Compositional Process Outline

1. Why are you writing this piece in the first place?

Subject matter or scene - what is this piece for? *"This is for a sad scene at a graveyard" "My teacher assigned me to write a funny etude"* You don't have to tell anyone what your piece is about, but it should be about something.

2. What are your parameters?

It is hard to be creative when you have endless possibilities, so create parameters for yourself.

- **Instrumentation.** (What fits within the genre?) – What's your color palette?

- **Harmonic language.** What chord progression are you using? Is it dark, is it happy? Mostly major/minor chords? Both? 7ths?

- **Rhythmic language**. What kind of rhythms are you using, what time signature, does it have a groove?

- **Structure.** Do you have different sections? Do things repeat? Do they change keys? What is your form? Intro - A section B section. Can be as simple as adding and subtracting elements.

3. What is the most important element?

Your melody? groove? bass line? chord progression? Can be any element, maybe an ostinato line or a rhythm you came up with. Even a synth texture. Create around that, frame it. Helps so elements aren't competing for attention and cluttered. This will help direct the listener.

4. Flesh it out/Orchestration

Who's going to play what? What is each instrument, voice or sound playing?
Keep building upon the elements you do know, don't try to compose every part at once. You will get ideas from the next elements you create. (Like a Sudoku puzzle)

4.a Frequency spectrum – have I evenly filled it? Do I have parts
covering the bass, middle, and high frequencies?

4.b Textures. Do I have complementary textures? Do all sounds have
too much attack? Filling in the space if needed with smaller elements like shakers, cymbal swells etc.

If unsure, make decisions that fit within the parameters and "rules" you established for this piece. Don't add too much, like fashion, always take 1 accessory off before you leave. **Every element you add should have a reason for being there.** Don't add things because you feel like you have to, this will often lead to a cluttered piece. Composition is composed of many different little decisions and choices, so always be forwarding the goal of the piece.

5. Production - mix, reverb, delays, EQ, compression. Create a field of depth, like a sonic spectrum, left to right, back to front.

It's best to be work on the production of each element as you add them. If you are adding a cello line, make the reverb sound how you'd like it. Think of production like a painting, and how you would have different layers of depth, foreground, background etc. If you've composed around your main element, the mixing stage will be much easier as you won't have to fix competing elements with a mix.

6. Editing
- Compare with reference track mix.
- Take a day away if you can to give your ears a break and listen again when you are fresh.
- Is something missing? Did you add too much?
- Share with trusted friend/colleague for opinion if needed.
- Play in different speakers (lap top, headphones etc.)
- Check: If someone just listened to this with no context, would they be able to get my intention?
- Be critical, it is not your "baby" anymore you are an editor; try not to feel personally about it at this stage.

7. Let it go.
Send to client, post it. Stop fiddling with it, things can always be better, but there comes a time to let the piece go. Usually this can be spotted by adding elements that are now making the composition "worse" and confusing your goal. That is the time to stop. (or more often, you've reached your deadline).