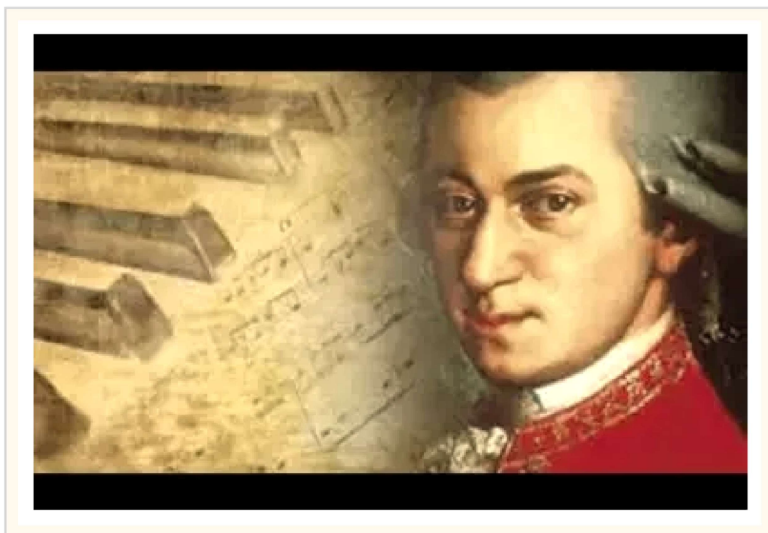




Beginner Composers Pack

Every great composer started exactly where you are now — with a blank page and one idea. This pack is your starter kit: bite-sized tips, real techniques, a few favourite tools, and blank pages waiting for your first masterpiece.

There are no wrong notes here — only surprising ones.



Wikimedia Commons

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Composing minuets by the age of five — and still, at the beginning, a beginner. Everyone starts somewhere.

Welcome aboard

This pack gathers everything from the *Learn & Create* section of the website into one printable booklet — perfect for reading away from a screen, and coming back to again and again. Work through it in order, or jump straight to whatever you need. There is no test, no deadline and no single right answer — just ideas to try on your own instrument.

What's inside

- 01 **Composing tips** — a three-stage path from your very first tune to real technique
 - 02 **Before you write** — the four choices that shrink a scary blank page
 - 03 **Four golden rules** for young composers
 - 04 **Quick guides to the basics** — rhythm, melody, harmony and form
 - 05 **Composer's workshop** — your first three pieces, step by step
 - 06 **My piece plan** and an **idea notebook** — pages to fill in
 - 07 **The Circle of Fifths** — the handiest map a composer can own
 - 08 **Blank manuscript paper** — so you can start writing right away
-

HOW TO USE THIS PACK

Read a page, then *try it*: pick up an instrument, hum an idea, or scribble a few notes on the manuscript paper at the back. Composing is learned by doing, far more than by reading.

Before you write

A blank page is frightening because anything could happen. Great composers shrink the page first: make these four choices before a single note, and every decision after them gets easier.

CHOOSE YOUR...

ASK YOURSELF

1 Tempo	Fast or slow? Decide the speed before you write a note.
2 Time signature	How many beats in a bar — a marching 2, a waltzing 3, a steady 4?
3 Key	Bright major or shadowy minor? The Circle of Fifths at the back is your map.
4 Instrument	Who is playing this? Write for a real voice or instrument you can hear.

Stage I — getting started

Good habits from your very first piece.

DO THIS

WHY IT WORKS

Keep it short	A good piece can be four to eight bars long. Length isn't what makes music good.
Start simple, then change one thing	Write one short idea, then vary a single element — a note, a rhythm, a dynamic.
Repeat on purpose	Repeating a phrase — even exactly — makes music feel intentional rather than random.
Leave space	Silences and rests are part of the music, not just gaps between the notes.
Play it, don't just write it	Try your ideas on an instrument as you go — the ear catches what the eye misses.

Shaping your melody

Stage II — making a tune that flows and feels finished.

DO THIS

WHY IT WORKS

Stay in the key	Stick to the notes of the key you're writing in until you're comfortable.
Favour steps over leaps	Big jumps are hard to sing. Move mostly step by step, with the odd leap for interest.
Keep the line flowing	Think of your melody as one shape that rises and falls, not disconnected notes.
End on a stable note	Finishing on the tonic — the home note — gives a satisfying sense of arrival.
Give it a clear shape	A beginning, a middle, an ending. Even a short piece should go somewhere.

Stage III — techniques to try next

Five tricks the great composers used.

TECHNIQUE

HOW IT GOES — AND WHO DID IT

Sequence	Repeat a short phrase, shifted up or down — all over Vivaldi's concertos.
Call and response	A question phrase answered by a contrasting one — so many of Mozart's tunes.
Inversion	Flip a melody upside down: where it rose, make it fall. Bach built fugues from this.
Contrast	Follow a busy section with something calmer, or the reverse — Haydn loved a surprise.
Simple modulation	Slip briefly into a related key before finding your way back home.

Four golden rules

- I

Keep it short, and repeat on purpose. A great piece can be eight bars long — repetition is what makes music feel intentional, not random.
- II

Play it, don't just write it. Try every idea on your instrument as you go — the ear catches what the eye misses.
- III

Give it a shape: a beginning, a middle, an ending. Build to a high point, then settle back down onto the tonic.
- IV

Don't wait for inspiration — follow your process. Set your restrictions, write, play it, improve it. When an idea does strike, jot it down; four bars is enough. A mood is never required to compose.

The basics — quick guides

TOPIC	KEY IDEA	TRY IT
Rhythm	The pattern of long and short sounds sitting on a steady pulse.	Clap a beat, then clap <i>wa-ter-me-lon</i> over the top.
Melody	A line of single notes you can sing, moving mostly by step.	Sing your tune — smooth out any jump that trips you up.
Harmony	Notes stacked into chords that support and colour the tune.	Hold one chord while you play a melody over the top.
Form	The plan of the piece: AB, or ABA — say it, change it, say it again.	Hum a song you know — can you hear the opening tune return?

Your first three pieces

Don't start with a masterpiece — start with these three little pieces, in order.

Each asks you to make only a few decisions, and each one teaches the next.

1

The one-note piece

Yes, really — one note. It proves every choice is a composing decision.

Set your four restrictions, then compose a piece that uses a single note. You still have real decisions: how long does it last? Does it start soft and grow to a roar, or fade to a whisper? Is it held smoothly or stabbed out in a rhythm? Decide, write it down in your own way, then perform it. You have just composed — and the blank page will never look as frightening again.

2

Borrow a bassline

Compose over a famous progression, the way composers always have.

Pachelbel's Canon has carried hundreds of tunes for three hundred years — building on a borrowed foundation is a proud tradition, not cheating. Loop the four chords below and write your melody on top: put chord notes on the strong beats, walk by step between them, and end on the tonic over the home chord.

C	G	Am	F
C	G	Am	F

3

The ABA piece

Your first complete form: the musical sandwich.

Write a short A section of four to eight bars that ends comfortably at home. Write a B section that contrasts — change one big thing: new rhythm, minor instead of major, quiet instead of loud. Then bring A back, exactly or nearly. Repetition with contrast is the oldest trick in music, and audiences love a homecoming.

My piece plan

Photocopy this page, or pencil straight in — one plan per piece. Restrictions first, then write.

PLAN ONE

Title of my piece

Tempo — fast or slow?

Time signature

Key

Instrument — who plays it?

First idea — hum it, then note it here

PLAN TWO — FOR YOUR NEXT COMPOSING DAY

Title of my piece

Tempo — fast or slow?

Time signature

Key

Instrument — who plays it?

First idea — hum it, then note it here

Idea notebook

Don't wait for inspiration — but when it strikes, catch it. Four bars is enough: name the idea, date it, and come back on a composing day. Every big piece starts life as a scrap like these.

Idea

Date

Idea

Date

Idea

Date

Idea

Date

Idea

Date

Idea

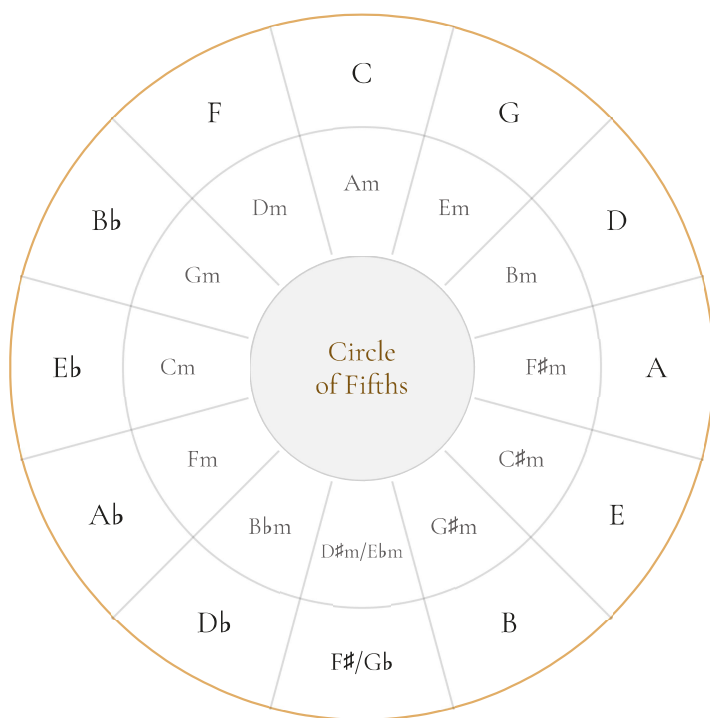
Date

Idea

Date

The Circle of Fifths

The handiest map a composer can own: every key, its relative minor, and how far apart any two of them sit.



HOW IT WORKS

Clockwise from C, each key adds one sharp: C, G, D, A, E, B, F#.

Anticlockwise from C, each key adds one flat: C, F, Bb, Eb, Ab, Db.

The inner ring is each key's relative minor — it shares the very same key signature.

Keys next to each other share nearly all their notes, so moving between them sounds smooth.

USING IT WHILE COMPOSING

Find a key signature fast — count the steps around the circle from C.

Change key smoothly — modulate to a neighbour, which shares the most notes.

Pick a relative minor for a darker version of a major-key idea.

Build progressions like I–IV–V from chords that sit close together.

Keep going

You now have a real starter kit: habits, techniques and a map of every key. That is more than plenty to begin — the rest comes from doing it, again and again. Whatever you write next, don't worry about making it perfect. Make it yours, make it *finished*, and make another one tomorrow.

More free printables

Head back to the Printables page for extra manuscript paper, reference charts and every downloadable pack.

Level up your theory

Work through Grade 1, 2 and 3 in the Learn section, one bite-sized chapter at a time — each with its own practice quiz.

Listen like a composer

Follow a guided listening walkthrough, then fill in the journal spread while the music is still in your ears.

Now go on — turn the page, and start composing.



Manuscript paper

FREE PRINTABLE · A₄[illegible]