Building knowledge through the elements of music, part 2

KS4

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Introduction

This resource follows on directly from part one (*Music Teacher*, September 2020), which covered melody, articulation, instruments and harmony/tonality. This resource will cover dynamics, structure, texture, and time, tempo and rhythm.

You'll need to think carefully about where information for students will be kept. What will they keep in their folders, and what is better kept elsewhere? With student folders, don't be shy about dictating how they should be organised. Some students will naturally keep their folders tidy and organised, but there will be a surprising number who need intervention to prevent their folders becoming a ragbag of haphazard sheets. Insist on file dividers for each Area of Study, with a separate section for their elements work, and with other sections for exam questions, low-stakes tests, and composition.

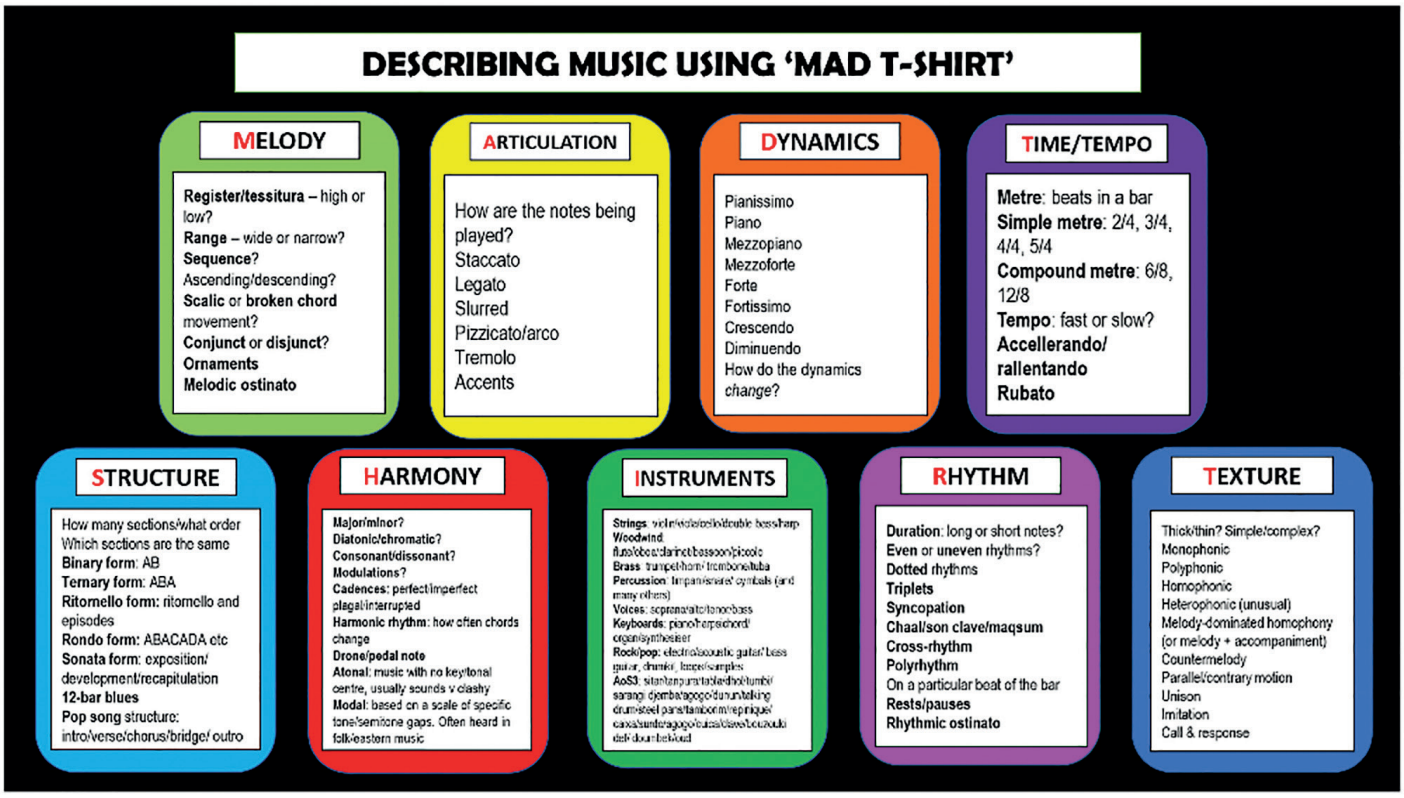
Having an online space for reference and revision material can also be invaluable. If you're a Microsoft school, OneNote and Teams are both good solutions for sharing material that may include audio, video and images for students to access. Google Classroom works in a similar way. The great thing about online platforms such as these is that you can gather together all of the YouTube videos, Quizlets, audio extracts and other resources to make a one-stop-shop for reference and revision, a bit like an online multimedia textbook. It can be added to bit by bit as you accumulate resources, and can be invaluable if remote learning remains a possibility.

An excellent knowledge organiser (different from the one mentioned in Part 1, which is shown on page 2) covering all the elements can be found here (**www.oasisacademywintringham.org/uploaded/Wintringham/Curriculum/Knowledge_Organisers_2020/Music/Musical_Elements_Knowledge_Organiser.pdf**).

Dynamics

This is possibly the most straightforward of all the elements, and is unlikely to take up too much time. These are the main things to bear in mind:

- Dynamics are often so easy to identify that GCSE students tend to think they are too obvious to include in an answer. They may need encouraging to state the obvious, especially when writing longer answers describing a musical extract, but should always be reminded to state *where* in the extract they are referring to, and include how the dynamics might change. For example, 'the music gets louder' is a reasonable answer, but 'at the start the music is pianissimo, but halfway through a crescendo begins that gradually builds to fortissimo' is so much better. Students will need to practise phrasing their answers using precise language.
- You may need to teach your students explicitly not to make woolly statements such as 'the dynamics are loud and soft'. They may be both loud and soft in the same extract, but they cannot be both at the same time, and more specifics are needed in order to achieve marks.
- Perhaps more than with any other element, an understanding of basic Italian prefixes and suffixes is necessary for dynamics. Knowing that '-issimo' means 'very', and that 'mezzo' means 'half' makes everything else quite straightforward.



► Sometimes students get dynamics and articulation mixed up. It may be a good time to revisit previous work done on articulation, and spend a little time ensuring that the differences between them are fully understood.

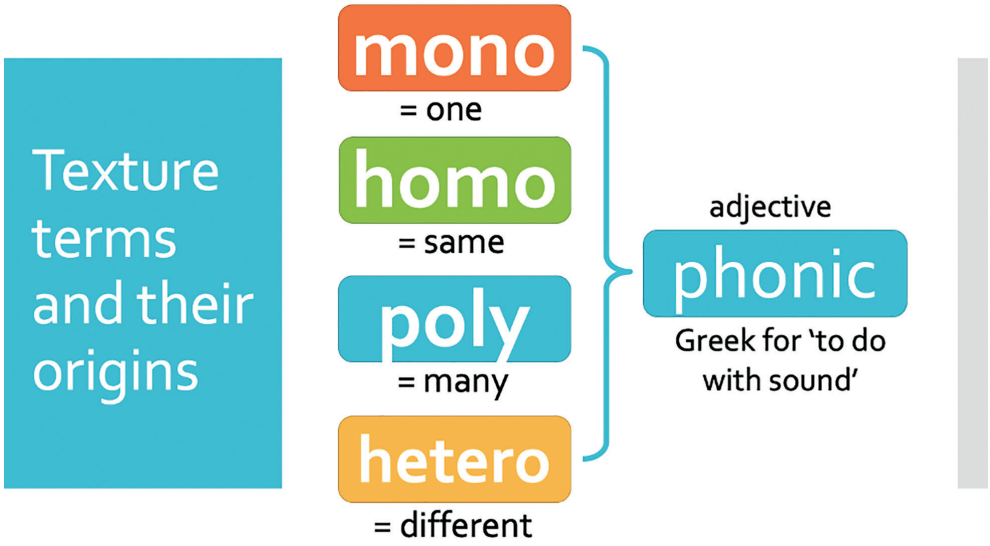
You can make a practical application of dynamics in any bit of practical music making you might be doing. You could practise playing whatever piece you're performing with different dynamics, perhaps getting a student to give directions, or even put dynamics terms on a random picker (such as **wheelofnames.com**) and spin the wheel to determine the next dynamic.

A video explaining dynamics that includes some very straightforward listening questions can be found here (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCCVhRvBe8A**). This could easily be used as remote or flipped learning. A Quizlet set to help students learn and revise dynamics terms can be found here (**https://quizlet.com/_7zsycm?x=1jqt&i=1vb41c**).

Texture

Texture is one of the meatier and potentially more problematic elements, partly because of a wealth of terminology, and partly because textures in real pieces of music can be quite ambiguous. However, the good news is that questions on texture in GCSE papers will only ever focus on clear-cut examples, and may even be multiple choice. A knowledge of texture, though, will be extremely useful to students when they come to composing, so a thorough investigation of how it works in various different styles will be invaluable.

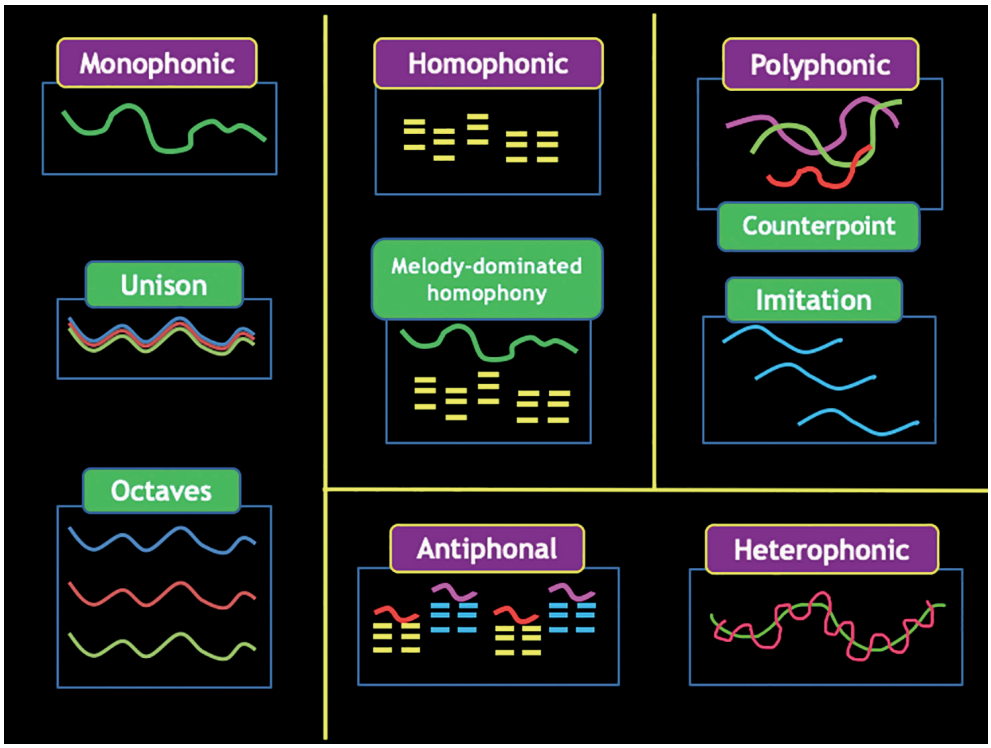
In order to understand basic texture terms beyond 'thick' and 'thin' it is necessary to understand a little bit of Greek:



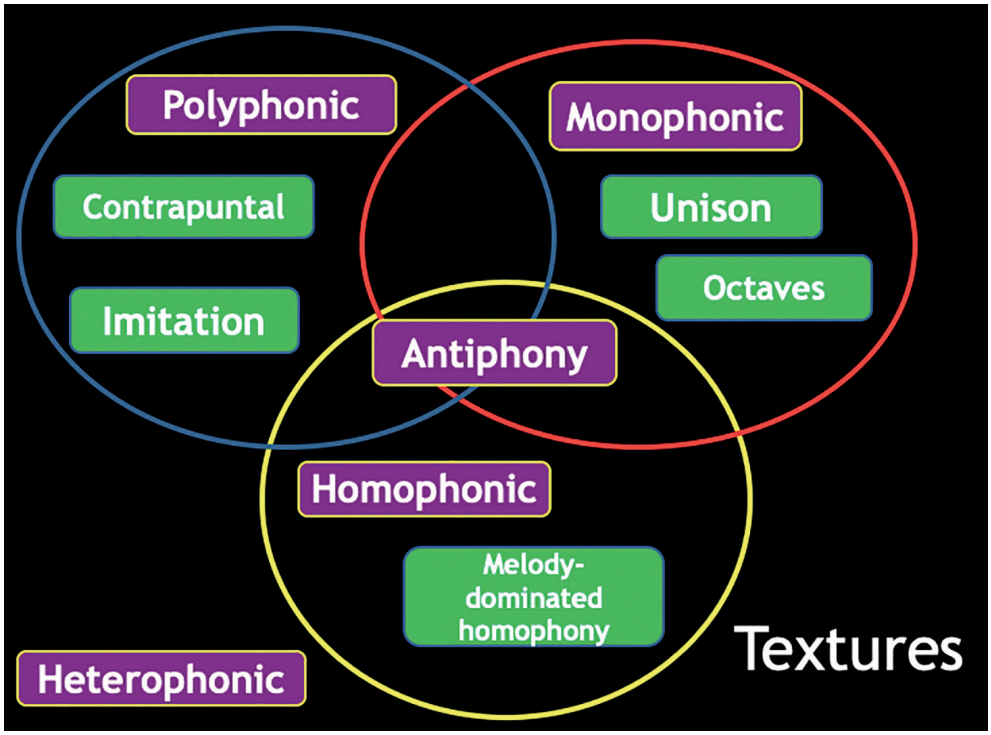
This should not prove too problematic for students, although linking the terms immediately to examples in real music will undoubtedly help, as in this video (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=yfoKgac3S4Q**).

It's interesting to know about heterophonic texture, but make it clear to students that unless they're studying Indonesian gamelan music, it's unlikely to come up in a GCSE exam. Although there are a few examples of heterophonic texture in classical music, it is not a texture that occurs regularly.

Of course, these are not the only texture words that are useful, and some additional terms are desirable for full understanding at GCSE level. This is where it can be useful to bring in some graphics to help:



You'll notice here how variants are collected together under the main '-phonic' headings. It can also be helpful to use a Venn diagram (even though some of the overlaps are not strictly accurate, it does a good job in showing how the textures interrelate):



I like the term 'melody-dominated homophony' and find that students enjoy using a term that sounds so intellectual. However, if you prefer 'melody and accompaniment' as a less pretentious option, it will fulfil every purpose perfectly well at GCSE and A level.

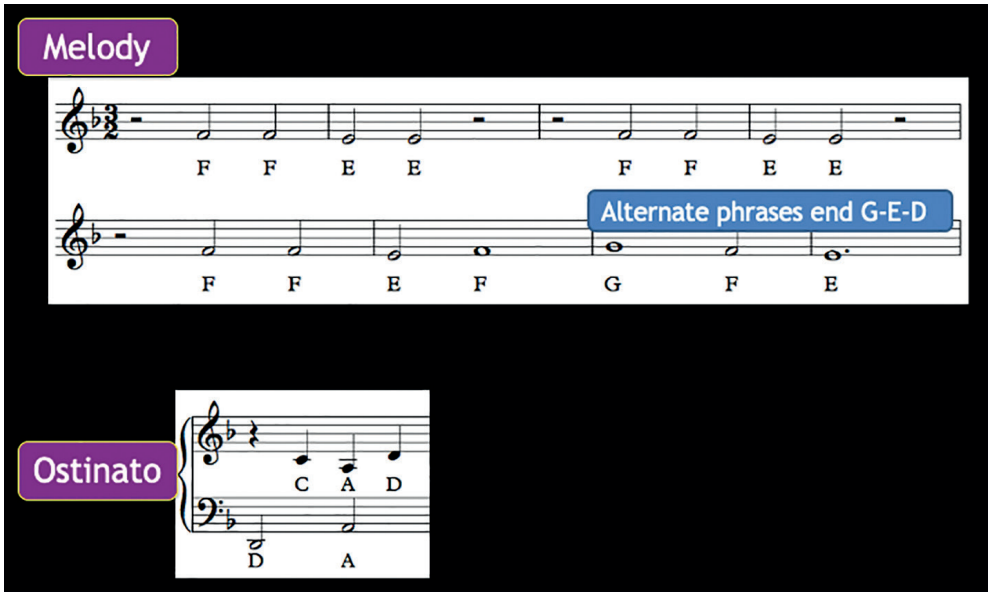
You'll notice here that antiphony goes in the middle. This is because antiphony can involve any of the other textures: you may have a monophonic texture set in call-and-response with a homophonic one, for example. Heterophonic texture is banished to the corner because it doesn't really fit with any of the others.

Once the terms are all fully understood, it is a good idea to consolidate them with some practical work. I find that 'O Fortuna' from Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* is an extremely useful piece for this. Listen to the opening, perhaps with a score as in this video (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=lK4TXtlMtw8**), and establish that the opening section (bars 1-4) has a very clear homophonic texture. After this, the orchestra creates a contrapuntal accompaniment while the choir sings in octaves, until 0:40 when the altos change pitch and the choral texture becomes homophonic over the continuing accompaniment.

There are some other interesting features to point out about this piece:

- Orff uses a huge orchestra: the piano reduction, as shown in the video, is written over three staves at the start to make it easier to read: there are so many changes of register that it would require very frequent clef changes if it was written over two staves.
- Vocal tessitura is used very skilfully: in the dramatic opening, all of the vocal parts are at or near the top of their range, where the voices will hold more tension and power. They come right down in pitch and dynamics for the slightly menacing pianissimo section from bar 5.
- The orchestral part from bar 5 is an ostinato, which is two minim beats long. This goes across the bar lines, as the music is written in 3/2.
- There is extensive use of accents and other articulation markings, even in the pianissimo section. When the singers shoot up an octave at 1:20 and the dynamic changes to fortissimo, the orchestral parts are marked 'martellatissimo', roughly translated as 'as hammer-like as possible'.

The bare bones of 'O Fortuna' are easily turned into a practical activity. The melody and ostinato are both so memorable that they lend themselves perfectly to being played on classroom instruments such as keyboards and tuned percussion. You might present them to students like this:



The challenge is to create an arrangement of 'O Fortuna' demonstrating as many different textures as possible. Orff uses parallel 3rds to harmonise the melody – how will it sound if different intervals are used? Can students create polyphonic textures from the melody using imitation? Could they build in antiphony? Can they create a more elaborate version of the melody to create a heterophonic texture? How many different textures can they include in their arrangements?

To consolidate texture knowledge, you could ask students to complete a listening quiz such as this one (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4v7-NjsQqI**). The answers are as follows:

1 polyphonic
2 homophonic (melody-dominated homophony)
3 octaves
4 monophonic
5 homophonic (melody-dominated homophony)
6 homophonic (melody-dominated homophony)
7 heterophonic
8 monophonic
9 polyphonic
10 homophonic
11 polyphonic
12 homophonic
13 octaves
14 monophonic
15 polyphonic

Students might also find this Quizlet set useful (**https://quizlet.com/_7ztiox?x=1jqt&i=1vb41c**).

Time, tempo and rhythm

Although this is a large topic, there are several things in its favour: it's likely that students will have done extensive work on rhythms at KS3; the tempo side of it is very straightforward; and it is, to a great extent, two-dimensional, given that we don't need to concern ourselves with pitch.

The things that are likely to need work at the start of a GCSE course are these:

- Revisiting of the nature of pulse, tempo, and its distinction from duration
- Compound time signatures
- Italian tempo terms
- Any particular rhythms required for GCSE areas of study

How can we prevent students from thinking that shorter notes equate to a faster tempo? The answer lies in an understanding of subdivision. Find examples of pieces where note values change but tempo remains constant. Pachelbel's Canon is a good example, as the note values get progressively shorter but the cello ground bass is a clear reminder that the tempo does not change. Gloria Gaynor's version of 'I Will Survive' is another useful track – the held chords in the introduction last for four beats each, but

tap along with the pulse and it will be clear that the tempo does not get faster when the drums come in and the music becomes more busy.

You can put this into practice – and reinforce students' understanding of rhythm notation – by doing a simple subdivision practical. Students could clap, tap on tables, or use instruments. Put on a backing track while you display different note-values on the board, ranging from semibreves to semiquavers. Include triplets for more variety once students are confident. All they have to do is play whichever note value you (or an appointed leader) point to.

Check the requirements of your syllabus with regards to the specific time signatures that students are required to know about – most syllabuses state this unequivocally, and while it is possible and even desirable to go beyond the requirements of the specification, it does give a starting point. Ask students to find their own examples of music with each time signature required, and compile these into a test that the whole class can do together. If you need a video for flipped learning or revision of how time signatures work, this (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtvx57P40Ko**) is an excellent introduction, while part two (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3xsoi-NKw8**) covers simple and compound time signatures.

Italian tempo terms are another of those things that just have to be learnt, but it's likely that students will only need a small number of them for GCSE. Adagio, andante and allegro can get you a long way: check your syllabus to see if any others are required, but if these three will suffice, think of silly ways that students can remember which is which. I have heard 'allegro' being explained with the idea of growing an extra leg to go faster, while 'adagio' rhymes with slow. Your students may be able to come up with other ways of remembering them: the sillier the better.

Complex syncopated rhythms, potentially layered up in polyrhythms, come into many of the styles featured in GCSE areas of study. Samba and salsa are two popular topics. Some practical work is in order to get these thoroughly ingrained. For any syncopated rhythms, syllables to say that go with them are a really helpful tool. Ollie Tunmer from **www.beatgoeson.co.uk** uses 'rhythmonics' extensively in his free resources that cover a variety of Latin rhythms, available free here (**www.beatgoeson.co.uk/free-resources**) and expanded further in his book *Body Beats*.

For any of the elements, it's very useful to drill students in a 'panic button' response that they can keep in reserve for desperate moments when they need an answer. If students remember syncopation for their 'go to' answer when a rhythmic device is required, have three tempo terms at the ready, and can distinguish between 2/4, 3/4 and 6/8 time signatures, then they will always have something that they can fall back on.

If you need a flipped learning or revision video that covers the basics of time, tempo and rhythm, try this one (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygjv7w4LNmo**). A time and tempo Quizlet set can be found here (**https://quizlet.com/_7zsz9i?x=1jqt&i=1vb41c**), and an equivalent for rhythm is here (**https://quizlet.com/_7ztddz?x=1jqt&i=1vb41c**).

Structure

Structure is another element with no conceptual difficulties to overcome. As with dynamics, it is simply a case of learning a little terminology. This will be quite specific to your specification, and will depend very much on whether you have set works to study. Whether or not your students need to know about sonata form, theme and variations, strophic form, or rounded binary form is going to depend on whether these are needed for your set works or styles.

That said, it makes sense to consider structure last in your journey through the musical elements. Why? Because structure is so bound up in all the other elements that it helps to have a good understanding of those others first. Ultimately, structure is concerned with repetition and variety, and that variety may be melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, textural, or to do with timbres and playing techniques.

If a more complex structure such as sonata form *is* required, then one of the best ways to introduce it is through workshopping. Let's imagine that you are doing the Edexcel specification, and your set work is the first movement of Beethoven's *Pathétique* Sonata. The idea with workshopping is to decide which aspects of a piece you want students to learn about, and explore those through creative practical work. Recreating the actual set work is not what it's about. When considering sonata form, you're going to want students to gain an understanding of the structure, including standard key relationships, and also think about the ways in which composers might develop their ideas within the structure.

It's not necessary to do this using the themes from the set work itself. In the case of the *Pathétique* Sonata, this would be quite difficult to do, as they are so difficult to play. Something very straightforward is required for workshopping purposes, so that students can easily manipulate it. You could steal one of Mozart's very simple and memorable themes, such as the opening of the first

movement of *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, or the opening of the K545 Piano Sonata. You could even use a simple melody such as 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star'.

Here is a proposed sequence of events for a sonata form workshop using 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' as a musical starting point:

1. Choose a key. Make it C major to keep things simple unless your class is very able. Work out the melody by ear.
2. Analyse the internal structure of the melody: it's in ternary form. How are the sections different? Identify the distinctive melodic contours of each section.
3. Add some harmony. You will know the capabilities of your class, so you will be able to predict what kind of scaffolding they need for this. Free choice of chords within the key? Specific chords to use? Just cover the cadence points?
4. We're going to need a contrasting theme, either in G major or in A minor, to act as the second subject. Again, you will need to make judgements based on your knowledge of your students. Could they compose something straight away, and could you then choose one of the themes developed for the whole class you use? If they need more structure than this, you could give them an opening phrase to copy ask them to each work on creating an answering phrase. You could even direct them as to what note it needs to finish on, or give them a specific set of notes to use.
5. Rehearse playing the first subject ('Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star') followed by the second subject (composed), with whatever accompaniment is appropriate, or that students come up with. It's important to respond to any ideas that arise, and if they're appropriate for sonata form (such as some kind of introduction, or a bridge between the two subjects), then embrace them. This is all very easily differentiated so that everyone in the class can contribute at their own level.
6. Now, consider the development section. This can involve any ideas from both subjects, combined and elaborated upon in different ways. This is where differentiation can really come to the fore. You could set individuals or small groups specific tasks, for example a very able student could be challenged to take the melodic shape of the second section of 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star', invert it, extend it, change its rhythm or its harmony – or any combination of those things. A pair of less able students could work together to turn the opening two bars into a descending sequence, perhaps harmonising them in 3rds. The ideas that the students come up with could be stuck together to create one big development section, or you could choose the most successful ideas if there are just too many.
7. Finally, the recapitulation: the main point here is to take your second subject and work out how to put it into the tonic key. If you chose to do it in the relative minor, this is especially interesting, as now it will need to be in C minor.
8. What else can be added? Some dynamic contrast, or maybe a coda? See what ideas students come up with. Rehearse the whole thing, and perhaps record it so that it can be revisited later (this could be stored on your class's OneNote notebook or Google classroom).

All of this may take some time – almost certainly more than one lesson – but the rewards are many. You will have recapped many of the preceding elements, and established an understanding of sonata form that will then enable you to tackle a set work from a position of being able to spot its characteristics and quirks.

Of course, a workshopping approach could be applied to a simpler structure if sonata form is not required for your syllabus. Another approach to structure would be to take something very straightforward and familiar – for example a standard pop song structure – and look at some anomalies. There are plenty of great songs that are different to the norm (by, for example, not having a chorus) that are fun to analyse with a class: examples include 'Uptown Funk', 'God Only Knows', 'Hey Jude' and 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. This blog post (**http://colinmorris.github.io/blog/weird-pop-songs**) looks into a few more, with some interesting details and graphics.

Other than explorations of structures through playing and listening, there is some terminology to learn, none of which is particularly complex, although it needs to be absorbed and committed to memory. This video (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=xE6PpAbkjz4**) might be helpful, as might this Quizlet set (**https://quizlet.com/_7ztan7?x=1jqt&i=1vb41c**).