

# Composing Your Own Song

## Composing Task (Level 1)

The main features needed to make a good song are **structure**, and the various layers that make up the overall **texture**. Of course there are other aspects such as a memorable chorus, a good melody, the overall mood and the meaning of the lyrics, etc..

### Starting off

First, make up a chord sequence. Many songs only use three chords: I IV and V. These are called **primary chords**.

Remember, a chord is 2 or more notes played together at the same time. To play a chord of D minor for example, find D, miss E, play F, Miss out G and play A. Play all three notes together to make the chord of D minor. Three-note chords like this are called **triads**. The three notes of each triad are called the **root**, the **third** and the **fifth**.

Rock and pop music are often based on **modes**. If you cannot think up your own chord sequence try using the Aeolian mode and its three primary chords. Work out the notes of the primary chords (Dm, Gm, Am). First play and then write their notes in the boxes provided.

5th													
3rd			Bb										
root	D												
D Aeolian - Notes	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 0 10px;">D</td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;">E</td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;">F</td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;">G</td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;">A</td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;">Bb</td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;">C</td> </tr> </table>						D	E	F	G	A	Bb	C
D	E	F	G	A	Bb	C							
Chords	Dm	(Edim)	F	(Gm)	(Am)	Bb	C						
	I		III	IV	V	VI	VII						

Next, using the three primary chords, compose your own chord sequence.

1. Count 4 beats in each bar.
2. Begin on Dm (the home chord - I, the tonic)
3. Use one chord in each bar. Choose from chords I, IV and V.
4. The last chord should be Am (V)
5. Play your chord sequence through until you are pleased with it.
6. Write your chord sequence on the grid below in pencil.

Bar	1	2	3	4																
Count	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">1</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">2</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">3</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">4</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">1</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">2</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">3</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">4</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">1</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">2</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">3</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">4</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">1</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">2</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">3</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">4</td> </tr> </table>				1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4					
4/4	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 0 10px;">Dm</td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;">/</td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;">/</td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;">/</td> </tr> </table>				Dm	/	/	/												
Dm	/	/	/																	
Bar	5	6	7	8																
Count	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">1</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">2</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">3</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">4</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">1</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">2</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">3</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">4</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">1</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">2</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">3</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">4</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">1</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">2</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">3</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">4</td> </tr> </table>				1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4					
	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> </tr> </table>																			
	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> <td style="padding: 0 10px;"></td> </tr> </table>																			

## Adding Backing Rhythms

1. Think carefully about the mood. Do the lyrics suggest a style which is fast and lively, slow and gentle, or something else? Decide on a style for your song.
2. Choose a suitable style for the backing rhythms available - either to compose yourself, or on the keyboard.
3. Choose the right tempo setting for your song.
4. Write the name of your rhythm and tempo setting on the top of your song score.
5. Practise your chord sequence until you can play it in the style and at the tempo you have chosen. *Either* use the single-finger chord facility, *or* play the chords with your right hand while your left hand plays the bass line (the root of each chord). You can make the bass line more interesting by repeating the left-hand note several times before changing to the next chord. You now have the beginnings of a bass line.
6. Add a 1 bar riff part (a repeating pattern), and play it beginning on the root note of each chord in the sequence. Now try it an octave or two lower, then play it with your chords.

## Composing the melody by ear

1. Play the chord sequence over and over while you say the lyrics aloud. After a while you will find that a melody should automatically appear.
2. Work out the notes of your melody. It is likely that if you have used the Aeolian mode that the first note will be D or A.
3. If you cannot notate your rhythm ask for help.

## Composing the melody from the chords

If your melody does not come from saying and then singing the words over the chord sequence, you will be able to build it from the chords themselves using the notes of your scale/mode.

1. Write out your chord sequence with the words written below the staff.
2. Basing your melody of the notes of the chord you have chosen for each bar, make up a melody that suits the words.
3. Play your melody through. Keep testing it by singing it against the chords. The occasional note that does not seem to fit the chord is OK if it sounds right. Let your ear guide you.
4. Write your melody down.

## Composing the chorus

A good chorus should be catchy, repetitive but contrasting to the verse. The main purpose of a chorus is to create an exciting climax to the song which people remember and want to hear again.

Compose your chorus section in the same way as your verse.

1. Compose a new chord sequence that follows on smoothly from the verse. (You might start the chorus with chord III.) The last two chords should be V - I.
2. Compose a similar bass line using the same approach as in the verse. You might try to add more notes to your bass line so that it contrasts with the verse.
3. Continue with the same rhythmic backing - or change it to make it more up-beat