



# DIGITAL HUMANITIES PROJECT

MONSOON 2018

---

## A Structured Approach to Composing Music

---

Submitted by  
Jyotish P (20161217)

*Under the guidance of  
Dr. T. K. Saroja  
Centre for Exact Humanities  
International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad*

## Contents

1	Introduction	2
---	--------------	---

# 1 Introduction

As a starting point, it helps to understand that composers are generally not creating something out of nothing when they write a new musical composition. Instead, they are creating it out of their past experience. That is their understanding of music theory, what they've studied and listened, what they would like to hear themselves – or maybe even just to answer some specific musical question they have. It may seem obvious for one to learn music theory to compose music. Gaining knowledge about music is essential to produce music. In the field of music, some of the knowledge tends to get packaged under the heading of theory and some don't. So, what aspects of music theory should one learn first?

Learning just a little bit of theory can be 'dangerous' because it leads to great confusions. Partly this is because lots of aspects of standard music theory arguably don't make so many logical arguments in the beginning phases. The way music theory is generally taught tends to mix up some genuine music fundamentals, culture specific notations and style/genre specific advice. There are many terms that have rather uncertain meanings, or multiple meanings in different contexts, or different meanings for different people to interpret. So, it should be already evident that the more one learns, better is the probability for one to compose good music.

Composition is something one can never fully learn. There is always a lot to learn. At the same time, even a newcomer to music can pick out a pleasing melody on an instrument and perhaps with a bit of effort and add some accompanying lines. So, it makes more sense to call music composition a journey rather than a destination.

In this report, we'll try to explore the minimum needs that one might need to get a kick-start to compose music. Along with that, we'll try to approach the composition in different methods. First, we will try to study compositions that follow a particular scale and harmony. In Indian context, these can be called "Rāga based compositions". Then we will try to compose bits of music by altering the notes but abiding to the patterns of the *Rāga*.

The next effort will be to study and observe correlation between Harmony, Scale and style/genres of music. We will also try to take a composition/song and try to present it in a different style/genre. This will help us understand the certain traits

that define a specific genre and thus give us better scope to compose songs in that genre.

Many of us like music because there are these certain songs that we can never forget. We will also try to select a song that we like and try to analyze different patterns in the song. We will try to make a note of as many features as possible that we have learned so far. Then we will try to alter the melody of the song, without the song losing much of its original essence. The expectation out of this experiment is to understand the thought process of composer rather than getting a new composition out of the song.

Most popular form of musical composition is song. Songs usually have a context involved, they have lyrics. We will make an effort to understand common scales and harmony patterns used in some repeated contexts across various composers. Given our experience from the above experiments we will try to prepare a set of guidelines for a song that can lead to decent composition.

Though we may try to structure the approach in a deterministic fashion, compositions often require something more than a set of guidelines. Guidelines may only help us to produce decent results but not creative and amazing ones. The creative results are only a result of continuous exposure to the field and the experience.