

INSPIRING COMPOSITION IN THE CLASSROOM

GETTING STARTED WITH GCSE COMPOSITION



A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK FOR
TEACHERS & PUPILS

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Introduction

Passing Notes Education is proud to have commissioned this GCSE composition guide. Set up in 2018 with the specific aim of providing high-quality but low-cost CPD and resources, Passing Notes Education has (as of September 2019) presented to over 100 teachers and provided free resources to many more. We are delighted to have teamed up with *I Can Compose*, who shares our educational philosophy and our belief that composition *must be taught*.

In particular, we believe that linking listening, analysis, performance and composition is key to success. The helpful links to set works across multiple GCSE exam boards will, we hope, help you make these vital links.

Chris Fish
Founder of Passing Notes Education

The aim of *I can compose* is simple: to make composing music fun and accessible. Our online music platform (www.icancompose.com) provides interactive courses and downloadable resources to help students and teachers. We are delighted to partner with Passing Notes Education to offer this composing handbook for GCSE Music teachers. Every pupil and every class is different and so whether you use the whole booklet, or simply use the ideas to build your own activities and lessons, we hope you will find it helpful.

Rachel Shapey
Founder and Director of *I can compose*

1. Teacher sheet: Using rhythm effectively

1. Rhythm grid

Rhythm grids can be flexibly used for all age groups to develop basic score-reading skills.

Rhythm grid example

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Player 1	⊙	⊙	⊙		⊙	⊙	⊙	
Player 2		★		★		★		★
Player 3			◆◆	◆◆			◆◆	◆◆
Player 4	✕		✕		✕			✕

Key:

⊙ = hand clap ✕ = finger click ★ = foot stamp ◆ = palm slide

Practical activity

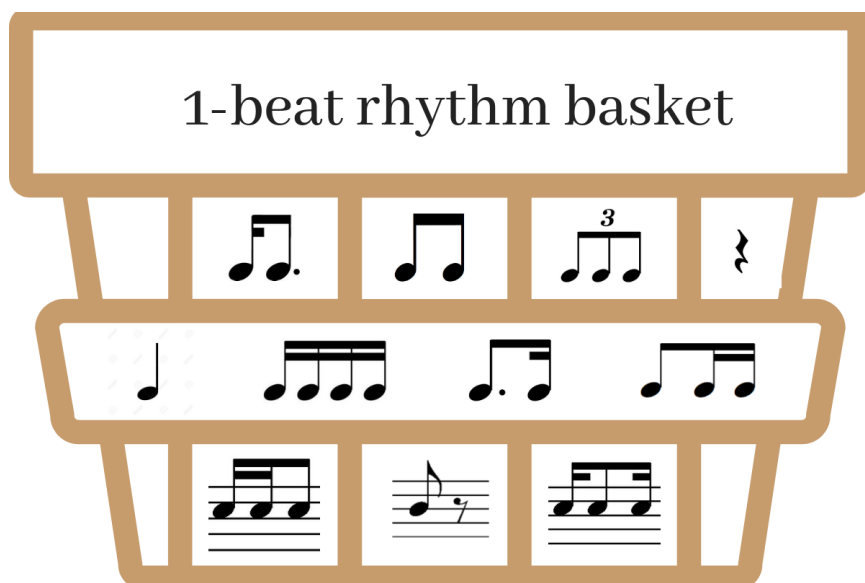
1. Create and display a rhythm grid using the example above.
2. Demonstrate each body percussion action; rests can be shown with palms facing up.
3. Launch straight into performing each part separately with the 8 beat pulse counted out loud.
4. Once pupils can perform each line confidently, put the piece together.

Extension

1. Add more players and complex rhythmic cells, e.g triplets.
2. Small group work to create grids using body percussion/instruments.
3. Introduce a small number of pitches.

2. Rhythm basket

Using the basket below pupils can choose any 4 'cells' in combination to create a 4-beat rhythm:



Activity 1. Which rhythm?

1. Display rhythm basket on the board.
2. Clap 4-beat rhythms containing repeated cells, for class to repeat back.
3. Pupils identify rhythm cells used. Extend to 8-beat rhythms and without repeated cells.
4. Pupils repeat the activity in pairs.

Activity 2. Pin code rhythm

1. Number each rhythm cell.
2. Clap a 4-beat rhythm and ask students to write down the 4-digit pin code.
3. Challenge pupils by clapping longer rhythms and assigning pupils as leaders.

Activity 3. Rhythm basket grid

1. In pairs, pupils create a rhythm grid, this time with notation, using the basket for guidance.
2. Put two pupil pairs together. The new groups of 4 perform each other's grids.

Extension: introduce pitched percussion, using pentatonic scales (CDEGA or ACDEG) to start with. Some pupils may wish to choose a key to work in.

Rhythmic devices

The following rhythmic devices can add interest and originality to a melody:

Syncopation	Hemiola	Anacrusis	Ostinato
-------------	---------	-----------	----------

§ Link to set works / suggested repertoire

Exam board	Title & composer	Device
OCR AoS5	Someone Like You (Adele)	Syncopation
(suggested repertoire)	Candle in the Wind (Elton John)	
Edexcel AoS1	3rd movement from Brandenburg Concerto no.5 by Bach	Anacrusis & triplet rhythm
Edexcel AoS 3 & OCR AoS2	Star Wars Episode IV main title theme (John Williams)	Triplet rhythm
Edexcel AoS3	Defying Gravity Stephen Schwartz	Syncopation & dotted rhythm (in chorus)
Eduqas AoS4	Since you've been gone (Rainbow)	Syncopation
AQA AoS4 study piece	Hoedown from Rodeo (Copland)	Off-beat rhythms, syncopation & use of triplets
AQA AoS2	Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band	Syncopation

Explore the use of rhythmic devices in your set works. Ask students to clap or play particular rhythmic segments and build short composition tasks around the excerpts.

Activity – adding rhythmic interest

Use the example below to demonstrate how a simple melody can be rhythmically transformed:




1.



2.



Further useful listening material:

Title of piece	Composer/artist	Notes
Golliwog's cakewalk	Debussy	 This rhythm opens the piece
Imperial March from <i>Stars Wars</i>	John Williams	Ostinato with prominent use of triplets
Mars from <i>The Planets</i>	Holst	Main theme uses dotted rhythms Ostinato in 5/4 time
Bolero	Ravel	Ostinato with prominent use of triplets
Can you feel the love tonight?	Elton John	Syncopation
From <i>The Lion King</i>		
Shape of you	Ed Sheeran	Syncopated riff
Prelude from <i>L'Arlesienne</i>, Suite No.1	Bizet	Prominent use of dotted rhythm
Theme from 2nd movement of the <i>New World Symphony</i>	Dvorak	Prominent use of dotted rhythm
<i>Skyfall</i> chorus	Adele	Use of anacrusis
The Montagues and the Capulets from <i>Romeo & Juliet</i>	Prokofiev	Prominent use of dotted rhythm
Eleanor Rigby	The Beatles	Use of syncopation

Practical Activity: Repetition

1. Select some class listening material from the table and / or set works list.
2. Identify motifs within each piece and how often they are repeated.
3. Pupils select 1 or 2 of the motifs and use as a basis for an ostinato.
4. Pupils then choose 2 cells from the rhythm basket to create and perform an ostinato.
5. Add in a set of 5 pitches to create a 2-bar riff.

Extension: in groups explore adding chords and /or a melody to the ostinato.

Words & rhythm

§ Link to set work:

- Choose some lyrics from a vocal set work. Write them with an unnatural-sounding rhythm.
- Next to it, show the correct version. E.g for **Defying Gravity** from **Wicked**, write out the chorus hook with straight crotchets & quavers.
- Highlight how the important words of the hook (*gravity*) are placed on the *strong* beat of the bar and emphasised through use of dotted rhythm.

Practical task:

Assign pupils this 'real world' challenge:

The class have been asked to teach Year 7 about rhythm and ostinato. Pupils need to create a simple ostinato piece for Year 7 students to learn and perform in groups of 4. They can use the rhythm basket, rhythm grid and any class listening material to help with composing the piece.

§ Link to set work

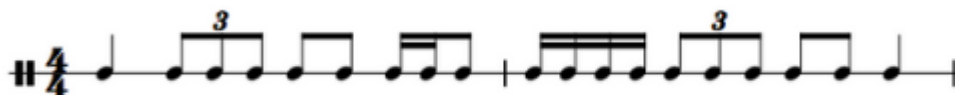
Eduqas: *Since you've been gone* by Rainbow

- Notate the 4-bar opening riff using a rhythm grid
- Pupils perform the riff using boomwhackers / tuned percussion
- Challenge pupils to create their own riff using the same rhythm but different pitch

Pupil sheet: Using rhythm effectively

Activity 1 – Creating rhythms

Use the rhythm basket to create 4 rhythms. Each 'cell' is worth 1 beat so you need 4 cells per bar. Write your rhythm in the space below then clap/play it for your partner. Here are 2 examples:

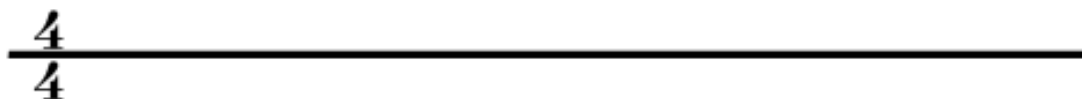
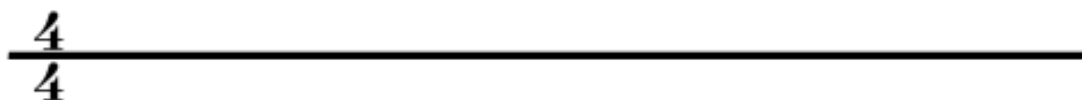
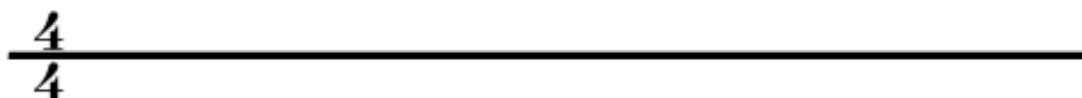


- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Activity 2 – Repetition

Key word: Ostinato: a repeating rhythmic pattern

For each line below write an ostinato using just 2 cells (repeated) from the rhythm basket.



Extension

Pair up with a friend and perform your ostinato patterns at the same time – can you keep your own rhythm going? If that's too easy, get into a group of four and try the same activity again!

Teacher sheet: Melody writing

We're going to look at 3 approaches to melody-writing:

1. Using a 'defining feature' as a starting point
2. Using a step-by-step recipe
3. Using a chord pattern

1. Using a defining feature

What is a 'defining feature'?

An element that is unique, repeated and developed later on. The most common 'defining features' are based on rhythm or a particular melodic interval.

The defining feature of *Happy Birthday* is the dotted rhythm anacrusis, as it occurs 4 times:



Examples of defining features:

Triplet rhythm	Descending perfect 5 th	Ascending major third
Dotted rhythm	Chromatic movement	Tritone

Activity 1 – identifying defining features

1. Give the class a brief explanation of 'defining' or 'special' features in melodies.
2. Play several melody examples (notated on the board) that have a clear defining feature (see suggestions on next page).
3. Pupils clap back or play the given melodies.
4. Ask pupils to identify whether the melody is defined by **rhythm** or **interval**.

Activity 2 – exploring defining features

Model this task first showing how to create a simple melody, using a minor third or dotted rhythm.

1. Give pupils a defining feature, e.g rhythmic cell or minor third, from a melody you listened to in Activity 1.
2. Giving a short time-frame for the task, ask pupils to create a new, short melodic idea using this defining feature.
3. Pupils perform their idea to the class, give feedback and continue to develop their ideas.

★ Activity 2 on the Pupil sheet asks pupils to identify defining features in melodies.

★ Activity 3 asks pupils to compose a melody using a defining feature.

§ Link to set works / suggested repertoire

Exam board	Set work	Composer	Defining feature(s)
Edexcel AoS3 & OCR AoS4	Star Wars Episode IV main title theme	John Williams	Prominent use of triplet rhythm Ascending perfect 5 th
Edexcel AoS1 & OCR AoS2	3rd movement from Brandenburg Concerto no.5	J.S Bach	Prominent use of triplet rhythm
Edexcel AoS1	1 st movement from Piano Sonata no.8 in C minor	Beethoven	Opening: prominent use of dotted rhythm Allegro: crotchet – minim – crotchet figure
Edexcel AoS3	Defying Gravity (from Wicked)	Stephen Schwartz	Chorus: Rising perfect 5 th falling to a 4 th
AQA AoS1	Clock Symphony	Haydn	Prominent use of dotted rhythm
AQA AoS4	Hoedown from Rodeo	Copland	Prominent use of triplet rhythm (+ developed later)
Eduqas AoS1	Eine Kleine Nachtmusik Minuet & Trio	Mozart	Use of rising perfect 4 th (interval) anacrusis (rhythmic feature)


Other suggested melodies:

Melody	Composer	Defining feature
In the Hall of the Mountain King	Grieg	Interval (third)
Theme from 2 nd movement of New World Symphony	Dvorak	Dotted rhythm
Chariots of Fire theme	Vangelis	Rhythm
Schindler's List theme	John Williams	Interval (Perfect 5 th)
London Marathon theme tune	Ron Goodwin	Rhythm

2. Melody recipe

This approach is most successful when:



- a) It's modelled, step-by-step, at the front of the class.
- b) Pupils work at keyboards and use the recipe to structure their ideas.
- c) Pupils use even phrases of 2 or 4 bars.



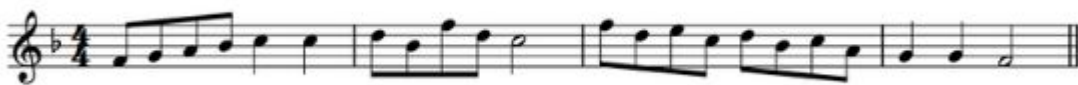
Melody recipe

1. Choose a key (major/minor)
2. Choose a time signature
3. Decide on a pitch direction (up or down)
4. Choose a type of movement (triadic or scalar or combination)
5. Start on the tonic
6. End of bar 2 should end on the dominant
7. End of bar 4 will end on tonic or dominant

Remember to use your **defining feature** to give character and style to your melody.



You can use this melody as an example in class and break down the process bar by bar:



Defining feature: use of third intervals.

Continue by showing how the melody can be adapted once the basic structure is in place.

★ **Activity 2** on the pupil sheet asks pupils to compose two melodies using the recipe.

3. Starting with a chord pattern

Activity 1

1. Use the chord pattern below to demonstrate how the melody has been derived from it.
2. Ask pupils to play the chords & melody to make the connection between the two elements.
3. Show how the basic melody can be developed using passing notes.



Now with added interest in melody:



Activity 2 - inversions

When all the chords are in root position, the accompaniment is limited and often jumpy. Demonstrate how chords can be rearranged without changing the actual notes, using **inversions**:



Handy Hint!

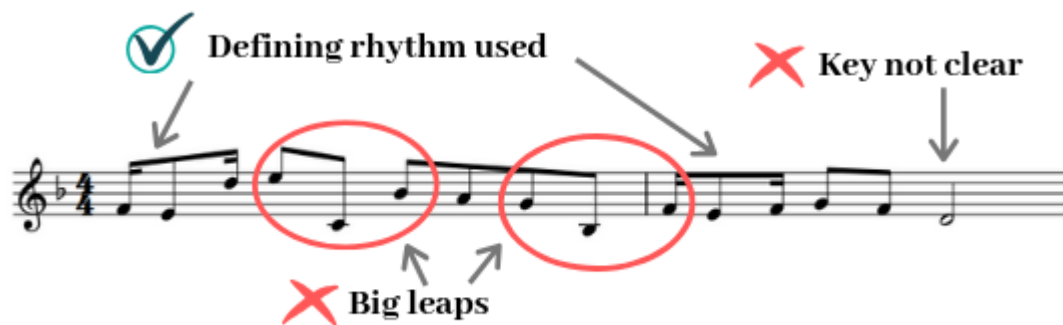
Boomwhackers are an effective visual tool for teaching chords and inversions. Asking the bass note to stand in a particular place helps pupils understand about the note positions within chords.

Why not ask pupils to perform a chord sequence from a set work?

Pupil sheet – Melody-writing

Activity 1 – what's wrong with these melodies?

Some students have composed these melodies and they need some help with improving them. Can you write down the positive points and circle any problems you can see/hear and write down what is wrong next to the problem. The first one has been done for you:



The first melody is written on a treble clef staff in 4/4 time. It starts with a quarter note on G4, followed by a quarter note on A4, and then a quarter note on B4. The next two measures each contain a half note on C5, followed by a quarter note on B4. The final measure contains a half note on A4 and a quarter note on G4. Annotations include: a green checkmark and the text 'Defining rhythm used' pointing to the first measure; a red 'X' and the text 'Key not clear' pointing to the final measure; and a red 'X' and the text 'Big leaps' with arrows pointing to the leaps between the first and second measures, and between the second and third measures.



Activity 2 – Identify defining features

Look at and play through the melody examples below. Identify whether each one has rhythm or melodic interval (or both) as its defining feature:



Defining feature_____



Defining feature_____



Defining feature_____

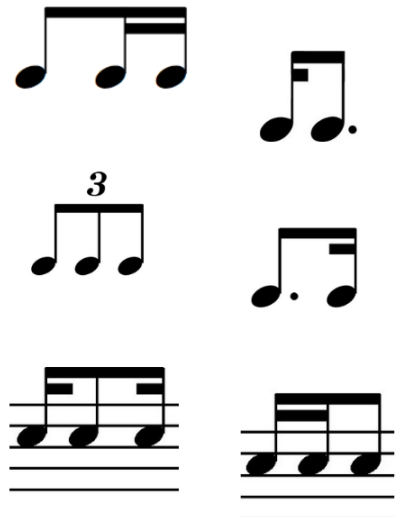


Defining feature_____

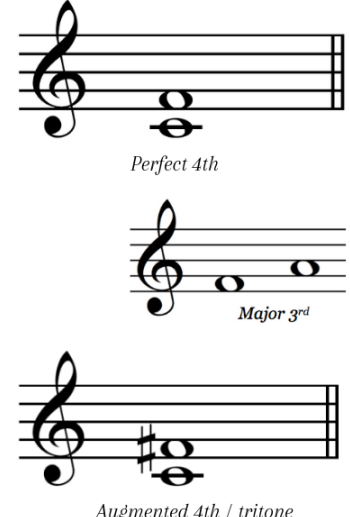
Activity 3 – Composing using a defining feature

Choose a defining feature from the box below and create a 4-bar melody based on it:

Rhythms



Intervals





Activity 4 - Using the melody recipe

Using your melody from the previous activity, use the melody recipe to refine your tune. For example, you might now need to start on a different note if you want to establish the key.

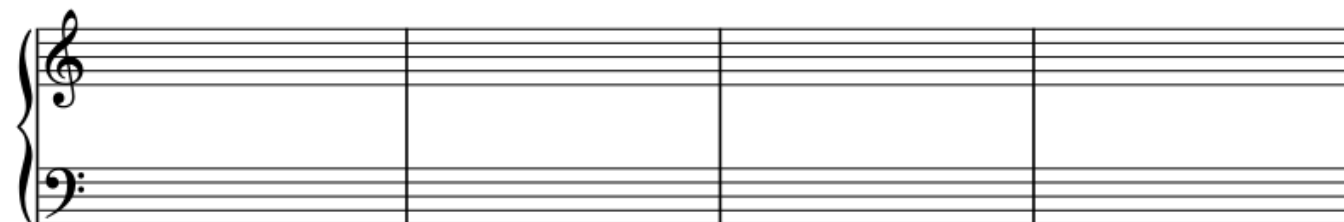


Activity 5 – using a chord pattern

Choose a chord pattern below and create three different melodies. Remember to try out your ideas on your preferred instrument.



Write your melody here:



Now choose another chord pattern and create a melody to go with it. Which one do you prefer?



Teacher sheet: Writing a Counter-melody

Composing a counter-melody can add further melodic interest to a composition as well as creating opportunities for musical development and dialogue between parts.

§ Link to set works / wider listening

Exam board	Title	Composer	Details
Edexcel AoS3 & OCR AoS4	Star Wars Episode IV main title theme	John Williams	Brass counter-melody (bars 15-18)
OCR AoS5 AQA AoS2	Help	The Beatles	Prominent vocal counter-melody
AQA AoS4	Saturday Night Waltz from Rodeo	Copland	Simple flute counter-melody (Fig 5)
All	Symphony no.7, 2 nd movement	Beethoven	Viola & cello counter-melody (bar 27)
Edexcel AoS3 OCR AoS2	Theme from The Magnificent Seven	Elmer Bernstein	Trombone counter-melody
All	Stars and Stripes Forever	Sousa	Two counter-melodies in the finale: One in the flute part and one in the trombone part.

Activity

Analyse examples from set works & wider listening pieces, looking at how the counter-melody relates to the main theme and harmony.

Counter-melody example:



Tips for composing a good counter-melody:

1. Create a second melody based on the chord sequence.
2. Create contrast through: using different note values; moving in the opposite pitch direction; using a new rhythmic feature e.g triplets or dotted rhythm; starting on the off-beat.
3. Make sure that it doesn't overshadow the main melody.

Pupil Sheet: Writing a Counter-melody

A counter-melody is a secondary tune played at the same time as the main melody. It should also be a successful melody in its own right.

Play through each of the examples below and compose your own counter-melody to enhance the existing tune.

1.



2.



3.



Teacher sheet: Developing a melody

1. Development Toolbox

Compositional techniques

Melodic augmentation/diminution

Rhythmic augmentation/diminution

Sequence

Inversion

Modulation

Activity 1 – Ideas page

- An 'Ideas page' provides a separate space for pupils to record & develop musical ideas.
- Include any snippets / chord sequences / lyrics that may or may not go into the 'final' piece.
- Encourage pupils to explore techniques from the toolbox above when developing a melody.

Useful tips on creating an Ideas Page

1. Create a completely separate computer file / manuscript page dedicated to trying out ideas.
2. Emphasise that *all* ideas are valid and nothing is a waste of time.
3. Try labelling and dating each idea to keep everything clear & organised.



Handy hint!

Show pupils some Ideas Page examples to demonstrate how it could be set out.

The activities on the corresponding Pupil Sheet are a good starting point – ask pupils to complete Activities 6 & 7 in their Ideas pages.

Using sequence

Explore how composers of your set works (see below) have used **sequence** to develop melodies.

★ Ask pupils to complete **Activity 6** on the Pupil Sheet.

§ Link to Set works

Exam board	Set work / recommended listening	Description
Edexcel	Music for a while by Purcell	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bar 10: ascending sequence on “Wondering” (+ imitation in accompaniment)• Bar 20-22 descending sequence (+ melisma) on “eternal”
Edexcel (+ OCR AoS2)	Brandenburg Concerto no.5, 3 rd movement by J.S Bach	Various examples throughout
AQA	‘Clock’ Symphony, third movement by Haydn	Bar 16 – ascending sequence in Violin I part

Activity 2 – diminution / augmentation

Copland’s *Five Variations on a Shaker theme* shows a clear example of rhythmic augmentation:

§ Link to wider listening

5 variations on a Shaker theme from *Appalachian Spring* by Aaron Copland

At *Doppio Movimento* (fig.55), the clarinet introduces the main theme. At fig.59 the cellos take on the tune with all the note values now doubled. Towards the end of the movement (fig.65), the whole orchestra plays the theme, with note values doubled again.

Question for class discussion:

Where might diminution and augmentation be useful in developing a melody?

- giving a feeling of space and slowing down (rhythmic augmentation)
- giving momentum and energy (rhythmic diminution)
- opening out the melodic pitch range (melodic augmentation)
- narrowing the melodic range and bringing in tension (melodic diminution)

★ Ask pupils to complete Activities 1-5 on the Pupil Sheet.

Activity 3 – modulation

Teaching pupils how to modulate will develop their melody-writing and composition skills.

Use the examples below to demonstrate how one melody can modulate to several keys.

1. Ask pupils to identify the tonic key and key modulated to.
2. Use example 2 to teach that the 7th degree must be raised when working in minor keys.
3. Use 🌟 **Activity 8** on the Pupil sheet for a modulating task.

Extension activity:

Ask pupils to play through each melody below and add appropriate chords.

1. G major to D major (dominant)



2. G major to E minor (relative minor)



3. G major to C major (subdominant)



Pupil sheet: Developing a melody

Activity 1 – augmentation & diminution

Look at the original melody and then the following examples. Identify whether each one has used rhythmic or melodic augmentation or diminution as a means of development.

Original:



Example 1



Answer _____

Example 2



Answer _____

Example 3



Answer _____

Example 4



Answer _____

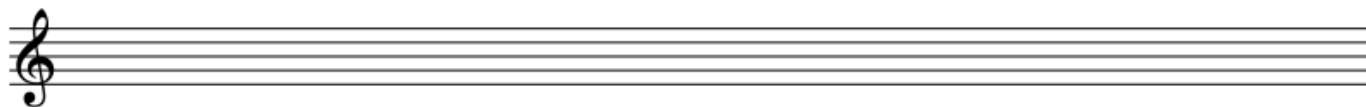
Activity 2 – Using rhythmic augmentation

Write out the melody below on the manuscript lines provided, using **rhythmic augmentation**:
Hint: you will need to double the note values.



Activity 3 – Using rhythmic diminution

Write out the melody from Activity 2 above, using **rhythmic diminution**:
Hint: you will need to halve the note values.



Activity 4 – Using melodic augmentation

Write out the melody below, using some **melodic augmentation**.
Note: there isn't an exact answer here, as there are several different options.



Activity 5 – Using melodic diminution

Write out the melody from Activity 4 above, using some **melodic diminution**.
Note: there isn't an exact answer here, as there are several different options.



Activity 6 – using sequence

A sequence is a melodic idea that is repeated up or down a pitch several times. Extend each melody below to create a 4-bar melody.

Example:



1.



2.



3.



Activity 7 – Developing your own melody

Using the ideas from the previous activities, develop your own melody. Use the ticked options below and create 3 versions of your melody.

- ✓ Sequence
- ✓ Melodic augmentation & diminution
- ✓ Rhythmic augmentation & diminution



Activity 7 – modulating (changing key)

Here are 3 examples of melodies that modulate. Identify the starting (tonic) and ending key:



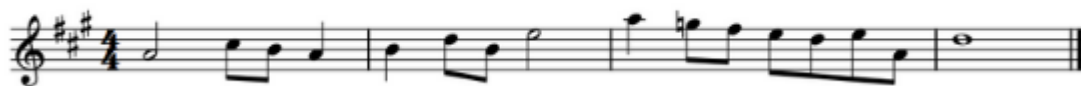
Starting key_____

Ending key_____



Starting key_____

Ending key_____



Starting key _____

Ending key

Activity 8 – modulating in your melody

Write a melody that modulates to a new key. Before you start, write down your starting key, and the key you're modulating to, and their key signatures.

Try modulating to three different keys.

Modulation 1

Starting key _____

Key moving to _____



Modulation 2

Starting key _____

Key moving to _____



Modulation 3

Starting key _____

Key moving to _____



Teacher sheet: Adding chords to a melody

1. Introduction to chords

Hopefully your students have already covered chords at KS3; now is the time to recap this work.

Tips for teaching chords:

- Do go right back to the basics – if they understand it all, you can move straight on.
- Get pupils performing a simple chord sequence with melody, ideally from a set work.
- Do use technical terms – tonic, dominant, third, triad etc
- Encourage pupils to notate chords appropriately – staff notation or chord symbols.







Handy Hint!

Encourage pupils to write out all the triads for the key they are working in and circle chords I, IV & V. It will be far easier to explore other harmonic options once these are in place.

Steps for harmonising a melody:

Adding chords to a melody

1. Identify the key 
2. Write out the **triads** for this key 
3. Number each chord underneath.
4. Circle chords I, IV and V in one colour.
5. Circle chords ii and vi in a **different** colour.
6. Play through, and look carefully at, the notes of the melody. 
7. If melodic notes on the **strong beats** contain notes from chords I, IV or V, choose from these 3 *first*.
8. Bar will *usually* start with chord I.
9. Add 1 or 2 chords per bar, depending on the melody. 
10. Keep listening back to your music - if it doesn't sound right, change it!

Activity – Choosing chords

Use this example to demonstrate the selection of chords I, IV and V:



Example to show chord I substitution with chord vi (bar 3) & use of chord I inversion (bar 1):



Example to show how 'block' chords can be changed into a simple accompaniment:



Activity

Use this example to model how to add chords to a melody, before pupils complete ★ **Activity 2** on the Pupil Sheet.



Pupil Sheet: Adding chords to a melody

Activity 1: What's wrong with these chords?

In pairs, play through each of the following phrases. Identify the key and circle any chords that do not fit with the melody and suggest an alternative chord.

1.



Key: _____

2.



Key: _____

3.



Key: _____

Activity 2: Adding chords to a melody

Play each melody below, identify the key and choose either 1 or 2 chords per bar.

1.



Key _____

2.



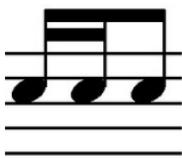
Key _____

3.



Key _____

1-beat rhythm basket





Melody recipe








1. Choose a key (major/minor)
2. Choose a time signature
3. Decide on a pitch direction (up or down)
4. Choose a type of movement (triadic or scalar or combination)
5. Start on the tonic
6. End of bar 2 should end on the dominant
7. End of bar 4 will end on tonic or dominant

Remember to use your **defining feature** to give character and style to your melody.



Adding chords to a melody

1. Identify the key 
2. Write out the **triads** for this key 
3. Number each chord underneath.
4. Circle chords I, IV and V in one colour. 
5. Circle chords ii and vi in a **different** colour. 
6. Play through, and look carefully at, the notes of the melody.
7. If melodic notes on the **strong beats** contain notes from chords I, IV or V, choose from these 3 *first*.
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