

Ten Composition Tips to Consider Before Submitting

By Larry Clark

1. Melody or motives make a composition memorable. Ask yourself if your melodic material is engaging and memorable.
2. Try to keep your harmony consistent throughout your piece. It seems odd to have harmony that sounds like it is from the classical period mixed with more dissonant harmony within the same piece.
3. Is your musical material idiomatic for the instruments? This means that the music works on the instruments you have chosen. Picking the right keys for the instruments is very important as well. Wind instruments just sound better in flat keys. Let the musical material dictate the instrument that play it rather than forcing the musical material on the instruments, even if it doesn't fit or pushes them out of a comfortable range.
4. Don't have too many things going on at one time. The listener can only absorb so many things at once. Too many musical elements at the same time will make your piece sound cluttered and chaotic. This goes for the number of parts as well as rhythmic clarity. Too many rhythms at once will sound cluttered.
5. Every instrument does not have to play all of the time. Colorful orchestration comes from changes in texture and instrument combinations that work together. Too much full scoring will become cumbersome and tiring to listen to. It's fine to have solo lines or two parts. Transparency in the scoring makes the fully scored sections sound that much better.
6. Make sure to put the instruments in playable ranges. Just because an instrument *can* play a high note doesn't mean it *should*. Keep the instruments in ranges where they sound the best.
7. Just because a piece is difficult doesn't mean it's better. Carefully consider if what you wrote would take the best players in the world to play it. If so, you might want to consider making it less difficult.
8. If at all possible have live musicians play your music. The notation software can play anything you write and make it sound acceptable, but the best way to know if your piece will work is to have it played by a real ensemble.
9. Often young composers write the lower voices too low and too close together. This is acoustically weak. Remember, the best sound will come from open voicing on the bottom and closed voicing on the top, which means don't put the lower voices notes close together near the bottom of the bass clef as it will sound muddy. Study overtones for more information on this topic.
10. Be yourself. Don't try to sound like another composer. Try to come up with music that is unique to you. This also means making sure you try to capture the emotion/feelings you want throughout the music.

Good Luck!