

**COMPOSITIONS LESSONS**  
**University of Utah \* Spring 2017**  
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**COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES**

An understanding of basic music theory, the equivalent of that covered in the first two semesters of music theory, will be helpful to provide a basis for communication. However, strict laws of common practice tonality will not be of much use here. Students will develop compositional skills through composition projects, score study, and various exercises. Students will also be encouraged to reflect on what it means to be a Christian composer. An emphasis is also placed on ensuring compositions are performed at some time during the semester.

**MATERIALS**

(Encouraged) Membership to the Society of Composers, Inc. (SCI). Membership is \$27.50.

<http://www.societyofcomposers.org/>

Staff paper: You can print your own here: <http://www.musicshleaf.com/> or

<http://people.virginia.edu/~pdr4h/musicpaper/>

**EXPECTATIONS**

Weekly Composing

I expect you to spend a minimum of 2.5 hours composing each week (though I challenge you to spend more time, especially if you wish to progress and to write music to the best of your ability). I also challenge you to “unplug” yourself from email, internet, Facebook, etc. during these 3 hours. This is essential for being a productive artist! I reserve the right to ask you to log your composing hours. A grade will be given each week for progress and amount of time spent composing. It is understandable if you experience “dry” weeks in which you produce little or nothing of value. This is natural. But you should never be satisfied when this happens and it should not happen because of lack of effort.

I will give a weekly grade in collaboration with the student. Grade will be determined by the output of the student’s weekly composing and the completion of any assignments. The twelve highest weekly grades will be averaged to make up 50% of the student’s grade.

Individual Projects

In addition to any required projects, each composer will compose at least one other work of his or her own choosing. The attached composition rubric may be filled out (by both student and teacher) for each composition project. Self-assessment is a crucial part of art-making. This rubric may not necessarily be used to determine a student’s grade, but it will provide quasi-objective feedback.

Required Composition Projects

One project for the semester will be a “required” project. That is, I will define a specific project for you to do, setting the parameters of the composition. This may be different for each student composer, as each student has individual strengths, weaknesses, musical background and level experience.

Performance of Composition

10% of the grade is earned by securing a performance. (This requirement may be waived for first-semester compositions students, at the discretion of the instructor.) Receiving performances is crucial for a composer’s growth. It is through performances that the learning really occurs, and the collaboration process with other musicians is one of the most meaningful aspects of being a composer. Each additional performance a student receives will replace a low weekly composition grade with a 100.

Other requirements

Students may bring composition on a laptop computer, but it will be preferable **to bring printed hard copies** of compositions-in-progress in to lessons in order to facilitate the use of playing at the piano, jotting down notes, etc. For some students, this may be required of the instructor.

**GRADE CALCULATION**

Weekly Progress	50%
Completion of Individual Project	20%
Completion of Required Project(s) (TBA)	20%
Performance of composition	10%

## Evaluation of Compositions

I will evaluate your compositions according to the following chart. The relative weight of each category may change depending on the particulars of each given assignment. The grading scheme is a general one, and I may improve a resulting grade when considering other factors such as the student's level of experience.

General Grading Scheme:

Poor (F) = 0pts, Below Average (C/D) = 1pt, Good (B) = 2pts, Excellent (A) = 3pts

Total score:

12 = A+	5 = C-
11 = A	4 = D+
10 = A-	3 = D
9 = B+	2 = D-
8 = B	1 = F
7 = B- or C+	0 = F
6 = C	

<b>Idiomatic Writing</b>			
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Poor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Demonstrates a lack of understanding of utilized instruments</li> <li>-Numerous problems/errors</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Below Average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Demonstrates a weak command in (or a disregard for) writing well for utilized instruments</li> <li>-Multiple problems/errors (e.g. range issues, practically impossible gestures)</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Good</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Demonstrates good command in writing for utilized instruments</li> <li>-A small number of questionable elements, but nothing persistent</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Excellent</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Demonstrates exceptional command in writing for utilized instruments</li> </ul>
Comments:			
<b>Formal Clarity, Cohesiveness &amp; Overall Sense of Direction</b>			
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Poor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Lacks a strong sense of direction</li> <li>-Lacking in cohesive use of materials (e.g. harmonic language, thematic material)</li> <li>-Formal confusion</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Below Average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Sense of overall direction needs improvement</li> <li>-Lacks cohesiveness of materials (e.g. harmonic language, thematic material)</li> <li>-Formally unclear (with meandering or superfluous passages/sections)</li> <li>-Composition too short or too long</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Good</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Demonstrates a good overall sense of direction</li> <li>-Demonstrates cohesiveness of materials (e.g. harmonic language, thematic material)</li> <li>-Demonstrates a sense of formal clarity</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Excellent</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Demonstrates an exceptional overall sense of direction</li> <li>-Demonstrates a strong cohesiveness of materials (e.g. harmonic language, thematic material)</li> <li>-Demonstrates formal clarity (no meandering or superfluous passages)</li> </ul>
Comments:			
<b>Overall Creativity and Richness of Musical Language</b>			
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Poor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Little care and thought put into constructing musical materials</li> <li>-Musical ideas are weak and lack distinctive qualities</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Below Average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Demonstrates a general lack of creativity and thoughtfulness in constructing musical material</li> <li>-Musical ideas are not particularly compelling, lacking in distinctive qualities</li> <li>-Materials betray a certain lack of imagination OR a certain triteness</li> <li>-Demonstrates a general lack of attention to non-pitch parameters</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Good</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Demonstrates a considerable amount of creativity and thoughtfulness in constructing musical material</li> <li>-Some musical ideas are compelling; some materials have strong defining characteristics</li> <li>-Materials could be strengthened through more thorough development</li> <li>-Demonstrates a considerable degree of attention to non-pitch parameters</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Excellent</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Demonstrates an exceptional creativity, thoughtfulness and thoroughness in constructing musical materials</li> <li>-Musical ideas are distinctive and compelling; materials have strong defining characteristics</li> <li>-Demonstrates careful attention to and effective use of non-pitch parameters</li> </ul>
Comments:			
<b>Score Presentation</b>			
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Poor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Score messy</li> <li>-Notation incoherent</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Below Average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Problems with improper notation</li> <li>-A number of notational elements need to be cleaner (e.g. accidentals overlap w/ slur marks) OR performance instructions are unclear</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Good</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Neat score</li> <li>-Notation mostly accurate</li> <li>-Certain notational elements could be cleaner) OR certain performance instructions could be clearer</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Excellent</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Exceptionally neat and clean score</li> <li>-Proper notation used</li> <li>-Clear, detailed performance instruction</li> <li>-Looks like a professionally published score</li> </ul>
Comments:			

Other possible penalties: Incomplete work; Failure to incorporate any explicitly required elements; Late submission.