

Georgia Young Composers Festival

Helpful Suggestions for Creating a Winning Composition

1) Make sure the score is readable and cleanly formatted.

Paying attention to formatting issues can greatly enhance the chorus's ability to read and perform your work. Watch for problems with the vertical alignment of notes in chords and homophonic sections of music. Singers also appreciate when the horizontal spacing of notes is pleasing. Avoid trying to cram too many notes in at the ends of lines or making the words too small when trying to fit the text into the notes. Be sure to check that the words are under the correct notes and that there are no collisions between printed words and notes.

2) Try to write for at least four vocal parts rather than just one or two parts.

While unison singing can make for a nice effect at appropriate points in a piece, the richness of harmony is a mark of a talented composer. The DeKalb Choral Guild is a mixed male/female chorus that regularly sings music ranging from four to even eight or more parts. Feel free to experiment with unique chord structures, divided sections (such as SSAATTBB), or other techniques to show your harmonic expressiveness.

3) Place text accents appropriately with the music.

Singing and poetry have much in common. Just as the poet strives for a rhythmical precision when selecting the order of words in a poem, the composer also has to pay attention to where the text falls in the rhythm of the piece. For example, in the phrase "the love of my life," the word "the" is probably not the most important word. Take some time to really live with the text, running it over and over in your mind before you start writing notes to determine how to create the phrasing in your work. After a while, you may even discover some hidden beauty within the text that was not apparent on the first few readings.

4) Write the music to fit the range of typical choral singers

The singers in a typical chorus typically do not have the extent of range that a soloist has for the same part. If a section is singing too low or too high for too long, the choir might not make the best music or present the best representation of your work. The singers in the Guild are accomplished amateurs who enjoy preparing challenging music, so feel free to experiment, keeping in mind the following ranges for each vocal part:

Part	Full Range	1 st Part Range	2 nd Part Range
Soprano	Low A to High Bb	Middle C to High Bb	Low A to High F
Alto	Low F to High E	Low A to High E	Low F to High C
Tenor	Low B to High A	Low D to High A	Low B to High F
Bass	Low D to High F	Low F to High F	Low D to High D

5) Do not be afraid to experiment with your music.

Choral music has such variety and richness, so be sure to express that richness in your work. Changes in dynamics, tempo or articulation can add great interest to your piece and keep the chorus on its toes! Remember that there is no rule that says you have to set one note per syllable. You can expand syllables over several notes, separate the sections on different phrases, or create a fugue or a canon, if you wish. You can also pull out a solo voice part to sing over the chorus if desired. You can change keys or tempos as well. Of course, you should always strive to keep things “musical,” so avoid overuse of technical aspects to compensate for a lack of harmonic interest.

6) Take advantage of the accompanist.

Although a capella works are perfectly acceptable, the Guild has a very accomplished piano accompanist. Feel free, if you desire, to include a piano part with your work. The piano part can be as inventive as you want. Obviously, there is often overlap between the chorus and piano parts, but try to avoid simply duplicating the chorus’s notes in the piano part for the sake of duplication.

7) Check-in with your sponsor every now and then for advice.

Many composers will often solicit the advice of a trusted colleague as they work on new pieces. It is easy to become too focused on the individual notes and lose your sense of how the whole piece should flow. For this reason, the GYCF asks you to select a sponsor to offer you advice and guidance through the composition process. Take a moment regularly to show your work to your sponsor so they can offer constructive comments to assist you. You should not ask your sponsor to do your work for you, but rather accept and weigh the advice as you work on the piece.

8) Take copyrights seriously, both those held by others and your own.

Using copyrighted text without permission is a violation of the law. Professional composers always obtain the permission of the copyright holder before setting text to music, and so should you if you decide to use a copyrighted text for your work. On the other hand, you should always try to protect your original works by obtaining a copyright.