

## Texture

In order to understand texture, we need first to understand the concepts of **melody** and **harmony**. Once we understand these, we can start to explore how they work together within the texture of the music we make.

### *Melody*

Melody is the “proper name” for the tune in a piece of music – the part you might whistle or hum (or even sing) when a favourite song or other piece of music hits your mind.

### *Harmony*

Harmony is the “backing stuff” – but not merely the melody being played behind the singer – think of the rhythm guitarist and bassist in a rock or pop band; the second violins, violas, double basses and brass section in a symphony orchestra, when the first violins are playing the melody. Harmony involves different instruments or voices playing or singing different melodies that blend well together, forming chords.

## Three fundamental forms of texture

We can think of texture a bit like the threads in a piece of fabric – this could be a fine, delicate silk scarf, a tough pair of jeans, a heavy tweed winter jacket, a crocheted shawl ... and just as, when you get dressed, the clothes you wear may not all be the same fabric or texture, so in music, the sounds of the different instruments you use, and the melodies you have them play, can vary, changing the texture of your music.

### *Monophonic*

A Monophonic texture is where we have one sound or melody played by one instrument or voice – this could be the solo singer at the start of a Christmas carol, or a lead guitar introduction to a rock song.

Monophonic – one instrument, one melody. One sound.

### *Polyphonic*

A Polyphonic texture has many sounds – but also playing different melodies and harmonies. For example, when the instruments in an orchestra are playing different melodies that together make up the complex texture of a movement in a symphony.

A choir where several different groups of voices are singing in harmony is also polyphonic.

### *Homophonic*

A homophonic texture happens when lots of instruments or voices are singing or playing the same melody. For example, when a crowd at a football match all sing either the national anthem, or the anthem of a particular football club, there may be hundreds or even thousands of voices, but they're all singing the same thing.

## Types of texture

### ***Thin (or light)***

We might think of this as “not a lot going on”. A solo voice opening a work for a choir; a flute or simple, uncomplicated piano melody at the start of a jazz piece; a solo guitar at the beginning of a folk song; these are all examples of thin or light texture. We get this sometimes with the “middle eight” section in a blues song.

### ***Thick (or heavy)***

On the other hand, we can think of this as “lots going on” or the music “getting busy” – in a rock band, the bass guitar might be playing a walking bass line; the rhythm guitarist laying down a steady 12-bar blues rhythm; the drummer belting out a backbeat rhythm; and the keyboardist and lead guitarist playing a sequence of “question and answer” melodies back and forth. There’s lots happening – and lots for the listener (and the players) to pay attention to.

## Using texture in composition

### **What you need to think about and how you need to use texture to make your music work**

Music with the same texture the whole way through can be boring. A major way to keep your listener interested is to vary the texture through your work. This can be done as much in a work written for one instrument (one of Beethoven’s piano sonatas, for example) as it can in a work for progressive rock band with added studio effects (Pink Floyd or the Moody Blues for example).

## Dynamics

Dynamics is the word we use to talk about how loud or soft the sounds in a piece of music are, and how much that loudness and softness varies within a piece. Just like texture, there can be times when the composer wants to use dynamics to keep their music interesting, as well as to express feeling and emotion.

Dynamics, like the other parts of texture, are a great tool you as a composer can use to express your feeling in your music, and use your music to change the emotions in your audience.

### ***Crescendo***

This is an Italian term meaning the music builds up to a loud peak.

### ***Diminuendo***

Another of the Italian words we use in music, telling us the music gradually becomes softer, quieter.