



# 31 TIPS FOR FASTER & SMARTER COMPOSING

31 ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS  
ASKED BY YOU!

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# **1. DESERT ISLAND SAMPLE LIBRARIES**

- Starting out: EW Hollywood Orchestra
- All-in-one's: Berlin Inspire, Albion ONE, Cinesymphony Lite
- Dedicated: Cinematic Studios

## **2. SKETCHING**

- Aim for speed
- Bare bones first
- Lay down melody, harmony, rhythm

## **3. STUDIO SETUP**

- Hardware: computer, MIDI controller, headphones/speakers, external hard drive
- Software: DAW, samples, notation software

## **4. ORGANIZING SAMPLES**

- Use dedicated external drive
- Create pathways that makes sense to you (instrument, company)

## **5. 3 WAYS TO WRITE MUSIC FROM NOTHING**

- Start with melody first - add harmony/rhythm after
- Start with harmony or chord progression first
- Start with rhythmic pattern first

## **6. MIDI CC'S**

- Enhance MIDI performances for realism
- Best to perform CC information in live (modulation, pedal)
- Don't be afraid to get down and dirty with it!

## **7. VOICE LEADING**

- Smoothest path from one note to the next
- Look for common chord tones, aim for steps or skips at the most

## **8. OSTINATOS**

- A repeating musical pattern (short, med, long)
- Scale fragments, arpeggios, repeated notes
- If it causes dissonance, that can work!

## **9. CREATE INTERESTING CHORD PROGRESSIONS**

- Extend your chord progressions beyond 4 chords
- Extend past diatonic chords - secondary dominants, modal mixture, chromaticism, etc.

## **10. HOW TO WRITE BASS LINE UNDER MELODY**

- Know your key
- Experiment with which chords fit your melody notes
- Dissonance is not necessarily bad!

## **11. TEMPLATES**

- Prebuilt loaded tracks for instant sound and quicker workflow
- I don't use them, I prefer starting from scratch each project

## **12. INSTRUMENT RANGES**

- Especially important for orchestral instruments
- Restrictions are good, write within human/instrumental limits

## **13. LAYERING INSTRUMENTS**

- Adds thickness and texture
- Either add similar (like) instruments, or different ones for more contrast and bite

## **14. QUANTIZING**

- Pulls MIDI data to the beat
- For orchestral music, stick with 80% at the most
- Maintaining realism is the most important aspect

## **15. IDIOMATIC WRITING**

- Write to the advantage of the instruments
- Woodwinds/brass need to breathe, strings need life through modulation, vibrato for expression

## **16. INSTRUMENT RUNS**

- Especially prevalent in strings/woodwinds
- Lead into next bar, top note most important in ascending run
- Type of scale determines mood of run

## **17. MIX AS YOU GO**

- Adjust volumes of all instruments as you work
- Maintain a realistic balance of the instruments so you can arrange accurately

## **18. RHYTHMIC INTEREST IN PERCUSSION**

- For regular simple and compound time, use syncopation to accent offbeats for interest
- Experiment with more uncommon time signatures

## **19. WRITING COMPLEX MELODIES**

- Use less resolutions to the 1, 3, 5 of the scale
- Introduce rhythmic and intervallic variety

## **20. WRITING FOR STRINGS**

- If it sounds good on piano, it will sound good on strings
- Use octaves and 5ths lower down, smaller intervals higher up
- Counterpoint is very effective

## **21. OVERVIEW OF HARMONY**

- 1, 3, and 6 chords serve tonic function (resolution)
- 2, 4, and 5 chords serve dominant function (tension)
- Add 7ths to your chords for extra colour

## **22. MODULATION**

- Go straight to new key
- Pivot chord (common chord between both keys)
- Chromaticism

## **23. MIXING LIBRARIES**

- Reverb makes the biggest impact here
- Make sure that the amount of room is similar between both libraries for realism

## **24. PREPPING MIX WITH EQ**

- Apply EQ on each track to get rid of low room frequencies
- Use boost and cut method to eliminate unwanted sound

## **25. STATIC MIX**

- Pull all your faders down to the bottom
- Introduce lead instrument up first in loudest section
- Balance all other instruments around it

## **26. TOP DOWN MIXING**

- Mix from the master bus first
- Achieve a solid sound that gets you 80% of the way
- Tweak groups next, then individual tracks for polish

## **27. SURGICAL EQ**

- Which instruments need extra air and life?
- Which instruments need taming in the mids?
- This phase will balance the frequency spectrum.

## **28. REVERB AND SENDS**

- Apply reverb plugin to its own aux channel
- Send individual instruments to that channel if they need more reverb
- Saves CPU power and lots of time



## **29. HOW TO KNOW YOU'RE DONE MIXING**

- Does anything stand out?
- Is everything smooth and balanced?
- If you can sit back and enjoy, you're done!

## **30. HOW TO GET WORK AS A COMPOSER/ARRANGER**

- You need a portfolio!
- Take examples of your best work and put them together as a short demo reel.
- Network in local areas and/or online.

## **31. HOW TO KEEP THEM COMING BACK**

- Be a decent human being. Treat them how you want to be treated.
- Be easy to work with, willing to revise until they're happy.
- Don't undercharge! They must respect your rate.

# THAT'S IT!

Thank you so much for downloading this guide. If you followed along with my channel during March (or anytime afterwards :D), I hope I was able to help you in a small way.

It means a lot to me that you stick around and watch me talk about music in the first place! Not many people have the opportunity to do that, so thank you!

I wish you all the best in your composing and arranging career!

Best wishes,

Chris