

Homework in the cloud using Noteflight

KS3/4

James Manwaring

Introduction

Setting suitable homework for our students can be a challenge. Not only do we need to make it meaningful, but we also need to ensure that it builds on their classroom experience. Cloud-based learning is now part of our everyday lives, and we can use this fact to our advantage when giving students tasks to do at home. The cloud is a place where software, documents and data can be stored, shared and adapted. It is also a tool that we can use when setting and assessing students' work.

This resource will look at ways of using Noteflight to set meaningful and creative homework for your students.

Notation software in the cloud: Noteflight

Noteflight is an online notation editor, and it's available for purchase through Music First (www.noteflight.com). It's a cloud-based service and is therefore available anywhere you have an internet connection. Students can therefore work on Noteflight in school, but then continue their work with it when they get home.

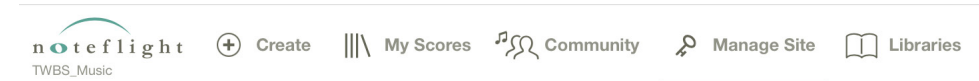
Setting up your community

Once you have Noteflight available to your school, you should first set up your community. This is Noteflight's area where you can add users and create classes. It's a useful process, allowing you to separate your teaching groups and year groups, and it's worthwhile having your Noteflight community well organised.

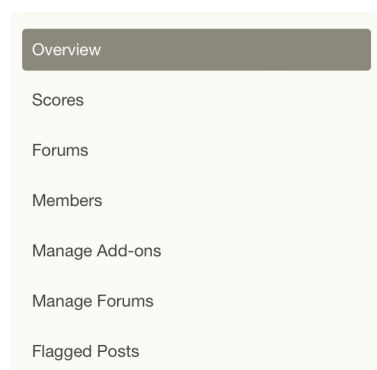
Adding a new member is straightforward, and you can also bulk upload using an Excel spreadsheet.

To add a student:

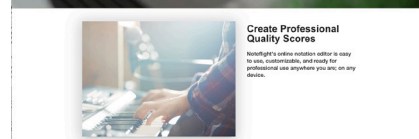
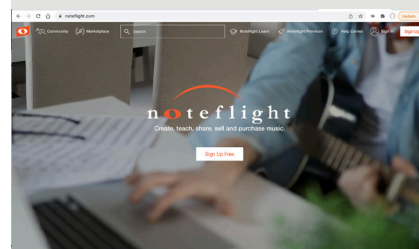
- 1 Log into Noteflight.
- 2 Click on 'Manage Site' at the top.



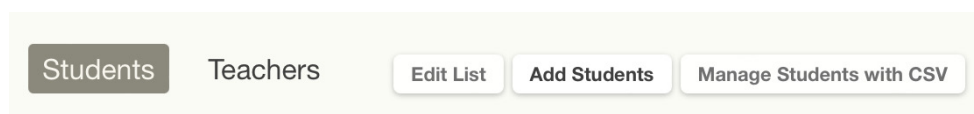
- 3 A new page will load. Select 'Members' in the left-hand column.



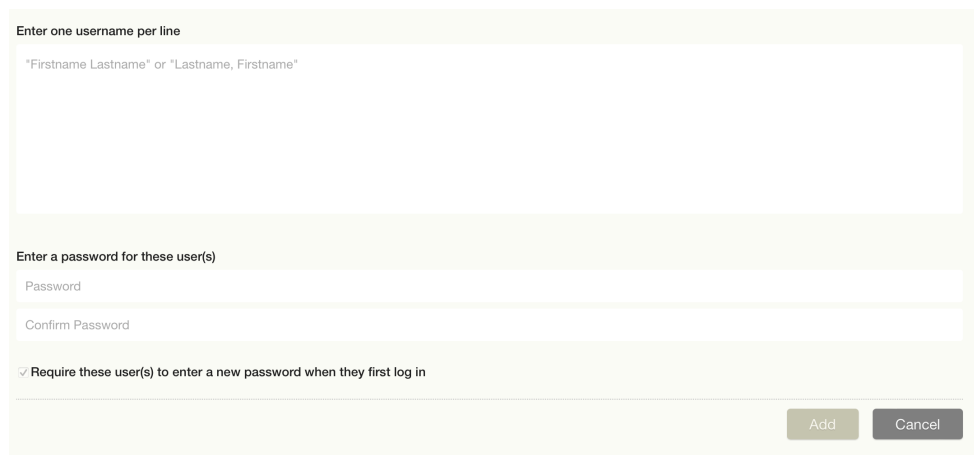
James Manwaring is Director of Music for Windsor Learning Partnership and has been teaching music for 18 years. He is a Teacher Support lead for the Music Teachers Association and he writes his own music blog.



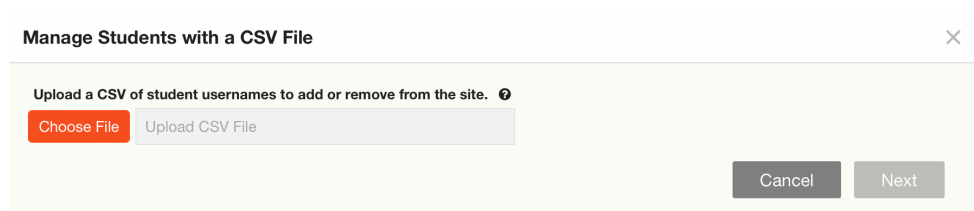
4 Now click on 'Add Students'. You'll be taken to another screen where you can add student details.



5 You can now type in the information for that user.

A screenshot of a form for adding a new user. The form has a title 'Enter one username per line' and a text input field with a placeholder '*Firstname Lastname* or *Lastname, Firstname*'. Below this is another section titled 'Enter a password for these user(s)' with two password input fields: 'Password' and 'Confirm Password'. There is a checkbox labeled 'Require these user(s) to enter a new password when they first log in' which is checked. At the bottom right of the form are two buttons: 'Add' and 'Cancel'.

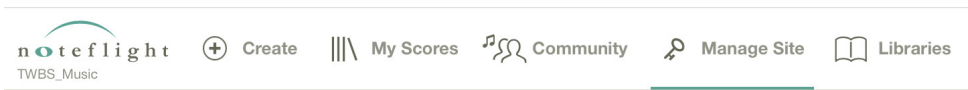
6 If you want to add multiple users, you can also upload the details using a CSV spreadsheet. Click on 'Manage Students with CSV', which will give you the option to upload an Excel spreadsheet saved as a CSV file, with separate columns for first name, last name and password.

A screenshot of a dialog box titled 'Manage Students with a CSV File'. It has a close button (X) in the top right corner. The main text says 'Upload a CSV of student usernames to add or remove from the site.' Below this text are two buttons: 'Choose File' (in orange) and 'Upload CSV File' (in a grey box). At the bottom right of the dialog are two buttons: 'Cancel' and 'Next'.

7 You can use the same process to add teachers. Click on the 'Teachers' tab and then add teachers using the same steps.

Once students are added you can then put them into class groups:

- 1 Click on 'Community' at the very top of the Noteflight screen. This will take you to the 'Public Scores' and 'Groups'. For this process, we're focusing on the Groups section.



- 2 Just a little way down the page, there's a link to 'Create a Group'. Click on this, and then fill in the information required on the next page.

Title
Music Teacher Magazine Readers

Site Image Choose a stock photo or upload

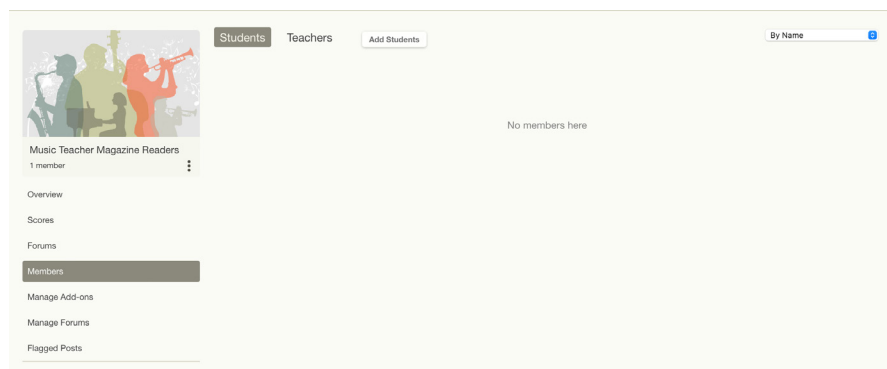
Overview *visible to members and non-members*

Overview *visible to members only*

Admission: the administrator of this group assigns all members

Access: only members can view the group's scores, discussions and membership

- 3 Once you've created the group itself, you'll be taken to another page where you can then add students and teachers to it. Make sure you already have students and teachers set up in your community: this then becomes a straightforward process.

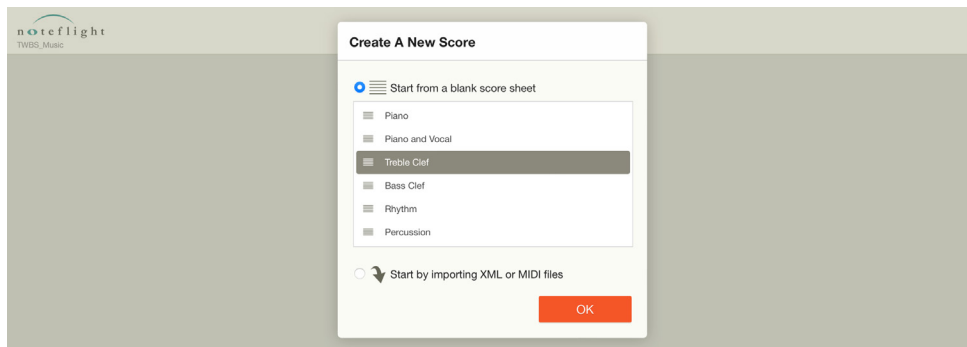


- 4 Your group is now ready to use and interact with. You can add teachers to the group and add/remove students if the class changes, which can be done through the Community area.

Noteflight: a basic user guide

Let's start by getting to know the Noteflight interface.

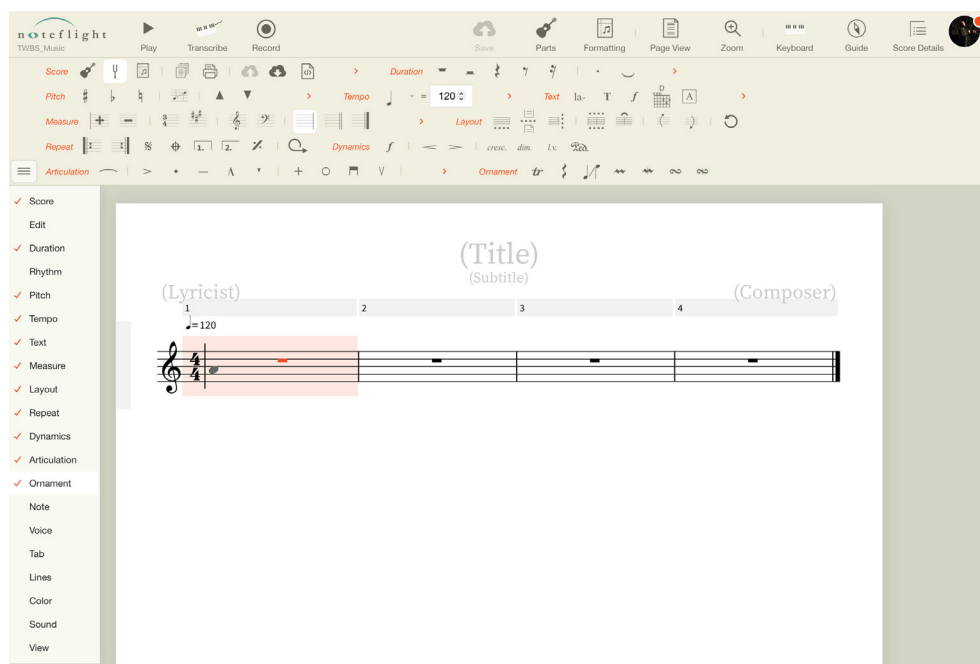
- 1 Click on 'Create' at the top of the page. This will open a window where you can select the type of score you'd like to use. Let's start with a treble clef.



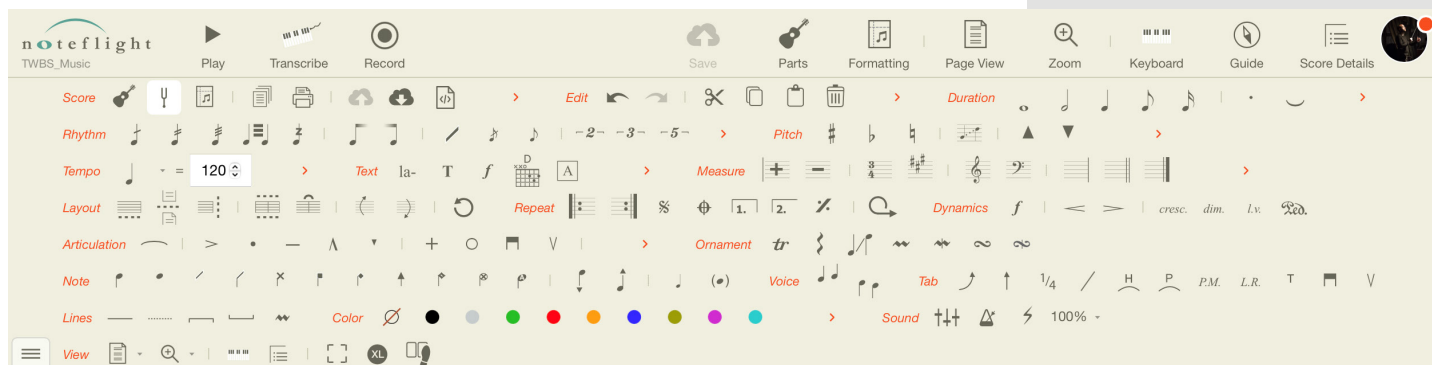
- 2 A score will open, and we can start to input notes.



- 3 Before inputting notes, however, it's worth looking at the menu and the various options you have. Noteflight doesn't show you all of its parameters and options at once. Instead, you can select what you view and what's hidden. Find the three-line symbol on the left of the window, underneath the Noteflight graphic. Click on this icon to see all the features you can add to the top of the Noteflight window:



- 4 If you choose to add everything to the top, you'll end up with something like the image below – but some of these things won't be used as often as others. The more you use Noteflight, the more you'll work out which tabs are most useful to you to keep open.



- 5 To remove anything from this section, simply click on the three-line icon and uncheck whatever you no longer need.

We're now ready to start putting some notes into our score.

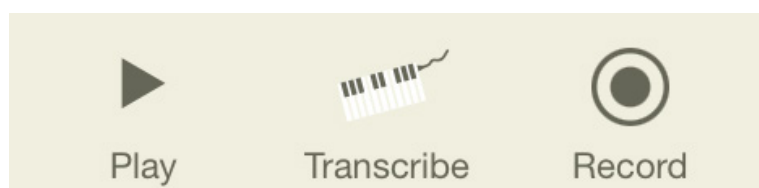
- 1 Let's start with crotchets, which means that we need to select a crotchet from the duration section of the top menu. Once we've selected that, we can put some notes onto our score using the mouse. Click on the bar you want to change, and then use the mouse to add crotchets to that bar.



- 2 If you want to change a note value, just click on the note you wish to change and then select the required note value from the duration menu. Here, I've changed some notes from crotchets to quavers:



- 3 If you want to repeat a note, press R on your computer keyboard and the note will repeat.
- 4 To play back the melody you've created, click on the first note and press P, or click the Play button at the stop of the screen:



- 5 If you want to delete a note, simply click on it and press delete. Likewise, to delete an entire bar, select the bar and then press delete.
- 6 Changing parameters such as time and key signature are straightforward. Click on the barline at the start of the bar you want to change. Then go to the Measure section of the menu. This will open another window where you can specify the time signature you want to use. The same applies to changing the key signature of a bar.

Change Key Signature ✕

Mode: Major ⌵ OK

Change Time Signature ✕

Time

$\frac{4}{4}$ 4 / 4

Common time

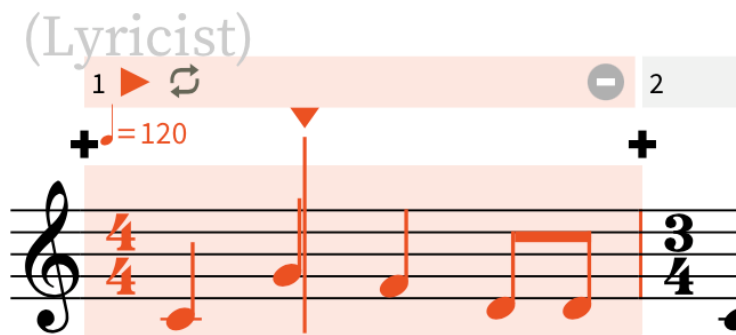
Cut time

Type Normal ⌵

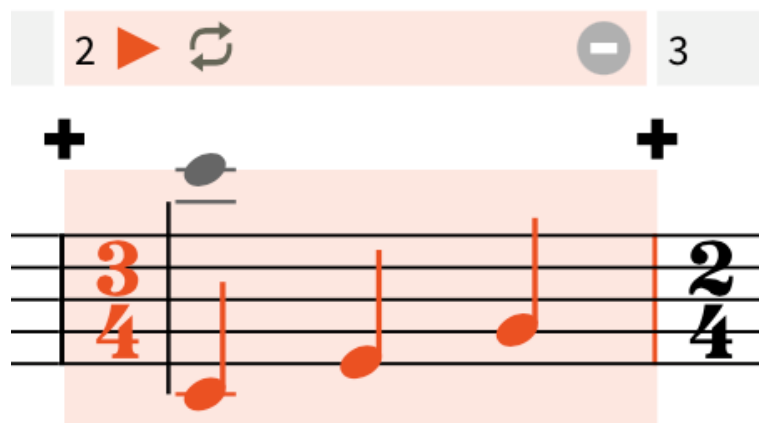
Visibility Default ⌵

OK

- 7 One of Noteflight's helpful features is being able to play back a particular bar as a loop. Click on any bar and a grey strip will appear above. Click on this strip and you can choose to play from that bar, loop that bar or delete the bar (using the minus symbol on the right):



- 8 To add a bar before or after an existing bar, click on the existing bar and press the plus symbol on either side:



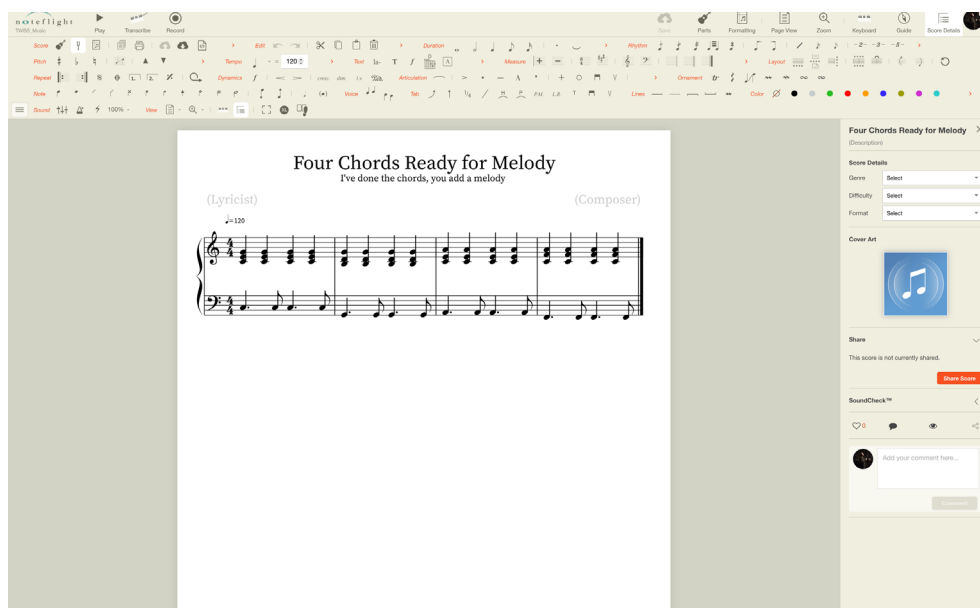
- 9 If you want to add another part to your score, click on 'Parts' at the top. This opens a window to the right that allows you to select more instruments.
- 10 It's also possible to play in notes using an on-screen keyboard, which can be opened by selecting 'Keyboard' from the top of the screen towards the right. When you click on an existing note in the score, that note is indicated on the keyboard. If you then click on a different keyboard key, the note in the score will change.
- 11 You can also quickly add notes using the computer keyboard. Pressing C will add a C to the score, for example. This is a quick and easy way to add notes, especially if students are confident with notation.

Sharing scores with your community

Before looking at using Noteflight in teaching, it's important to know how to share scores. Anything you create in Noteflight can be shared with your community, which is a useful facility if you want to share examples with your students or set them a task to complete.

As an example, I've put together a simple four-chord pattern that I want to share with my students.

- 1 Once you've created your score, click on 'Score Details' in the top right-hand corner. This will open a side panel on the right where you can add details about the score.



- 2 Click on 'Share Score', an orange box halfway down the panel. You now have two options for sharing. You can share the score and allow members to view, comment or edit. Alternatively, you can create an activity template, which is useful if you want each member of a class to create something new using your starting point. The first option means that they can all change your original score, but not create their own work. You can also select which group to share it with, or even choose to share it only with certain individuals, allowing you to be specific about who gets a copy of the score to edit, for example.
- 3 Click on Save, and a box will open with a link to the assignment. This link can be shared with students. When they open it, however, they will be opening their own unique copy that has been copied to their area, not your original version. They will therefore be able to create something of their own using the score, and they won't overwrite anyone else's work.
- 4 Return to 'My Scores', and you'll see a small jigsaw piece next to the score. This shows that you have shared it. As students open the work and add it to their scores, this jigsaw piece will also show how many copies have been made. You'll then be able to see these copies to assess the students' work.

Homework Tasks in Noteflight

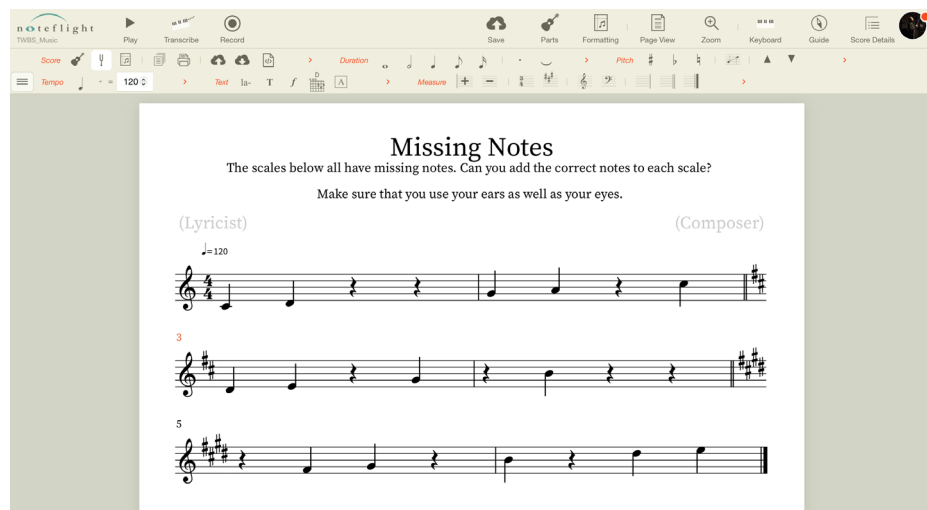
Since Noteflight is based in the cloud, students can access it both at school and at home – provided they have a computer or tablet to use at home, and an internet connection. Before embarking on asking them to use it at home, however, it's important to check that the software works for the students remotely, and they'll also need to ensure they have their log-in details. Consider sending a short questionnaire to help identify what technology students have available to them.

In addition, however, the other benefit is that Noteflight can be used on any computer in a school, meaning that music lessons don't necessarily have to take place in a music room.

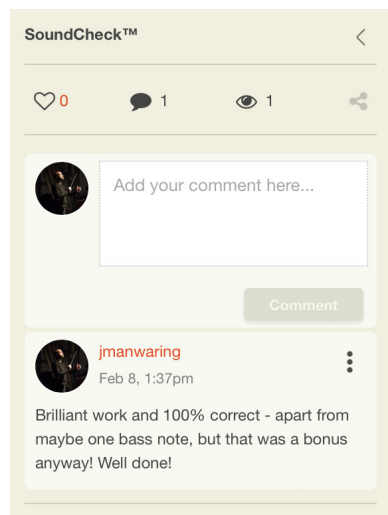
The ideas below range from tasks that focus on specific areas of music to more developed composition suggestions. They all use a similar initial process, one of creating an initial score in Noteflight that is then shared with a student, group or class.

Missing notes: scales and chords

- 1 Create a new score in Noteflight using either treble clef or bass clef, depending on what you want to assess.
- 2 Create a series of scales, giving the key signature at the start of the staff.
- 3 Delete notes from the scale, leaving rests in their place that students then need to fill in. (Delete notes in Noteflight by simply clicking on them and pressing delete.)



- 4 Mix things up by providing the starting note but not the key signature, asking students to complete the scale by adding accidentals along the way.
- 5 Once you've created the file, share it with a student, group or class using the steps outlined above.
- 6 When they've completed the work, you can give them feedback directly on their Noteflight file. Click on Score Details and it will open a side window. At the bottom of this window there is space to add comments, which the student will then be able to read.



The same process as that described above could be followed for adding notes to a series of chords. Students could build up the notes in a chord from a given starting note or add missing notes.

Chord progressions

Creating chord progressions from scratch can be tough, particularly at Key Stage 3. Providing students with some chords to start them off is therefore a valuable way to kick things off.

- 1 Create a piano or guitar score in Noteflight.
- 2 Decide on a key, or provide a selection of keys. In the example below, I've given students chords for the tonic, dominant and relative minor in C major.
- 3 Their task is to decide which of these chords they want to use to create their own chord progression in Noteflight.
- 4 As before, once you've made the score, share it with your students using the process outlined above.

The screenshot shows the Noteflight web application interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with icons for Play, Transcribe, Record, Save, Parts, Formatting, Page View, Zoom, Keyboard, Guide, and Score Details. Below this is a toolbar with various musical notation tools like notes, rests, and accidentals. The main workspace displays a music score titled "Creating a Chord Progression" in 4/4 time. The score includes a title, a brief instruction, and a paragraph explaining the task. It features three systems of music notation, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The first system is marked with a tempo of 120. The score is divided into sections for the Lyricist and the Composer.

Melody starters

Asking students to compose a melody can be quite daunting. Where do they start, what notes do they use, and how do they make them into a convincing melody? If you've given some core knowledge of melodies to start students off, it is good for them to experiment with ideas, learning as they go what makes a melody 'work' and 'sound good', and Noteflight can help with this process. Using the comment feature, you can provide feedback directly on their music, and students can also comment back when they've made any changes. You can even make changes to their music yourself if you think it might be useful.

Consider providing students with some starting points for a melody that they can then extend.

- 1 Create a score using an instrument or your choice.
- 2 Give students with some melodic starting points, such as the ones shown below. You might want to offer different keys and tonalities to encourage the students to explore different options.

Melody Starters

Below you have some starting points for melodies. They are in different keys and your task is to choose one or two of these to extend into a full melody. Once you have picked one, start to create a melody on this score using the starting point

(Lyricist)

(Composer)

♩ = 120

- 3 You might also want to give them some 'notes along the way' to help guide them through the process. An eight-bar phrase, for example, might include notes given at the beginning, middle and end:

Melody Starters

Below you have a melody starter and some notes to aim for as you create your own. Make sure that you shape your melody in such a way that you reach the notes given in bars 4 & 8.

(Lyricist)

(Composer)

♩ = 120

Spot the mistakes

Giving students a melody with mistakes is an interactive way for them to test their observation skills and musical understanding. When they're composing, students will often hear that something's wrong but not always know how to make it right. A 'spot the mistake' task will encourage them to consider how to make a melody or chord progression sound correct. Write your own melody, use an existing tune, or even use a melody from a GCSE set work to see how well they know the music they're studying.

Here are some suggestions for mistakes to include in a score to be shared with students:

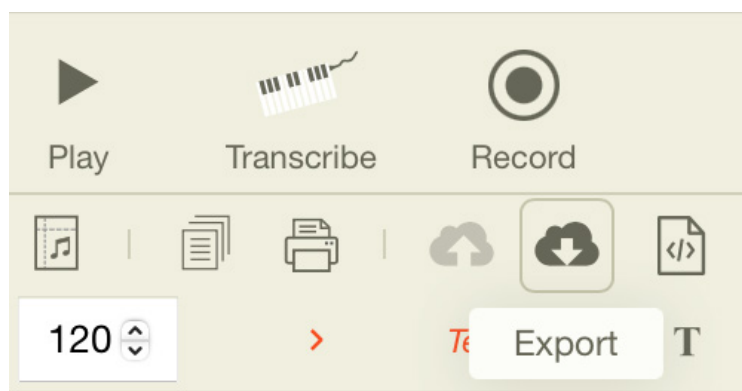
- ▶ Give students a melody that has no key signature and the wrong accidentals.
- ▶ Provide a melody with minor tonality but no sharpened 7th.
- ▶ Incorrect rhythms can be hard to spot and would work best with a well-known melody or a set work melody. Students should try to work out the correct rhythm.
- ▶ Share a melody with students that contains angular leaps at different points. See if they can work out how to re-shape the melody and give it a better shape and flow.

Using Noteflight with Soundtrap

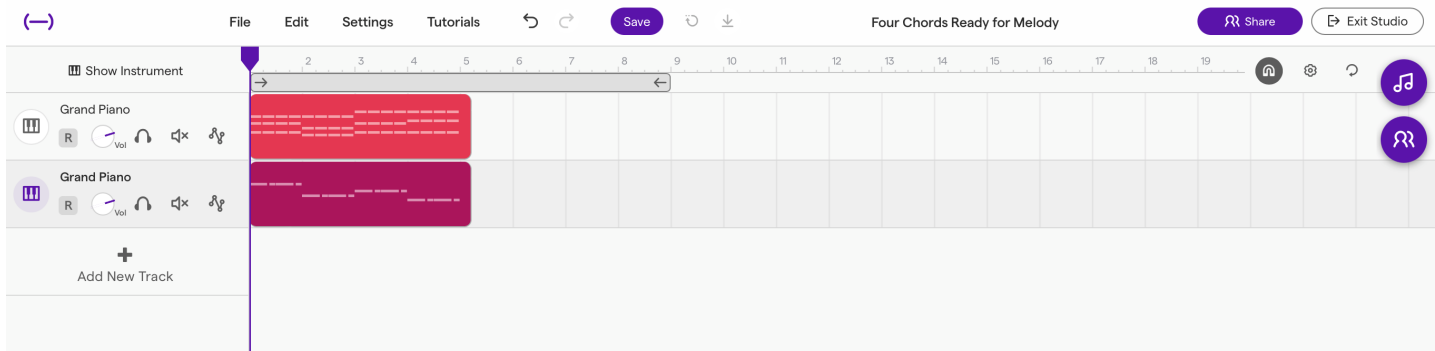
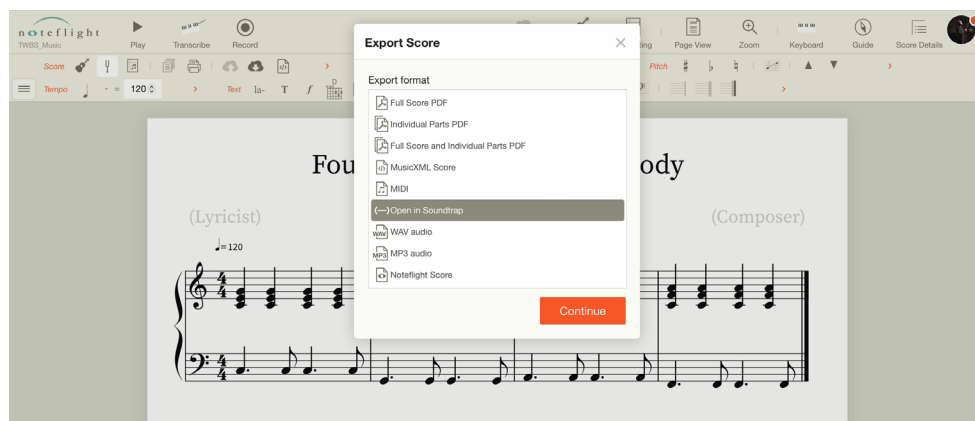
Soundtrap is another piece of cloud-based software (explored in its own resource, *Music Teacher*, July 2021). Soundtrap can be used in a similar way to set work for students to complete at home and then share with you. Like Noteflight, you can create work in Soundtrap and then collaborate on it with your students.

In addition, you can automatically export a score from Noteflight into Soundtrap, so you can use the two cloud-based resources together. Students could use ideas created in Noteflight within a Soundtrap project, for example.

- 1 Create a score in Noteflight that you want to share with Soundtrap.
- 2 When the score is complete, click on the export button towards the top.



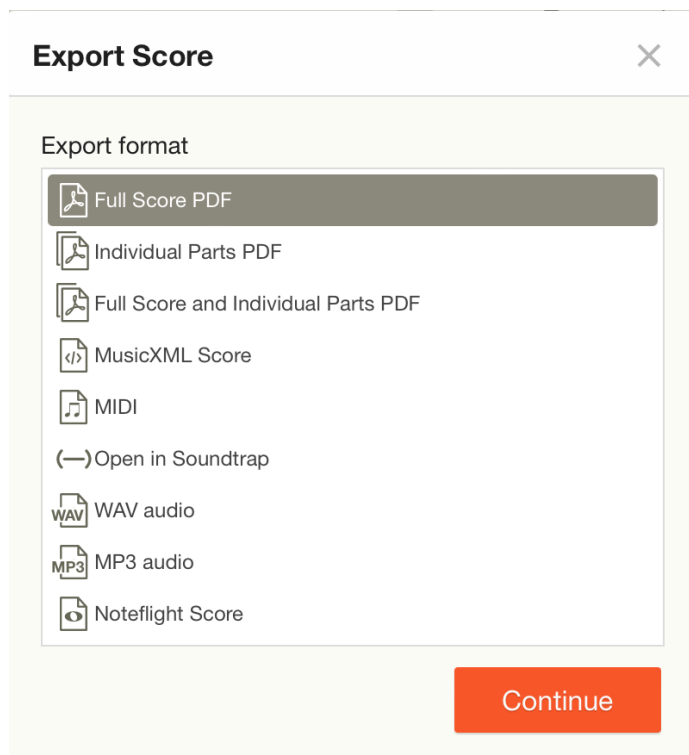
- 3 Another window will open, and among the options offered is 'Open in Soundtrap'. Click on this, and Soundtrap will launch and open your score as MIDI.



Using both these pieces of software together is a useful way to ensure that students are engage with both traditional notation and more modern ways of representing MIDI and loops.

Exporting options

As well as exporting to Soundtrap, there are several other exporting options within Noteflight:



It is useful for students to know the different ways in which they can share work with you. Sometimes you might want them to export a PDF or MP3 so that you can easily mark their work. Alternatively, students could export a MIDI file to use within another DAW. There's also the option to export individual parts, which is useful if they're giving parts to live musicians to play.

It's also possible to export work from within Soundtrap directly into Noteflight. Doing that, anything created in Soundtrap will automatically appear in Noteflight, thereby allowing students to see their MIDI tracks in traditional notation.

