



**London
Sinfonietta**

Teacher Resource

COMPOSITION CHALLENGES

**Open up the world of composition and
invite your students to write music for the
London Sinfonietta.**

For KS2 and KS3 (all levels of experience and ability)

COMPOSITION CHALLENGES



Welcome to the London Sinfonietta's Composition Challenges. This series of special commissions for schools invites young people to compose music for us.

We want to support your students to become composers, develop their creativity, explore different sound worlds and craft interesting and innovative new music. With each challenge we encourage you and your class to think like composers and ask these key questions:

Why do I want to create a new piece of music?

How can I do this using sound?

Who am I creating it for?

I love the sound of the violin, I want to show off those beautiful sounds for other people to enjoy

I want to write music to warn people about climate change

I want to experiment with sounds to invent something that nobody has ever heard before

Sitting in the park on a warm, sunny day makes me feel really happy, I wonder if I can recreate that feeling using music?

I want to write a piece of music that tells the story of my culture and where I come from

COMPOSITION CHALLENGES



Each challenge consists of three simple steps:

1. **Watch the composition challenge film.** This will be your starting point for creative composition. It will introduce your students to how they can compose and invite them to listen, evaluate and discuss what they see and hear.
2. **Use this teacher resource** to help support practical composing in the classroom.
3. **Submit your students' compositions to the London Sinfonietta.** We will share their work on our website, perform it or perhaps showcase it in our annual Sound Out Schools Concert. We can also offer live, interactive sessions (online or in person) with our musicians who can give your students feedback on their compositions.

Submit your compositions to compositionchallenge@londonsinfonietta.org.uk

Curriculum learning

Each challenge will support KS2 and 3 curriculum learning as well as developing young people's wider creative and musical skills. Challenges are focused on composing but also include listening and performing activity. Young people will develop their skills;

- as composers working on their own and with others.
- to understand how music is created and communicated.
- to organise and manipulate ideas within musical structures (including pitch, duration, texture, structure and musical notation).

COMPOSITION CHALLENGE #4: DEEP LISTENING

SUITABLE FOR:
All ages and abilities
No instruments or
notation necessary



**Create a new piece of music inspired by
listening to the sounds around you.**

Deep Listening is inspired by American composer **Pauline Oliveros**. It is inspired both by her piece, *Earth Ears*, and by her approach to music which she called *Deep Listening*. The piece can be played by any instrument or object that makes a sound. Oliveros described *Earth Ears* as a ‘sonic ritual’ – i.e. something carefully laid out or ceremonial that uses sound. *Deep Listening* encourages people to concentrate all their energies on listening and to listen to everything they can hear. This approach overlaps with meditation and other mindfulness techniques.

This Composition Challenge encourages young people to develop their listening skills, listen to the world around them and then to create some rhythmic patterns with instruments or found objects and to layer and structure those to create more complex sounds.

Deep Listening invites students to create short compositions inspired by the sounds they can make on classroom instruments or with objects they have found like pebbles and sticks. There is no need to use any traditional notation in the compositions and the challenge encourages young people to be imaginative and inventive in the way they compose their piece. Using both ‘real’ musical instruments and/or found objects allows everyone to take part and the structure of the composition, inspired by Pauline Oliveros’ structures, gives young composers a clear and direct way into organising sound.

COMPOSITION

CHALLENGE #4:

DEEP LISTENING



GET STARTED

Use our short film as a starting point for composing a piece inspired by Earth Ears. We suggest you spend at least two or three sessions with your class, developing and trying out ideas before you create your final piece. Watch the film with your class. Pause it whenever you like to talk about what you are seeing and hearing and encourage observations and comments.

Listen

Try a minute (or 30 seconds) of listening in the classroom. After a start signal, get the class to listen intently for one minute without writing anything down. At the end of the time, have a discussion in the class about what they could hear – you can write down the sounds in order on the whiteboard OR write them down like mind-map. Encourage the class to think about sounds within the room and outside – distant sounds.

Listening Walk

Before you start your listening walk, challenge the learners to remember what they heard at each point rather than write anything as you go. When you are writing, you are no longer listening and the point of the exercise is to treat listening as the primary sense. The geography of the walk will give them a natural structure when they come to write it down.

Encourage your class to think like composers

Encourage your class to think like composers. Decide what instrument or object you are going to use – choose on the basis of the sort of sound(s) you want to make. Some instruments/objects make hard sounds, others softer sounds. If you are using a musical instrument you can make a sound on it in a traditional way or you can experiment with an extended technique (see glossary). If you are using a found object – encourage the learners to experiment with the sounds it can make – you can strike it, rub it, shake it etc. Composers love to explore and experiment with sound!

COMPOSITION

CHALLENGE #4:

DEEP LISTENING



GET CREATIVE

This challenge encourages you to explore all the different sounds you can get from a musical instrument or a found object. You can make your piece as simple or as complex as you like.

Although you can do this as a whole class, it is advisable to work in groups of between 3 and 6 people. This allows each person to compose/invent their own rhythmic patterns and it allows their choice of sounds to be heard.

Need some inspiration?

- Here is a large group of people performing *Earth Ears*
<https://youtu.be/h1vxkgELZcE>
- In Anna Clyne's piece *Steelworks*, the sound of the machinery is blended with musical instruments
<https://youtu.be/1yph3HoV28w>
- Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Stimmung* is a piece for voices using vowel sounds and the music moves very slowly
<https://youtu.be/3hPkJW95jsw>

COMPOSITION

CHALLENGE #4:

DEEP LISTENING



INVENTING A MUSICAL PATTERN



Once your students have found their instrument or object, ask them to find a good way of making a sound on it. This may be by striking it, or scraping it etc.

They only need to make one sound at this point.

Now for the first part of our sonic ritual, ask each student to invent (compose) a rhythmic pattern on their instrument. Keep the patterns simple so that they are easy to repeat very exactly. It is the exact repetition that is crucial. If learners are stuck, then getting them to think of a sentence can offer a memorable rhythm (perhaps their own name or something related to a topic they are currently studying).

Slower speeds (tempi) and quieter dynamics are most suitable to the piece.

- Ask each member of the group to play their patterns to each other
- Ask the group to play their patterns at the same time and remember to ask them to listen to how all the sounds combine (one member of the group might have to count everyone in!)
- As an extension, you could ask the group to add some structure – ask one member to start (and keep repeating their pattern) and then each other member joins in until everyone is playing. This is a good way of exploring the music's texture – the combination and density of sound

For the second part of the piece, you can repeat the steps above BUT ask the students to find a different sound from their instrument/object and create their new pattern using this sound - make it as different as possible from their first sound to create real contrast.

COMPOSITION

CHALLENGE #4:

DEEP LISTENING



SILENCE AND SPACE

Encourage the students to think about how they might use silence in their piece and how the piece could feel calm and thoughtful.

- Try experimenting with using silence at the start or in the middle of the piece
- Experiment with how long the silences should be, always listening to the other sounds that are being played in the group and choosing whether to incorporate short or longer silences
- Keep the dynamics of the music quite soft – the musical terms are piano and pianissimo
- Keep very still at the end of the piece so that the silence at the end is part of the performance

COMPOSITION



CHALLENGE #4: DEEP LISTENING

CREATE YOUR PIECE

Once you have composed the two parts of the ritual get the groups to think about how to put the finishing touches to their compositions. This also doubles as rehearsals for their performance or recording.

- What order do they start in?
- How does the first part finish?
- What order do they come in for the second part?
- How does the piece end?
- When and where can they use silence as part of the piece?

Encourage everyone to try different versions of their piece until they find the version they prefer. Composers often use this sort of reflection and editing to get their own pieces as perfect as they can.

Find a way of writing the piece down. This can be as a list of instructions or could even use some simple musical or graphic (pictorial) notation.

COMPOSITION

CHALLENGE #4:

GLOSSARY



Composer someone who writes/imagines/creates music. In Latin, the word means 'one who puts together'.

Commission the act of inviting someone to compose a piece of music (and, at professional level, the act of paying the composer to write it).

Dynamics a term that relates to volume in music. We can use English words like loud or quiet. Traditionally, we use Italian words for these: forte and piano.

Texture this describes how dense or light a piece of music is. If there are many notes being heard at once, the texture is often described as dense. If the music has fewer instruments or perhaps the notes move more slowly, the texture can be described as lighter. There are many imaginative ways of describing texture in music as there are in visual art or even food.

Expressive marking in music, this is the 'how' not the 'what'. In traditional musical notation, pitch, volume etc are often absolute but the expressive marking will tell the performer what the mood or intention of the note is. Playwrights use this when they give an instruction prior to a line being spoken. Like many musical terms, musicians have traditionally used Italian words (i.e. dolce means 'gently') but in modern times, words in the language of the composer are very common.

Extended technique a technique of playing your instrument that is in some way unorthodox – using a different part of the instrument to generate the sound or creating a very different sound from what is expected. Lots of modern composers ask for extended techniques and many of them are now very common for instrumentalists to learn. A good example would be for a piano player to lean inside the piano and pluck the strings with their fingers.

Tempo is the speed that the music moves. This is most obviously heard in the pulse or beat of the music. A slower tempo is good for ritualistic music

Structure refers to the shape of the whole piece and the journey through the music. This can be heard really clearly in pop music where we refer to verse and chorus

Graphic notation is where we use other sorts of notation to capture the music we have composed so rather than using traditional musical notes on a staff, we use colours, shapes, lines, pictures and even written instructions to capture our composition.

COMPOSITION CHALLENGES

The London Sinfonietta is one of the world's leading contemporary music ensembles. We focus on performing works by living composers. We often commission composers to write music especially for us.

Composition Challenges is part of our Sound Out Schools Programme. For more information please contact us at compositionchallenge@londonsinfonietta.org.uk or visit our website www.londonsinfonietta.org.uk

