



Digital Music and Production

A full-year visual and performing arts elective, designed from scratch and carried through the University of California's a-g subject-area review to approval.

LEVEL	High school, grades 11-12
LENGTH	Full year, four nine-week units
ENVIRONMENT	Classroom-based
SUBJECT	Visual & Performing Arts (F)
DISCIPLINE	Elective
STATUS	Approved through University of California a-g subject-area review
AUTHOR	Taylor Fox

The source proposal was written for a school that required faith integration as a design element, and it carries a Faith Integration section in every unit. Those sections are omitted from this version, along with the faith language in the original course description. Everything else appears as written. The full document is available on request.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course invites students to explore the art and science of music through the lens of creativity and culture. Students gain a foundation in music theory, digital composition, and audio production while discovering how music has shaped, and been shaped by, history. Projects include original music creation, tech crew leadership for the spring musical, and a study of careers in the music industry. Designed for all skill levels, Digital Music encourages students to develop their gifts and express them with purpose.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Understand and apply basic to intermediate music theory and aural skills
- Identify and analyze diverse musical styles and cultural contexts
- Develop proficiency in digital music software and live production techniques
- Compose and produce original music projects
- Participate in technical production for a live musical performance
- Explore music-related career paths and prepare a personalized capstone project

MATERIALS

- A well-working laptop. Chromebook and similar will not suffice; Mac preferred
- Personal headphones
- School provided: access to digital music software (GarageBand, Soundtrap, MuseHub)
- School provided: textbook, Modern Recording Techniques by David Miles Huber
- School provided: staff paper spiral
- Composition notebook and folder
- USB flash drive or cloud storage for project files

COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE

Unit	Duration	Title and key activities
1	9 weeks	Foundations of Music and Digital Composition. Music theory quizzes, aural dictation, mini composition project.
2	9 weeks	Music Across Time, Culture, and Technology. Genre analysis, instrument family presentation, sound collage.
3	9 weeks	Creative Projects and Live Production. Original music project, tech crew participation in the spring musical.
4	9 weeks	Careers in Music and Capstone Project. Career research, personal career plan, capstone project.

CALIFORNIA COMMON CORE AND VAPA ALIGNMENT

This course integrates California Visual and Performing Arts standards with Common Core literacy goals to provide a comprehensive learning experience. Students develop musical skills through analysis, composition, and live production while also building critical reading, writing, research, and communication abilities. This dual focus ensures that students not only become proficient musicians but also thoughtful, articulate learners who can connect artistic creativity with academic rigor.

Alignment matrix

Course unit	California VAPA standards	Common Core (ELA & Literacy)	Activities and examples
Unit 1: Foundations of Music and Digital Composition	1.1 Elements of music: pitch, rhythm, timbre, dynamics. 2.0 Creative expression: perform, improvise, compose.	RL.9-10.4 determine meaning of words and phrases in context. W.9-10.3 write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences.	Music theory quizzes and dictation exercises; beginner composition projects with written reflections on process and creative choices.
Unit 2: Music Across Time, Culture, and Technology	1.0 Artistic perception: analyze music characteristics. 3.0 Historical and cultural context. 4.0 Aesthetic valuing.	RI.9-10.2 analyze central ideas in texts. SL.9-10.1 participate in discussions. W.9-10.2 write informative and explanatory texts.	Listening journals; genre comparison presentations; essays on music history and cultural significance; group discussions analyzing styles.
Unit 3: Creative Projects and Live Production	2.0 Creative expression. 4.0 Aesthetic valuing. 5.0 Connections, relationships, applications.	SL.9-10.4 present information effectively. W.9-10.7 conduct research projects.	Original composition presentations; participation and leadership in live production; project documentation and peer critiques.
Unit 4: Careers in Music and Capstone Project	4.0 Aesthetic valuing. 5.0 Connections, relationships, applications.	W.9-10.7 research projects. W.9-10.9 draw evidence to support analysis. SL.9-10.1 collaborative discussions.	Career research reports and presentations; personal career plan writing; capstone project creation and presentation; reflective essays.

UNIT 1: FOUNDATIONS OF MUSIC AND DIGITAL COMPOSITION

Approximately 9 weeks. Unit 1 establishes the foundational knowledge and skills necessary for students to engage meaningfully with both traditional and digital music. Students explore the building blocks of music theory, develop aural comprehension skills, and gain initial experience with digital composition tools.

Learning objectives

- Identify and interpret basic music notation: staff, clefs, key signatures, note values, rhythms
- Understand and apply foundational theory including pitch, rhythm, scales, and the circle of fifths
- Demonstrate basic aural skills, including rhythmic and melodic dictation
- Create short musical phrases using beginner-level improvisation and composition techniques
- Use introductory digital music software to record, arrange, and manipulate simple musical ideas

Key topics and skills

Reading and writing standard notation. Clefs, key signatures, note names, and rhythmic values. The circle of fifths and its application. Aural training for intervals, rhythm patterns, and pitch recognition. Simple improvisation. Beginning composition in written and digital formats. Introduction to music technology platforms.

Assessments and deliverables

- Music theory quizzes and dictation exercises
- Short composition assignments, written and digital
- Aural skill check-ins
- Mini-project: a 30 to 60 second digital sketch demonstrating pitch, rhythm, and loop layering

UNIT 2: EVOLUTION OF MUSIC

Approximately 9 weeks. Students expand their understanding by studying how music has evolved across historical eras, global cultures, and modern styles. Through active listening, analysis, and hands-on digital exploration, students learn to identify and describe a wide range of genres, from classical and jazz to hip-hop, pop, and world music. This unit treats music as both cultural expression and artistic innovation, helping students build a critical ear and a creative voice.

Learning objectives

- Identify key characteristics of major genres: classical, jazz, blues, gospel, rock, hip-hop, pop, folk, EDM, and world music
- Analyze how melody, rhythm, harmony, texture, and timbre define different styles
- Understand the historical, social, and cultural contexts that shaped musical movements
- Recognize and categorize the major instrument families and their use across genres
- Create digital compositions inspired by various musical styles
- Listen critically and discuss selections using appropriate terminology

Key topics and skills

Western music periods: Baroque, Classical, Romantic, twentieth century, contemporary. Genre deep dives including jazz improvisation, gospel harmonies, hip-hop sampling, and EDM structure. World music traditions and their instruments. Music as a reflection of societal change, including protest music, sacred music, and cultural identity. Instrument families in ensembles and digital production. Intermediate digital creation using loops, sampled sounds, and style emulation.

Assessments and deliverables

- Genre identification quiz and listening journal
- Comparative essay or presentation on two genres or cultures
- Sound collage or remix inspired by a chosen style or historical period
- Group genre analysis project using digital tools and multimedia

UNIT 3: CREATIVE PROJECTS AND LIVE PRODUCTION

Approximately 9 weeks. Unit 3 shifts the course into an applied, project-based focus where students synthesize their knowledge of theory, style, and technology by creating original music and taking part in live production. Students compose and produce an individual project of their choice while serving on the technical crew for the high school spring musical.

Learning objectives

- Compose and produce an original piece using digital music software and techniques
- Make creative decisions about instrumentation, genre, form, and digital effects
- Apply technical production skills in a live performance setting: sound, lighting, cues, backstage
- Understand the roles and workflows of a live performance production team
- Collaborate effectively with peers to manage real-time performance logistics
- Reflect on their creative process and technical growth

Key topics and skills

Composition: song structure, melodic development, harmony, texture, and digital layering. Project planning: setting creative goals, drafting, revising, publishing. Production roles: sound engineering, lighting design, stage crew coordination, cue-calling. Technical operations: tech booth setup, microphone use, soundboard basics, light board programming. Communication and teamwork in performance environments. Problem-solving in live settings.

Assessments and deliverables

- Original digital composition: audio file, process journal, and artist statement
- Rehearsal logs and self-assessments of production crew involvement
- Live participation and leadership in the spring musical production
- Peer critiques and end-of-unit reflection on creative and technical contributions

UNIT 4: CAREERS IN MUSIC AND CAPSTONE PROJECT

Approximately 9 weeks. Unit 4 prepares students to envision and plan for opportunities in the music field. Through research, guest speakers, and reflective activities, students explore careers including performance, production, education, therapy, business, and technology. The unit concludes with a capstone that allows students to integrate their learning in a personalized way.

Learning objectives

- Identify and describe a variety of career paths within the music industry
- Understand the education, skills, and experiences required for different music professions
- Develop a personal action plan or portfolio aligned with their interests and goals
- Complete a comprehensive capstone demonstrating accumulated knowledge and skills

Key topics and skills

Career exploration across performer, composer, producer, sound engineer, music educator, therapist, manager, and marketer. Industry insights: internships, networking, continuing education, and entrepreneurial opportunities. Portfolio development: compiling recordings, compositions, resumes, and reflections. Goal setting and time management. Capstone planning, execution, and presentation.

Assessments and deliverables

- Career research report or presentation
- Personal music career plan or portfolio
- Capstone project, format tailored to student interest: composition, production, research paper, performance, or multimedia
- Reflective essay connecting creativity and career aspirations