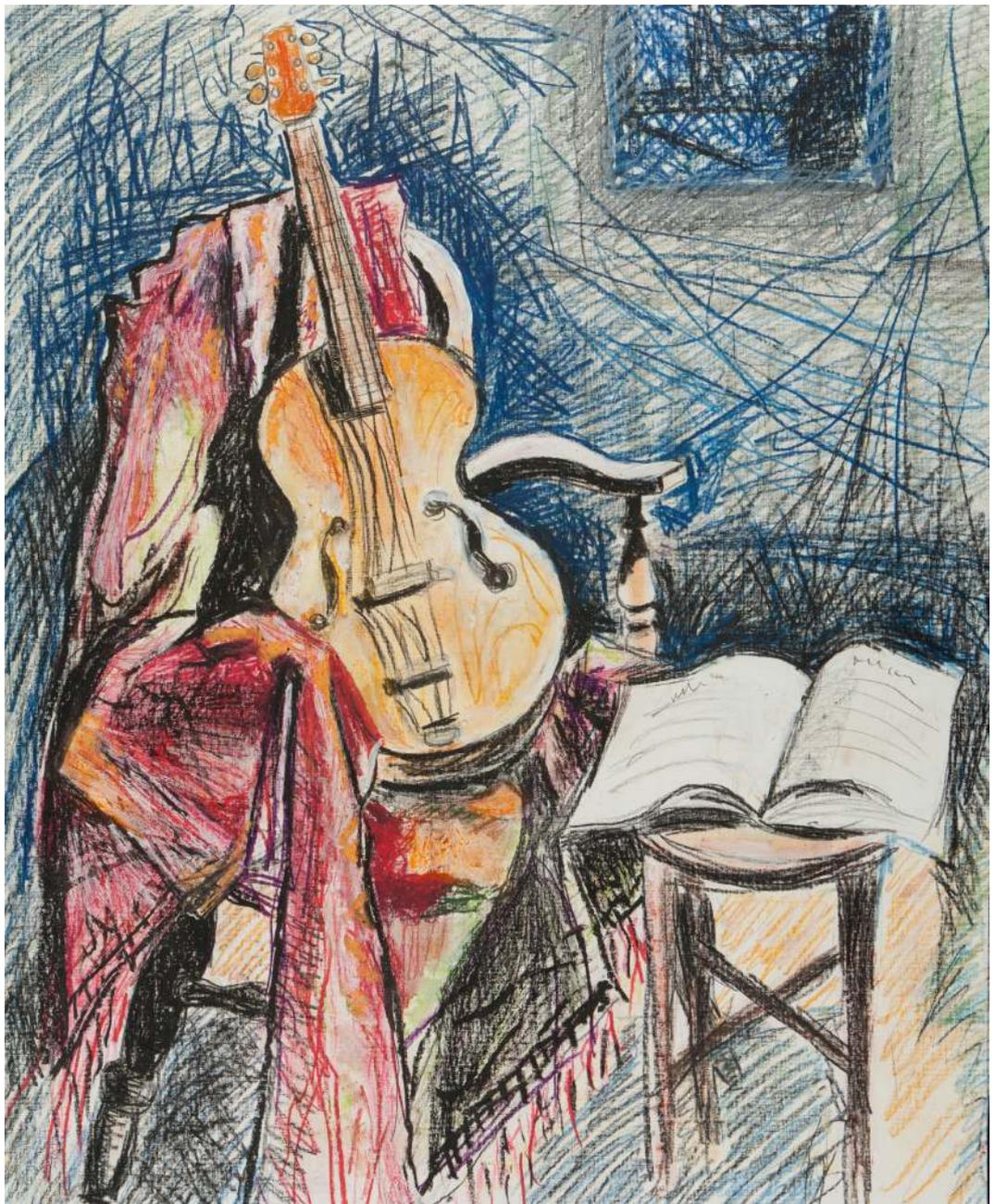


Music One

Composing Music



Level HE4 - 40 CATS

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This course was written and illustrated by Patric Standford.
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Cover image by Valerie Newman.

Contents

Times are given here as a guideline: you may want to spend more. Research and writing time, time for reflecting and logging your learning are included.

Approximate time in hours

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Before you start

Welcome to *Music 1 Composing Music*. Your OCA Student handbook should be able to answer most questions about this and all other OCA courses, so keep it to hand as you work through this course.

Course aims

This course aims to:

- Introduce the common as well as the less familiar forms of musical composition.
- Develop your ability to compose both melodic and percussion pieces.
- Enhance your ability to write counterpoint in two and three parts.
- Present the music of established composers and enhance your ability to read and hear written music.
- Develop your reflective skills.

Learning outcomes

By the time you've completed this course, you'll be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the common and less familiar forms of music composition.
- Compose both melodic and percussion pieces.
- Write counterpoint in two or three parts.
- Demonstrate an ability to read and hear the work of established composers in written form.
- Reflect upon your own learning experience.

Even if you do not intend to submit for assessment, it is useful to take ownership of these outcomes to aid your learning and use them as a means of self assessment. You can check your progress against the learning outcomes in your learning log, when you review your progress against each assignment.

Your tutor

Your tutor is your main point of contact with OCA. Before you start work, make sure that you're clear about your tuition arrangements. The OCA system is explained in some detail in your *Student handbook*.

If you haven't already done so, please write a paragraph or two about your experience to date. Add background information about anything that you think may be relevant for your tutor to know about you (your profile) – for example your experience of writing so far, your reasons for starting this course and what you hope to achieve from it.

Email or post your profile to your tutor as soon as possible. This will help him or her to understand how best to support you during the course. Arrange with your tutor how you'll deal with any queries that arise between assignments. This will usually be by email or phone.

It will be helpful for your tutor to see some of the work that you produce in between assignments. For example, you could attach files or scanned pages of your project or exercise work, and your learning log, and email them to your tutor. Or you could post your learning log as an online blog in the OCA website so that your tutor can see how your work is developing. It's particularly important that your tutor sees regular evidence of your development if you're planning to have your work on this course formally assessed.

Make sure that you label any work that you send to your tutor with your name, student number and the assignment number. Your tutor will get back to you as soon as possible after receiving your assignment but this may take a little time. Continue with the course while you're waiting.

Formal assessment

Read the section on assessment in your *Student handbook* at an early stage in the course. Your *Assessment and how to get qualified* study guide gives more detailed information about assessment and accreditation. For assessment you'll need to submit a cross-section of the work you've done on the course:

- the final four assignments (Assignments 2 to 5), which may be in revised form, selected by you and agreed with your tutor
- related projects and sketches to each submitted assignment and its original version (if revised)
- your learning log or blog url (to include listening, reading and research), and any other relevant papers

Pre-assessment review

If you decide to have your work formally assessed, you'll need to spend some time at the end of the course preparing your finished work for submission. How you present your work to the assessors is of critical importance and can make the difference between an average mark and an excellent mark. Because of this your tutor is available to guide you on presenting your work.

Assessment criteria

Here are the assessment criteria for this course. These are central to the assessment process for this course, so if you are going to have your work assessed to gain formal credits, please make sure you take note of these criteria and consider how each of the assignments you complete demonstrates evidence of each criterion. On completion of each assignment, and before you send your assignment to your tutor, test yourself against the criteria - in other words - do a self assessment, and see how you think you would do. Notes down your findings of each assignment you've completed in your learning log, noting all your perceived strengths and weaknesses, taking into account the criteria every step of the way. This will be helpful for your tutor to see, as well as helping you prepare for assessment.

Assessment criteria points

- **Technical presentation.** Clarity of scores and orderly presentation; good command of appropriate software; accuracy of notation; understanding and application of graphic publishing conventions.
- **Compositional skills.** Evidence of craftsmanship in manipulating material; structural cohesion; exploration of ideas; appropriate and correct use of performance resources.
- **Creativity.** Exploration and inventiveness toward developing an individual voice; original ideas and experimental adventurousness.
- **Stylistic awareness.** Evidence of listening and reading, research, critical thinking and reflection; development of responses to exploratory enquiry and analysis.

What to do

Put together your portfolio for assessment as directed in the submission guidelines. Attach your notation files, and photograph or scan any other work you plan to submit, and email it to your tutor.

Don't photograph every page of your notebooks or learning logs, but describe what you're planning to submit. You should also outline the way you plan to actually present the work so that your tutor can make sure that you're making the most of the work you are sending in. Your tutor will give you feedback and guidance so that you're well prepared to make the best of your work at assessment.

Only work done during the course should be submitted to your tutor or for formal assessment.

Keeping a learning log

Your learning log is an integral part of this and every other OCA course. For music courses, the learning log will also be a log of your *listening, reading and research*. If you're new to OCA courses, read your *Keeping sketchbooks and learning logs* study guide for further information.

It is vitally important for music composition to have a solid experience of music through its major developments: from Medieval music, through the Renaissance and the Baroque, during which opera and church music rose to a peak in the 17th century, to the repertoires of the Classical, Romantic and Modern period. There is so much to hear, and so much that can be learnt from listening to music and when possible following a copy of the musical score. Make use of the listening lists and bear in mind this is only a small selection of the huge range available to explore on the internet and in music libraries.

Music theory

For *Music 1 Composing Music* you need a basic grounding in music theory. *The AB Guide to Music Theory Part 1* by Eric Taylor, published by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music provides essential theory for the course. The relevant chapters are flagged up at the start of each part of the course, and you should read and revise this material before starting each group of projects. If you are not familiar with the theory in Part 1, take time to get to grips with it thoroughly before you start the course. Discuss this with your tutor if you need more information.

Notation software

You will need a music software package so that you can write and listen to your own work and email your software files to your tutor, who can also send you back suggested revisions. Our recommendation is that you purchase Sibelius: you will need this to access the notation files that are provided with this course on CD.

New software comes on the market all the time, so do some research on the web and find out more about which package is likely to suit you best. There are also free notation programmes that you can download from the internet. Also ask your tutor for advice and make sure that your software is compatible with his or hers.

Planning ahead

This Level 1 course represents 400 hours of learning time. Allow around 20% of this time for reflection and listening log development. The course should take about a year to complete if you spend around 8 hours each week on it. As with all OCA courses, these course materials are intended to be used flexibly. Do keep your tutor fully informed about your progress. You'll need to allow extra time if you decide to have your work formally assessed.

Music 1 Composing Music is divided into five parts, corresponding to the five course assignments. Each part of the course addresses a different issue or topic and is separated into projects designed to tackle the topic in bite-sized chunks. As well as information and advice, each project offers exercises to develop your composing. The exercises slowly build up and feed into the assignments that you'll send to your tutor.

The first assignment is a diagnostic assignment that will allow your tutor to get a feel for your work and help him or her to decide how best to support you. This assignment is not submitted for formal assessment.

Managing your time

Each part of the course should take between 70 and 90 hours to complete. You'll need to decide how to divide this time in a way that works effectively for you. The time you spend on each part of the course will depend on how quickly you work, the time available to you, how easy or hard you find each exercise, and how quickly you want to complete the course. Don't worry if you take more or less time than suggested provided that you're not getting too bogged down in a particular part of the course and that your tutor is happy with the work you're producing. If it helps, draft a rough study plan and revisit this at the end of each part. The course structure is intended to be flexible, but it's always useful to bear deadlines in mind.

Reading

You'll find a suggested further reading list at the end of this course guide and a regularly updated version on the OCA website. *The AB Guide to Music Theory – Part 1* by Eric Taylor covers all the music theory you need to perform instrumental and vocal music from Grades 1 to 5 of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. Read the Preface which helps to make clear the distinction between the theory of musical notation and using all that information in the process of composition. Taylor's '*Irregular divisions of time values*' and the glossary of foreign words used for performance directions will be useful throughout the course.

Referencing your reading

Whenever you read something that you might want to refer to in your projects and assignments, get into the habit of taking down the full reference to the book, article, website or piece of music straight away. You must fully reference any other work that you draw on if you plan to go for formal assessment. To do this you should use the *Harvard system of referencing* – there is a guide to referencing using the Harvard system on the OCA website. Getting down the full reference at the time will save you the frustration of having to hunt for the details of a half-remembered reference long after the event – and ensure that you don't inadvertently plagiarise someone else's work.

Spotify

You will need access to Spotify, a free music streaming service available to Microsoft and Mac users, providing a huge range of music by arrangement with leading world record labels. You first need to download the free Spotify software from the Spotify website, then you can search for the suggested listening pieces and either listen to the whole piece or short extracts.

Almost all the suggested listening pieces are available on Spotify. Alternatively, you may be able to buy some pieces quite cheaply from Amazon or iTunes, or borrow them from a music library. Or choose an alternative from the suggested listening.

Petrucci Music Library

You can download many copyright free scores from the Petrucci Music Library website. Follow the scores of the pieces you choose to listen to whenever you can.

Your listening should include both recorded music and live performances, and you should actively seek out music that is unfamiliar to you – whether or not the experience results in you liking what you hear! The purpose is to know what is out there, to have knowledge of the wider context in which you are creating music, to consider how your work may be influenced by and link to the work of other composers, and to be aware of how experienced audiences will hear your own work and what they will compare it to. Make detailed comments as you are listening, because you may forget your initial reactions – when later you come to the same piece again you may discover your reactions are quite changed. Your own commentaries on heard experiences will help both you and your tutor see how you are progressing with your learning.

After any session of listening or concert visit, make a note of page number or index words that you may want to use for future reference.

Reading about the history of music and the development of musical techniques over time will deepen your appreciation of music from other periods, and its influences on contemporary composers. Use the recommended reading and resources listed on the OCA student site oca-student.com. Always read articles and books with a note pad available so you can jot useful ideas as you go; it's often hard to go back to find a choice phrase, comment or paragraph if you don't note it down at the time.

Use your learning and listening log to record your progress through the course. Your log should contain:

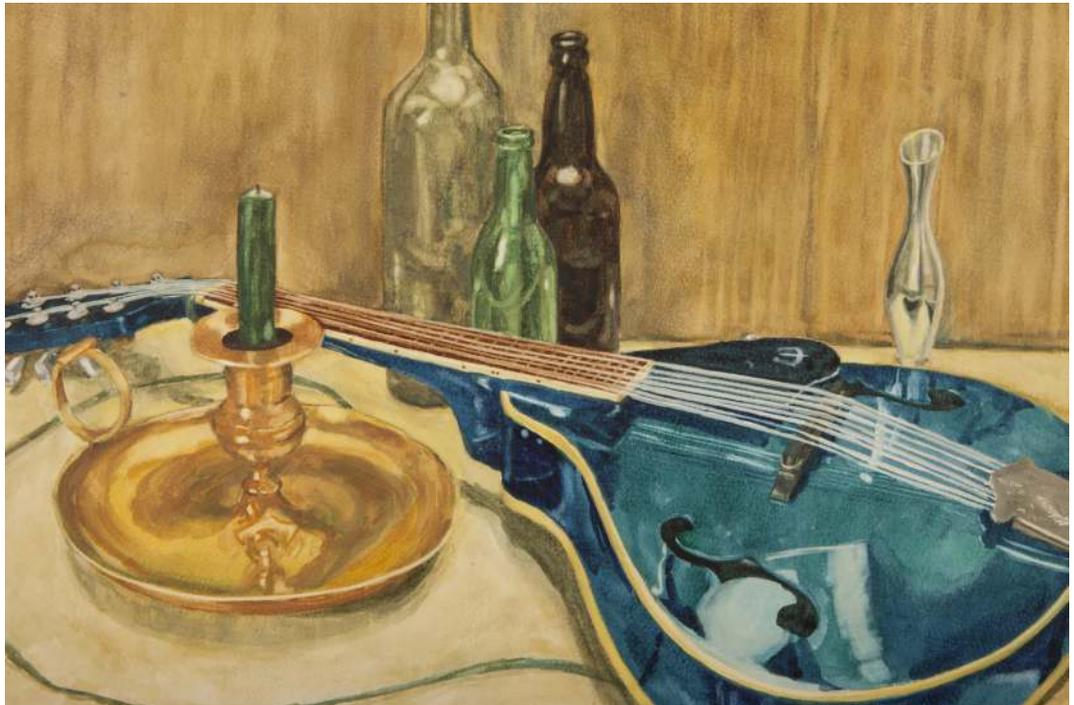
- your notes on the projects, exercises and assignments (i.e. your reasoning behind your approach to this work)
- details of your further reading and research (on music history, theory, techniques, composers, etc.) – make notes on any books, encyclopaedias, journal articles, or websites that you refer to
- ideas for composition projects and any other compositions that you work on during the course – these provide evidence of your creativity, even if you decide not to use them for project or assignment work
- full details of all your listening, including concerts, recordings, programmes, and your reactions to and reflections on the pieces that you hear
- your tutor's reports on assignments and your reactions to these.

Keep your learning and listening log up to date and in good order. You'll need to send extracts from your log to your tutor as part of your course work, and if you choose formal assessment, your learning log will be reviewed as part of the assessment process.

Composing Music

Part one

Exploring Rhythm



Gregor Phillips

Introduction

For Part One, you will need to be familiar with the theory covered in these chapters of *The AB Guide to Music Theory – Part 1* by Eric Taylor:

1: The Basics of Rhythm and Tempo

3: Continuing with Rhythm

5: The Grouping of Notes and Rests

10: Tempo, Dynamics and Mood

13: Reiterations and Repeats

Focus on rhythm

The course begins *rhythmically*. The focus is on compositions for percussion instruments and, to begin with, untuned percussion. In Part One you will make up a series of short *Studies* for untuned percussion instruments.

About untuned percussion

Most untuned percussion instruments are allocated a single line stave, and it is suggested that you follow these guidelines.

Place the *metallic instruments* first, highest sounds at the top:

- triangle, cymbal (high and low, suspended and played with two beaters)
- the less controlled cymbal 'clash', produced with two cymbals brought together, either lightly or heavily
- gongs and tam-tams.

The tambourine is a hybrid and might therefore appear next.

Wooden instruments include castanets and some instruments that will need more than a single-line staff:

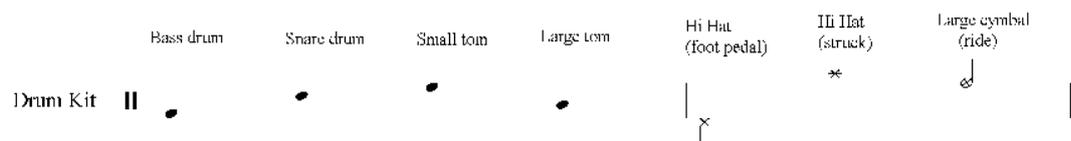
- wood blocks which usually produce sounds at two contrasting indeterminate pitches and are allocated a two-line staff
- temple blocks which are sets of five ornamental hollow wooden skull- or clam-shaped blocks in different sizes approximating to a pentatonic scale, and are usually notated on a five-line staff

Below these come the membranes from the highest to lowest:

- side drum (or snare drum - snares are ON by default)
- tom toms
- bongos
- tenor drum
- bass drum

The drum kit (drum set in America) is usually notated on a 5-line staff, although notation is generally minimal as most jazz drummers find it easier to improvise than read.

Example 1



Example 1 shows how some percussion instruments are distributed over the staff. More careful indications may be necessary if you want a realistic computer playback. Check whether your computer programme has its own distribution of instruments over the staff.

The choice of **sticks** or **beaters** determines the sound produced by percussion instruments, apart from 'clashed' cymbals and tambourines, which are usually played with the hand and fingers.

There are three types of beaters: hard, medium and soft. The harder the stick, the thinner and brighter (not necessarily louder) the sound produced.

A metal beater is normally used for the triangle. Large soft headed sticks are normally used for gongs and the tam-tam – but for these instruments, wooden side drum sticks (for instance) would create a quite different sound. Wood blocks and temple blocks would be played with marimba mallets or snare drum sticks.

Untuned percussion notation

For sustaining instruments (cymbals, gongs, tam-tams), the **duration** of notes must be accurately indicated from start to the point of finish, when the sound is dampened and stopped. The drums have very little resonance, and there is virtually no difference between a staccato semiquaver and an unmarked crotchet.

Percussion players take the tremolo to indicate measured notes. The trill on untuned percussion is a multi-stroke unmeasured roll.

Example 2

The image shows two musical staves. The first staff, labeled 'Measured notes', shows a sequence of notes: a quarter note, followed by a pair of eighth notes with a tremolo symbol above them, then a quarter note, another pair of eighth notes with a tremolo symbol, and finally a quarter note. The second staff, labeled 'Unmeasured roll', shows a single note with a trill symbol above it, indicating a multi-stroke unmeasured roll. Below this note, there are dynamic markings: a hairpin crescendo from *p* (piano) to *ff* (fortissimo).

Indications of speed and dynamic are essential, even in the rough sketches for a piece. Without knowing about how quickly or slowly, how loudly or softly the composer intends the performance to be, the player cannot easily judge the notation or what it all adds up to. The composer makes decisions, for example, about whether to use a group of crotchets at a fast tempo, or semiquavers at a slower speed.

Research point



The speed at which music moves from note to note is set by indicating the number of times a fixed note value (minim, crotchet, quaver etc.) occurs each minute. An adjustable apparatus that first helped to set the tempo in this way was the metronome, a clockwork device patented by J. N. Maelzel in 1814. Digital metronomes are now widely available with a variety of useful applications. Read chapter 10: Tempo in the AB Guide for more about ways of notating speed.

In Example 3 the sound of each passage is exactly the same – but the psychological effect of the notation is quite different for both composer and performer. The expectation of a slower tempo when longer note values are used can be both useful and confusing. Complexities are sometimes made more apparent with greater space, yet some composers enjoy making their notation (and their music) complicated.

Example 3

The image shows two musical staves for Violin, labeled 'Example 3'. Both staves contain the same melodic sequence of notes, but the notation is different. The top staff is in 4/4 time, with a tempo marking of a quarter note equal to 72 (♩ = 72) and a dynamic marking of forte (f). The bottom staff is in 2/2 time, with a tempo marking of a half note equal to 72 (♩ = 72) and a dynamic marking of piano (p). Both staves feature a triplet of eighth notes in the middle section.

Dynamics should be carefully thought through and indicated. A triangle **ff** is much softer than the cymbal or the devastating tam-tam with the same marking. All crescendos and diminuendos should have a clearly marked start and finish; players adapt their technique to these different requirements.

Project 1: Percussion solos

The first task is to compose four contrasting short pieces in which you demonstrate the different characters of some untuned percussion instruments. The pieces should not challenge percussion players, but challenge your own creative ingenuity. Each piece should be about 8 to 16 bars.

First, study the examples below.

Example 4 shows the military character of the side drum.

Example 4

Alla marcia

Side drum

f *p* *f*

Example 5 demonstrates the more sombre quality of strokes on a suspended cymbal with a soft headed stick.

Example 5

Slow, mysterious

Cymbal

p *mf* *f*

In Example 6, the interchanges between the higher and lower wood blocks notated on a two line staff have a rather comical character.

Example 6

Lively

Wood blocks

The musical score for wood blocks is written on two staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a 6/8 time signature, and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music consists of eighth-note patterns. The first staff starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic and ends with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second staff starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and ends with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The third staff starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and ends with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. The score includes dynamic markings (*f*, *p*, *ff*), a crescendo (*cresc.*) marking, and accents (*>*) over the final notes of the third staff.

Now compose four examples of your own, exploring the character of four percussion instruments of your choice.

Project 2: Duets

In this project, the task is to combine two untuned instruments in a series of four duet studies. Each study should be at least eight bars long.

The first two should explore an interesting 'conversation' or rhythmic discussion between two percussion instruments of your choice.

In the interchange between the two instruments, little rhythmic ideas can be passed from one player to the other, each adding interesting changes and additions – see Example 7.

Example 7

Musical score for Example 7, a duet study for Side Drum and Tenor Drum. The score is in 4/4 time, marked Moderato with a tempo of 100. It features four staves: Side Drum, Tenor Drum, Side Drum (S. D.), and Tenor Drum (T. D.). The Side Drum part starts with a forte (f) dynamic and a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Tenor Drum part starts with a forte (f) dynamic and a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The S. D. part starts with a piano (p) dynamic and a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The T. D. part starts with a piano (p) dynamic and a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The score includes dynamic markings such as f, p, and cresc. (crescendo).

Alternatively, one instrument could accompany the other, in a subsidiary role. They could perhaps reverse their roles in the second part of the study, to balance the composition.

The third and fourth studies should use some less familiar time signatures – five and seven beats to the bar respectively.

Five can be grouped as 3 + 2 or 2 + 3 throughout, or you may choose to keep changing the grouping without any fixed pattern – see Example 8.

Example 8

Vivace [2 + 3]
♩ = 184

Wood block
Tambourine
Cast.
Tamb.

Seven units to the bar might be grouped as: 4 + 3; 3 + 4 or 2 + 3 + 2.

The beats can be semiquaver, quaver or crotchet, as you choose – and the instruments also as you wish.

Patterns of constantly changing time signatures can be a source of added vitality to the music. The metre might change every bar, and an organised numerical system could be imposed on the changes to make patterns like 3.4. 3.4.5. 3.4.5.6. 3.4.5. 3.4. You may wish to explore and apply this system of 'variable metre' in the longer piece that you will be asked to compose for Assignment 1.

Research point



Variable metre is a fascinating process introduced by the German composer Boris Blacher, principal of the Berlin Hochschule until 1970, and an enthusiast for jazz and electronic devices too. His *Piano Concerto No 2 for variable metre* is entirely structured on this principle.

Use the library or internet to find out more about Blacher and the concept of variable metre. Listen to his second *Paganini Variations* on Spotify. Make notes on what you find out about him, and on your response to his music in your listening log.

Project 3: Three and more instruments

Now compose two studies for three or more instruments. With more instruments, you are likely to generate more material. You may want to make the pieces much longer. This is a good thing as long as each piece is interesting and doesn't go on too long. Listen critically to your own composition. Play the piece through several times. If you are still interested, then other listeners might be too. If not, the piece probably needs re-thinking.

Use these questions to reflect critically on your work:

- Does it have a principal idea?
- Is it focussed clearly enough on the principal idea?
- Does it have a clearly defined structure – or does it wander aimlessly?
- Is it too long? – could it be made tighter and more interesting by cutting it down?

Keep each study focussed on one topic only. It should feel structurally compact, well balanced and complete.

You can if you wish use one or more of the examples below as a starting point. Copy them and modify them as you wish. Use them as samples of how the instruments in the group can interact, each with its own characteristics, to create an interesting, colourful and well balanced short composition.

Example 9 has a march-like character and although notated in 6/8 it should have the effect of a duple time (2-beat) march.

Example 9

Alla marcia
♩ = 66

The score for Example 9 is in 6/8 time with a tempo of 66. It features six parts: Tambourine, Snare Drum, Tenor Drum, Tamb., S. D., and T. D. The top system contains the first four measures, and the bottom system contains the next four measures. The Tambourine and Snare Drum parts start with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Tamb. part starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes trills. The S. D. and T. D. parts also start with a piano (*p*) dynamic and include trills. The piece concludes with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic.

Example 10 assembles patterns that produce an overall lively dance piece.

Example 10

Lively
♩ = 108

The score for Example 10 is in 2/4 time with a tempo of 108. It features eight parts: Cymbals, Tambourine, Wood block, Maracas, Cym., Tamb., W. Bl., and Mres. The top system contains the first four measures, and the bottom system contains the next four measures. The Cymbals part starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes a wood stick. The Tambourine, Wood block, and Maracas parts start with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Cym. part starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The Tamb., W. Bl., and Mres. parts start with a piano (*p*) dynamic and include diminuendo (*dim.*) markings. The piece concludes with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic.

The suspended cymbal would be played here with a snare-drum stick; there will be a marked difference between notes with and without staccato dots.

You could if you wish use one of these examples as a starting point for a more extended composition – perhaps the one you develop for Assignment 1.

Example 11, which is intended as the opening of a larger piece, uses a group of eight instruments, creating a wider range of colours and an exciting compositional challenge.

Example 11

Andante
♩ = 88

Triangle
Cymbals
Tambourine
Wood Blocks
Temple Blocks
Snare Drum
Tenor Drum
Bass Drum

Tri.
Cym.
Tamb.
W. Bl.
T. Bl.
S. D.
T. D.
B. D.

Project 4: About structure

For longer pieces, a first step is to draft a design plan for the proposed work. Even before you have the vaguest idea of content, it is possible to divide up a 3-minute duration by deciding on a moderate tempo and working out from that an 'empty canvas' of blank bars – an architect's ground plan, if you like.

The architect is unlikely to design the front porch and plant roses around it without first knowing the dimensions of the plot and where the main drainage and other services will be. Building two or three storeys would be dangerous without good foundations. Once you have resolved some of these issues, you can move on to consider the building materials.

A basic structural design

A balanced composition is one that demonstrates a clearly defined structure:

- an opening section in which the main idea or theme is stated unmistakably
- a contrasting (although not too distantly related) middle section
- and a closing section that recalls the opening part.

Composers are constantly exploring possible elaborations and developments of this basic scheme. The ultimate aim is always to create a clearly heard overall cohesion.

Principal section [A + B]	Subsidiary [C]	Principal reprise [B + A]	Closing [A,B or C]
4/4 $q = 96$ 60" = 24 bars	40" = 16 bars	60" = 24 bars	20" = 8 bars

96 crotchets (quarter notes) per minute cut into 4/4 bars = 24 bars per minute

TOTAL: 3 minutes / 72 bars

With your basic design in place, and your vague material ideas becoming clearer, you don't necessarily need to work systematically from the beginning.

You might, for example, expand an idea for **[A]** (perhaps no more than a bar or two) and make it suitable for the 'reprise' section, before you have decided on **[B]**. **[C]** might be composed independently to lead from, and then into, a space that may later be filled with **[B]**.

As all compositions should have a memorable ending, you might consider writing that first, and then make sure the beginning, and later incidents, are related to it. This is like deciding who did it before writing the whodunit. It would be strange if an author had no idea at the outset of where such a crime story could end. Many subtle development opportunities would be lost.

Of course, many things may change before completion. The plan is used as a template, a guide – it's not set in stone. It's easier to change a draft plan than to have no plan at all and wander aimlessly in the darkness.

With a structural design in place, you can then give your attention to the nature of the piece. Fast and lively, or brooding? Decorative and fantastic, or strong and threatening? As music is capable of changing mood very rapidly, **[A]** might be dark and sombre, leading to a more lively **[B]**, turning into a frivolous **[C]** which then dissolves again into a more sober return to **[B]** and through the darkness of **[A]** – perhaps to end with a brief surprise return of that **[C]** frivolity as a startling close.

The abstract nature of musical composition is often conceived in such loosely emotive terms. You might begin the whole series of projects and assignments with this kind of rough sketch for your structural design.

Exercise

The task is to sketch out a compositional plan for the assignment at the end of Part One. This should be a single substantial composition of between 2 and 3 minutes duration.

Here are two examples of a first stage in sketching the components of a design:

Example 12

In Example 12, the first two bars are broadly repeated, but with slight modifications.

The image displays a musical score for percussion instruments, divided into three sections: [A], [B], and [C].

Section [A]: Labeled "J-96" and "modified repeat of the first two bars". It features five staves: Triangle, Cymbals, Tambourine, Tenor Drum, and Bass Drum. The time signature is 4/4. Dynamics include *f*, *p*, and *f*.

Section [B]: Labeled "[B] Contrasting rhythmic figures". It features five staves: Tri., Cym., Tamb., T. D., and B. D. Dynamics include *f*, *mp*, *p*, *mf*, and *p*. A note is marked *p dry (secco)*.

Section [C]: Labeled "[C]". It features five staves: Tri., Cym., Tamb., T. D., and B. D. Dynamics include *f*, *mp*, *p*, and *mf*.

Such small changes often add greater interest than an *exact* repeat – they can keep a listener’s attention - but if the purpose of a passage is to establish a main ‘thematic’ pattern, especially at the beginning of a piece, then changes should be kept small so as not to be a distraction.

[B] creates a small contrast, but not enough to become the Subsidiary Section **[C]**, which serves also to prepare for the Principal Reprise and make it sound fresh.

Example 13

The musical score for Example 13 is divided into three sections:

- [A] Focus on 'membranes'**: This section is marked with a tempo of ♩ = 108. It features a rhythmic pattern primarily on the membrane instruments: Tambourine, Tenor Drum, and Bass Drum. The Triangle and Cymbals are silent. Dynamics are marked *p* (piano).
- [B] Focus on metallic instruments**: This section shifts the focus to the Triangle and Cymbals. The Tambourine, Tenor Drum, and Bass Drum are silent. Dynamics range from *p* (piano) to *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *f* (forte).
- [C] for the subsidiary section**: This section involves all instruments in a complex, repeated rhythmic pattern. Dynamics are marked *ff* (fortissimo).

Example 13 is economical in the Principal Section by dividing the ideas between membranes and metallic instruments. The Subsidiary Section involves them all in a big repeated pattern – maybe eliminating some in a gradual *diminuendo*, so that there is a smooth run into the Reprise, either **[A] [B]** or **[B] [A]**. The Closing could be **[C]** in reverse, starting quietly and rising to a big climax.

It is better to avoid big or sudden changes to patterns before they have been well established. Once you have securely established what the piece is about, you can introduce significant changes in the development of the material. Otherwise you risk confusing or even losing the listener in the early stages.

To sum up the main points we've considered so far:

- concentrate musical ideas in clear statements;
- create a structure in which ideas and the overall composition can be developed;
- research and apply practical information about speed, dynamics and the instruments you intend to use in your composition.

Research point



*The assignment below gives you the opportunity to apply your learning so far to a longer percussion composition of your own. Before you tackle the assignment, listen to one or two exciting percussion pieces by other composers. Good examples can be found by logging on to **Marc Zoutendijk Percussion Information**, then, on the left, **Misc> Compositions** for a full list of pieces that feature percussion. [<http://marcz.home.xs4all.nl/percussioninformation/index.html>].*

Also explore for yourself using the internet and Spotify to find other pieces of classical or contemporary percussion. Make notes in your listening log on how your chosen composers use percussion instruments and what effects and emotions the percussion sections produce in the listener.

Assignment 1: A composition for a group of untuned percussion

First choose your instruments - at least one from each of the three main groups: metallic, wooden, and membrane. Choose instruments that make opportunities for as much colour contrast as possible.

Focus on:

- concentrating musical ideas in clear statements ;
- creating structure in which ideas and the overall composition can exist;
- acquiring practical information about speed, dynamics and the instruments.

Now apply the information you have to a composition that you initiate. Using these resources, Assignment 1 is to use Exercise 14 below as the start of a short dance scene for untuned percussion of about 2 to 3 minutes duration. It may be for either a real or imaginary dance or video sequence.

Percussion is well suited to support choreography which needs rhythmic impetus and a neatly structured time frame. A sequence of events on video should first have been edited into its own time frame. With the knowledge that a sound track is to partner in the project, provision can be made for music to become an integral part of the process. There will be space in the partnership on both sides- space for dance to happen so that music does not overpower choreography; and space in the dance for music to assert its identity. The same with other visual material.

The music should confine itself to two principal ideas (at most - though one *may* be enough) and some subsidiary material. Plan a framework (i.e. the structural design) to fit the overall timing of the dance or video, and work as for Project 4.

This may be a good time to explore 'variable metres' mentioned earlier (see the note with Project 2). Stravinsky's relationship with dance certainly allowed him to explore rhythmic flexibility with huge creative success. The changing time signatures may be haphazard- as instinct suggests- or carefully systemized to a recurring mathematical sequence.

The following *Wild Dance* is the beginning of the first scene of a percussion ballet, left unfinished by the composer. Use it as a starting point, and continue the piece for 2 to

3 minutes in total. The tempo is quite fast moving; it could be altered at will, but try to make it relate to the dance action.

Reflection

Before you send this assignment to your tutor, take a look at the assessment criteria for this course, which will be used to mark your work when you get your work formally assessed. The assessment criteria are listed in the introduction to this course.

Review how you think you have done against the criteria and make notes in your learning log. Send these reflections, along with work, your sketchbook, supporting studies and your learning log (or link to your blog).

Example 14

1. Wild Dance

CURTAIN rises: enter a group of demons
Allegro vivace ♩ = 120

repeat ad lib.

etc.....