

Composing Rhythms and Melodies

When composing rhythms to words (Grade 4), or composing melodies to words and instruments (Grade 5), there are some guidelines you should try to follow!

Grade 4

1. Say the phrase over and over in your head to get an idea of the natural rhythms of the words
2. Identify stressed words and syllables; they will be the parts of the phrase you would naturally stress when speaking. They will normally occur on the **stronger beats of each bar**.
3. Decide on your time signature! This takes practice, but try saying the phrase over and over in your head while tapping your finger to find a natural pulse. The words should fit into a regular beat!
4. Insert your rhythms above the words:
 - a. Be **careful of upbeats**! If the phrase begins with a weak word (like 'A' or 'The') then this will be an upbeat!
 - b. Each **syllable needs to get at least one note**! If a word has two or more syllables you will need to split the word up, with each syllable beginning with a **consonant**. For example, the word *primroses*, would be written like this: *prim-ro-ses*, **not** like this: *prim-ros-es* or this: *pri-mro-ses*. Split the word up according to how you say it!

Example 1

One road leads to London

One road leads to Wales

My road leads me seawards

To the white dipping sails.

Identify stressed words and syllables!

One road **leads** to **Lon** - don

One road **leads** to **Wales**

My road **leads** me **sea**wards

To the **white** **dip**ping **sails**.

Decide on Time Signature and insert your rhythms!

One road leads to Lon - don

One road leads to Wales

My road leads me sea-wards To the

white dip-ping sails.

Some points to consider!

1. Notice how the **stressed syllables** are on the main beats, with the weaker syllables on the weaker beats.
2. Notice how the words 'London', 'seawards' and 'dipping' are written (with the second syllable beginning with a consonant).
3. Notice how the words 'To the' are both weak, so they belong to the previous bar before the word 'White'.

Example 2

A silver-scaled Dragon, with jaws flaming red

Sits at my elbow and toasts my bread

Identify stressed words and syllables!

A **sil**ver-scaled **Dra**gon, with **jaws** flaming **red**

Sits at my **el**bow and **toasts** my **bread**.

Decide on Time Signature and insert your rhythms!

A sil-ver-scaled Dra-gon with jaws fla-ming red

Sits at my el-bow and toasts my bread.

Some points to consider!

1. The **stressed syllables** are on the main beats, with the weaker syllables on the weaker beats.
2. The upbeat on the weak word 'A'.
3. The words 'Dragon', 'flaming' and 'elbow' are written (with the second syllable beginning with a consonant).

Grade 5

At Grade 5 you have to consider all the above points for Grade 4, but also compose a melody

For voices

1. Once you have decided on a rhythm, look at the words and **decide if it's a major or minor key**. Major keys may be suggested by **happy/positive words** like 'awaken', 'laugh', 'golden', while minor keys may be suggested by **sad/negative words** like 'setting', 'weeping', 'dark', 'scary'. If you decide on a minor key be sure to use the melodic minor (raised 6th and 7th when ascending only!)
2. Try to **begin on the tonic note** and **end on the tonic note or the dominant note!** **If there is an upbeat** at the beginning (on a weak word) you should **use this as a dominant note**, to be followed by a tonic note on the first beat of the first bar!
3. Look at the words again and see if any could affect the dynamics, articulation and tempo of the melody.
 - a. Words like 'sleeping', 'slumber', 'night' suggest quiet dynamics, while words like 'dancing', 'laughter', or other action words suggest louder dynamics. **Insert appropriate dynamic markings!**
 - b. A sentence like 'knocking at my window' suggests staccato articulation, while a sentence like 'the river flowing past me' suggests a more legato articulation. **Insert appropriate articulation markings!**
 - c. Words like 'slow', 'lagging', 'slumber' suggest a slow tempo, while words like 'excited', 'fast', 'running' suggest a faster tempo. **Insert appropriate tempo markings!**
 - d. Words like 'rising', 'awaken', 'flying', 'soaring' would suggest the melody should also rise around these words also, while words like 'fall', 'setting', 'bow down', 'droop' suggest the melody should fall around these words. Try to compose a **curve in your melody** so the listener is taken on a musical journey:
start low - getting higher - high point - getting lower - end low
start high - getting lower - low point - getting higher - end high
4. Insert your words, rhythm and melody and be sure to be guided by the above points! In your head keep singing what you're composing to make sure it sounds appropriate! No wide leaps or strange intervals!

Example 1

Andante

But slum - ber hold me tight - ly till I wa - ken in the dawn And

p

5

hear the thrus - hes sin - ging in the li - lacs round the lawn.

f

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It consists of two staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The melody starts on a dotted quarter note (G4) and continues with eighth and quarter notes. A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) is placed below the first four bars. The second staff starts with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. The melody continues with quarter and eighth notes. A dynamic marking of *f* (forte) is placed below the first four bars of this staff. The lyrics are written below the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables across bar lines. Brackets and lines are used to group notes and lyrics across bar lines.

Some points to consider!

1. The rhythmic features follow all the guidelines for Grade 4.
2. The upbeat is the dominant followed by the tonic in the first beat of the next bar.
3. The piece also ends with the dominant (could have ended on the tonic if you wanted).
4. Melodic curve achieved: begins low - gets higher - high point - gets lower - ends low.
5. Contrast achieved: the first four bars are different to the last four bars: in terms of dynamics, articulation, and register but they have a similar rhythm so they belong together.
6. Words match the melody: dotted note on the word 'hold', rising melody and increasing dynamics on 'waken in the dawn', highest note and loudest point on the word 'singing', staccato on 'hear the thrushes singing' to mimic birds singing