



INTRODUCTION TO K-POP

**THIS COURSE
PROVIDES A
COMFORTABLE NON
JUDGEMENTAL SPACE
FOR STUDENTS TO BE
ABLE TO FREELY
EXPLORE AND EXPRESS
THEIR CREATIVE
TALENTS.**

**EACH WEEK, WE WILL ANALYSE 'COMPOSITIONS',
FROM POP HITS, TO FILM SCORES, TO MODERN
CLASSICS, TO JAZZ STANDARDS..**

- We will explore compositional techniques and develop ideas based off the topics / songs studied.
- We will take inspiration from elements within the songs including; chord harmony, melodies, rhythm and arrangement.
- We will be exercising students own compositional/improvisational talents by applying the study and analysis into their own practice.
- We will encourage students to start thinking outside the box, creatively and analytically during the creative process.
- We will explore weekly compositional/improvisation exercises, and students will showcase / perform their ideas in class and be open to the feedback of the teacher and fellow students.
- We will develop your own unique writing style and harness your own creative talents whilst adapting that to a variety of musical styles within contemporary music.
- Each week, there is an optional task to write to a professional style brief. Writing a piece of music for a specific project, ie writing for film, tv ads, pop singers, games, radio, podcast themes etc

RECAP



Diatonic keys

Non diatonic keys

How to break the key signature

Any questions before we move forward?



LISTENING SESSION

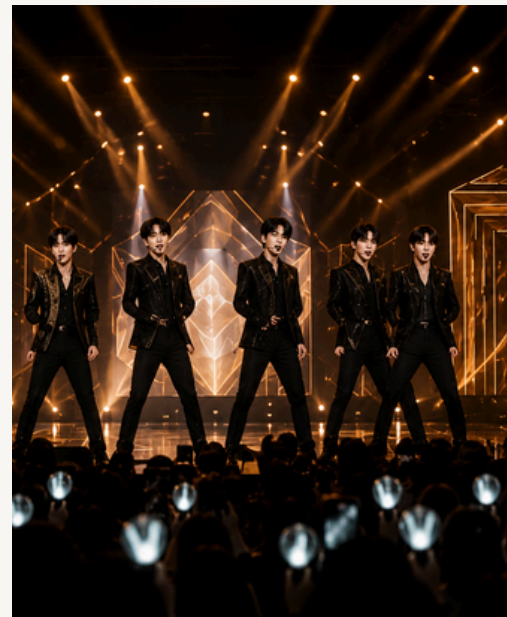
Showcase your
pop funk / soul composition
from last weeks lesson



INTRODUCTION TO K-POP

K-Pop is a highly stylised and globally influential genre known for its fusion of diverse musical traditions, complex production techniques, rhythmic melodic ideas and interesting chord progressions. Rather than belonging to a single sound, K-Pop incorporates elements from pop, hip hop, R&B, EDM, funk, rock, and musical theatre—often within the same song. Its signature features include extended and colourful chord progressions, melodically intricate vocal lines, tight rhythmic precision, and multi-section song forms that shift energy rapidly to create drama and contrast. K-Pop producers also rely heavily on layered vocal harmonies, countermelodies, trap-influenced beats, and hybrid rhythmic patterns, making it a rich genre for studying advanced composition.

Modern K-Pop artists such as BTS, BLACKPINK, Stray Kids, Seventeen, EXO, TWICE, and Red Velvet demonstrate how harmony, melody, and rhythm are used to create emotionally engaging, high-impact arrangements with strong commercial appeal. The genre's ability to blend Western pop conventions with Korean melodic sensibilities and innovative production makes K-Pop one of the most exciting areas for contemporary composition.



DISCUSSION

CAN YOU NAME ANY
SUBGENRES OR STYLISTIC
VARIATIONS WITHIN K-
POP?

CAN YOU THINK OF ANY K-
POP SONGS THAT
SHOWCASE ADVANCED
HARMONY, COMPLEX
MELODIC WRITING, OR
INTERESTING RHYTHMIC
STRUCTURES?



SONGWRITING FOR PITCH IN THE PUBLISHING WORLD



WRITING FOR K-POP HAS BECOME ONE OF THE MOST LUCRATIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR MODERN SONGWRITERS BECAUSE THE INDUSTRY IS BUILT ON A GLOBAL ECOSYSTEM OF PUBLISHER-DRIVEN PITCHING, HIGH-VOLUME PRODUCTION, AND INTERNATIONAL FAN ENGAGEMENT. UNLIKE MANY WESTERN MARKETS, WHERE ARTIST-WRITERS CREATE MOST OF THEIR OWN MATERIAL, K-POP ACTIVELY DEPENDS ON PROFESSIONAL SONGWRITERS AND PRODUCERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD. THIS CREATES A CONSISTENT DEMAND FOR CATCHY TOPLINES, ADVANCED HARMONIES, AND POLISHED DEMOS—MEANING MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PLACEMENTS.

A SINGLE CUT ON A MAJOR K-POP ALBUM CAN GENERATE SIGNIFICANT UPFRONT FEES, STRONG MECHANICAL ROYALTIES, PERFORMANCE ROYALTIES, AND LONG-TERM INCOME FROM GLOBAL SALES, STREAMING, TOURING, MERCHANDISE, AND FAN CONTENT. BECAUSE K-POP GROUPS OFTEN ACHIEVE MASSIVE INTERNATIONAL REACH, EVEN AN ALBUM TRACK—NOT JUST A SINGLE—CAN OUTPERFORM WESTERN CHART RELEASES IN TOTAL REVENUE. AS THE GENRE CONTINUES TO DOMINATE WORLDWIDE CHARTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA, WRITING FOR K-POP HAS BECOME ONE OF THE MOST FINANCIALLY REWARDING AND GLOBALLY IMPACTFUL AVENUES IN THE SONGWRITING AND PUBLISHING LANDSCAPE.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will learn to:

- Understand what defines K-Pop musically, culturally, and structurally.
- Analyse advanced harmony common in K-Pop (modal mixture, borrowed chords, jazz/R&B influence).
- Deconstruct K-Pop melody writing and rhythmic phrasing.
- Identify production-based songwriting techniques (switch-ups, pre-chorus lifts, rap/sing sections).
- Compose a K-Pop song.



HARMONY & CHORD COMPOSITION IN K-POP



K-Pop uses richer harmony than most Western Top 40 pop, often borrowing from R&B, neo-soul, jazz, and gospel.

Common K-Pop Harmonic Traits

- Extended chords are extremely common:

Maj7, Min7, Min9, Dom9, Dom11, 13 chords

“Lush pop-R&B” voicings: add9, sus2, sus4

- Modal interchange (borrowed chords from parallel modes)

e.g., bVI, iv, bVII to add emotional contrast

- Chromatic voice-leading

Smooth stepwise bass note movement

R&B-style passing chords (e.g., diminished 7 leading chords)

- Pre-chorus harmonic lift

Using rising bass lines or ii-V turnarounds to heighten tension

HARMONY & CHORD COMPOSITION IN K-POP



Typical K-Pop Progressions

- I – vi – IV – V (with 7ths and add9s)
- ii – V – I (borrowed from jazz)
- I – V – bVII – IV (modal pop-rock flavour)
- IV – iv – I (borrowed iv for melancholy lift)
- i – bVI – bVII – V (dramatic minor)
- VI – III – VII – i (K-pop ballad progression)

NEW JEANS - DITTO

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Km71Rr9K-Bw>

Key of A Major (Chorus/Verse):

Dmaj7 - C#m7 - F#m7 - Bm7 - E7 - Amaj7

- **Modal Mixture/Borrowed Chords:** The progression uses chords borrowed from parallel keys (like the minor iv chord or altered dominants) to add emotional depth, such as the E7b5 (E7 with a flattened fifth) which creates tension and a strong pull back to the tonic.
- **Chord Extensions:** Using maj7 (major seventh) and m7 (minor seventh) chords (e.g., Dmaj7, C#m7, F#m7) instead of simple triads adds sophistication and that signature hazy, R&B-infused sound.
- **Key Variations:** While often simplified to I-V-vi-IV in A (D-A-F#m-B), "Ditto" adds flavor with the specific sevenths and altered chords, giving it a unique, dreamy quality distinct from basic pop progressions.

NEWJEANS - 'DITTO'

TRANSCRIBED BY CHEN
ANALYSE-YOURE.COM

♩ = 134

5

9

13

17

21

25

29

33

37

Pre-chorus

Per/Classic ฝึกอบรม L300 โทร 086-344-2560

MELODY WRITING IN K-POP

K-Pop melodies are highly expressive, wide-ranged, and rhythmically varied. They often move between Western pop simplicity and R&B vocal agility. There are usually multiple members of each band, so vocal ranges and styles can be wide and varied.

K-Pop Melodic Traits

- Large interval leaps in choruses for drama
- Pentatonic + blues scale influence (especially in rap-adjacent parts)
- Chromatic passing tones to enhance extended chords
- Melodic sequencing, often ascending to build tension
- Melismas and ornamentation drawn from R&B and gospel

Multi-Section Melodic Contrast

K-Pop is famous for its “section-switching”:

- Verse: conversational
- Pre-chorus: rising tension, longer phrases
- Chorus: high range, anthemic, hook-based
- Post-chorus (“tag”): short, repetitive pop motif
- Bridge: emotional or harmonic change of scenery



RHYTHM & GROOVE: K-POP'S MODERN RHYTHMIC IDENTITY

Rhythm in Melodies

K-Pop melodies often use:

- Syncopation (off-beat accents)
- Short rhythmic cells that repeat (like Western pop)
- R&B-influenced triplets
- Switches between straight and swung feels
- Multi-syllabic rhythmic phrasing in pre-choruses

Production-Driven Rhythmic Foundations

Most K-Pop uses a hybrid of:

- Trap hi-hat rolls
- EDM 4-on-the-floor kicks
- Funk-inspired bass movement
- Hip-hop rhythmic flows under sung melodies



MELODY - COMPARING THE VERSE AND CHORUS

Compare the verse and chorus from these song examples and write down any noticeable K-pop writing elements.

Blackpink - How you like that - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioNng23DkIM>

BTS - Fake love - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7C2z4GqqS5E>

Twice - This is for - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHHQaoEW30Q>

Dayoung - Body - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJpmNMWboWg>

Stray kids - Do it - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NED7nev2ywQ>

Notice the rhythmic delivery. Are the verse's conversational?

Are there changes between straight and swung feel?

Do they have R&B traits or more western melodic ideas.

What about the sections? Are there noticeable changes?

Are there large interval leaps in the chorus?

Does the chorus have gang vocals and is rhythmically repetitive?

MODERN K-POP PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES

K-pop production is varied between artists and songs. The most important thing to notice is that it draws from popular Western Styles. K-Pop production is generally polished and is meticulous and layered, combining Western pop aesthetics with Korean vocal stylings.

Common Production Traits

- Layered vocal stacks (doubles, harmonies, octaves)
- Countermelodies in synths or backing vocals
- Bright, polished mix with boosted highs
- Bass synth + live bass hybrid approach
- Sectional contrast through production (drop-outs, reverses, filters)
- Tonal FX: risers, impacts, chopped vocals, reverse reverbs

Section-Based Production Changes

- Verses: sparse → rhythmic emphasis, filtered instruments
- Pre-chorus: build through synth pads, rising bass, snare rolls
- Chorus: full wall of sound, vocal layers, wide stereo image
- Bridge: often production “reset” → new tonal palette

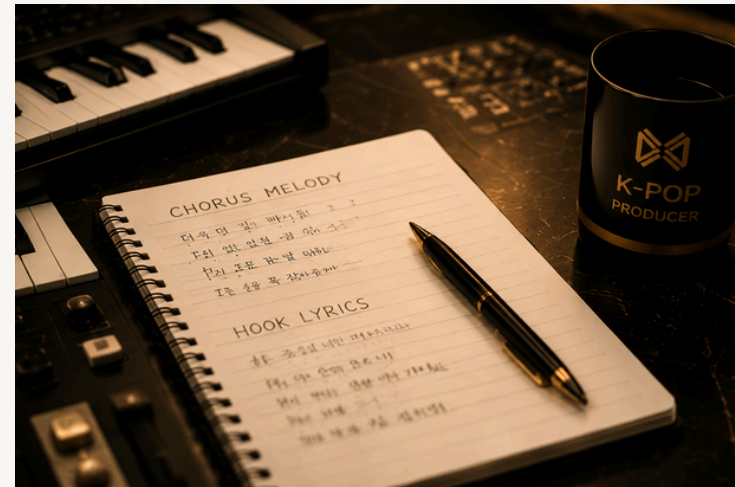


COMPOSING FOR K-POP

K-Pop gives students an opportunity to practise:

- Extended-chord writing (Maj7, Min9, 11 chords)
- Modal borrowing & chromaticism
- Melodic contrast through range, rhythm, and contour
- Advanced rhythmic phrasing (syncopation, triplets, polymetric patterns)
- Large-scale structural thinking
- Modern production-informed orchestration

These skills are relevant to contemporary songwriting careers.



SONGWRITING BRIEF – NCT DREAM

In groups of 2–4 create a new composition for this K-POP Brief

Band – NCT Dream

General Direction

- Balanced distribution between rap and vocals
- Rhythmic 'busy' vocal melodies with a hooky big chorus with gang vocals
- Should highlight NCT DREAM's bright and energetic identity
- Must be dance beat-oriented / suitable for K-Pop choreography

Explosive, Energetic Dance Pop with Real Band Elements

- A performance-driven dance track combining real-sound band elements suitable for dance sequence
- Should express explosive, free-spirited energy inspired by punk, rock, or synth-pop influences
- Must convey an emotional, lyrical message – overall lyrics don't matter as they will be translated to Korean, but there must be a strong English tag line/word.

Recent NCT Dream songs

Beat it up <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wvtNmMmcAYw>

Tricky https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kT_bK9QD-T4

Tempo <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqWk4Hn3slg>

Song References

Panic! At The Disco – High Hopes

<https://youtu.be/IPXlgEAGe4U?si=xYhAhYrA4uyXoxXN>

mgk – emo girl (feat. WILLOW)

https://youtu.be/yh_ydvlJAxg?si=QaWgMGZtgAEK9Xs

1WALK THE MOON – Shut Up and Dance

<https://youtu.be/6JCLYORlx6Q?si=KjPK6UEAKstjxqTU>

Start by creating a simple production/beat

Think about your chord progression / extended chords / use of modal interchange etc

Draw inspiration from the reference songs and recent NCT Dream songs in terms of Melody and multi layered vocal parts

LISTENING SESSION

Students play back each of their compositions to the class.

Give constructive feedback on the chords, structure, melody and counter melodies.

Make comparisons to other K-Pop songs.

Give advice on how to emulate the K-Pop sound.

Recap

Who can summarise some K-Pop writing elements?

What constitutes as a strong K-Pop melody?

What makes K-Pop chords more interesting than standard Western Pop?

Is K-Pop influenced by jazz, hip hop and R&B?

Are there noticeable sections in K-Pop (verse, pre, chorus, post chorus etc?)

Who has any comments?

Would anyone like to focus on writing more for K-Pop?

