THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

GCSE

Composing

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

IN THIS GUIDE YOU WILL FIND INFORMATION TO HELP YOU COMPOSE IN SEVERAL DIFFERENT STYLES. INCLUDING IDEAS TO GET STARTED AND HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT INSTRUMENTS AND KEYS FOR YOUR PIECES.

THE KEY THING TO REMEMBER IS NOT TO OVERLOAD YOURSELF! YOUR FREE COMPOSITION GENERALLY (DEPENDING ON YOUR EXAM BOARD) DOES NOT NEED TO BE EXTREMELY COMPLICATED TO GET A HIGH MARK. IT QUALITY OVER QUANTITY!

AQA

FREE COMPOSITION: SET BY THE STUDENT.
BRIEF COMPOSITION: COMPOSE TO A BRIEF RELEASED BY THE EXAM BOARD IN YEAR OF CERTIFICATION. COMPOSITION MUST DEMONSTRATE SELECTION AND USE OF AT LEAST FOUR TYPES OF MUSICAL ELEMENT AS FOLLOWS:
- AT LEAST TWO OF RHYTHM, METRE, TEXTURE, MELODY, STRUCTURE, FORM.
- AT LEAST TWO OF HARMONY, TONALITY, TIMBRE, DYNAMICS, PHRASING, ARTICULATION.

THE COMBINED DURATION OF THE COMPOSITIONS MUST BE A MINIMUM OF THREE MINUTES.

Eduqas

FREE COMPOSITION: LEARNERS WILL COMPOSE A PIECE OF MUSIC IN A STYLE OF THEIR OWN CHOICE.
BRIEF COMPOSITION: COMPOSE TO A BRIEF RELEASED BY THE EXAM BOARD IN YEAR OF CERTIFICATION. LEARNERS ARE ASSESSED ON THEIR MUSICAL RESPONSE TO THE BRIEF THEY SET, WHICH IS NOT ITSELF ASSESSED.

THE COMBINED DURATION OF THE COMPOSITIONS MUST BE A MINIMUM OF THREE MINUTES AND A MAXIMUM OF SIX MINUTES.

Edexcel

FREE COMPOSITION: SET BY THE STUDENT.
BRIEF COMPOSITION: COMPOSE TO A BRIEF RELEASED BY THE EXAM BOARD IN YEAR OF CERTIFICATION. EACH COMPOSITION MUST BE AT LEAST ONE MINUTE IN DURATION.

OCR

FREE COMPOSITION: SET BY THE STUDENT.
BREIF COMPOSITION: COMPOSE TO A BRIEF RELEASED BY THE EXAM BOARD IN YEAR OF CERTIFICATION. THE COMBINED DURATION OF THE FREE AND BRIEF COMPOSITIONS MUST BE A MINIMUM OF THREE MINUTES.

PLEASE SEE INDIVIDUAL SPECIFICATIONS FOR DETAILED DESCRIPTIONS ON EACH EXAM BOARDS REQUIREMENTS.

SOFTWARE FOR COMPOSING

THERE ARE SEVERAL OPTIONS FOR SOFTWARE AND THIS CAN DEPEND ON FUNDING AVAILABLE TO THE SCHOOL AND SPECIALISMS OF TEACHERS.

THE COMMON OPTIONS ARE:

Sibelius or Dorico

SIBELIUS HAS BEEN USED FOR DECADES FOR GCSE COMPOSITION AND IS INCREDIBLY VERSATILE. HOWEVER, IT IS COMPLICATED TO USE AND YOU NEED TIME TO LEARN HOW IT ALL WORKS AND THE SHORTCUTS TO MAKE IT WORK MORE EFFECTIVELY. IF YOU STRUGGLE WITH NOTATION AND TAB THEN THIS IS A MORE DIFFICULT OPTION.
DORICO IS EXTREMELY SIMILAR TO SIBELIUS BUT HAS BEEN AROUND LESS TIME.

I USE SIBELIUS FOR MY SCHOOL AS WE ALREADY HAVE A LICENCE FOR IT AND I KNOW HOW TO USE IT INSIDE OUT. OTHER TEACHERS MAY HAVE THE SAME EXPERIENCE WITH OTHER SOFTWARE PROGRAMMES.

Logic or Garageband

LOGIC IS THE MOST EXPENSIVE OF THE OPTIONS AS NOT ONLY DOES THE SCHOOL NEED A LICENCE BUT IT REQUIRES APPLE PRODUCTS TO RUN IT. GARAGEBAND IS ESSENTIALLY 'BABY LOGIC', IT IS FREE AND WORKS SIMILARLY BUT WITH FAR FEWER OPTIONS AND ACCESSORIES. IT STILL REQUIRES APPLE PRODUCTS TO RUN THOUGH.
IF YOUR SCHOOL HAS ACCESS TO THIS, THEN THIS IS AN EXCELLENT AND VERY VERSATILE PLATFORM TO USE, ESPECIALLY IF YOU ARE PLAYING THE PARTS OF YOUR COMPOSITION YOURSELF OR CREATING ELECTRONIC MUSIC.

Bandlab

BANDLAB IS A FREE ONLINE PROGRAMME THAT IS VERY SIMILAR TO GARAGEBAND. IT WORKS IN A SIMILAR WAY BUT IS ACCESSIBLE ON ANY COMPUTER, WHICH MAKES IT GOOD FOR WORKING ON COMPOSITIONS AT HOME AS WELL AS IN SCHOOL. THIS ALSO HAS A GREAT USER INTERFACE FOR TEACHERS TO MONITOR COMPOSITIONS AND SET WORK ONLINE.

AN IMPORTANT THING TO NOTE WITH GARAGEBAND, LOGIC AND BANDLAB OR ANY SOFTWARE THAT HAS BUILT IN LOOPS, IS TO DOUBLE CHECK THAT YOU WHETHER YOU WILL BE PENALISED FOR USING THEM IN YOUR COMPOSITIONS. CHECK WITH YOUR TEACHER AND EXAM BOARD AS IT COULD BE SEEN AS PLAGIARISM.

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COMPOSING MUSIC
Getting Started

COMPOSING MUSIC
Getting Started

GETTING STARTED CAN BE THE MOST DIFFICULT PART OF THE COMPOSITION PROCESS.

IF YOU ARE STUCK, CONSIDER NOTE PATTERNS, PICTURES, A SEQUENCE OF ACTIONS OR EVEN A SET OF WORDS TO GET YOU GOING.

FINDING INSPIRATION

STORIES, PICTURES, ABSTRACT PATTERNS, NEWS ARTICLES AND THE WORLD OF NATURE HAVE INSPIRED COMPOSERS WORKING IN A VARIETY OF MUSICAL GENRES.

PAINTINGS

NEWS EVENTS

FAIRYTALES

TV SHOWS

FILMS

GAMES

FRIENDS/ FAMILY

POSTERS

MEMORIES

HISTORICAL EVENTS

TONALITY

CHOOSING THE RIGHT KEY TO SUIT YOUR PIECE CAN SEEM VERY COMPLICATED, HOWEVER, EACH KEY HAS ITS OWN UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS THAT CAN SUIT DIFFERENT THEMES AND IDEAS.

TAKE A LOOK AT THE LISTS OF KEYS BELOW AND THE EMOTIONS THEY CREATE WHEN USED.

MAJOR KEYS

C Maj	INNOCENT, HAPPY
G Maj	SERIOUS, MAGNIFICENT, FANTASY
D Maj	TRIUMPHANT, VICTORIOUS, WAR
A Maj	JOYFUL, LOVING, PASTORAL
E Maj	INCOMPLETE, RIOTOUS, ARGUMENTATIVE
B Maj	HARSH, STRONG, WILD, RAGE
F Maj	FURIOUS, QUICK-TEMPERED, REGRET
Bb Maj	JOYFUL, QUAINT, CHEEFUL
Eb Maj	CRUEL, HARD, DEVOTION
Ab Maj	DARK, ETERNITY, JUDGEMENT

MINOR KEYS

A Min — TENDER, PLAINTIVE, PIOUS

D Min — SERIOUS, PIOUS, RUMINATING

G Min — DISCONTENT, UNEASY

C Min — INNOCENT, SAD, LOVE-SICK

F Min — OBSCURE, PLAINTIVE, FUNEREAL

Bb Min — TERRIBLE, NIGHT, MOCKING

Eb Min — EFFEMINATE, AMOROUS, PLAINTIVE

Ab Min — GRUMBLING, WEAK, WAILING

E Min — EFFEMINATE, AMOROUS, RESTLESS

B Min — SOLITARY, MELANCHOLY, PATIENCE

COMMON GUIDELINES

WHEN COMPOSING IN MOST SITUATIONS THERE ARE SOME COMMON GUIDELINES THAT YOU CAN FOLLOW TO MAKE IT EASIER.

START AND END YOUR MELODY WITH THE **FIRST** NOTE OF THE KEY.

MAKE YOUR MELODY 2, 4, 8 OR 16 BARS LONG. KEEP IT EVEN, UNLESS OTHERWISE COMMON TO THE STYLE YOU HAVE CHOSEN.

USE REPETITION OF NOTES AND SEQUENCES TO CREATE YOUR MELODY.

DO NOT OVERCOMPLICATE FOR THE SAKE OF IT. IF YOU AREN'T COMFORTABLE USING COMPLICATED KEYS THEN DON'T.

A WELL WRITTEN PIECE IN C MAJOR IS BETTER THAN A POORLY WRITTEN PIECE IN C# MAJOR. CHALLENGE YOURSELF BUT DO IT APPROPRIATELY!

DEGREES OF THE SCALE

EVERY SINGLE KEY HAS SEVEN NOTES AND EACH NOTE IS GIVEN A NUMBER AND A NAME. THE NUMBERS AND NAMES NEVER CHANGE AND CAN BE APPLIED TO EVERY SCALE.

THE EXAMPLE BELOW IS THE A MINOR SCALE:

A 1ST (I) - TONIC

B 2ND (II) - SUPERTONIC

C 3RD (III) - MEDIANT

D 4TH (IV) - SUBDOMINANT

E 5TH (V) - DOMINANT

F 6TH (VI) - SUBMEDIANT

G 7TH (VII) - LEADING NOTE

DEPENDING ON THE TYPE OF PIECE YOU ARE COMPOSING YOU MAY USE DIFFERENT DEGREES IN YOUR COMPOSITION BUT YOU WILL ALWAYS USE THE TONIC.

COMPOSING MUSIC

MUSIC

Developing Ideas

ALPHABET METHOD

PLACE THE 7 NOTES OF YOUR CHOSEN KEY ABOVE THE ARROWS. THEN USE DIFFERENT WORDS LIKE YOUR NAME TO CREATE A MELODY.

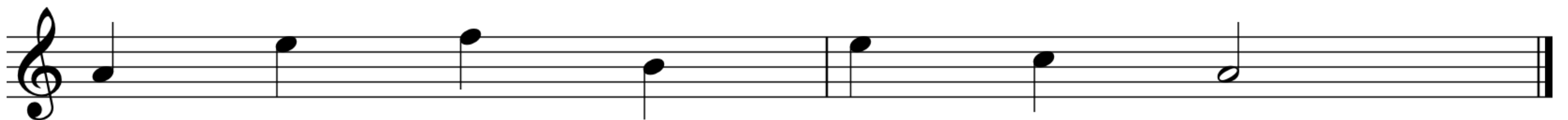THE EXAMPLE BELOW IS THE A MINOR SCALE:

A B C D E F G

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

A B C D E F G

H I J K L M N

O P Q R S T U

V W X Y Z
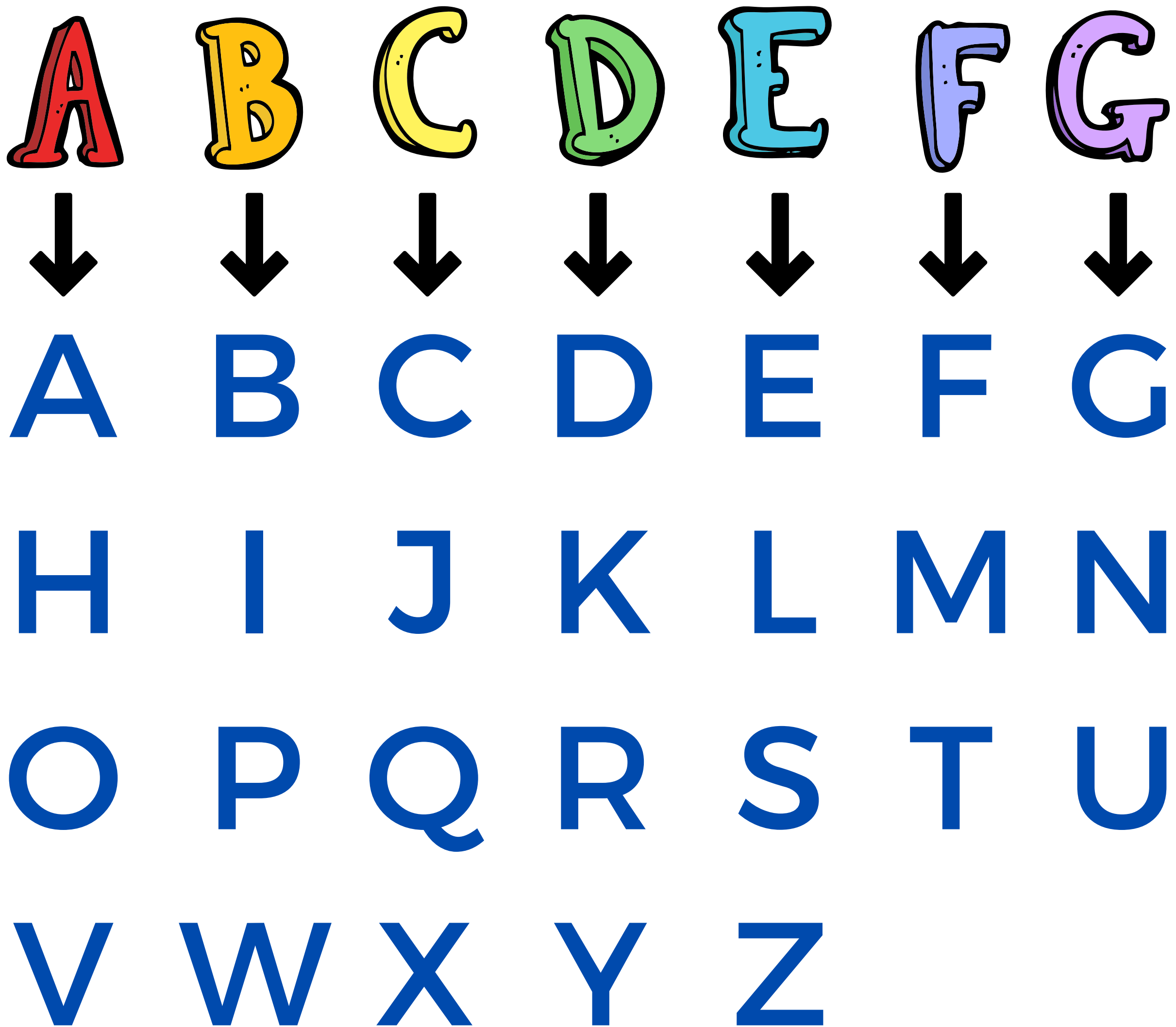
IF I USE MY NAME (EMILY) I GET THESE NOTES:

E F B E C

ALPHABET METHOD

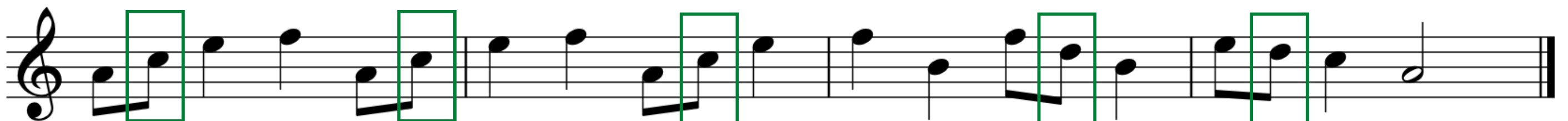NOW IF I APPLY THE COMMON GUIDELINE OF HAVING THE TONIC NOTE AT THE START AND END I GET:

A E F B E C A

O R

PLAY AROUND WITH THE PITCHES OF EACH NOTE UNTIL IT SOUNDS GOOD
(I DECIDED TO GO HIGHER IN PITCH)

NEXT I ADD IN SOME REPETITION SO THAT THE MELODY BECOMES FOUR BARS LONG:

THEN I CAN PLAY AROUND WITH THE RHYTHM AND ADD SOME PASSING NOTES TO MAKE IT FLOW BETTER:

AFTER THIS I CAN MAYBE ADD IN A SEQUENCE:

I CHOSE A DESCENDING SEQUENCE

I AM HAPPY WITH MY MAIN MELODY NOW. TO MAKE MY SONG LONGER I COULD DO SEVERAL THINGS:
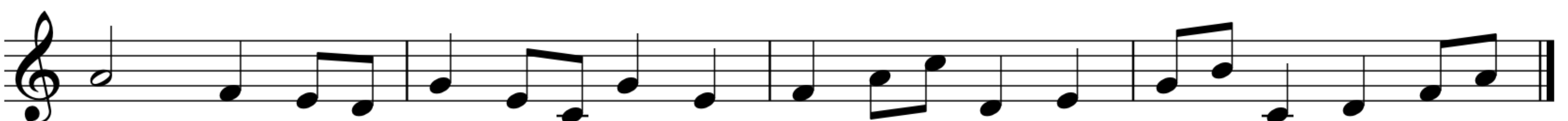
REPEAT THE MELODY AGAIN THE SAME

REPEAT THE MELODY BACKWARDS (RETROGRADE)

REPEAT THE MELODY UPSIDE DOWN (INVERSION)

REPEAT THE MELODY BACKWARDS & UPSIDE DOWN (RETROGRADE INVERSION)

REPEAT THE MELODY BUT DOUBLE THE LENGTH OF THE NOTES (AUGMENTATION)

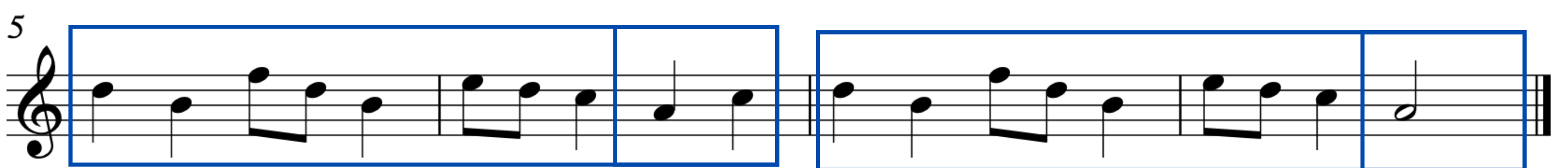# REPEAT THE MELODY BUT STARTING ON A DIFFERENT NOTE.

BEFORE YOU DO THIS ONE, THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT WHICH NOTE IN THE SCALE YOU WILL START FROM.

I HAVE USED THE **DOMINANT** (5) OF **A MINOR** BUT DEPENDING ON THE TYPE OF MUSIC YOU ARE WRITING THERE MAY BE MORE APPROPRIATE OPTIONS TO CHOOSE.

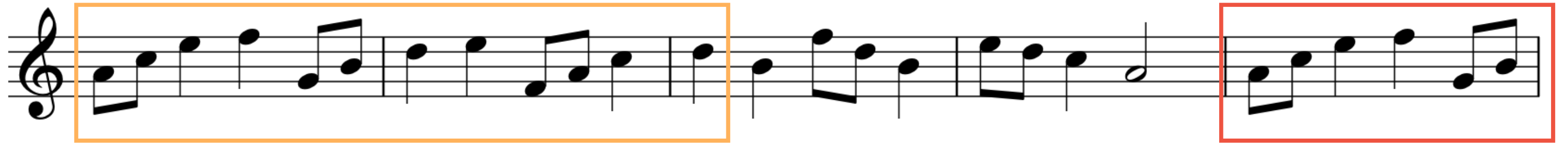# REPEAT DIFFERENT SECTIONS OF THE MELODY

THE FIRST TWO BARS REPEATED TWICE

THE LAST TWO BARS REPEATED TWICE (WITH A MINOR CHANGE TO THE RHYTHM THE FIRST TIME TO MAKE IT FLOW BETTER)

REPEAT USING SEQUENCES

MY ORIGINAL DESCENDING SEQUENCE

THE SAME SECTION REPEATED TWICE & DESCENDING FURTHER

ASCENDING SEQUENCE OF THE 3RD BAR TO GET BACK UP TO THE ORIGINAL MELODY

I COULD DO ONE OF THOSE OR ALL OF THESE IF I WANTED, IN ORDER TO DEVELOP MY PIECE.

REPETITION IS YOUR FRIEND! DON'T THINK THAT IT IS CHEATING - ALL THE GREATS DID/DO IT!