



Composition

There is no right way to compose! You can focus on writing melodies, rewriting songs you like, focusing on sounds, or create your own notation system! You can use some of the below prompts to get you started but the more you write the more you will explore and discover what interests you. “Yes and” your ideas! The important thing is to not judge yourself too quickly or harshly. You have to experiment and try things out to create something new.

Questions to begin

What type of music do you like?

What sounds interest you?

What do you want your piece to be about? Literally, metaphorically, in the abstract?

What format do you want your piece to take – length, tempo, groove, accompany media, lyrics?

What instruments, voices, or other objects are you composing for?

What are that instrument’s traditional rolls? Do you want to compose to the rolls or break them?

Composition Prompts

1. Riff melodies/repeated ideas. An example would be “Friday the 13th” by Thelonious Monk
2. Use chords from existing song and write a new melody
3. Deconstruct an existing song and reverse engineer it using the elements you like
4. Pick a form– ABA, ABAC, verse-chorus-verse-chorus-bridge-chorus
5. Object writing. Pick an object and build a story around it. What tempo would fit, major/minor?
6. Music storytelling. Write music to accompany a story or piece of writing. You could use a newspaper article, essay, poem, or a favorite book
7. Stream of conscious writing for lyrics. Write non-stop for five minutes, write anything that comes to mind the purpose is to not stop writing though and edit after.
8. Song Circle Improv. Start with one person playing anything and go around the screen/circle having everyone respond to what they just heard. Come up with ideas based on improvising and feeding off each other. Record so you can remember what it played.
9. Restriction Writing. Put restrictions on what you write (number of measures, number of notes, phrasing direction, chords, etc) Pull restrictions out of a hat to decide.
10. Go outside and listen to sounds around you. Try and play with those sounds on your instrument or using your voice. Record yourself and the sounds you hear to develop a soundscape.
11. Compose new music to an existing movie scene. You can mute the scene and experiment with different sounds that relate to what is happening visually.
12. Challenge yourself to write a short piece using only one note. It can change octaves, be articulated in different ways, or be for multiple instruments. How many ways can you play one note?

Websites/Articles

New Music Box, <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/>

Sitting with it: Thoughts on Inspiration & Creativity, <https://bit.ly/3kyRJ3k>

I Care If You Listen, <https://www.icareifyoulisten.com/>

Composer Portraits written by Lara Pellegrinelli, <https://www.millertheatre.com/explore/program-notes>

People/Organizations

Luna Composition Lab, <https://missymazzoli.com/projects/luna-composition-lab/>

Golden Hornet , <https://www.goldenhornet.org/composers-and-collaborators>

Danny Clay, <https://www.dclaymusic.com/>

Carla Bley composition library, <http://www.wattxtrawatt.com/leadsheetsbley.htm>