# Making Composition Accessible:
## A Practical Approach for All Music Teachers

### Abstract Questions this presentation explores:

Who is composition for? What is the process of composition?

How can we begin introducing it at any level?

What materials can help make the process simple, meaningful, and engaging?

Presented by Hannah E. Adhikari (November 6, 2026)
Mississippi Music Teachers Association State Conference

# Composing is Expression, Not a Goal

**Composition is for everyone!  But only WHEN…?**

Saying composing is for everyone, but then adding conditions, is exactly why composition can start to feel like a GOAL to attain instead of simply being what it is: EXPRESSION.

**I began to introduce composition to every student. I developed a 5-step process to continue to bring out my students expressive sides and to add onto their knowledge of music!**

- **5 step adaptable process** by Hannah Adhikari.
  1. The IMAGERY Core
  2. The IDEA PAGE, 3 levels: lower, mid, and upper level.
  3. The Listening and Revising Stage
  4. The Transferring Stage
  5. Finishing Touches

# The Value of Adding Composition to Lessons

**Composing is creating, and creating is liberating!**

## What is composition at its core?

- A way to express yourself through creation
- A compass to direct you to confidence in yourself and ideas

## Why composition is valuable to students

- Ownership of something personal
- Confidence in their own opinions
- Eagerness to play and share
- Motivation to keep learning

# Composing with Simple Materials

**Before we begin, prepare your studio with the right materials.**

## Writing Scores by Hand

- **Pencils** and eraser
- **Blank paper** or ruled paper
- Staff paper (or buy a manuscript book if desired)
  Free staff paper printables at *hannahehmusic.com/students/resources*

## Utilize software or technology you already have

- Input the student's COMPLETED score into **music notation software** to create a polished digital pdf *(MuseScore or Dorico Free)*

# 1. The Creative Process: The IMAGERY Core

**I developed what I call the IMAGERY core (concept and musical styles) to give students something physical to attach their ideas to.**

## Concept: a specific and descriptive idea or image that acts as inspiration.

Image Scenery Color Animal Hobby Memory Form Style Person Emotion

## Musical styles: something physical and musical to attach their concept to.

**SOME BASIC STYLES**

**Tempo:** speed (slow, medium, fast, allegro, vivace, etc.)

**Mood:** emotion attached (serious, happy, sad, angry, etc.)

**Range:** where they are on their instrument (low-middle-high, 8va, 8vb, etc.)

**Dynamics:** volume (soft, medium, loud, crescendo, subito, etc.)

# The IMAGERY Core Example

**Start with a concept, match a musical style to that concept, then begin writing your notes and letter names!**

## Concept: Bumble bee buzzing through a flower field.

## Musical style choices may be:

**Tempo: fast, Allegro**
**Range: middle notes**

**Mood: happy**
**Dynamics: loud, *f***

*NOTE: Learning "how to imagine" may vary from one student to the next. Offer a starting point or a match one or two musical styles FOR them until they can do it on their own!*

# 2. The Composing Process: The IDEA PAGE

**The IDEA PAGE is the rough draft of the student's composition.**
**It offers an approachable way to get thoughts on paper.**
**3 levels: lower, mid, and upper level.**

## IDEA PAGE Tips

- The IDEA PAGE is a helpful way to initiate the composing.
- Choose an IDEA PAGE level based on your student's COMPOSITION experience, not by their age or instrument skill level.
- Skilled, older musicians may not have much experience creating.
- As you assign these steps, watch how quickly the student is grasping it.

# Lower Level IDEA PAGE

**Students NEW to composing write a basic IDEA PAGE on blank paper until mastered.**

## COMPOSING STEPS

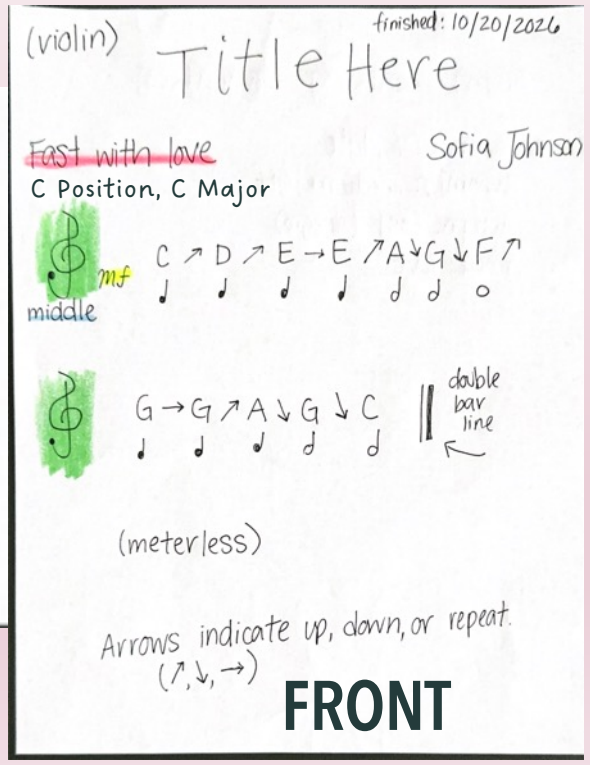
**Assign 1 per week on blank paper:**

1. **Imagine and write concept**
2. **Match concept to musical styles**

**Assign 1-3 per week:**

1. **Draw clefs for chosen range (8va/8vb)**
2. **Meterless. Teacher chooses position, key.**
3. **Write musical styles in together.**
4. **Student chooses letter names from position.**
5. **Draw arrows between letters.**
6. **Draw notes beneath letters. Rests between.**
7. **Draw double bar line at end.**



# Mid-Level Composer IDEA PAGE

**Students move on to using meter concepts and begin organizing music into measures and systems until mastered.**

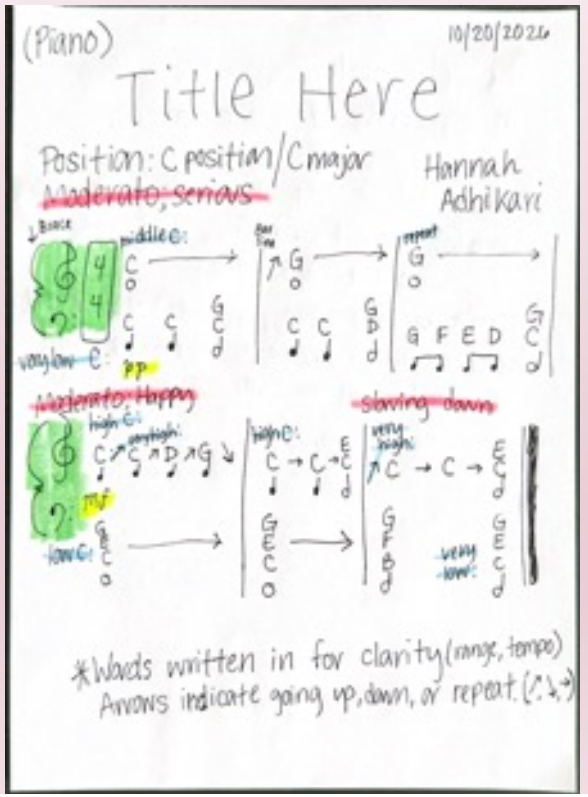
## COMPOSING STEPS

**Assign on blank paper:**

1. **Imagine concept. Match musical styles.**

**Assign 1-2 per week:**

1. **Draw clefs for chosen range (8va/8vb/loco)**
2. **Choose meter. Teacher chooses position, key.**
3. **Write musical styles in as they go.**
4. **Student chooses letter names from position.**
5. **Draw arrows between letters.**
6. **Draw notes beneath letters. Rests between.**
7. **Draw double bar line at end.**



# Upper Level Composer IDEA PAGE

## Students move on to writing their IDEA PAGE on the staff.

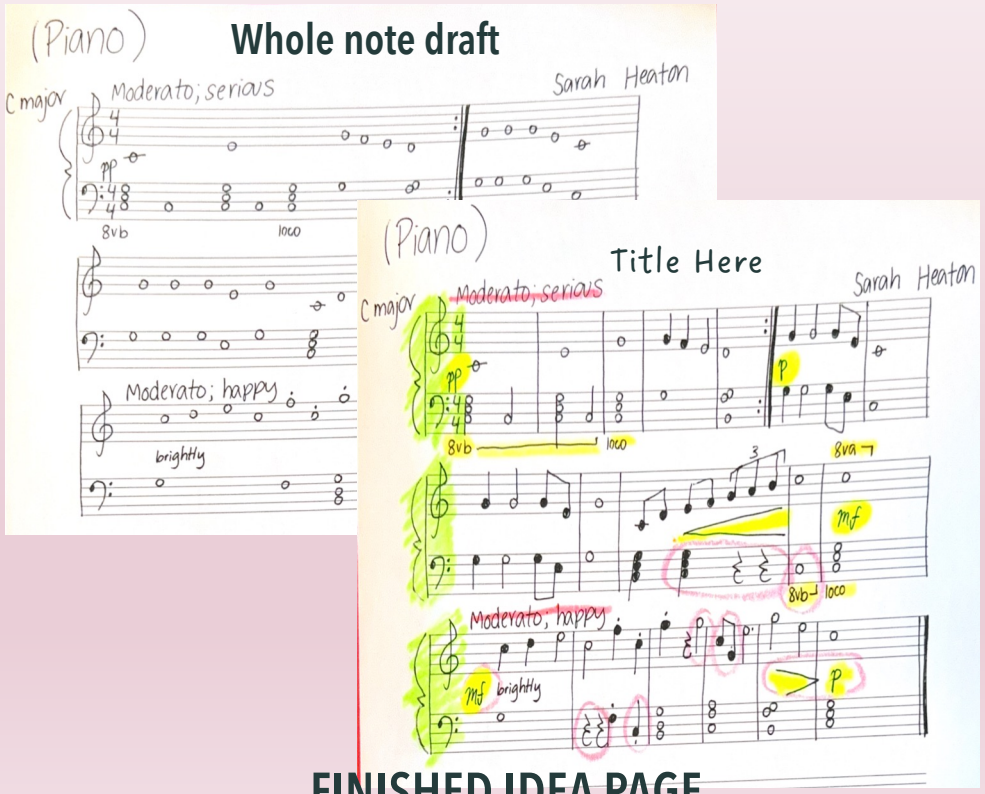
### COMPOSING STEPS

**Assign on blank paper:**

1. Imagine concept. Match musical styles.

**Assign 1-3 per week on staff paper:**

1. Draw clefs, grand staff (8va/8vb as you go)
2. Choose meter, position, key, key signature.
3. Choose notes. Write as whole first.
4. Tap and play; add in note values/rhythm.
5. Adjust stems, rhythms, or notes with Teacher.
6. Draw bar lines; adjust note values.
7. Draw rests in empty staves. Add new notes.
8. Draw double bar line at end.




FINISHED IDEA PAGE

# 3. The Listening and Revising Stage

**Teachers play the IDEA PAGE exactly as written during the lesson, so students can hear their work all at once. Ask about any additions, changes, or corrections they may want, and assign those changes as homework.**

***While you play, ask the student to watch their IDEA PAGE to catch anything that they don't like.**

**ADJUST THEORY FIRST: Immediate correction on score format or theory.**

"This part needs to line up." "We forgot to draw a rest here." "You want soft here, so let's draw a *p.* "
"Change this to a quarter note, if you want 1 beat." "This bar line is missing."

**ASK ABOUT THE SOUND NEXT: Use open ended questions.**

**Instead of…**"Do you like how that sounds?" "Is that what you want?"
**Ask questions like…**"What should we change in row 1? What do you want to add or take away?"
"Which musical style didn't sound right? What should we change it to?"

# 4. The Transferring Stage

**Next, transfer the completed IDEA PAGE along with additions, changes, or corrections onto a new sheet of staff paper.**

## For young or new composers:

- **Do not transfer to staff.** Instead, keep the complete IDEA PAGE as a final **pre-staff score**.
- Help the student transfer **1-5 measures** at a time **during the lesson**.

## For older or adult composers:

- Teachers **assign # measures** to transfer **at home**. **Assign any corrections of the ongoing score at next lesson** (format or music changes) as needed**.**
- Teachers help the student transfer music into **music notation software during the lesson**.

## Maximizing the review time at the next lesson:

- Assign # **measures** of IDEA PAGE to transfer **at home.** Review **a little at a time during lesson**.

# 5. Finishing Touches: Title, Full Name, & Date.

**After transferring, the student has completed their final score!**
**Help them choose a title that represents their music and concept.**

## A descriptive title works wonders!

- Transform their initial concept into a shorter title.
- Choose a title that feels different
- Provokes more imagery into the piece alongside the student's concept!

## Placement on score:



# Realistic Time Used During the Lesson

| # Weeks | Student Homework Assignment | Lesson Time Used |
|---|---|---|
| **1-4 weeks** | Assigning the IMAGERY CORE | **1-3 minutes**: assigning<br>**2-5 minutes**: reviewing and assigning |
| **1-8 weeks** | Assign 7-8 steps for IDEA PAGE. 1-3 steps per week. | **1-3 minutes:** assigning<br>**3-7 minutes:** reviewing and assigning |
| **1-3 weeks** | During lesson, Teacher plays piece. Asking student changes. Change 1-3 things per week. | **5-10 minutes:** during lesson time and assigning changes. |
| **1-6 weeks** | **Transfer IDEA PAGE** onto staff paper as complete final score. Teacher helps transfer a little at a time in-lesson or assigns to the student as homework. Answer questions or fix in-lesson as needed. | **3-10 minutes:** Teacher helps transfer. During lesson. 1-3 measures per week<br>**1-3 minutes:** Assign as homework.<br><br>**3-7 minutes:** To answer questions, fix |
| **1 week** | **Write title, full name, and date on final score.** | **1-3 minutes:** assign or during lesson |
| **1-4 weeks** | Teacher input final score into notation software for a polished digital pdf. Enter competitions. | **NONE** if on Teacher's own time.<br>**7-10 minutes:** with student per week |

# How I Adapted As the Student Grew

**Add to the process they already know: the IMAGERY Core in step 1.**

## Concept: Add new musical aspects or incorporate exercises.

**Rhythm:** ear training, writing the rhythm of familiar song, notes vs rests, triplets, new meters, etc.

**Forms:** rondo, through composed, sonatina/sonata, prelude, monophonic, waltz, character piece, etc.

**Harmonic language:** new key signature, tonic, subdominant, dominant, mediant, modulation, etc.

**Musical structure:** question-and-answer, phrases, fragmentation, building on a motif, etc.

## More Musical Styles: Add on to the basic styles from the IMAGERY core.

**Articulation:** legato, staccato, accents, tone, instrument specific, etc.

**Exercises**: scales, chords, inversions, arpeggios, chromaticism, etc.

**Add New Intervals**: melodic or harmonic intervals, steps, skips, $4^{th}$, $5^{th}$, 8ve, whole or half step, etc.

**Unique Aspects**: gliss, pedaling, body movement, accompaniments, new instruments, embouchure, etc.

# How I Motivated My Students

**I realized my students don't need a perfect teacher, just a willing one.**

## Make composition enjoyable. Let it be an outlet, not a requirement.

- Allow them to compose what they enjoy. Use repertoire to continue giving them what they need.
- Only correct theory or the score formatting. Everything else is a suggestion!

## Enter online composition competitions for motivation to compose!

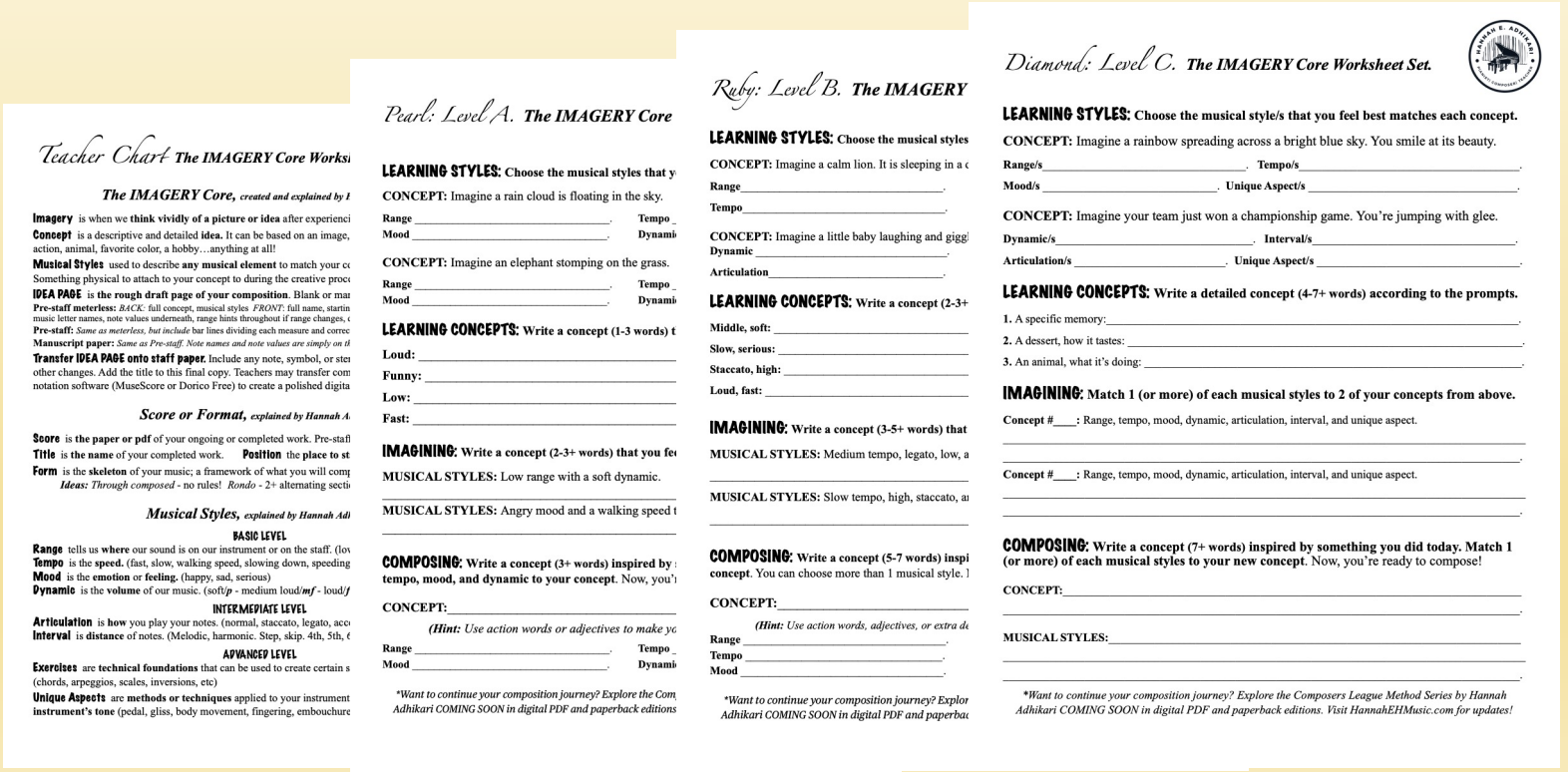
- **NFMC:** National Federation of Music Clubs Junior Composer Competition. *(1st-3rd place cash prize)*
- **MTNA:** Music Teachers National Association, Composer Competition (State AND National!)

## When you assign and review their music together, join them in their journey!

- There's always more to learn; for. Teacher and student!
- Join them on their journey! Be curious. Show your own creative side in front of them.
- Genuine encouragement far superseded how much composition knowledge I could give.

# Extra Materials by Hannah Adhikari

## **IMAGERY Core worksheet set** (FREE printable at *hannahehmusic.com )*



*Teacher Chart* **The IMAGERY Core Worksh**

***The IMAGERY Core,*** *created and explained by H*

**Imagery** is when we **think vividly of a picture or idea** after experienci
**Concept** is a descriptive and detailed **idea.** It can be based on an image, action, animal, favorite color, a hobby…anything at all!
**Musical Styles** used to describe **any musical element** to match your cc Something physical to attach to your concept to during the creative proc
**IDEA PAGE** is **the rough draft page of your composition**. Blank or mar
**Pre-staff meterless:** *BACK*: full concept, musical styles *FRONT*: full name, startin music letter names, note values underneath, range hints throughout if range changes, c
**Pre-staff:** *Same as meterless, but include* bar lines dividing each measure and correc
**Manuscript paper:** *Same as Pre-staff. Note names and note values are simply on th*
**Transfer IDEA PAGE onto staff paper.** Include any note, symbol, or ster other changes. Add the title to this final copy. Teachers may transfer com notation software (MuseScore or Dorico Free) to create a polished digita

***Score or Format,*** *explained by Hannah A*

**Score** is **the paper or pdf** of your ongoing or completed work. Pre-staf
**Title** is **the name** of your completed work. **Position** the **place to st**
**Form** is the **skeleton** of your music; a framework of what you will comp
***Ideas:*** *Through composed* - no rules! *Rondo* - 2+ alternating secti

***Musical Styles,*** *explained by Hannah Ad*

**BASIC LEVEL**

**Range** tells us **where** our sound is on our instrument or on the staff. (lov
**Tempo** is the **speed.** (fast, slow, walking speed, slowing down, speeding
**Mood** is the **emotion** or **feeling.** (happy, sad, serious)
**Dynamic** is the **volume** of our music. (soft/***p*** - medium loud/***mf*** - loud/***f***

**INTERMEDIATE LEVEL**

**Articulation** is **how** you play your notes. (normal, staccato, legato, acc
**Interval** is **distance** of notes. (Melodic, harmonic. Step, skip. 4th, 5th, 6

**ADVANCED LEVEL**

**Exercises** are **technical foundations** that can be used to create certain s (chords, arpeggios, scales, inversions, etc)
**Unique Aspects** are **methods or techniques** applied to your instrument **instrument's tone** (pedal, gliss, body movement, fingering, embouchure

*Pearl: Level A.* **The IMAGERY Core**

**LEARNING STYLES: Choose the musical styles that y**

**CONCEPT:** Imagine a rain cloud is floating in the sky.

**Range** _____. **Tempo** _
**Mood** _____. **Dynami**

**CONCEPT:** Imagine an elephant stomping on the grass.

**Range** _____. **Tempo** _
**Mood** _____. **Dynami**

**LEARNING CONCEPTS: Write a concept (1-3 words) t**

**Loud:** _____
**Funny:** _____
**Low:** _____
**Fast:** _____

**IMAGINING: Write a concept (2-3+ words) that you fe**

**MUSICAL STYLES:** Low range with a soft dynamic.

_____

**MUSICAL STYLES:** Angry mood and a walking speed t

_____

**COMPOSING: Write a concept (3+ words) inspired by tempo, mood, and dynamic to your concept**. Now, you'

**CONCEPT:** _____

***(Hint:*** *Use action words or adjectives to make yo*

**Range** _____. **Tempo** _
**Mood** _____. **Dynami**

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*Ruby: Level B.* **The IMAGERY**

**LEARNING STYLES: Choose the musical styles**

**CONCEPT:** Imagine a calm lion. It is sleeping in a c

**Range**_____.
**Tempo**_____.

**CONCEPT:** Imagine a little baby laughing and gigg
**Dynamic** _____.
**Articulation**_____.

**LEARNING CONCEPTS: Write a concept (2-3+**

**Middle, soft:** _____
**Slow, serious:** _____
**Staccato, high:** _____
**Loud, fast:** _____

**IMAGINING: Write a concept (3-5+ words) that**

**MUSICAL STYLES:** Medium tempo, legato, low, a

_____

**MUSICAL STYLES:** Slow tempo, high, staccato, a

_____

**COMPOSING: Write a concept (5-7 words) inspi concept**. You can choose more than 1 musical style.

**CONCEPT:** _____

***(Hint:*** *Use action words, adjectives, or extra d*

**Range** _____.
**Tempo** _____.
**Mood** _____.

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*Diamond: Level C.* **The IMAGERY Core Worksheet Set.**

**LEARNING STYLES: Choose the musical style/s that you feel best matches each concept.**

**CONCEPT:** Imagine a rainbow spreading across a bright blue sky. You smile at its beauty.

**Range/s**_____. **Tempo/s**_____.
**Mood/s** _____. **Unique Aspect/s** _____.

**CONCEPT:** Imagine your team just won a championship game. You're jumping with glee.

**Dynamic/s**_____. **Interval/s**_____.
**Articulation/s** _____. **Unique Aspect/s** _____.

**LEARNING CONCEPTS: Write a detailed concept (4-7+ words) according to the prompts.**

**1.** A specific memory:_____.
**2.** A dessert, how it tastes: _____.
**3.** An animal, what it's doing: _____.

**IMAGINING: Match 1 (or more) of each musical styles to 2 of your concepts from above.**

**Concept #____:** Range, tempo, mood, dynamic, articulation, interval, and unique aspect.

_____
_____.

**Concept #____:** Range, tempo, mood, dynamic, articulation, interval, and unique aspect.

_____
_____.

**COMPOSING: Write a concept (7+ words) inspired by something you did today. Match 1 (or more) of each musical styles to your new concept**. Now, you're ready to compose!

**CONCEPT:**_____
_____.

**MUSICAL STYLES:**_____
_____
_____.

**Want to continue your composition journey? Explore the Composers League Method Series by Hannah Adhikari COMING SOON in digital PDF and paperback editions. Visit HannahEHMusic.com for updates!*

# Questions & Free Resources

## Questions about the 5 step process?
## How to incorporate a certain theory concept?
## How to adjust for a specific student scenario?

**IMAGERY core worksheet set** and this **complete powerpoint pdf**
available for FREE on my website! (permission to reproduce)

*STAFF PAPER PRINTABLES: hannahehmusic.com/students/resources*
*POWERPOINT PDF: hannahehmusic.com/awards-research*
*FREE IMAGERY CORE WORKSHEETS: hannahehmusic/composersleague*

# Composing Steps from Start to Finish

### Step 1, IMAGERY Core

•Imagine and write concept
•Match concept to # musical styles (tempo, range, mood, dynamics, articulations, intervals, unique aspect)

### Step 2, IDEA PAGE and Composing

•Write in meter/meterless, clefs, position/key and musical styles together.
•Assign composing. Notes (letter names), note or rest values, draw bar lines.
•Adjust theory. Stems, score format, lining up notes, add rests, fix values, etc. Draw double bar line at end.

### Step 3, Listening and Refining

•Teacher plays IDEA PAGE as written. Adjust theory first. Ask student suggestions.
•Teacher assign: theory corrections, changes, additions. Assign student suggestions.
•Teacher suggestions on music or style. Assign if student desires. Student has final say.

### Step 4, Transferring to Staff Paper

•Transfer finished IDEA PAGE onto new staff paper during lesson or as homework.
•Optional: Do not transfer to staff, leave finished IDEA PAGE as a pre-staff score or input into music notation software.

### Step 5, Finishing Touches

•Add title on top center, student's full name on top right, and finish date above title.