

Composition Syllabus (MUCP 2180) FA 2026

Lesson Times and Location:

There is no common class meeting time. Lessons are scheduled individually, one on one, and meet weekly at a standing time arranged with the instructor during the first week of the semester.

Instructor:

Benjamin Shirey

Contact: BenjaminShirey@my.unt.edu | 903-268-3948

In-Person Office Hours: Tue/Thu 11:00am-2:00pm (Music Building 2001)

Zoom Office Hours: By Appointment

Enrollment Information:

MUCP 2180 is the applied composition lesson for students whose principal study is composition. Enrollment is by placement through the Division of Composition Studies in consultation with the student's major professor and Department Chair. Students are expected to be concurrently active in the composition division: studio class, division recitals, departmentals and new music events.

Course Structure

Primary Goal

Finished music is the central focus of this course. Each student will conceive, draft, revise, and complete original work under weekly supervision, and will present that work at the end of the semester. Lessons are working sessions: you bring materials, we examine them, and you leave with specific tasks. The measure of the semester is not how many ideas you started but how much finished, notated, performable music you produced.

Composition Objectives

Over the course of the semester you will complete one work of approximately three to five minutes, or a set of two to three shorter miniatures, for an instrumentation approved by the instructor. Deliverables include a clean engraved score, legible parts, a short program note, and your sketch material. Work must be new and written during this semester.

Performer Collaboration

A composition is not finished at the double bar. You are expected to find performers, share parts in usable condition, and hear your music played, even informally. Where scheduling allows, a reading or in-class performance will be arranged. Treat every performer's collaboration as professional work, because it is.

Additional Goal (In Development): Studio Showcase

I am exploring the possibility of an additional performance beyond the required end-of-semester presentation. If confirmed, this will give students a second context for their work and a broader audience. Participation will require an earlier completion deadline (TBD). More details will be provided as plans develop.

Expanded Course Goals (Our Intent)

This course is designed to help you grow as a musician, collaborator, and creative thinker, whatever your primary field. The skills built here (score reading, notation, analysis, revision, deadline management) transfer directly to teaching, performing, and arranging.

Craft and Technique

You will develop working control over pitch, rhythm, texture, form, and instrumentation, and you will learn to diagnose why a passage is not working rather than simply replacing it. Technical study will be assigned based on what your music needs.

Notation and Score Preparation

Scores and parts should be clear and professional. Clear notation is not decoration; it is the interface between your idea and the people who realize it.

Creative Exploration and Personal Voice

I want you to find your own artistic voice. This is a space for bold ideas, unusual sound worlds, and unconventional approaches. You are encouraged to take creative risks, including acoustic, electroacoustic, and hybrid approaches.

Professionalism and Classroom Readiness

Finally, this course is built to prepare you for real-world work. You will practice deadline management, project planning, correspondence, and program note writing, skills that apply equally to the studio and the classroom.

Expectations

Composing Time:

Students are expected to compose outside of lessons every week. Plan on a minimum of three to four hours per week of focused work. Steady weekly progress is the single strongest predictor of a successful semester.

Lesson Preparation:

Bring new material to every lesson: score, sketches, audio, or a specific question about a specific problem. Bring a legible printed score or a screen that we can both read. Come with a record of what you tried, not only what you kept.

Professionalism:

When using the CEMI studios and MEIT, treat all equipment with respect and maintain a clean workspace. This includes picking up after yourself and leaving rooms in good condition for the next users. Answer emails promptly.

Listening and Repertoire Study:

Assigned listening and/or score study will run alongside your composing during the semester. I will assign these when I feel that it is relevant. These are designed to encourage critical listening, analysis, and engagement with a range of repertoire. Come prepared to discuss them in your lesson.

Grading

Rubric:

- **Lesson Attendance and Preparation:** 30%
- **Completed Work and Portfolio:** 30%
- **End-of-Semester Presentation/Reading:** 20%
- **Professionalism:** 10%
- **Assigned Listening:** 10%

Grading Scale:

- A (90-100%): Outstanding craft, excellent preparation, and superb engagement.
- B (80-89%): Very good craft, preparation, and engagement.
- C (70-79%): Average craft, preparation, and engagement.
- D (60-69%): Moderate to poor craft, preparation, and engagement.
- F (<60%): Unacceptable craft, preparation, and engagement.

Attendance Policy

Attendance and Tardiness:

Attendance at your weekly lesson is mandatory. Notify the instructor in advance for absences. Tardiness will result in Attendance grade deduction.

Rescheduling and Make-Up Lessons:

Lessons cancelled by the instructor will always be made up. A lesson you cancel will be made up only if you give at least 24 hours notice and a mutually workable time exists that week. Lessons missed without notice are not made up and are recorded as unexcused.

Unprepared Lessons:

Arriving with no new work, no score, and no sketches is not a substitute for an absence. The lesson will still be held and used for study or analysis, but it will be recorded as unprepared and will affect both your Lesson Preparation and Professionalism grades.

Juries:

Do not schedule other end-of-semester juries or performances against your assigned presentation or jury slot. Choose a slot that does not overlap, including warm-up and travel.

Unexcused Absences:

Unexcused absences not only count against Attendance, which is 30% of your final grade, but also reduce your Professionalism grade. The impact increases with the number of missed lessons and with the effect on your project timeline.

All students should review the relevant UNT course information below.

Additional Information

Academic Integrity:

Cheating or plagiarism receives a zero (0) for the assignment or exam and may be reported to the Dean of Students for further penalties.

[Academic Integrity](#)

Student Behavior:

Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated and may result in removal from class and referral to the Dean of Students.

[Student Code of Conduct](#)

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Eagle Connect / Access to Information:

All official UNT communication is sent to your Eagle Connect email. Your access point for business and academic services is my.unt.edu.

[Eagle Connect](#)

ODA Statement:

For accommodations, register with the Office of Disability Access each semester and provide your Letter of Accommodation to your instructors. You are encouraged to discuss your specific needs with your professors.

[Office of Disability Access](#) | Phone: (940) 565-4323

Health and Safety:

Student health and wellness information.

[Student Health and Wellness](#)

Registration Information:

Procedures and student registration resources.

[Registration Information](#)

Fall 2025 Academic Calendar:

Important dates and deadlines.

[Fall 2025 Academic Calendar](#)

Final Exam Schedule, Fall 2025:

See the Academic Calendar for the final exam schedule.

[Fall 2025 Academic Calendar](#)

Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

Requirements for maintaining aid eligibility.

- Undergraduates: Minimum 2.0 cumulative GPA, meet credit-hour completion standards, and remain within 150 percent of degree length. Music scholarships require at least a 2.5 overall GPA and a 3.0 GPA in music courses. Dropping courses may affect aid; consult an advisor before dropping.
- Graduates: Minimum 3.0 cumulative GPA and compliance with program timeframes. Music scholarships require a 3.5 cumulative GPA. Dropping courses may affect aid; consult an advisor before dropping.

[Financial Aid – SAP](#)

Retention of Student Records:

Course records are kept securely for at least one year after course completion. Canvas records are stored safely. FERPA governs access and privacy rights.

[FERPA](#)

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Counseling and Testing:

Counseling and testing services for students.

[Counseling and Testing](#)

[Mental Health Resources](#)

Add/Drop Policy:

Dropping classes or failing to complete registered hours can affect aid and enrollment status. Review dates before making changes.

[Add/Drop and Calendar](#)

Student Resources:

University-wide academic and student support services.

[Student Resources](#)

Care Team:

Interdisciplinary support for students, staff, and faculty in crisis.

[Care Team](#)