

# Introduction to Film Scoring

## Course Details

**Course Location:** New Cabell Hall 191

**Course Time(s):** M/W 4:00-4:50

**Credit Hours:** 2

## Course Description

Have you ever noticed the music playing in the background of a scene in your favorite movie? How does that music make you feel? Why does it leave such a strong impression? Often, a movie score can make or break a scene, sometimes without the audience even registering what they are listening to.

In this class, we will examine the anatomy of film scores from *Lord of the Rings* to *Interstellar* to discover how music interacts with picture to create emotion in a scene. This class is designed to break down the elements of music composition such as motive, harmony, and instrumentation to examine how they impact audience perception of the film. By the end of this class, students will not only have intimate knowledge of these musical elements but be able to use them to create their own scores. This class will take a hands-on approach, focusing heavily on not only listening to scores but also putting knowledge into practice through short composition assignments.

## Instructor Information

**Instructor:** [REDACTED]

**Hours:** Wednesday 2:00-3:30

**E-mail:** [REDACTED]

## Objectives

By the end of the course, you will be able to...

- identify motives, themes, and established techniques in film scores
- evaluate how the different dimensions of composition (pitch, rhythm, timbre, texture, amplitude) function together to shape audience perception of a scene.
- Develop basic skills on a DAW and notation software
- develop your own compositional preferences based on listening and practice
- Identify useful resources and opportunities to practice composing, such as working for student films and re-scoring favorite films.
- Learn how to communicate with directors and other filmmakers as a composer

# Assessments and Grading Scheme

## Mini-Compositions

These 3 assignments will be short, low-stakes opportunities for students to practice composing and apply knowledge relating to the material covered that week. Students will be given a set of parameters to create a short composition (1-2 minutes) and a short write-up (~300 words) explaining their intentions and choices for the piece. These are quick assignments, so I am not expecting anyone to be the next John Williams-- the purpose is to let you practice and experiment!

**Value:** 30%

## Final Composition

The final composition assignment will allow you to take what you have learned this semester and get creative! You will choose roughly 5 minutes of any film or TV out there and re-score it in your own style and sensibility. You may choose your favorite film and re-interpret a section meaningful to you. On the other hand, if you've ever seen a film and disliked its score-- this could be your chance to fix it! Whichever direction you choose, you must consider all the building blocks we have discussed: pitch, rhythm, timbre, texture, and gesture. You must also submit a write-up (500-750 words) explaining your inspiration and choices. This is a big project that we will be working on for a good part of the semester, so the tasks and grades associated with them will be broken down into parts. You will submit an outline/spotting notes (10%), draft (15%), and final project (20%) with feedback along the way.

**Value:** 45%

## Class Participation

I am assigning a selection of films to watch outside of class. Pay special attention to the musical choices the composer uses and how sounds and motives sync with the picture. On the day the watching/listening is due, we will take some time out of class to discuss the score. Come to class prepared to discuss different motifs and themes you identified, cue changes you noticed, and how the essential elements of music (pitch, rhythm, timbre, texture) affected how you perceived the story. What if there was no music at all? How would your perception change? This way of watching/listening is probably different from how you typically watch films, so we will also practice this in class with interactive lectures and small group discussions. Your participation grade will depend upon your engagement with the material and your respect for others during the discussion.

Also included in class participation are the shorter homework assignments and workshopping sessions for the final composition. In these workshopping sessions, you will break into groups to listen to and provide feedback on your peers' drafts. You will be given a worksheet to fill out with guiding questions to facilitate the workshop. Your participation grade will depend upon your attentiveness and respect for your peers in giving and receiving feedback.

**Value:** 25%

## Calendar Overview

A tentative schedule of topics, reading assignments, and due dates is shown below. Nothing will be made due earlier than indicated but some things may be pushed back or eliminated altogether, depending on time. All changes will be announced in class and on the course website.

Date	In-Class	Homework/Reading Due
Aug. 23	Introduction!	
Aug. 28	On Music and Film: "Why is this funny?" Listening Discussion/Presentations	Come to class with a clip from a film and its music that moves or inspires you. Be prepared to talk about why it moves you.
Aug. 30	Lab: Lab overview, Intro to Reaper, Explanation of Mini Composition 1	
Sept. 4	Film Discussion On Motive: How do you build an effective theme?	Watching/Listening: <i>Lord of the Rings</i>
Sept. 6	Mini Composition 1 Workshop	
Sept. 11	Mini Composition 1 Presentations, What are the core elements of music?	Mini Composition 1
Sept. 13	LAB: Intro to MuseScore, Elements of music (cont.)	
Sept. 18	Film Discussion, How does notation fit into modern film music?	Watching/Listening: <i>Everything Everywhere all at Once</i>
Sept. 20	LAB: What is gesture? Explanation of Mini Composition 2	
Sept. 25	Film Discussion	Watching/Listening: <i>Star Wars: A New Hope</i>
Sept. 27	LAB: How do you use different software programs together effectively? Mini-Composition 2 questions.	Gesture Sketch exercise
Oct. 2	NO CLASS- FALL BREAK	
Oct. 4	LAB: Mini Composition 2 workshop	
Oct. 9	Mini Composition 2 Presentations, What is spotting?	Mini Composition 2
Oct. 11	LAB: What can you do with orchestration?	
Oct. 16	Film Discussion: How does orchestration affect our	Watching/Listening: <i>Interstellar</i>

	perception of time and history? Introduction to Mini Composition 3	
Oct. 18	LAB: Mini Composition 3 Workshop	
Oct. 23	Film Discussion, Mini Composition 3 questions	Watching/Listening: <i>How to Train Your Dragon</i>
Oct. 25	Introduction to Final Composition	
Oct. 30	Mini Composition 3 Presentations	Mini Composition 3
Nov. 1	LAB: Gesture sketch workshop	
Nov. 6	Composition Proposal Peer Workshop	Deadline to Send me an MP4 of your clips to get re-created sound design
Nov. 8	Lab: Questions and Work on Spotting Exercise	
Nov. 13	Proposal/Spotting Peer workshop	Gesture sketch and Final Composition Proposal/Spotting
Nov. 15	Work on Draft 1	
Nov. 20	Composition Draft Peer Workshop	Final Composition Draft
Nov. 22	NO CLASS	
Nov. 27	On production: How do you make the most out of introductory tools?	
Nov. 29	Lab: Remaining Final Composition Questions	
Dec. 4	Final Composition Concert, Opportunities for Further Study	Final Composition

## Attendance Policy

Given the creative and cumulative nature of the class, attendance and active participation are especially important. Everyone is expected to be on time and to attend all classes. If you have an unavoidable absence because of illness, religious observance, or the like, please email me prior to the start of class to avoid an unexcused absent mark. Barring extenuating circumstances, if you have an unexcused absence, meaning you do not let me know ahead of time, you will not receive participation/discussion points for the activities completed that day.

## Late Work Policy

Turning in work on time allows the class to stay on schedule and for me to keep track of everyone's assignments and grades. Because of this, I cannot accept late work if it is not discussed with me ahead of time. However, I understand that there can be extenuating circumstances and unexpectedly busy times in the semester, so each of you receives one free, no-questions-asked late pass that allows you to turn in an assignment up to 3 days late

without any penalty. You must contact me 24 hours in advance of the deadline if you wish to use this late pass.

## **Honor/Academic Integrity Policy**

I trust every student in this course to fully comply with all the provisions of the University's Honor Code. By enrolling in this course, you have agreed to abide by and uphold the Honor System of the University of Virginia. In this class, this means that all compositions and write-ups must only include original content, unless otherwise stated in the assignment instructions. Receiving feedback or assistance with technology when needed is not considered plagiarism but turning in someone else's work is not acceptable. With music, this can be particularly tricky because composers are constantly inspired by the work of others, often without knowing it, and it is difficult to tell if or when a rhythm or sequence of pitches becomes intellectual property. To avoid this issue, mention your inspirations and samples for your pieces in your write-ups.

Please let me know if you have any questions regarding the course Honor policy. If you believe you may have committed an Honor Offense, you may wish to file a Conscientious Retraction by calling the Honor Offices at (434) 924-7602. For your retraction to be considered valid, it must, among other things, be filed with the Honor Committee before you are aware that the act in question has come under suspicion by anyone.

## **Accessibility**

This course is designed to be welcoming to, accessible to, and usable by everyone, regardless of ability, socio-economic status, and previous experience with composition and computer music technology. Be sure to let me know immediately if you encounter a required element or resource in the course that is not accessible to you and I will make accommodations. Also, let me know of changes I can make to the course so that it is more welcoming to, accessible to, or usable by students who take this course in the future.

It is the policy of the University of Virginia to accommodate students with disabilities in accordance with federal and state laws. Any UVA student with a disability who needs accommodation (e.g. in arrangements for seating, extended time for examinations, or note-taking, etc.), should contact the Student Disability Access Center (SDAC) and provide them with appropriate medical or psychological documentation of their condition. Once accommodations are approved, it is the student's responsibility to follow up with the instructor about logistics and implementation of accommodations. Accommodations for test taking should be arranged at least 14 business days in advance of the date of the test(s). Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the SDAC: 434-243-5180/Voice, 434-465-6579/Video Phone, 434-243-5188/Fax. Further policies and statements are available at <https://www.studenthealth.virginia.edu/sdac>.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or isolated, there are many individuals here to help. The Student Health and Wellness Center offers Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) for its students (<https://studenthealth.virginia.edu/caps>); call 434-243-5150 to speak with an on-call counselor and/or schedule an appointment. If you prefer to speak anonymously, you can call Madison House's HELP Line at any hour of any day: 434-295-TALK (<http://www.helpineuva.com>). Alternatively, you can call or text the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (1-800-985-5990, or text TalkWithUs to 66746) to connect with a trained crisis counselor; this is toll free, multilingual, and confidential, available to all residents in the US and its territories (<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>).