

SELF-HELP FOR DEVELOPING COMPOSITIONAL SKILLS

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Dear Composers: If you have lost access to your composition teacher or simply prefer to study on your own, I offer the following educational approach: *Self-Help for Composers*. I hope this process will prove useful, and if it does, that you will share it with others. Enjoy!

STEP 1

Choose a work written by another composer that meets the following criteria:

1. You've not previously studied the work in depth.
2. You like the work or at least are curious about some aspect of it.
3. You have access to both the printed music (in either hard or soft copy) and a recording.

STEP 2

Listen to the whole work but **do not** look at the printed music.

STEP 3

Choose a 5- to 30-second segment of the work that intrigues you. Listen to the segment several times and then try to write it down (transcribe it). Do your best to find a notational solution for **all** musical parameters, including meters, pitches, rhythms, instrumentation, dynamics, and articulations. Take your time and don't give up.

STEP 4

Now, look at the printed music and compare your version of the segment to the original.

STEP 5

For your own personal use, make a final copy of the **original** version of the segment by hand or computer, but also include your own edits and comments. With each stroke of the pencil, mouse, or trackpad, this step will help you remember the connection you've made between these sound events and their visual representation, potentially leading to a more spontaneous and efficient workflow when notating your own music.

STEP 6

Using some aspect of the segment, (if not the entire segment), create some new music. This new music might be

1. a variation on the original,
2. an extension of the original,
3. in the style of the original, or
4. otherwise inspired by the original.