The late afternoon sunlight streamed across the floor and onto the empty risers. Ms. Jones sat at her desk and stared thoughtfully into her empty classroom. She had just returned from a meeting with her principal, Ms. Clement. Ms. Clement wanted to hold a competition to create a school song. The school was a new one and she felt a school song would help build a spirit of unity among the students. Ms. Jones was new to the school as well, but she had been teaching for several years before arriving at this school in September. It was now October and she had conducted several assessments to allow her to get to know her students and their levels of musical skill and understanding. While some of the students played piano or other instruments, most indicated on her surveys that they had never made up music of their own. Ms. Jones was surprised to find this because composing was included in district curriculum guides as well as state and national standards for music education. She had done a few group composition projects in her previous school, but none had included song writing. She wondered where to begin this school-wide activity and how to plan for student success so that there would be a variety of good songs from which the school song could be selected.

There are many things to consider when planning for composition projects with students. The previous chapter discussed one of those in some detail: compositional context. That is revisited briefly in this chapter under the composer characteristics. Similarly the compositional principles introduced in chapter one are referred to here. This chapter also considers the tools of creation and preservation that students have available to use. When thinking about planning composition projects, prerequisites and task guidelines are the focus. Finally there are some suggestions regarding the assessment of students’ compositions and the connections that can be made to other areas of music instruction as well as other curricula. Readers may find it useful to follow along using Table 4.1 Composition planning template as a guide while reading this chapter. It represents a summary of the chapter content.

Table 4.1 Planning Grid

Note: The table that follows differs from the model published in 2009. This version was updated in 2013.
# Planning for Composition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Skill Level</th>
<th>Physical setting</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compositional Capacities</th>
<th>Feelingful Intention</th>
<th>Musical Expressivity</th>
<th>Artistic Craftsmanship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling or feelings to be sonified:</td>
<td>Principles in primary and/or supporting roles:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motion/stasis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unity/variety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sound/silence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tension/release</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stability/instability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compositional Context</th>
<th>Ensemble, large group/whole class, small group, partnered, individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>Instruments: Classroom, band, orchestra, keyboards, guitars, recorder, voices, computers, tablets, or other ________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preservations: invented or traditional notation, recordings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prerequisites</th>
<th>Conceptual knowledge:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Musical skills:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intuitive understandings/perceptual knowledge:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-compositional Activities (Which, when, how?)</th>
<th>Singing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Playing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improvisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moving</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Guidelines</th>
<th>Product:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Length:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specs:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active composition time:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preservation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performance:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessments</th>
<th>Why assess?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What will be assessed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How will it be assessed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant connections</th>
<th>To past or future music lessons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To other disciplines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Composer Characteristics: Who Are the Composers?

One of the first considerations in planning for composition experiences is the age of the students. Part two of this text considers in detail the characteristics of primary, elementary, middle and secondary level students. It considers how children’s natural abilities and interests contribute to their success as composers. Here it is simply the fact that the age of the student is an important consideration. Planning compositional activities for a class of five- and six-year-olds is quite different from planning for a group of seventh graders.

Similarly, it is important to consider their skill level both as performers and as composers. Students who have had some successful composing experiences may approach a new composing task quite differently from those who are composing for the first time. Those with several years of private instrumental instruction may also approach a composition task differently from students who have never studied an instrument. This is particularly true of pianists and guitarists who have experience working with more than one line of sound at a time. Knowing about the background of the students can help teachers plan more appropriate instruction.

Teachers in public schools also need to plan for children with exceptional needs in their classes. They must consider any modifications that may be required by the child’s individual education plans. These children, too, need to experience the joy of creation and can experience success if the lessons are created to take advantage of their specific abilities.

Compositional Setting: Where and When Will Composing Be Done?

The next thing to consider is where the children compose. Will they work on their pieces only at school? If so, will that work be done only during music class time? Certainly working only in school during class time might be appropriate for compositional etudes that teachers assign to highlight a particular technique. Yet, even with group compositions, it might be possible for the work to continue outside of school. For some types of music ensembles, a location outside of school might be the preferred setting for a group composition. Individuals also may work better outside of the school in a familiar place. Their pieces then may be brought to school and performed for their peers and teachers.

The setting may also impact what resources the student has at his or her command. The resources of a computer lab differ from those of a private clarinet studio. The resources available at home in the student’s bedroom are not the same as those of a rehearsal hall. Where composing takes place has always had a direct influence on the works created and the processes that composers use. Composition can take place anywhere the composer chooses to compose. Part two of this book includes examples from rehearsal halls, computer labs, private studios, classrooms, and at home. Some of the examples require extensive materials and equipment. Most can be done with less elaborate materials.

Similarly, consider how long the student has to create the composition. It is quite different to have to summon all of one’s resources in a thirty minute class and create a product than it is to have a couple of months to create, extend, revise and edit a composition. Often teachers allow too little time for the product to emerge. This may be especially true for group composition where the creators need time to collaborate as well as to create. While the needs of a classroom curriculum may necessitate that there be a time limit of some sort, that limit should be as generous as possible to allow time for creative solutions to surface.

The first solution a student discovers is not always the best one and it takes time for other ideas to occur to the student. Teachers need to encourage students to seek a variety of solutions to compositional problems and then to choose among them. This often requires more than one
class period or lesson. Still, when making a plan, teachers need to estimate how long it will take the student to complete the piece. They then can decide how much time to allocate to the project. Composers often work under some kind of deadline as to when the composition must be completed. Students need a sense of closure as well. While it is important not to have closure too soon, it is also important not to allow the process to continue indefinitely. There are other pieces and projects to create.

Focus Principle: What Principle(s) Will Students Use in This Piece?

The principles of sound and silence, motion and stasis, unity and variety, tension and release and stability and instability have been introduced and discussed in previous chapters. Focusing on principles helps students create more expressive pieces. In lesson planning, the teacher must guide students to consider the relationship between the principles that they are selecting and the responses they expect people to experience when they hear the composition. Connecting principle relationships to human experience is a fundamental compositional skill.

Beginning students tend to create pieces that reflect the continuum extremes of the principles. They may create pieces that are either highly stable (and quite repetitious) or highly unstable in that they lack any sense of cohesion (no repetition). Students benefit from creating a compositional etude (a composing exercise to teach a particular technique or concept) to explore how repetition can be used to balance stability and instability to draw the listener into a work.

Even though stability and instability served as the focus of the previous example, the principles rarely operate in isolation. While a lesson may have a specific emphasis on one of the principles, the others undoubtedly are included as well. Teachers should choose a principle for their focus, but then include the others as appropriate. Each of the principles can be applied to many musical tasks. As teachers plan instruction, they should think about the many ways the principles can impact a task they design. They can then decide which seems the most logical for what they wish to accomplish and make it explicit to the students at some point in their instruction.

When planning compositional etudes that focus students’ attention on principle relationships, teachers may wish to focus on particular musical elements or techniques. As they consider the ways they might teach such things as rondo form or motivic repetition, they can consider also which of the principles might effectively enhance the musicality of the pieces, or which exemplify the specific concept or technique. Certainly both rondo and motivic repetition emphasize unity and variety, although to differing degrees of emphasis and structure. Similarly explorations of tone color and dynamics both emphasize sound quality and are related to sound and silence. The emphasis here is that the principles should be kept in mind, so that musicality and expressivity are encouraged even in creations that the students may well regard as exercises rather than compositions.

The elements of music are the tools a composer uses to express the musical principles. These elements can be grouped in three loose groups: elements of time (form, meter, rhythm, tempo); elements of pitch (tonality, melody, harmony); and elements of expression (dynamics, texture, tone color, articulation). Excellent lessons on any one element can fail to produce expressive compositions. Combining the principles with an emphasis on one or more of the elements usually results in something more musical. Principles are expressed in elements combined with compositional techniques. Consciousness structuring of all three can lead to more expressive musical creations.
Compositional Capacities

Compositional capacities are the capabilities of the students to make choices regarding feelingful intentions and product intentions, expressive qualities and artistic craftsmanship. These have been extensively discussed in chapter two. However, two questions should be considered while planning composition experiences: 1) how to include all three in the compositional process; and 2) when to discuss each of these with students.

Intention

The purpose of intention on the planning template is to remind teachers to plan for when they discuss compositional intention with the composers and to establish who is determining the intention to compose and to what degree. Intention might seem to be an either/or proposition. Either the intention is dictated by the teacher or left to the students.

However, even when the teacher determines the composing activity, there is often space for students to add their own intentionality to the task if they are encouraged to do so. For example, a teacher might create a task where the students are asked to create a scary sounding piece. Students might on their own decide to use the assignment to tell a sonic story or to create a soundtrack for a story they already know. At some point a question about intention would need to be asked in order for that feelingful intention to be made explicit. Often this occurs just before or after the piece is performed.

Asking questions can also make explicit the composers’ intentions even when they have composed a work on their own. Such questions as “What is this piece about?” or “What feeling were you trying to evoke” lead to discussions of composer intention and its expressive success. These questions can come at the end of the process, but often can also guide the process if the young composer seems to be experiencing some difficulty during the process.

Expressivity

Again, the question teachers should ask themselves about expressivity is when to discuss it with the composers. Questions about expressivity may be necessary in order for children’s expressive capabilities to expand. Sometimes this occurs as they listen to each other’s compositions; at other times, it can occur while listening as part of a co-compositional activity. The point is that expressivity should be a focus in each composition project at some point. Teachers should plan when questions about it might occur. Expressivity is the foundational relationship between sound and feeling. Those relationships should be made explicit whenever possible to help young composers discover the skills of artistic craftsmanship.

Artistic Craftsmanship

This is often the easiest of the compositional capacities for teachers to include in their plans. The difficult thing is to not let craftsmanship dominate the composing task. While teachers should certainly encourage growth in compositional artistry, it must be predicated on a growth in expressive intent. Otherwise, the techniques will be meaningless to the composers and the resulting pieces often less than satisfactory to all concerned. Craftsmanship should spring from a need to express something which composer feels, but lacks the skills to express.

Teaching the skills of composition works best when the lesson is promoted by a question from the composer. When a student asks how to do something, the teacher can ask leading questions, demonstrate, and provide examples. This is also the best time to create compositional etudes to practice these newer skills that have interested the young composers. These etudes are
deliberately intended to be exercises and often not regarded as compositions by their creators since they are quite teacher directed. However, the techniques made explicit by the etudes sometimes then appear in subsequent works and some students use the structure of the etude to create intentionally expressive examples of the technique.

Finally, artistic craftsmanship is evident in varying degrees in the works young composers create. This is a great opportunity for discussing with the composer why the composer chose to a particular technique or skill for use in the piece and how it impacted compositional choices. Teacher-facilitated discussions in group contexts are enlightening, not only for the composer of the piece under discussion, but for others in the group.

Compositional Context: What Group Is Doing the Composing?

Students create music within the compositional contexts take place in a physical setting. The compositional context refers to the social aspects of that setting while the physical location may be a rehearsal room, a classroom or other space. Are students composing as part of an entire ensemble such as, for example, a high school choir? They might do this in conjunction with a guest composer who creates a work with them that they subsequently perform.

Similarly, is it an entire class composing a piece together for some purpose? In the primary grades section of part two, the Song for Our Teacher lesson does this. Is this a group compositional activity where a small group or a small ensemble work together to create a piece? Examples of this can be found in the middle school sections of part two. Having partners compose together works especially well with novice composers and students at about the ages of seven and eight. Of course, individuals of all ages can also create pieces on their own. From the songs that preschoolers make up to accompany their play to adult singer/songwriters, individuals create music to express their own feelings.

Choosing a context for composing is often at least in part determined by the setting. Group compositions are not usually possible in private lessons. Finding time for individual composing in an elementary general music setting can be daunting. Still, creative teachers find ways to help their student musicians compose in a variety of contexts regardless of the setting. In a class setting, students can compose a single piece together, break into small groups and create group pieces, work in pairs or work individually.

Students’ work preferences should be considered when determining appropriate compositional contexts. Some students prefer to work with partners while others want to work in small groups or even by themselves. As students gain compositional experience, they are likely to develop a preferred working style. At least at the early stages, it may be wise to see that students experience working in a variety of contexts so that one context does not dominate simply from lack of exposure to the others.

Students who only create in small groups may not appreciate the value of working only with one partner by themselves. Some students find the whole class approach very limiting and be eager to work in a small group. Student guitarists often enjoy working with a student drummer or bassist as they create new pieces. Throughout their schooling, students should have the opportunity to experience composing in a variety of contexts. This usually requires deliberate planning on their teachers’ part.

Tools for Composing: What Sounds Are Available?

The setting may partly determine the tools of sound production and of preservation that are available for composing. If the setting is a computer lab, composers have access to the
myriad of sounds on the computer and the internet. However, many programs allow for sound input and the students can play or sing in tracks that they create on acoustic instruments.

Still, there are some limitations to be kept in mind before beginning compositions on computers. A computer screen limits the literal vision of piece. It reduces to just a few measures what can be in sight at a time regardless of whether students are using notation, graphics, or looping programs. This can allow the “wholeness” of a work to become blurred or lost, especially with young or inexperienced composers. Some composers who work at computers surround themselves with visual reminders of their musical sketch or plan to compensate for this.

Computers also allow for a different kind of composing – composing in the absence of sound. It is possible to create a work visually by various means without listening to it until the student feels it is finished. It is up to the skillful teacher to keep the emphasis on thinking and creating in sound. Visuals should be an aid to composing, not a replacement for hearing what is being created. The goal is to think in sound and not just create a picture or graphic that then once listens to once the visual aspects are complete.

In a general music classroom it may be necessary to provide some means of sharing instruments. The teacher needs to decide if the children will choose the instruments from all those available, if groups will have matching sets of instruments or if each group will have different sets of sounds. If the students work at home on their pieces, they may need sounds to use. Usually an instrument that they can play or a computer is the best source for those sounds, but students sometimes find other sounds to use as well.

It is important to remember that the voice is a source of many sounds as well. Even if this is the only tool available, composition can still take place. Some people compose by using only their voices, and some composers find it necessary to sing to themselves as they work. The human voice is not limited to singing and may create a extensive array of both pitched and percussive sounds.

Found sounds – such as those of keys rattling or metal wastebaskets being tapped with pens, rulers or shoes – can become sound sources for composing. Even a sheet of newspaper can be used to create a variety of sounds which can them be combined in interesting ways (see Schafer, 1967). Students can be quite inventive when it comes to creating their own musical instruments. This also gives them a chance to explore the ways sounds are made and changed. It can be extended even further if these invented instruments then become the basis of a composition.

Similarly, composition should be a part of instrumental music lessons almost from the very beginning. This applies to piano, recorder, guitar, wind and percussion instruments and beginning strings classes. Progress in playing technique and understanding notation goes much faster when students are trying to figure out ways to create their own music and preserve it to share with others. Creating a piece based on the first few notes beginners master pretty much guarantees that students will spend a good amount of time playing those notes. This is particularly true if teachers focus some attention on the musical principles used in the pieces in the students’ method books and suggest that the students create pieces to share in their next lesson. One of the quickest ways to teach musical tension and release and the effect of dissonance is to have instrumental students create duets. The subsequent discussions with the students about what was intended and how things sounded can be very educational.

Over the course of students’ musical education, they should have the opportunity to explore and create with a variety of tools. People do not expect students to learn to use pencils, crayons, paint and computers all at once, but rather at different times and for different purposes.
Similarly teachers should guide students’ exposure to the available tools use for musical creation and help them to select the most appropriate tools for their work.

**The Tools of Preservation**

Once students begin to create pieces there needs to be a means of preserving their work. Initially this should be in some format that does not require students to know standard music notation. One of the quickest ways to discourage budding composers is to insist that they notate their music or to limit their compositions to only what they know how to write in standard notation. There are other means of preserving the work of beginning composers.

Just as beginning writers often use invented spelling and pictures to tell their first stories, beginning composers can invent graphic notations or other symbol systems to help them remember what they create. Pieces may also be recorded on computers or other recording devices. Later a teacher or other knowledgeable musician can transcribe the recordings to create traditional scores. Student work and transcriptions can be kept the composer’s paper sketchbook or on their computers. Computer-based sketchbooks can easily house songs they have sung into it, parts of incomplete pieces and ideas for future pieces.

Always ask if notation is necessary for the students. Does invented notation solve a memory issue? Does it allow them to work on a project across multiple class periods? Is it setting up the need for more a more formalized system of notation? Is it simply creating a record of a project? Notation for the sake of notation is not a musical goal. Indeed, taking time to create notation because the teacher has required it may decrease the amount of time the students spend thinking critically and artistically about their compositions.

Finally, pieces can sometimes be preserved in standard musical notation. While not all creative works lend themselves to this format, it is one that has served musicians long and well and should eventually be a part of compositional training. However, it should not be used with young beginning composers, but postponed until they have some experience creating in sound. It has been our experience that children learn notation fastest when they have something they want to write down. There is no faster way to teach them standard notation than to have them attempt to write down something they have created and then to help them to improve its accuracy. More will be said about this in chapter eight.

**Prerequisites: What Do Students Need to Know Before They Begin?**

With beginners of all ages and very young students, it is usually best to begin with as few prerequisites as possible, and that usually means with almost none. The “Sonic Snowstorm” lesson below is an example of a composing lesson that has very few prerequisites. The students need to know what a snowstorm is like, but even that can easily be taught through discussion. They have additional intuitive knowledge about how music works, such as that it has a beginning middle and end. They need the ability to follow directions in a group setting. Beyond that, they need little additional knowledge or skill to participate successfully in the composition.
Overview: Prepare a collection of instruments that make metallic sounds (small suspended cymbals with mallets, triangles, jingle bells, finger cymbals, tambourines shaken, etc.) and have one for each child in class. Ask how a snowstorm begins. After taking several responses, direct attention to the fact that snowstorms often begin with just a few flakes and then gradually more and more snowflakes fall. Discuss that the snow becomes very thick and that the wind may blow off and on or steadily. Guide the conversation and helps the class decide that snowstorms often end with a gradual diminishment of snow and the sun coming out. Review cuing and cutoffs and dynamics for conducting or teach it. Give these directions: “When I point to you, begin playing your instrument quietly. When everyone is playing, watch me for the signal to play louder or quieter. After a bit, I will look at you and give you a cutoff. You will stop playing one at a time.” After several practice attempts, record the children’s efforts and play it back to them. Invite various children to be the conductor and the class creates snowstorms that are recorded and discussed similarly.

Table 4.2 Sonic Snowstorm

| Composer Characteristics | Grade level: K  
Skill level: Novice  
Setting: Classroom  
Time allocation: 30 minute lesson segment (listening and composition) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus &amp; supporting principles</td>
<td>Principle: unity/variety to produce the sounds of a snowstorm through texture and timbre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Compositional Capacities | Intention: Feeling of a snowstorm.  
Expressivity: Discussed throughout - How to we sonify a snowstorm?  
Artistic Craftsmanship: Enacted through performance. |
| Compositional Context | Whole class, group activity |
| Tools | Many metallic percussion instruments in a variety of pitch ranges |
| Prerequisites | Familiarity with snowstorms |
| Co-compositional Activities | Discussion of what happens during a snowstorm: beginning, middle, end  
Listening map and experience with Snow is Dancing by Debussy |
| Task Guidelines | Product: Percussion sound piece  
Length: 30 seconds to three minutes  
Spec: Create a sonic snowstorm that has a clear BME. Start and end with only a few sounds. Get louder and quieter during the piece. Teacher and students take turns acting as the conductor/composer.  
Time: 20 minutes  
Preservation: Recording of class (opt)  
Performance: Whole class |
| Assessment | Are students able to use texture to create unity/variety to differentiate between formal sections?  
Are students able to select and employ timbres effectively to create unity/variety within the snowstorm? |
| Connections | Similar activity with rainstorms (other natural events) using a wider selection of percussion instruments.  
Other pieces, poems etc about snow |
As students progress beyond the beginner stages of composer development, they begin to seek ways to make their pieces more individually expressive and to have their ideas accepted in a group context. It is then that the prerequisites for compositional projects become more important for the teacher to consider. These prerequisites can be grouped into three categories: 1) conceptual knowledge; 2) musical skills; and 3) intuitive knowledge.

**Prerequisite Conceptual Knowledge**

In the “Sonic Snowstorms” lesson presented above, the knowledge of what a snowstorm is like is an example of conceptual knowledge. In the school song unit mentioned in the vignette at the start of the chapter, a knowledge of what a school song usually is like and what children of all ages and backgrounds agreed was true of their school would be examples of conceptual knowledge. Conceptual knowledge is knowledge about something. Musical knowledge can also be conceptual knowledge. Examples include knowing the difference between around a line and in a space, the typical sections in rondo form or how to write notation for viola in the C clef. This type of prerequisite is what the children need to know about something in order to complete the task successfully.

**Prerequisite Musical Skills**

Musical prerequisites include the musical performance skills, the perceptual skills and the expressive capacities to create in sound. In order create a duet using a computer program the student needs to know how to use the computer to open the program, enter information, create, organize, record and play back the sounds. To write a duet for two recorders it is usually helpful to have the ability to play recorder. Anything that is related to producing the sounds and preserving them could be considered technical skills.

Skills related to identifying and understanding sounds are perceptual skills. Tone color recognition is perceptual skill. Distinguishing sounds that move upward, downward or stay the same is another. Almost any musical similarities and differences that students need to identify from sound are perceptual skills.

Notice that notation skill is not a musical skill, but rather a conceptual understanding. Remember that it is not necessary that students understand notation in order to create with sound. Notation is a tool for composers to use, not a prerequisite to composing. Musicians without traditional notation skill have created many fine compositions.

A final kind of prerequisite musical skill is that of expressive skills. This is related to the ability to organize sounds with expressive intention. Beginners may not have the technical or perceptual skills to be able to create what they hear in their heads. However, as their skills develop and they become more accustomed to working with the principles of musical expression, they need to be encouraged to expand their abilities to evoke feeling in their pieces. For example, at an intermediate level of compositional skill a prerequisite to creating music for a scary film clip would be a knowledge of what makes music sound scary to their intended audience. Similarly, creating a march for a solemn occasion such as a graduation or “moving up” ceremony requires a knowledge of what makes music sound solemn. These prerequisites are those of expressive skill.

**Prerequisite Intuitive Knowledge**

Students enter formal school with many kinds of intuitive knowledge about how music works. They often have a good sense of what constitutes a “song”. Many have an intuitive sense
of beat and phasing. They have heard many hours of music on television and through other media. Some have even had formal music experience through early childhood music programs or instrumental lessons with teachers trained in the Suzuki method. Depending on their cultural background, they may have experienced music in many social or religious settings. During all of this they are absorbing unconsciously an understanding of what music is and how it works. However, that understanding can be quite specifically culturally based. Teachers cannot assume that all students have the necessary intuitive understandings and may need to determine that before beginning. In the vignette at the start of the chapter, the students need to have an intuitive understanding of what a song is, and possibly some sort of understanding of the types of purposes a school song might need to fulfill.

Intuitive knowledge can be difficult to assess and often is hard for teachers to predict in the planning process. However, assumptions about intuitive knowledge will quickly be tested when the project begins. Teachers need to think as deeply about these prerequisites as the knowledge of their students allows.

Co-compositional Activities: How Other Musical Behaviors Can Assist Composing

Whenever possible teachers should make connections between composing and the other musical behaviors: listening, singing, playing instruments, improvising and moving. Co-compositional activities are musical engagements that allow children to experience music in multifaceted ways. These are called co-compositional activities because they can go along with composing. Sometimes an activity may precede actual work on a composition, sometimes it may occur during a break in the composing work, and sometimes it may occur after composing is completed to point out how other composers have solved similar compositional problems. These may occur naturally during the course of a project. The teaching context often determines when to use a co-compositional activity.

There are many ways to use co-compositional activities to enhance composition study. In the “Sonic Snowstorm” lesson presented above, the co-compositional listening activity using Debussy’s “Snow Is Dancing” could occur before the composing activity, in between conductors during the activity or after doing the activity.

The suggested activity is a listening map, but the youngest students also enjoy doing a movement activity where they all begin curled on the floor and rise to move like floating snowflakes when tapped gently on the head by the “snow fairy” (teacher). During the B section they run as if blown by the wind (no bumping allowed) and, as the music becomes less energetic, they drift to the ground until the sun comes out (the end). This movement activity helps build an intuitive sense of motion and stasis that perhaps must be predicated on movement of their bodies. It could be used as a pre-compositional activity. The listening map could be used following the creation of the snow pieces or a simple listening exercise where the children listen for how a piano can be a snowstorm (a la Debussy) and talk about how it is similar and different from the pieces they created.

Listening as a Co-compositional Activity

In many ways, listening to music is one of the most important co-compositional activities. Philosopher Bennett Reimer (2003) states, “Composing absent a broad repertoire of listening experiences is composing in a vacuum and therefore, in a real sense, composing in ignorance (p. 260).” Listening provides music models before or after composing. This can maximize student understanding of compositional techniques and their means of expression.
Creative decisions are often ruled by stylistic conventions that the students have adopted. To broaden students’ options, they must encounter a variety of styles and learn to understand the conventions of each style. Because the music played for students comprises a foundation upon which future composition experiences draw, every effort must be made to insure that only the music that exhibits the highest degrees of excellence is used. Music of this caliber exists in every genre, but so does music of lesser quality. If students are to discover how the musical principles are used, it should be music that is rich with both expressive gestures and craftsmanship.

Selecting music that works well with students requires careful planning and analysis. As teachers listen to pieces of music, they might consider the following questions:

1. Is this music exemplary of the craftsmanship and quality found within this genre or style?
2. What do my students already know about music?
3. What can my students easily identify in this selection?
4. What can my students be led to hear in this selection? What is its pedagogical value?
5. Is this selection of an appropriate length for my students? Can it be excerpted effectively and musically?
6. What type of activity could my students do to demonstrate their ability to perceive the principles and elements that I wish them to focus on and identify in this selection?

The first time students listen to a piece of music serves to familiarize them with the overall content and character of a piece or logical excerpt. The first question asked of students should be one that they can all answer correctly to ensure feelings of success. As students hear the piece a second time, their attention should be drawn to a particular feature that becomes the focus of the lesson. The question asked this time should lead them to identify the feature. For the listening experience, ask students to discuss what is happening in specific detail. For example, students might indicate that the flute and trumpet are having a conversation and sharing the melody, or taking turns playing, or that the orchestra echoes their parts. The more detail elicited here, the better. It is during this step that teachers should model visually, through mapping or moving or some other representative way, what is happening in the music.

At this point teachers can ask the students to create their own representations (move, draw, write, etc). If the majority of students seem secure with the skill, it is time to move on with the lesson to another activity. If many students are unable to represent individually the new knowledge, teachers should go back to the point where the attention was drawn to the principle, concept or element of focus, and clarify it further. Repetition is usually a good thing in listening lessons. It takes time for students’ ears to hear in meaningful ways.

Finally, listen simply to enjoy the selection. This final listening puts the music back together holistically. If students are listening to an excerpt, consider hearing it this time within the context of a larger section. The students select their own listening focus during this listening.

**Singing as a Co-compositional Activity**

The school song unit in the opening vignette might begin with learning to sing some songs of other schools and discussing their various strengths and weaknesses from the point of view of the students who will be composing the new ones. These discussions might also include a technical analysis of what works and does not work musically, particularly with reference to
the range of the song and the form it takes (ABA? Verse and chorus? 32 bar song? Simple four phrase song?). Discussions of the various ways the musical principles are applied would also be helpful.

Many young composers sing to themselves as they work on their pieces. As one might naturally expect, this seems to be especially true when students are setting texts. Trying to make music fit the words or the words fit the music may be best tried out by singing them. Students also sing to get the feel of melodic lines, to try out a musical thought, and to test the phrasing of their musical ideas. This is singing to compose, rather than singing for performance or to demonstrate a compositional device or technique.

However, singing performances can also be used to help students understand how composers have used principle relationships, elements and compositional devices. Teachers can ask leading questions about the music the children are learning to perform. The focus should be on emphasizing the principles, elements, and compositional techniques that were employed by the composer.

Students who are comfortable with their singing voices naturally sing to compose. Even toddlers sing to accompany their play and make up their own tunes as they do. So often children are silenced in school as they work. How wonderful it is to provide them with a space where humming and singing to oneself is expected and accepted.

**Playing Instruments and Improvising as Co-compositional Activities**

Playing instruments often takes the form of exploring new sound sources and experimenting with the sounds a composer has available. When confronted with a new sound source, most people intuitively begin to play with it to see what it can do. This is exploring the sound possibilities of the sound source. Teachers should allow time for this to happen and encourage finding nontraditional ways to produce sounds on instruments as long as it does not alter the instrument irreversibly.

Experimenting is very much like improvising, except that it is not intended as part of a performance “in the moment”, but rather it is a search for sounds that might be useful in the work being created. It is using a familiar sound source to search for a musical idea. Even in groups, individual students often experiment with an instrument until they find a beat or a melodic fragment they like, at which point they may share it with the other members of their group. Composers working alone sometimes work out a section of a piece only to reject it and start over when the experimenting does not seem to lead anywhere, or when they decide they do not like the fragment with which they have been working. Novice composers most often find instruments a useful tool to create, modify and extend their ideas.

Improvisation is creating a performance without the opportunity to revise except in a subsequent performance. The opportunity to reflect on musical creations and to revise them is what distinguishes composition from improvisation. There is a continuum that begins with exploring and experimenting, continues with purely improvisatory performance pieces and extends at the other end to composed pieces that have benefited from reflection and re-visioning. In between are many overlapping areas of musical creation. All make use of the principles of music and the compositional capacities to varying degrees. There is probably no useful purpose served by deciding where improvisation ends and composition begins. This is particularly true for works created by novice composers and very young students.
Arranging as a Co-compositional Etude

Creating arrangements for the available instruments to play along with recordings is another way to approach compositional activities. Classroom groups often enjoy creating their own arrangements to accompany the same recording and then analyzing the products each group created. This can lead to further understanding of the musical principles and compositional capacities as they compare and contrast their differing solutions to the same problem. This form of arranging can be a step toward arranging more complicated scores for their compositions or as a way of approaching more complicated arranging tasks. It also helps clarify the differences between what arrangers do and what composers do.

Using Movement to Develop Musical Knowledge and Understanding

Movement and music are synonymous in many cultures. Humans are moving beings and this natural tendency can be observed among young composers. Consequently, moving to music can be a particularly effective way acquiring musical understanding. This can be a simple as using hand gestures to trace some aspect of the music in the air or as complicated as designing an interpretive dance to accompany a composition. Movement can often readily convey the musical principles and is especially effective for motion and stasis.

Since some students quite literally need to move in order to learn, movement as a co-compositional activity should be used to demonstrate the music principles and as many compositional techniques as practical. Very young children also often benefit from being able to move to demonstrate their understanding of musical principles and elements. They frequently can demonstrate a bodily understanding of musical feeling long before they can articulate these concepts verbally. Some very young composers need to be able to move to work out their expressive intentions as they make up their own music. They need to enact what it is they are creating.

Teachers can use co-compositional activities as a way to start a unit or to start a lesson within the unit. They can also conclude a lesson or occur in the middle. These directed learning engagements allow students to connect other aspects of musical experience to their composing, and allow the teacher to incorporate easily additional conceptual or perceptual learning or further practice using newly acquired skills. Additional examples of co-compositional activities are in each suggested lesson included in the chapters in part two of this book.

Task Guidelines: What Is Specified and What Do the Composers Get to Decide for Themselves?

This book is dedicated to helping teachers teach composition, which implies that in some way they assist the process of learning to compose. However, the range of assistance that teachers provide can vary widely. Not all composing which children do is done in school or at the direction of the teacher. Sometimes they create only for themselves. At other times they may create works they share only with friends or family. Skillful teachers encourage students to share their pieces with them and, at times, with classmates and larger audiences. Composing occurs on a continuum from highly structured composition etudes designed for some instructional purpose at one end of the spectrum to compositions that students create purely because they have chosen to do so at the other end. Somewhere in the middle is where much composition in schools takes place.

Task guidelines in the planning template (Table 4.1) refer to the parameters of the task specified in the directions. It also defines how much the task the students can decide for
themselves. As noted in chapter three, too much task structure may stifle creativity and result in compositional exercises instead of expressive music. On the other hand, too little task structure can cause novice composers to have difficulty beginning their pieces or organizing them. Task guidelines are efficient and expeditious ways of proceeding pedagogically. However, educators need to consider carefully what impact their directions and procedures have on students.

Typically teachers think of creating more scaffolding of the task for beginners and less for more advanced students, but this is not necessarily true. Much depends on the task and purpose of task. Etudes are much more highly structured and carefully scaffolded than are compositions or parts of compositions that children create by themselves and bring to the teacher for feedback and commentary.

According to Reimer (2003), “Students should be asked to identify and solve compositional problems” (p.111). The authors agree, but with a note of caution: while students need to be engaged in problem-finding, teachers must be aware of the size of the problem that students are allowed to create for themselves. It is best to prevent found problems from taking on inhibiting proportions. Young composers should be encouraged to extend the boundaries of their learning, but teachers must at the same time guide students toward a path that allows for the completion of a satisfactory creative work. So some tempering of the enthusiasm may be advisable when some students select their own compositional projects.

Teachers must also have ideas about what they want children to learn from a composition project. This includes not only the intended product – the piece the student creates – but also what experiences in compositional thinking the student will have while working on the project. It is natural to focus on the eventual product that will be created, but the process may be even more important to what the student learns. Those processes must be included as part of the teacher’s creative thinking when designing composition lessons.

**Three Kinds of Compositional Thinking**

The students should be engaged in three modes of thinking within each task: analytical thinking, critical thinking, and creative thinking. The teacher can play an advisory role in each of these. Initially teachers may need to explicitly teach these modes of thinking by modeling them in various other activities or on whole-class composition tasks.

Students need to analyze what was included in the directions and then in the resulting composition. This analytically thinking is the basis of the structure of the composition. As a result of analytical thinking, sometimes students make deliberate decisions to alter the stated directions for expressive purposes. This should be encouraged by the teacher and used as a teachable moment for other young composers as well.

They need to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of their craftsmanship and aesthetic concerns within the composition. This evaluative thinking helps the students create and improve the expressivity of their music. Often it occurs spontaneously in young composers. Long before they have the technical language to explain their choices, they tell questioners that something simply “sounded right” or “just didn’t fit.”

Finally, they must also think creatively about the possibilities for alternative ways for accomplishing the same tasks. They need to be encouraged not rush to judgment by accepting their first idea as the best one, even if sometimes it does turn out to be the most appropriate solution. Teachers can model this for students. Student can role-play situations that address valuing everyone’s ideas and entertaining several possibilities at once.
Encouraging multiple answers to quick improvisational exercises can be one way of demonstrating this. One example of this is given in chapter six in the section on developing music ideas (p. 176). Another example could occur in a small group lesson. The students have mastered some short piece from their method books and can play it by ear or from memory. The teacher models a jazzy rhythmic variation on the tune and then each child takes a turn doing the same. As students become more fluent with this activity, it can lead to more idea generation in other musical settings. This musical brainstorming creates multiple options as young people simply generate as many ideas as possible in a short period of time.

**The Role of Sharing**

Teachers often believe it is important for students to share their compositions with audiences. However, is this a compositional need or an artifact of educational practice? Educators may need to hear some of the music that a student has created for the purpose of assessment or to determine the course of future instruction. Nevertheless, a piece of music can exist simply in the mind of a composer, or in the composer’s own notebooks or recordings. It does not need to be shared publicly in order to be a “real composition.” Students and their teachers should understand that a composition is a means for making meaning whether it is shared or kept personal. Creations do not need to be shared to be of value. The act of composing is an act of meaning making in sound that assists in the development of the self. It is that personal meaning making that makes the act of composing so valuable and precious to humankind.

**Writing Task Guidelines: A Quick Summary**

Here is a quick summary of the things teachers should consider when designing task guidelines. Decide on the intended product – is it a compositional etude or a composition? Determine a minimum and maximum length, if any. Specify the musical considerations: are there principles, techniques or elements that must be included? Determine the allotted work time and class time that is available. Specify the mode of preservation. Decide on the details of sharing or performing the piece and who the intended audience is.

**Assessing Compositions**

Chapter five deals with this topic in detail, but deciding whether or not student compositions will be assessed or evaluated formally should be part of a teacher’s planning process. Here are some things related to assessment to consider while planning:

- Should these compositions receive only feedback or commentary or should they be assessed more formally?
- If the compositions will be assessed, will they be assessed by composer, the teacher, the composer’s peers or other individuals or groups?
- What tools (checklists, rubrics, etc.) will the assessors use?
- Will the assessment be based on accurate task completion, the musicality of the resulting product, or both?
- How will the assessment be used? If the composition will be subject to formal evaluation, what purpose will that evaluation serve? If the composition is to receive only feedback or commentary, to whom will that be given – the student, the teacher or both?

All of these issues are considered in greater detail in the next chapter.
Making Connections: Linking Composing to Other Areas of Music Instruction and to Other Disciplines.

The section of this chapter on co-compositional activities suggested some ways to connect other areas of music instruction to composing. More suggestions are included in each chapter of part two of this book. Children studying instruments learn the techniques of their instruments more readily, play more expressively and read notation with more fluency when composition projects are included in their lessons. Young children sing more readily when the teacher listens to and values their songs. Students seem to listen more intently to the works of others when they have created works of their own.

When thinking about composition projects, a wide range of extensions may be possible. Extensions may be found by considering what students could do in the next class after the projects are finished that might be closely related to their projects or a logical extension of their work. Similarly, teachers can consider what the next composing project might be. While it may be easier to think about this after completing the project and consulting the students for their ideas about the next project, the teacher should make a note of any thoughts she has on the topic as she plans.

Finally, there may be a way of extending the work at home. The simplest of these is the request that the child play a recording or perform the piece for the members of his or her household. Completed projects can be sent home with students with an accompanying note from the teacher. Alternatively, the projects can be posted on a school website. Then an email or text message can be sent to parents informing them that project is available and encouraging them to listen to the piece and support their student’s efforts with positive comments.

Sometimes classroom teachers and others have children create new words to familiar tunes and consider that composing. Creating new lyrics is not music composition, but lyric writing. However, many times those activities could become real composition projects if they were done collaboratively between the classroom teachers, the music teachers and the students they both share.

Many projects involve creating and presenting some sort of assembly or show to demonstrate some area of learning. It is possible for the various teachers that share students to collaborate on such a project. Creating Original Opera, sponsored by Education at the Met in New York, is one process that accomplishes this. This program requires formal training and collaboration between at least one music teacher and one classroom teacher. Students have done productions at various ages from six year olds upward and at locations all over the United States. The end result is a public performance that is predicated on original music composed by the children. (See http://www.metoperafamily.org/education/educators/creating_original.aspx for more information about this program.)

Music teachers are often expected to produce assemblies or shows that are related to some school theme. How much more entertaining these might be to audiences when the children create at least a portion of the materials being presented. Moving-up ceremonies and graduations are perfect opportunities for this type of collaboration, but they require plenty of advance planning and cooperation from everyone involved.

One end of year project with primary grades in a first and second grade school was called Camp Skeeter (short for mosquito). During the final week of school, the students in grades one and two participated in activities that resembled those one might find at a summer day camp in the woods. Part of the exercise was designing cabin logos for the various camper groups and creating camper theme songs as well. Similarly, kindergarteners can create songs for their
teachers (see chapter seven for details) and sang them at kindergarten graduation ceremonies. Adding music to established and valuable school programs is a wonderful contribution for young composers to make to school life.

While composing is the most intellectually demanding of the musical arts, it is also the most intimate. It draws on all the personal musical experiences that the student has previously had to create a piece and alters the nature of future experiences once the composition has been created. Composing is not a journey into the music, but a journey within music that ultimately leads back to the composer. The nature of music does not change, but the self, the creator, does. The composer has accomplished something and expressed something that alters the way she or he views the musical world.

A Scenario: Ms. Jones Plans a Project on Creating a School Song

Ms. Jones turned to her bookshelf and removed her copy of Minds On Music: Composing for Creative and Critical Thinking. She flipped to the page where the blank composition planning template was located. As she looked at it, she began to think about the various issues involved in composing a school song. Most of her students were at the beginner level of composing. She decided that the competition would be open to any one, but that she would focus her efforts on her fourth and fifth graders, who were the oldest students her school.

She would plan some lessons that were co-compositional lessons, but would allow the children to work independently on their pieces at home if they wished. Ms. Clement was hoping to have a song as soon as possible, so Ms. Jones decided six weeks would be about right. This would give about two weeks to plan thoroughly her lessons and locate materials, and two weeks for instruction. The children would have to turn in their songs on December 1st and the voting for the winning song could take place before the winter holiday break.

Ms. Jones decided to take this opportunity to introduce most of the musical principles to the children and not to focus on any one principle specifically. She decided to encourage the children to work on their songs individually or in partners. She also decided to talk about famous song writing teams such as Gilbert and Sullivan and Rogers and Hammerstein and to play some examples of their work as a co-compositional activity.

The children would be allowed to use any tools they wanted to create and preserve their compositions. Because Ms. Jones had a good ear and a strong theory background, she felt she could transcribe whatever the children created into standard notation. She did feel that the song would have to be singable and able to be written down so that others could perform it. She knew the children would need some experiences with school songs to help them understand what made a suitable school song. She also knew they would need help with text setting. She decided that all classes would try to write a song as whole classes in the next few weeks so that she could help them with some ideas about how text fits music.

For guidelines, she decided to limit the songs to no more than eight phrases, the that range should be from Middle C to fourth space E and most of the notes should be on the lower end of that range. The words should be an original poem about the school that rhymes and that would be understood by the youngest children, but not too simple for older children.

Ms. Jones decided to brainstorm possible topics to include in a school song before singing songs from other schools and to add to the list as appropriate ideas came up while they were singing. This list would remain posted in the classroom and copies would be available for the children to take home. The children would be reminded weekly about the contest. They would
be encouraged to bring Ms. Jones a recording or score of their songs when they were finished, or to come in and sing them for her if they could not write them down or record them at home.

The children would be told that a panel of judges who were musicians and teachers would be listening to their songs without knowing whose song was being heard, and would select five songs that the school would then vote on to select a winner. The chorus would “premiere” the song (“What a great way to teach this musical term,” thought Ms. Jones) at their February concert.

Ms. Jones sat back and smiled. Tomorrow she would begin planning the specific lessons to introduce the project to the children. She would email a few of her colleagues from other schools to see if they could send her copies of their school songs and she would find a copy of the song from her previous school. This was beginning to look like a great way to teach the children a lot about singing, songs and composition.

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Unit: Composing a School Song
Project: School Song for Our New School
Level: Intermediate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning Elements</th>
<th>Thinking guides</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Composer Characteristics</td>
<td>Grade level: 3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skill level: better for intermediate, and advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Setting: Classroom and home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time allocation estimate: two classes and work at home. Completion in one month</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus Principle (supporting principles)</td>
<td>All will apply. No specific focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compositional Capacities</td>
<td>Intention: Teacher directed but student involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expressive: feelings school pride and solidarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Artistic Craftsmanship: text setting; qualities of a march</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compositional Context</td>
<td>Probably mostly individual, but allow for partners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tools</td>
<td>Instruments: whatever the student can play including voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preservation: invented or traditional notation, recordings as suits the skill level of the child</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prerequisites</td>
<td>Concepts: what is a school song, Lines that rhyme</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Musical Skills: performance skill helpful, text setting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intuitive Understandings: balanced phrases, sense of tonality and meter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Co-compositional activities</td>
<td>Singing other school songs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Guidelines</td>
<td>Product: a song with lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Length: eight lines</td>
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<td>Specs: range from middle C to fourth space E. Easily sung</td>
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<td>Time: one month</td>
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<td>Preservation: recording or score or both</td>
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<td>Performance: must be able to perform it for the teacher</td>
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| Assessments | What: by a panel of judges who will pick 4 - 5 finalists. School will then vote.  
How: discussion among the judges and within classrooms; voting |
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<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>Chorus to premier the song at the winter concert. Older classes may help create the arrangement. All classes will learn the winning song after it is chosen.</td>
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</table>

**References**
