










Lesson 1	<h2>Music Production Process</h2> <div style="text-align: right;">   </div> <h3>Overview</h3> <p>How does a musical idea make its way from a composer's imagination to a CD that plays on your home stereo, or to an MP3 file that you play on your computer?</p> <p>Throughout this course we'll be thinking about that question as we take a look at the various stages in the desktop music production process and the tools that are used.</p> <p>A musical idea can take many forms, from a simple drum and bass pattern to a complete song with melody, lyrics, and chord changes. How the final product sounds has a great deal to do with musical arrangement and the tools used to produce it.</p> <p>In this lesson, we'll take a look at the steps involved in producing a piece of music. The steps are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • musical ideas • recording • editing • mixing • mastering <p>Mouse over any step below and read what happens at that stage of the process.</p>
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Figure 1.1: The music production process.

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Creating Musical Ideas



Musical ideas take many forms but usually start out as a simple melody and chord progression. From there, a producer makes decisions about how those ideas are to be arranged: what instruments will be used and what the musical form will be. Along the way, these arranging choices will have a profound effect on how a piece of music is produced.

Let's take a look at different kinds of arrangements and the tools we'll use to produce them.

Types of Arrangements: Vocal or Instrumental?





One of the first arranging choices made is whether the melody of a piece will be sung or played by an instrument, and if played by an instrument, which one. In either case, we'll usually have instruments providing accompaniment to the melody.

Vocal Arrangements	Description
Voice with single accompanying instrument	This is the typical starting point for singer/songwriters. The accompanying instrument is usually guitar or keyboard.
Voice with rhythm section	The accompanying instruments are usually drums, bass, keyboard, and/or guitar.
Voice with rhythm section and an instrumental arrangement	Additional horn, string, or other parts are often added to a basic vocal and rhythm section arrangement to provide a fuller, richer sound.
Instrumental Arrangements	Description
Solo instrumental	An instrument that's able to play melody and accompaniment parts at the same time, such as a piano, usually performs this.
Instrumental melody with rhythm section accompaniment	This is the standard model for a jazz ensemble.
Instrumental melody with instrumental arrangement	This is typical of any type of orchestral or chamber music.

Figure 1.2. Types of vocal and instrumental arrangements.

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Creating Musical Ideas



Acoustic, Electric, or Electronic Instruments and Production Tools

Once you decide on an arrangement, you choose the instruments. The types of instruments you choose will greatly influence the kinds of tools you'll use to produce that piece. Performances by vocals or any type of purely acoustic instrument such as a piano or sax need to be recorded as audio. You'll typically use a microphone and some sort of audio recording device to capture these types of performances.

Acoustic Sources

Performances by vocals or any type of purely acoustic instrument, such as a piano or sax, need to be recorded as audio. You'll typically need to use a microphone and some sort of audio recording device to capture these types of performances.

Electric Instruments

Instruments such as electric guitars, basses, and some electric pianos and organs are electro-acoustic instruments that need some sort of amplification to be heard. Although these instruments can be recorded using microphones much like acoustic sources, that fact that they produce an electrical output allows us to record directly into an audio recorder. A new breed of amplifier modeling technology allows the desktop producer to record convincing guitar sounds without the need to use a microphone and amplifier.

Electronic Instruments

Synthesizers, samplers, drum machines, and grooveboxes are all examples of purely electronic instruments. Unlike an electric guitar that amplifies a vibrating string, these instruments produce sound solely through electronic means. More importantly, any recent electronic instrument can be controlled using a communications language called MIDI, the Musical Instrument Digital Interface.

As we've seen from the previous audio example, you, the desktop music producer, have a wide range of musical choices in producing any piece of music. The instrumentation you choose will often depend on the resources you have available. Fortunately, the current crop of available hardware and software tools offers a wide range of options for even the modest home setup.

In this course we'll focus mainly on electronic, instrumental desktop production. Any time you work with either a vocal or acoustic instrumental source, we'll supply the necessary prerecorded material.

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Recording



Once you have decided on the type of musical arrangement you are going to produce, you can begin recording. Keep in mind that the final distributed version of your song or composition will be some sort of stereo audio file that will play from either an audio CD or an MP3 file. Although there are many recording formats to choose from, you'll want to end up with a version that can be played by the widest possible audience.

There are two distinct models for recording a musical performance:

- direct-to-stereo recording
- multitrack recording

Figure 1.4: Two models for recording a musical performance.

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