

Writing for Open Score ensembles - guidelines and requirements

What is flexible scoring?

Open Score ensembles vary in size and instrumentation, so we ask composers to write flexible scores which are designed to be performed by different numbers and combinations of instruments. You may specify your preferred instrumentation, but pieces must be playable using many different combinations of instruments.

There have been articles written about the Open Score process which can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Please note that much of this document is aimed at those using conventional notation, but these principals should be adhered to non-conventional scores. Examples of such scores can be seen [here](#) and [here](#).

Division of parts

Flexible scores usually consist of four parts, and often a number of different instruments will play from each part. The conductor and performers will choose which instruments play each part, depending on what instruments are available, adjusting the instrumentation to achieve the right balance. You may also include parts for keyboard and percussion if you wish. The following is a typical division of parts:

- Part 1 upper range:
 - e.g., violin, flute, oboe, clarinet
- Part 2 upper middle range:
 - e.g., violin, oboe, clarinet, viola, alto saxophone, trumpet
- Part 3 lower middle range:
 - e.g., viola, tenor saxophone, french horn, tenor horn, bassoon, trombone, guitar
- Part 4 lower range:
 - e.g., cello, double bass, bassoon, trombone, euphonium, tuba, bass guitar
- keyboard (piano or electronic keyboard) – normally one player only
- percussion – normally one player only

Percussion

The percussion instruments available vary between ensembles, so please suggest alternatives. For untuned percussion, specifying a generic timbre rather than a specific instrument is flexible and useful (e.g. drum, wood, metal etc). Tuned percussion instruments (if available) may be assigned to one of the four core parts. Note that in CoMA ensembles, percussion is usually played by a non-specialist.

Score and part preparation

Please include either an XML or Sibelius file where possible. Please see overleaf for examples of good practice in score and part preparation. All guidance here is to be adhered to for ease of publishing.

Cover pages

There should be a cover page and inside cover page formatted in the following manner:

Title of piece
subtitle/dedication optional, op. X

Composer first name and surname

Duration: X mins

Composer biography

Composer forename surname (b. XXXX) should write a short biography here of no more than 120 words. Please include your rough location (e.g. London, England) and any contact details you would like to share with performers, such as a website or email address.

Programme notes

Please explain your piece in no more than 120 words. You may want to include information about where and why it was written.

Performance notes

Performance notes that apply to the whole piece should appear here. If it is necessary, then include them in parts too.

The third page overleaf is just before the score and contains the instrumentation. If writing a choral piece, the full lyrics should be included here too. Size of font and typeface used is to the discretion of the composer but can be subject to change for the sake of legibility.

Instrumentation

Solo Clarinet in Bb

Part 1

Part 2

Part 3

Part 4

Piano

Percussion (cymbals and triangle)

Title of piece
subtitle/dedication optional, op. X

For choral works include a lyricist here
Lyricist forename and surname (b.XXXX OR XXXX-XXXX)

Composer forename and surname (b.XXXX)

Solo part above ensemble

Allegro moderato (♩=100)

Clarinet in Bb

All parts in C in full score

Part 1

Staff size = 7mm

Part 2

Part 3

Part 4

Keyboard part situated below the ensemble

Allegro moderato (♩=100)

Piano

Percussion on a single staff (for a single performer) at the bottom of the score

Cymbal Triangle

Percussion

On all pages of both full score and parts:

- Please include the title on every page.
- The score should show all parts 'in C', i.e., not transposed.
- Page numbers must be used.
- Where the piece is for specific instrumentation, including transposing instruments, transposed parts are preferred.
- Use only one staff per part unless the part contains complicated divisi passages.
- Use clefs for each part which are appropriate to the tessitura of the music (NB alto clef may be used for part 3).
- Bar numbers must be shown in all pieces. In longer pieces, rehearsal letters should also be used.
- The initial tempo and all tempo changes must be clearly marked and metronome marks should be used where possible.
- In the full score staff size should be no less than 7mm
- **Score and parts should be made available in PDF format with files titled in the following format:**
SURNAME, FORENAME - TITLE - SCORE/PARTS
When submitting parts ensure they are in the correct transposition

Order of staves in full score

- If there are any solo instruments, their parts should appear at the top of the score.
- Then place the ensemble parts in order of tessitura – Parts 1,2,3,4, etc.
- The Keyboard part(s), if any, should be placed below the ensemble parts.
- The Percussion part(s), if any, should be placed at the bottom of the score.

Parts

Here is an example of what a part should look like:

Clarinet in B \flat Title of piece

Part and transposition clearly visible

Title of piece
subtitle/dedication optional, op. X

For choral works include a lyricist here Composer forename and surname (b.XXXX)
Lyricist forename and surname (b.XXXX OR XXXX-XXXX)

Allegro moderato ($\text{♩}=100$) **3**

Rehearsal marks clearly visible when necessary

A **3** **Andante** ($\text{♩}=72$) **17**

Tempo changes clearly marked in bold with a metronome mark

- The parts should be clearly labelled on each page with the part number, transposition and clef – e.g., ‘Part 1 in C Treble’; ‘Part 2 in Bb Treble’; etc.
- Some parts may need extra clarification. For example, if you provide two versions of Part 3, one for clarinet and one for tenor sax, the transpositions are different by an octave. The clarinet part should be ‘Part 3 in Bb Treble (Cl)’; the sax part should be ‘Part 3 in Bb Treble (Sax)’.
- Please try to avoid difficult page turns in the parts wherever possible.
- For percussion, list the instruments/timbres and the number of percussionists required on the score and at the beginning of the part.
- Lay out the percussion parts in instrumental groupings (tuned and untuned), or on one continuous line but do not use multiple separate parts. Show instrument changes clearly. Be consistent about the use of specific stave lines/space for specific sounds.
- Staff size no smaller than 6.6mm

Playing from the score and graphic scores

If a piece is played from the score there may be no separate parts, with the exception of the score covering several pages, where parts may be more appropriate. It is up to the composer whether they want instruments to play from a score in concert pitch C without transposition, or whether transposing scores are needed, depending on the desired effect.

Graphic scores should be accompanied by clear written instructions for players and conductor, with performance notes and diagrams to explain any notation as necessary.

Use of tapes/videos

Scores using recordings alongside written music are welcome in this call for scores. This needs to be provided when submitting scores.

Allocation of instruments to parts

The following table gives a rough guide to how the most common instruments may be assigned to different parts in the ensemble. Parts for those instruments marked in bold are essential; other parts may be regarded as optional.

In most cases, one part can serve for several instruments. E.g., **Part 1 in C Treble Clef** could be given to Flute, Oboe and Violin. **Part 4 in C Bass Clef** could be given to cello, bassoon, trombone and double bass, but bear in mind that in this case the double bass will sound an octave lower than written.

Part No.	Clef	Transposition	Instrument
Part 1			

1.1	Treble	Concert pitch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flute • Oboe • Violin • Alto (treble) recorder • Tenor recorder
1.2	Treble	Bb, tone higher than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarinet in Bb • Soprano Saxophone • Trumpet
1.3	Treble	Eb, minor 3rd lower than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eb Clarinet • (Cornet/trumpet in Eb)
1.4	Treble	C, octave lower than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piccolo • Glockenspiel • Xylophone • Soprano (descant) recorder
1.5	Treble	A, minor 3rd higher than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarinet in A
Part 2			
2.1	Treble	Concert pitch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flute • Oboe • Violin • Alto (treble) recorder • Tenor recorder • Bass recorder
2.2	Treble	Bb, tone higher than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarinet in Bb • Soprano Saxophone • Trumpet
2.3	Treble	Eb, major 6th higher than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alto Saxophone • Tenor Horn • Alto clarinet
2.4	Alto	Concert pitch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viola
2.5	Treble	F, perfect 5th higher than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horn in F • Cor Anglais
2.6	Treble	C, octave higher than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guitar
Part 3			
3.1	Alto	Concert pitch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viola
3.2	Bass/ tenor	Concert pitch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bassoon • Trombone • Cello
3.3	Bass	Concert pitch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Euphonium/baritone/trombone (bass clef)
3.4	Treble	Bb, major 9th higher than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bass clarinet • Tenor Saxophone • Euphonium/baritone/trombone (treble clef)

3.5	Treble	Bb, tone higher than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarinet in Bb • Trumpet
3.6	Treble	F, perfect 5th higher than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horn in F • Cor Anglais
3.7	Treble	C, octave higher than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guitar

Part 4			
4.1	Bass/ tenor	Concert pitch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bassoon • Trombone • Cello
4.2	Bass	Concert pitch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Euphonium/baritone/trombone (bass clef) • Tuba
4.3	Treble	Eb, major 13th higher than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baritone Saxophone • Eb tuba (treble clef) • Contra alto clarinet
4.4	Treble	Bb, major 9th higher than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bass clarinet • Tenor Saxophone • Euphonium/baritone/trombone (treble clef)
4.5	Treble	Bb, major 16th higher than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contrabass clarinet • Bb tuba (treble clef) • Bass saxophone
4.6	Bass	C, octave higher than sounding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double Bass • Contrabassoon

Queries

If you have any queries about writing for Open Score or the CoMA music catalogue, then please contact music@coma.org.