



Transcribing a Theme

Transcribing is the act of taking what you hear and writing it out in standard musical notation. For this assignment you will be transcribing a melody of your choice. You do not need to transcribe an entire song, just a single theme, chorus or verse. You can write it out in Flat.io or on paper, whichever suits your desires.

CHOOSE AN INSTRUMENT YOU WILL BE USING FOR TRANSCRIBING

To transcribe a piece of music, you need to be able to test-drive it. As you listen, you need to play it back to see if you get it right. Usually a piano or keyboard is a best-choice for this, but you can still use a wind or string instrument. Alternatively you can use Flat.io or even the “Shared Piano” app from <https://musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/Shared-Piano>, or the <https://onlinesequencer.net>.

If you are using an instrument where you can adjust your intonation (bend the pitch), like most wind instruments or string instruments, you need to be careful not to allow yourself to bend the pitch or play out of tune. For example, in a song you are playing you might hear a C-Sharp, but not remember the fingering for it, and so play the fingering for a D and bend the pitch down. You do this through intuition, but it will give you a bad result. Just be careful, and you’ll be fine.

Do not use music notation software at this point. If you don’t have the rhythm exactly right, it will instead frustrate you.

CHOOSE A SECTION OF A SONG

Usually the best place is the chorus. Don’t stress yourself out and do more than is necessary.

CHOOSE A STRATEGY – NOTES FIRST, OR RHYTHMS FIRST?

Transcribing is difficult if you try to do too much at once. Discipline yourself, and focus on only one thing or the other; most people start with the notes, but you can easily start with the rhythms first if you choose.

Working with Notes

First, there is no specific notation required for this. You can write this on manuscript paper or on lined paper or in the margins of a newspaper, it doesn’t matter. All you’re trying to do is figure out what notes are played, and in what order.

1. Find the first note. Mark it down.
2. To get to the next note, determine first whether or not it is going up or down, and then the type of movement;
 - a. a unison (the next note is the same as the first)
 - b. a half-step (the next note is a chromatic step away from the first)
 - c. a whole-step (the next note is a diatonic step away from the first)
 - d. a skip or jump (an interval; you need to experiment to find out how big the interval was)
3. Continue this way until you think you have all the right notes.

One thing you can sometimes do is compare a note at the beginning of a phrase to a note at the end of the phrase, just to make sure it was what you expected.

A challenge you may have to deal with is singers who sing ornamentally. If you hear someone pulling an Arianna Grande moment, you might have to choose the best note for that moment, and ignore all the singers’ flourishes.

Working with Rhythms

This time there is a right way to do this. You must follow through this exact process. You can begin using Flat.io at this point, and it will help you make sure that you don’t add too many notes to a bar.

USERS OF FLAT.IO

IF YOU ARE PLANNING ON USING FLAT.IO, FIRST CREATE A FREE ACCOUNT WITH YOUR SCHOOL GOOGLE ACCOUNT.

WHEN YOU CREATE A NEW SCORE, MAKE SURE YOU USE THE “SHARE” BUTTON TO SHARE IT WITH JWINDSOR@REDEEMER.AB.CA OR WITH [@WINDYJMUSIC](https://www.instagram.com/windyjmusic).

1. Determine the Time Signature (4-4 time, 3-4 time, 6-8 time, or something even weirder)
2. Determine whether or not the first notes are pickups. If they are, determine which note is the one on the main beat, then work backwards from there.
3. Count as you write.
4. Many musicians use unique rhythms such as syncopations, triplets, and ornamentations. Try to ignore the ornaments. If you need to recall what each of these devices are, refer back to Chapter 5 of Breezin' Thru Theory.

Dynamics and Articulations

1. Once you think you have combined the Rhythms and Notes, now is the time to add dynamics. There may only be a couple, but it's important to get them.
2. Articulations are likely more common. If you are transcribing a piece of music with lyrics, use the articulations to mimic the sounds of the consonants and vowels. A vowel sung across many notes will likely be slurred, whereas hard consonants like T and D may be staccatos.

THE ASSIGNMENT – TRANSCRIBE A THEME FROM A SONG OF YOUR CHOOSING

Your assignment is to transcribe an entire theme. You can choose either a verse or chorus from a favourite song, or a theme from a classical piece.

1. Write the clef, the key signature, and the time signature in that order.
2. Don't forget to make sure you keep your beats organized by the bar.
3. Finish the theme with a double-barline at the end.

You can complete this assignment either in Flat.io and Share it to [@windyjmusic](#) or jwindsor@redeemer.ab.ca or you can complete it on paper, take a photo of it, and submit it to the [#transcription](#) Discord channel.
