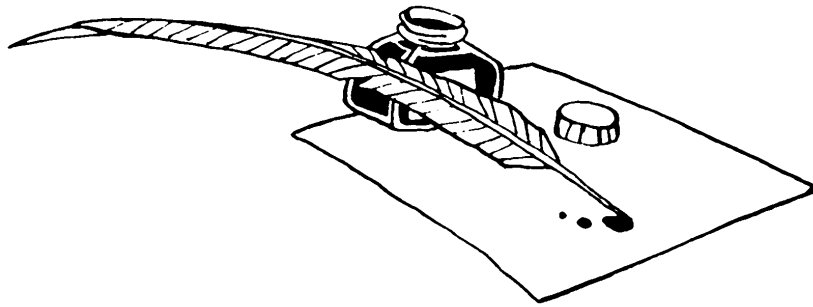


Getting started with
COMPOSITION
for instrumentalists and singers

beginner to grade 3

by Paul Harris

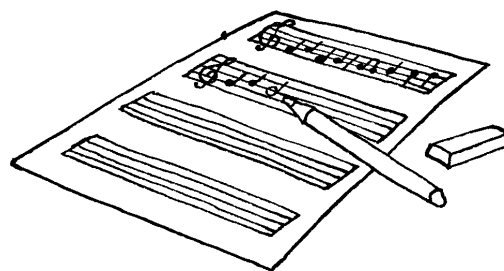


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Composing a 2-bar phrase

What is a 'phrase' in music?

Play the following phrase:



☐ Describe the rhythm:

☐ Describe or draw the melodic shape:

☐ Does the phrase sound complete? (If so, why?)

☐ Did you like the phrase? Why/why not?

Complete the phrases

Compose a second bar to each of the following, using the first five notes of C major.

- ☐ Use the rhythm and melodic shape of the first bar—but don't copy the notes exactly.
- ☐ Of the five notes, which will give a sense of completion and which make the phrase sound as though it is continuing? Why?
- ☐ Try out (improvise) various ideas before writing down your final versions. Try to hear both bars in your head before playing them.

Make these phrases sound finished:



Make these phrases sound unfinished:



For help with music notation see the *Getting started with theory book*.

Introducing 4-bar phrases

The 4-bar phrase is a common musical building block used by many composers. With the help of your teacher, have a look at some of the pieces you are currently learning and see how many 4-bar phrases you can find.

Piece title: _____

Which bars: _____

Piece title: _____

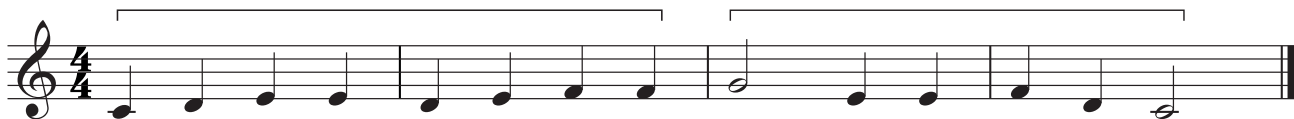
Which bars: _____

Piece title: _____

Which bars: _____

*Notice how
often
repetition
is used in a
simple melody.*

Now play the following phrase:



Most 4-bar phrases are made up of two 2-bar phrases, as this one is.
Answer the following:

☐ How are bars 1 and 2 similar?

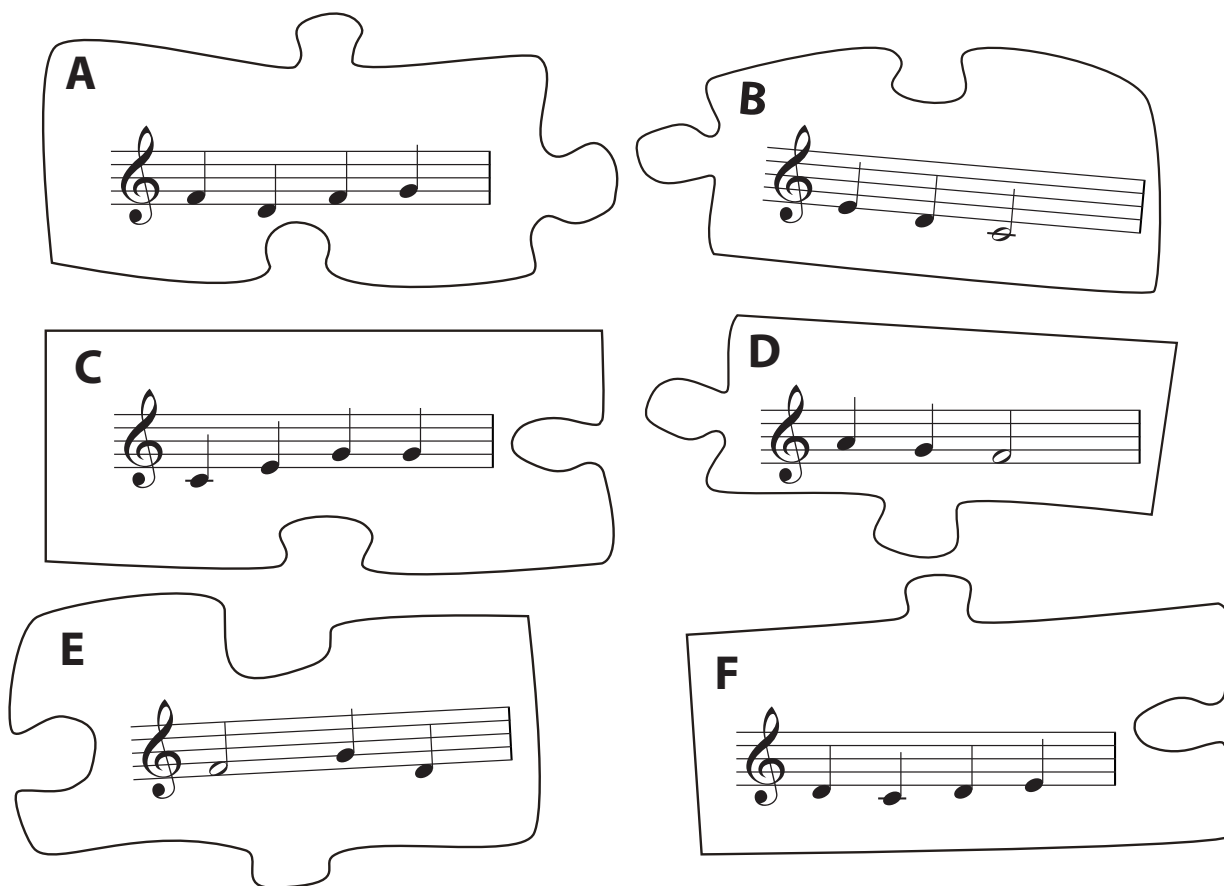
☐ Are bars 3 and 4 related in any way?

☐ Is bar 3 related in any way to bars 1 and 2?

As you'll see, the notes that make a successful tune are carefully chosen, and most good tunes contain repeated or similar patterns. You'll also notice the importance of the 'key-note' (the first note) of the scale: it's where many phrases both begin and end.

Musical jigsaw

Play each of these jigsaw puzzle 1-bar phrases:



Choosing different combinations of the pieces, make up some 4-bar phrases.

Try them out and then answer these questions:

- ☐ Which makes a particularly good first bar?

- ☐ Does one (or more) make a good final bar? Why?

- ☐ Note down which combinations you like best.
Do they have anything in common?

*Copy each bar
onto a separate
piece of paper
so you
can try them
in different
orders*

Composing a 4-bar phrase

Play each of the following 4-bar phrases. Look at the way they've been written and the similarities in the melodic and rhythmic shapes between the bars. You'll see all sorts of patterns that help to make a successful 4-bar phrase.

Go and tell Aunt Gertrude



Fly swat



Cream cake



Here are three more 4-bar phrases. Compose your own music to fill in the missing bars. Remember to base your ideas on the rhythmic and melodic shape of the first bar. After you've completed each melody, try it out and then make any alterations you'd like.

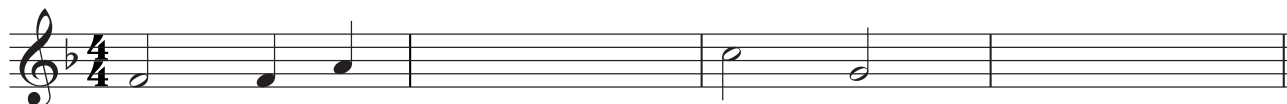


Give each 4-bar tune a title.

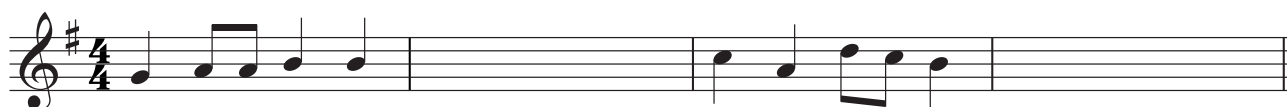
Title:



Title:



Title:



Compose your own music to fill in the missing bars in these phrases.
Make up a title for each.

Title:



Title:



Title:



Sometimes the third bar of a 4-bar phrase can be the same as the first bar.
Play this tune:

Bucket and spade



Compose the final two bars of these 4-bar phrases, making bar 3 the same as bar 1. Add your own titles.

Title:



Title:



Title:

