

Composition Basics Course: Lesson Plan

Course Title: Foundations of Classical Composition

Level: Beginner

Duration: 12 Weeks (1–2 sessions per week, 90 minutes each)

Objective: To provide students with fundamental knowledge of classical composition techniques, basic harmony, melody, rhythm, form, and orchestration, enabling them to create simple original compositions.

Week 1: Introduction to Composition

Learning Objectives:

- Understand what composition entails.
- Familiarize with terminology: melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, timbre, form.
- Identify roles of composer, performer, and listener.

Activities:

- Lecture: “What is Composition?”
- Listening session: Analyze a short classical piece (e.g., Bach Prelude in C Major).
- Discussion: What makes this music interesting? Identify melody, harmony, rhythm.

Assignment:

- Write a short paragraph describing your favorite piece of music and what you notice in terms of melody, harmony, and rhythm.

Week 2: Pitch and Scales

Learning Objectives:

- Learn about pitch, notes, and octaves.
- Understand major and minor scales.
- Recognize the concept of key signatures.

Activities:

- Demonstration of scales on piano or keyboard.
- Exercise: Write C Major and A Minor scales on staff paper.
- Listening: Identify scales by ear from simple examples.

Assignment:

- Practice writing major and minor scales in at least 3 different keys.

Week 3: Intervals and Simple Melodies

Learning Objectives:

- Understand intervals (unison, 2nd, 3rd, etc.).
- Learn to construct a simple melody using stepwise motion and small leaps.

Activities:

- Lecture: Interval identification and naming.
- Exercise: Write a 4–8 bar melody using only C Major scale.
- Class activity: Sing or play melodies written by classmates.

Assignment:

- Compose a short 8-bar melody in a major key.

Week 4: Rhythm and Meter

Learning Objectives:

- Understand basic note values: whole, half, quarter, eighth notes.
- Learn simple time signatures (2/4, 3/4, 4/4).
- Explore rhythm patterns and their effect on phrasing.

Activities:

- Clap and count exercises in different meters.
- Compose a short rhythm pattern and practice performing it.
- Dictation exercise: Identify rhythms by listening.

Assignment:

- Create a 4–8 bar rhythm to accompany your previously written melody.

Week 5: Harmony and Chords

Learning Objectives:

- Understand triads (major, minor, diminished).
- Learn chord symbols and basic chord progressions (I–IV–V–I).
- Introduce simple harmonic accompaniment for melodies.

Activities:

- Lecture: Introduction to chord construction and Roman numeral analysis.
- Exercise: Harmonize your 8-bar melody using I, IV, and V chords.
- Listening analysis: Identify chord changes in classical excerpts.

Assignment:

- Harmonize a 4–8 bar melody using triads in a key of your choice.

Week 6: Phrase Structure and Cadences

Learning Objectives:

- Understand musical phrases (question and answer).
- Learn common cadences (perfect, imperfect, plagal).
- Create balanced 8-bar phrases.

Activities:

- Analyze simple classical phrases (e.g., Mozart or Haydn).
- Compose 2 four-bar phrases forming an 8-bar period.
- Perform phrases in class.

Assignment:

- Write a short piece (8–16 bars) with clear phrases and cadences.

Week 7: Counterpoint Basics

Learning Objectives:

- Introduction to two-part counterpoint.
- Understand consonance vs. dissonance.
- Learn basic rules: stepwise motion, contrary motion, avoidance of parallel fifths/octaves.

Activities:

- Lecture and example analysis (Palestrina, simple Bach inventions).
- Exercise: Write a 4-bar melody and compose a simple counter-melody above or below it.
- Peer review and discussion.

Assignment:

- Compose a 4–8 bar two-voice piece with proper counterpoint rules.

Week 8: Introduction to Form

Learning Objectives:

- Understand basic forms: binary (AB), ternary (ABA), rondo (ABACA).
- Learn how form shapes musical ideas.

Activities:

- Analyze simple works (Bach Minuet, Mozart's Minuet).
- Compose an 8–16 bar piece using binary or ternary form.

Assignment:

- Sketch a short piece in binary or ternary form, with labeled sections.

Week 9: Orchestration Basics

Learning Objectives:

- Introduction to instruments: ranges, timbres, and capabilities.
- Learn basic scoring for piano, strings, and winds.

Activities:

- Demonstration: piano vs. string sounds, simple arrangements.
- Exercise: Assign your melody to different instruments and note the effect.

Assignment:

- Arrange your 8–16 bar piece for a small ensemble (2–3 instruments).

Week 10: Dynamics and Articulation

Learning Objectives:

- Learn basic dynamics (p, mp, mf, f) and articulation (staccato, legato).
- Understand expressive markings in classical notation.

Activities:

- Lecture and listening: Observe dynamics in classical excerpts.
- Exercise: Add dynamics and articulation to your melody and accompaniment.

Assignment:

- Revise your piece with dynamic and articulation markings.

Week 11: Putting It All Together

Learning Objectives:

- Combine melody, harmony, rhythm, counterpoint, form, orchestration, dynamics.
- Prepare a complete beginner-level composition.

Activities:

- Workshopping: Students draft final pieces with instructor guidance.
- Peer feedback sessions to refine compositions.

Assignment:

- Complete a short original composition (16–32 bars) using all learned techniques.

Week 12: Performance and Reflection

Learning Objectives:

- Perform original compositions.
- Develop listening and analytical skills through peer feedback.

Activities:

- Student performances in class.
- Group discussion: challenges, discoveries, and personal growth.
- Instructor provides detailed feedback on each composition.

Assignment:

- Reflective essay: What you learned about composition, your creative process, and next goals.

Additional Resources

- Staff paper and manuscript notebooks.
- Piano/keyboard access.
- Recording device for playback.
- Recommended Listening: Bach Inventions, Mozart Minuets, Beethoven Easy Sonatas.
- Optional: Free notation software (MuseScore) for assignments.

Key Notes for Instructors

- Keep lessons interactive: listening, singing, clapping, and playing should complement writing exercises.
- Encourage experimentation; mistakes are part of learning.

- Feedback is crucial—both peer and instructor.
- Pace the lessons flexibly; some students may need extra time with counterpoint or harmony.