

# Composer interview questions

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## What to expect

Composer interviews typically blend a portfolio review with a conversation about your creative process, technical skills, and ability to collaborate. You may be asked to discuss past work, complete a short scoring exercise, or respond to a hypothetical brief.

- **Portfolio and technical:** Questions about your software proficiency, notation skills, and recording experience.
- **Creative process:** How you approach a brief, develop themes, and align music with narrative.
- **Collaboration and client-facing:** Working with directors, producers, and musicians, handling feedback and revisions.
- **Scenario and problem-solving:** Hypothetical situations that test your judgement, creativity, and deadline management.
- **Project management:** Juggling multiple projects, time management, and prioritisation.

The interview often starts with a portfolio walkthrough, where you discuss selected works and your role in each. Then it moves into a conversation with the director or producer about creative alignment. You might be given a short scene to score or a brief to respond to on the spot. Finally, there may be a discussion about rates, availability, and how you work as a freelancer.

## 1. Walk us through your process for scoring a scene from first brief to final mix.

### Why they ask

Assesses your technical workflow and ability to articulate a structured creative process.

### How to structure your answer

Use a linear walk-through: brief, spotting session, thematic sketches, arrangement, recording, mixing, delivery. Highlight your decision points and how you incorporate feedback.

### Example answer

*"When I receive a brief, I first have a spotting session with the director to identify key emotional beats and where music should enter and exit. I then sketch thematic ideas, often at the piano or in Logic Pro, and share rough demos for feedback. Once the direction is locked, I arrange and orchestrate for the chosen ensemble, prepare scores in Sibelius or Dorico, and book a recording session. During the session I conduct and direct the musicians, then take the recordings into Pro Tools for editing and mixing. Finally, I deliver stems and a stereo mix, ensuring all technical specifications are met. Throughout, I keep communication open so the director feels involved in the creative process."*

## 2. Tell me about a time you had to revise a composition after feedback from a director or producer. How did you handle it?

### Why they ask

Tests your ability to take direction, adapt your creative work, and maintain a professional relationship.

### How to structure your answer

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Focus on how you listened, interpreted feedback, and implemented changes while preserving your creative voice.

### Example answer

*"On a short film project, the director initially wanted a lush orchestral score, but after seeing a rough cut, they felt the music was too overwhelming for a pivotal dialogue scene. My task was to rework the*

*cue to support the intimacy of the moment. I scheduled a call to understand their concerns, then experimented with a solo piano and subtle synth pad. I presented two options: one minimal and one with a small string section. The director chose the minimal version, and we refined it over two revisions. The result was a score that felt integrated with the scene, and the director later said it was their favourite cue in the film."*

### **3. Imagine you're scoring a tense chase scene but the director wants a minimalist approach with a single instrument. How would you approach that?**

#### **Why they ask**

Evaluates your creative problem-solving under constraints and your ability to reason about musical choices.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Demonstrate judgement under creative constraints: clarify the brief, explore options, and reason through musical choices. Show you can balance tension with minimalism.

#### **Example answer**

*"I would start by asking the director what kind of tension they want to evoke: is it frantic, cold, or psychological? Then I would suggest a single instrument, perhaps a cello or a prepared piano, and explore how rhythmic repetition, extended techniques, or subtle dynamics can create unease without a full orchestra. I might record a few sketches: one with a pulsing low note, another with fragmented motifs. I would share these and discuss how the music interacts with sound design and dialogue. If needed, I could layer in subtle electronic textures, but I would keep the core minimal. The goal is to enhance the chase without overpowering the visuals."*

### **4. How do you manage multiple deadlines when working on several projects at once?**

#### **Why they ask**

Assesses your project management skills, reliability, and ability to handle the freelance workload.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Practical approach: prioritisation, planning, communication, and tools. Show how you keep track and avoid burnout.

#### **Example answer**

*"I use a project management system, like a spreadsheet or Trello, to track each project's milestones, deliverables, and deadlines. I prioritise based on urgency and complexity, often blocking out specific days for composition, recording, and mixing. I communicate proactively with clients if a deadline is at risk, and I build in buffer time for revisions. I also know my limits and avoid overcommitting, because creative work suffers when I am rushed. For example, last month I was scoring two short films and a game demo; I scheduled the game demo first because it had a fixed playtest date, then allocated mornings to the films. I still delivered all three on time."*

### **5. Describe your experience with DAWs and notation software. Which ones do you use and for what?**

#### **Why they ask**

Checks your technical proficiency with industry-standard tools and how you integrate them into your workflow.

#### **How to structure your answer**

List your tools and explain specific workflows. Be ready to discuss strengths, weaknesses, and how you integrate them.

#### **Example answer**

*"I use Logic Pro as my main DAW for composing, arranging, and mock-ups because of its intuitive MIDI editing and extensive library. I also use Pro Tools for final mixing and stem delivery, especially on film projects where compatibility with post-production houses is important. For notation, I rely on Sibelius for orchestral scores and parts, and I have recently started using Dorico for its advanced engraving features. Ableton Live is my go-to for electronic elements and sound design, particularly for interactive media. I am comfortable moving between these tools, exporting audio and MIDI as needed, and I stay updated with new versions and workflows."*

## **6. How do you collaborate with musicians during a recording session? Give an example of directing an ensemble.**

### **Why they ask**

Gauges your leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills in a studio setting.

### **How to structure your answer**

Use a specific example. Show communication, leadership, and respect for musicians. Mention preparation and how you create a positive environment.

### **Example answer**

*"Before a session, I prepare clear scores and parts, and I share reference recordings so the musicians understand the feel. During the session, I introduce the piece, explain the emotional arc, and then run through sections, giving notes on phrasing, dynamics, and timing. I listen carefully and adjust my direction based on their interpretations, because great performances often come from collaboration. For instance, on a recent recording with a string quartet, I wanted a particular warmth in the cello line. I demonstrated what I meant by singing it, then asked the cellist to try a different bowing. We experimented together and found a phrasing that felt more natural. The session ran smoothly, and we captured the takes efficiently because everyone felt heard."*