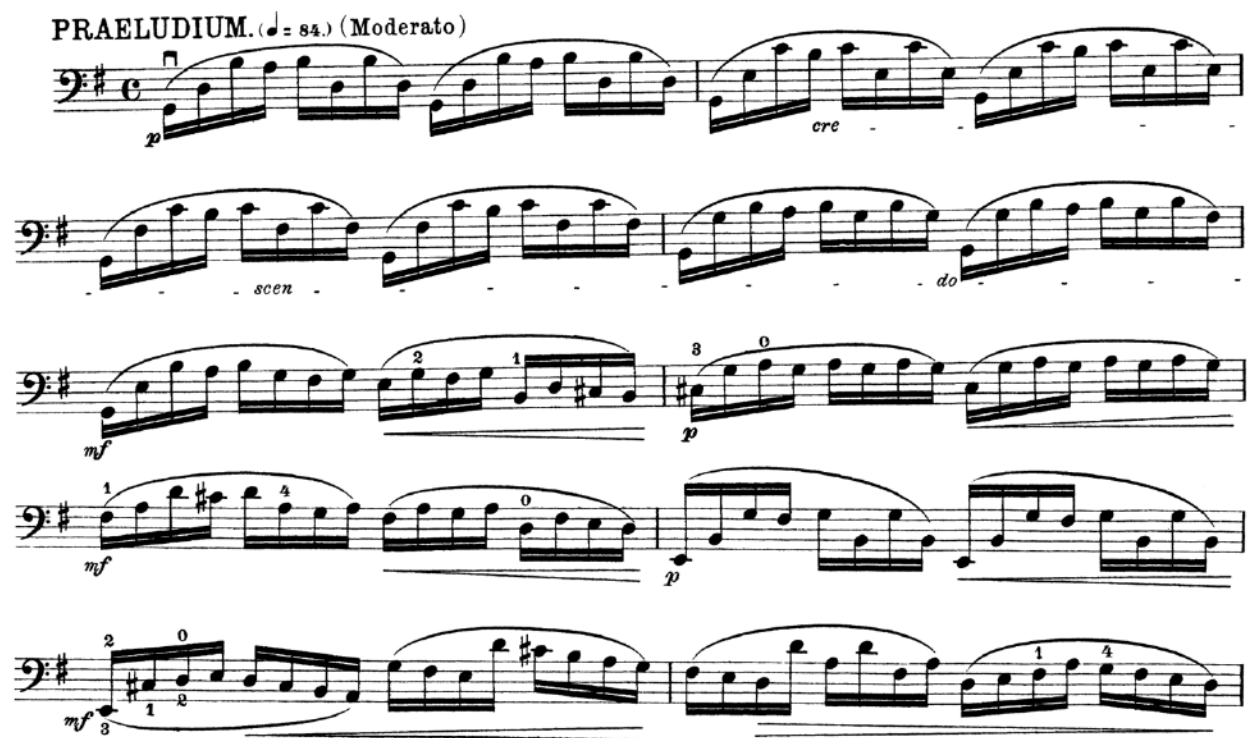
Texture

Texture refers to the layers and fabric of a piece. It includes instrumentation, range between lowest and highest parts or instruments, and how the melodic and harmonic elements are combined. It could be a song with guitar and voice, or a full symphonic choir with 100 members.

In this text, we can primarily concern ourselves with colors and layering, instead of specific definitions of harmony.

Consider *Prelude from Suite No. 1 in G Major* (J. S. Bach). This was written for solo cello, and with one instrument provides elements of melody and harmony. An excerpt of the score is included below.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/61dYvvlRtIDFuqZypPAta?si=cafa8d74aafa49d0>



Compare this to Pyotr Tchaikovsky's *Finale: Allegro con Fuoco* from his *Symphony No. 4*, written for an orchestra of approximately 100 players. Right away, notice that the score can only give you four measures on the first page. On the left-hand side are labels for the instruments you're hearing.

160

IV. Finale.

Allegro con fuoco.

Piccolo.

Flauto I.

Flauto II.

Oboi.

Clarineti in B.

Fagotti

Corni in F. 1. 2.

Corni in F. 3. 4.

Trombe in F.

2 Tromboni ten.

Trombone basso e Tuba.

Timpani in F. C. G.

Triangolo.

Piatti.

Piatti e Gr.Cassa.

Violini I.

Violini II.

Viole.

Celli.

Contra-Bassi.

Allegro con fuoco.

What are some textural differences? Both have melody, harmony, rhythm...all the elements of music. The Tchaikovsky - due simply to the number of different instruments, ranges, and colors - offers more opportunity for contrast, sound combinations, and volume. The Bach is much more intimate. Both tell a compelling story.

Texture is often described as thick, rich, sparse, or light. We can also comment on whether one voice has the melody and rest is accompanying, whether the melody is passed to various instruments, which instruments comprise different parts of the song (the rhythm section in a jazz group), etc.

Timbre

Timbre (pronounced tamber) is the quality of sound. It is how one can hear the difference between a flute and a violin, though they may be playing the same notes and rhythms. Certain instruments are evocative of certain times and places or work well for certain characters. The harp is often used for angelic sounds, the cello for soulful and sad, the violin for virtuosic, extroverted, the trumpet for fanfares.

Key Ideas and Terms to Know

- **Texture refers to the number and type of instruments used, and the overall sound created by melodic and harmonic elements.**
- **Timbre is the quality of sound produced by different instruments.**

Unit 1 Analysis: *The Story* (Brandi Carlile)

Use this Spotify link or any of your choice:

<https://open.spotify.com/track/0EKBV6GybPtALXUgWqWrym?si=c84662021bb447d4>

First, listen actively several times. Notice your responses, and how they develop on consecutive times through. Don't multi-task. The first time through, just listen. On subsequent listens, start writing down notes. Anything that comes to mind is valid.

Background:

There is usually some inspiration for a story beyond an album deadline. Having some idea of why it was written, what it's about and what was going on with the artist can have a huge impact on our appreciation and understanding.

1. Who wrote the song?
2. When was it recorded?
3. What is it about, how did Brandi Carlile make it her own, and what does it mean to you?

Form:

This song is strophic. Each verse is 16 measures long, with the same lyrics at the end ("I belong to you,") and the same music repeated several times.

1. How many verses are there before the instrumental break?
2. How many verses are there after the instrumental break?
3. How do you know a new verse is starting? What cues do you have from the music, lyrics, etc.?

Tempo:

How fast is this song? How does the speed affect you?

Rhythm and Texture:

The tempo is stable through the piece, but different rhythms and instruments are emphasized throughout.

1. What is the time signature?
2. What instruments are used in the first verse?
3. What is added throughout?
4. Does each added instrument stay, or does it change after they're all in? Comment on the effect.

Harmony:

This song was not written in C Major, but it has been transposed to C from its original A Major as we start looking at harmony. The root of the chord (the note the chord is built on) is written above the lyrics for the first verse. In a C Major scale, we can call C: 1, D: 2, E: 3, F: 4, G: 5, A: 6, B: 7, C:1.

C

All of these lines across my face

G

Tell you the story of who I am

am

So many stories of where I've been

F

And how I got to where I am

C

G

But these stories don't mean anything

am

F

When you've got no one to tell them to

C

G

C

It's true, I was made for you.

1. Write the Arabic numbers (scale degrees) for these notes.
2. What do you notice? Which four numbers are used? Do you recognize this progression?
3. Three of them are major chords (bright, happy). One is minor (dark, moody). The major chords are notated in upper case letters and the minor chord is written in lower case with a small m. How does this dark chord line up with the lyrics? What is the effect?

Verse 1 Lyrics:

1. What do you notice about rhyme in this first verse, and in following verses?
2. What do you notice about use of repeated lyrics? What is the effect?

What else drives this song? What makes it work, in your own words?

Composition One

Writing a Verse

The verse is the part of the song that tells a story, while the chorus allows us to relish in the moment.

Songs can be written in any order, but we're going to start with a harmonic framework. Use the chords given in the examples and write a melody over the top.

To get started, just write! It's like any other paper: the hardest part is getting something down on paper. You can edit later.

Verses generally use more stepwise motion and a smaller range.

Compositional Process

Tonality/Key

Our first composition is in the key of C Major. The C Major scale begins and ends on C and has one of every note name in between (every line and space from beginning to end). Write a C Major scale in bass clef, using whole notes and starting with the C on the second space up in the staff. Label the note names over the staff.

Write Arabic numbers underneath, 1-1. The bottom and top C's are 1 (same note, same number). Now you have defined C as "home" or 1 and it becomes possible to discuss relationships within the scale.

Layout

Use MuseScore or an equivalent program for composition.

<https://musescore.org/en>

There are several programs that will work well, but not all work on mobile devices, and not all set the page up correctly. MuseScore, Finale, Dorico, and Sibelius are recommended. Use software for a couple of reasons: first, the playback features are useful compositional tools. Second, it will set the piece up correctly (number of beats per measure, etc.) and becomes a valuable learning tool.

Since the composition will be symmetrical (eight measures total, broken into two four-measure phrases), the layout will be symmetrical. This makes it easier to organize during composition and makes it easier to read as a performer. The musician will immediately see where the phrases are and gain important information about shaping the piece.

Each system (line) should have four measures. Each system includes a grand staff (treble and bass clef, connected by a bracket).

Bar lines go through the treble and bass clef of each grand staff (not down the entire page). These are needed on the right-hand edge of the staff.

Only the first system includes a time signature. Ours will be $\frac{4}{4}$



Harmony

Music can be composed harmony first, melody first, or both at the same time. We will start with harmony first.

This composition uses the triads (chords) built on the first note of the scale, the fourth, fifth, and sixth.

Using the scale you wrote above, build chords on these notes. If the note is a space note, stack two more space notes directly on top of it. If it is a line note, stack two more line notes directly on top of it. Write Roman Numerals underneath the Arabic numbers 1, 4, 5 and 6. Use upper case for I, IV and V, and lower case for vi. I, IV V are major chords in a major key (they sound bright and happy). vi is a minor chord (it sounds darker and sad).

To designate scale degrees, use Arabic numbers with a caret over top. To designate chords, use Roman Numerals.

Next, copy the following Roman Numerals into your score, one per measure, under the bass staff (not in the middle of the staves):

I V vi IV I V IV I

Write lead sheet symbols (letter names) above the treble clef staff (not in between the treble and bass clef staves). Use upper case letters for the Major chords (I, IV, V) and a lower-case letter followed by a lower-case m for the minor chord (vi).

The lead sheet symbol gives the bottom note of each triad. Write this as a whole note in the bass clef. Stack two more notes on top, creating either line-line-line notes or space-space-space notes. Because C Major uses the seven letter names of the alphabet and the lines and spaces of the staff indicate these letter names, you have created triads in the key of C Major.

The image shows two musical staves, each with a treble and bass clef. The first staff contains four measures. Above the treble staff, the chords are labeled: C, G, am, F. Below the bass staff, the chords are labeled: I, V, vi, IV. The second staff also contains four measures. Above the treble staff, the chords are labeled: C, G, F, C. Below the bass staff, the chords are labeled: I, V, IV, I. Each measure shows a whole note in the bass clef and a triad in the treble clef.

Melody

Consider the overall shape of the melody. There is typically one high point. Many different contours will work but try an arc that generally goes up and then generally falls. Melodies should be balanced; after rising for a while, or after a big leap in any direction, follow with motion in the opposite direction.

Each four-measure phrase will end with a musical comma, question mark, or period. This means the music will breathe, even if lyrics are not included.

Melody: Chord Tones

Melodies are based on the notes of the harmony. To get started, use only **chord-tones**, or notes of the chord. If you've done this, the composition will sound **consonant** and pleasing. It may or may not win a grammy nomination, but musically it will work. Later, you will add **non-chord tones** to create a smoother line and add some pleasant **dissonance** (clashing notes used for interesting color).

Very generally, aim for a contour that rises and then falls.

Whatever you compose can be edited later. The first step is getting started. This can be done academically first, if inspiration has yet to strike. Start lower, use only chord tones, create a general arc, and then use playback or perform on an instrument to see how you like it.

Start simply. You can always add more complex rhythms later (and may need to, to fit lyrics). If the music is too busy and complicated, you'll lose your audience.

Example (use this chord progression but your own original melody, not mine):

Verse

Chord progression: C G am F C G F C

Scale degrees: I V vi IV I V IV I

Melody: Non-Chord Tones

This composition is passable, but it would be more interesting if there were smoother lines (instead of skipping or leaping to the next chord tone) and some notes that purposefully clash or sound **dissonant**, to create interesting colors. Dissonance also creates a need for the music to resolve to a **consonance**, which moves the musical story forward.

This is where **non-chord tones** come in. Go gently; dissonance is best used sparingly and in service of the line. It is often easier to add in later than take away.

Verse

The musical score for the Verse section is written in 4/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has four measures with chords C, G, am, and F. The second system has four measures with chords C, G, F, and C. Roman numerals I, V, vi, IV, V, IV, and I are shown below the bass staff.

Add lyrics (Edit to fit your lyrics)

I'm writing this piece two days after a young person tried to assassinate a former president. It's the first really smoky day of 2024 in beautiful Bozeman, MT. It's easy to get caught up in life – both removed, like politics and climate, as well as the everyday challenges. I am feeling a little melancholy but also hopeful for the future. I find a huge dichotomy in my life: the way I view the outside world with all its troubles, and the upwelling of happiness I feel when I look at my daughter. She's so joyful, she lives in the moment, and her troubles are tangible and right in front of us. They're very real for her but so much easier to solve than the ones she'll find down the road. We have a family cabin on a Montana river. It's quiet, beautiful, and peaceful; a place where time seems to stop and normal life seems far away. My song is about a day with her and our family dog at that river.

Verse

C G am F

Toes in the riv- er clouds float- ing by, a

I V vi IV

5 C G F C

dog and a girl oh _____ she's my why.

I V IV I

Add lyrics to your song. You may have to change some rhythms to make it work. Experiment with rhyme, and how literal you want to be. Choose anything in your life – a seminal moment, or the way you felt walking to class this morning. These can be changed later, as well if you're so inspired.