

# MacPhail EMRA Approaches Guide

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**MacPhail**  
CENTER FOR MUSIC

## Section 1: Ideation

Before there is music creation there is music ideation. In this context, we're talking about the space and activities where musical ideas are formed, engaged with, explored, examined, and nurtured.

Music ideation is a crucial step in the creative process of making music. It involves brainstorming and experimenting with different musical ideas, including melodies, rhythms, sounds, textures, and concepts, both individually and in groups. This stage allows musicians to explore their creativity and lay the foundation for later stages of the music creation process.

During music ideation, people can often draw inspiration from various sources such as personal experiences, environments, emotions, preexisting music or other forms of art. They may use things like instruments, software, their own voices, recording devices, or other tools to experiment with different sounds and concepts. This phase of the creative process is essential for artists to explore and connect with their ideas and develop possible directions for their music.

In this chapter we'll explore several examples of the music ideation process as food for thought for facilitating music creation. These are meant to be suggestions open to interpretation as --needed.

### Idea Capture

Recording and capturing an audio sound or idea is a powerful act that is easily overlooked. It allows musicians to preserve their creative ideas and revisit them later for further development. By recording and capturing audio, artists can capture the essence of a musical idea, including its unique sound, mood, and atmosphere. This process not only helps in the documentation of ideas but also serves as a valuable tool for collaboration and sharing with other musicians or producers.

Recording and capturing audio can also serve as a form of self-reflection for musicians. By listening back to their recorded ideas, artists can gain new perspectives and insights, allowing them to refine and enhance their musical creations. Additionally, the act of recording can inspire new ideas and directions for the music, as artists may discover unexpected elements or nuances in their performances.



### Voice Memo

Simple capture of words, sounds, singing, tapping, nature. This facilitates learning to hear and listen on a fundamental level.

### Field Recordings

Recording the world around develops the ear for listening and brings awareness to what differentiates sound vs music.



### Recording Jam Sessions

Whether individually or in groups, always try to record the activity of jamming.

## Playlists/Curation

You can encourage musicians, and participants in general, to make and share playlists with you. Consider having contests and encouraging everyone to vote on and critique each other's choices. You could also host a playlist of the week via streaming platforms.

Creating playlists encourages budding musicians to hold their own opinions, and curate their own aesthetics. Creating new art or music, especially with music production, requires artists to develop their own sounds and aesthetics. Often artists you see will already have this together, but many new or beginning artists need guidance in developing their taste. Playlists can be a vehicle to isolate this process while cultivating a shared experience of music.



It can be daunting for a new artist to express their true feelings in the way they need to to make fulfilling work. Every new artist will have to go through the feeling of making a good first impression when they are just starting out. Making playlists together is a way to go through that process without making brand new art. Curation can make things smoother and keep new artists from getting cold feet.

Sharing playlists throughout your community can help cross boundaries between individuals. Just having a space where you feel accepted and encouraged to express yourself can make all the difference when learning to make art. Making playlists creates a safe buffer which prevents having to be totally vulnerable and makes it easier to take the first step in self-expression.

### **80s Ballads Playlist:**

**"Every Breath You Take" by The Police**

**"Total Eclipse of the Heart" by Bonnie Tyler**

**"Careless Whisper" by George Michael**

**"I Want to Know What Love Is" by Foreigner**

**"Heaven" by Bryan Adams**

**"Time After Time" by Cyndi Lauper**

**"Against All Odds (Take a Look at Me Now)" by Phil Collins**

**"True Colors" by Cyndi Lauper**

**"Eternal Flame" by The Bangles**

**"Hello" by Lionel Richie**

### **Rainy Days Playlist:**

**"When the Party's Over" by Billie Eilish**

**"Someone Like You" by Adele**

**"Skinny Love" by Bon Iver**

**"Liability" by Lorde**

**"Fix You" by Coldplay**

**"Take Me to Church" by Hozier**

**"Stay" by Rihanna feat. Mikky Ekko**

**"Breathe Me" by Sia**

**"Hurt" by Christina Aguilera**

**"Runaway" by Aurora**

## Physical Instruments

While we typically think of instruments as expensive and high-end tools for music making, they can also be very affordable and accessible options that can be very powerful tools for music making. An inexpensive keyboard such as the Yamaha PSR-E473 Key Portable Arranger is one. Inexpensive guitars and hand percussion are also very powerful music-making tools.

Inexpensive instruments not only provide a cost-effective option for musicians but also offer a unique and accessible way to explore different sounds and styles. They can be a great starting point for beginners or a refreshing change for experienced musicians looking to experiment with new ideas. Whether it's a budget keyboard, guitar, or hand percussion, these affordable instruments can unlock a world of creativity and inspiration in the music ideation process.

This speaks to the idea of jamming, both as individuals and in groups. Jamming, in this context, refers to the idea of creating music through playing an instrument or making physical sound, and through repetition



developing a deeper sense of the sound being made and its possibilities for development. It can often be the step before outright song writing that gets overlooked or under appreciated.

Jamming can be a transformative experience for musicians. It allows them to explore different musical ideas, experiment with improvisation, and develop a deeper understanding of their instrument. Whether jamming alone or with others, this process of repetition and exploration can lead to unexpected breakthroughs and new creative directions in music. It is a powerful tool for

musicians to expand their musical horizons and push the boundaries of their own creativity

Jamming can take many forms. One form is to create ostinatos, or repeating patterns, which can be an invaluable part of the music ideation process and are a fundamental part of many musical practices around the world. This includes clave rhythms and bell patterns. This act of "musical meditation," individually and in groups, is often an overlooked aspect of building a solid connection and foundation for music making. Working with these smaller phrases can allow the participant time to digest and process what one is hearing and playing and make decisions about what might come next. Here are some examples:

On a keyboard, do a 2-finger black note repeating part. Then switch to white note. After arriving at both parts experiment with going back and forth between the two.

It can sometimes be helpful to start a jam with percussion instruments only. This allows the participants to focus on the rhythmic aspect without having to worry about pitch and key centers. It can be a helpful way to invite everyone into the music making process.

Using either a small shaker, or other hand percussion instrument, or even a pencil tapping on a table or chair, start a simple "beat" or "groove." Tip: allow the percussion jam time to grow and evolve, don't be too quick or worried about it sounding "good" right off the bat. Allow time for the jam to develop.

A music creation space can be a very simple space that doesn't need a lot of hi-end or technical equipment. In fact, it can be beneficial for this space to have a decidedly low-tech threshold. A low-cost portable keyboard, a couple of hand percussion instruments, and perhaps an acoustic guitar, alone is plenty for a jam session or song writing session. This space can be a part of the recording studio itself or can be a separate space or part of the room that is more focused on jamming.

Spoken word or poetry is also a very powerful use of the studio and jamming space. A helpful tip is to try to encourage spoken word creators to both take part in the jams as well as make use of the recording studio.

## DJing and Turntablism:

DJing, originating from early 20th-century radio broadcasts, has evolved into a complex art of manipulating records for unique sounds. DJing is a combination of music performance and music sharing. Key innovations like Technics' direct drive turntable in 1969 and the iconic SL-1200 model in 1972 revolutionized the field, setting standards worldwide. Pioneers like DJ Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash laid the foundation for hip hop music and DJ culture with techniques like scratching and beat juggling.

The introduction of the MP3 format in 1995 ushered DJs into the digital realm, enabling unprecedented possibilities for software development. Pioneer Global's 2001 release of the world's first CD turntable and subsequent DJM mixer series marked the dawn of professional digital DJing. Dutch company N2IT's Digital Vinyl System (DVS) with "Final Scratch" software further expanded DJs' reach, allowing control of music via vinyl, CD, or hardware controller connected to a computer. Modern DJ software includes Serato DJ, Rekordbox, Algoriddim, and Traktor. All of these options offer proprietary controllers while allowing connection with other controllers on the market.

When introducing DJing to teenagers, emphasize hand placement and coordination. Encourage them to experiment with their dominant hand for controlling either the record/platter or the crossfader to determine comfort. Utilize visual markers like stickers or controller platter indicators to aid in monitoring record movement, akin to a clock face. Teach them to position their record hand on the left half of the record/platter, while the fader hand lightly "squeezes" the crossfader cap, timing fader movements with record movements. Emphasize that the crossfader acts as an ON/OFF button for sound manipulation, and through





## Digital Music Making Tools

Digital music creation tools, such as Ekwe, FL Studio, and GarageBand, are tools and platforms that are especially good at encouraging musical ideas from creation to development.

These tools provide a wide range of virtual instruments, effects, and recording capabilities, allowing musicians to experiment with different sounds and styles. They also offer features like MIDI sequencing and loop-based composition, which can aid in the process of developing musical ideas. With the ability to easily manipulate and arrange musical elements, these digital tools provide a convenient and accessible way for musicians to explore their creativity and bring their musical visions to life.

### Helpful reminder:

- popular styles and genres of music heard on many media and streaming platforms are not the only viable uses of DAWs and their possibilities. The range of types of musical creation are infinite, and a good analogy is painting and visual art. Just like there is some physical artwork that is literal and others more impressionistic, so can there be in musical creation with digital tools. Be open to however musical inspiration flows

## Using Loops to explore styles and general aesthetic preferences: BandLab, Soundtrap, Ekwe

You can use loops as a way to effortlessly explore the software and the process of creation at a high level. This process can lead into personal creation by framing the process as customization. Participants create project after project using default loops and patterns until eventually starting to customize those loops. Always work on fresh projects in your DAW of choice and don't create pressure to finish anything.

## Templates & Demo Projects

Exploring demo projects or using song templates are excellent ways to start playing in DAWs without the pressure of having to come up with new ideas. Demo projects and song templates work in opposite directions. Exploring demo projects, or premade finished projects, gives the opportunity to reverse engineer and see examples of complete work. This helps to set a basic goal for what a project that someone might make could look like.

Templates, or song starting points, give the opportunity to play around in a sandbox of basic concepts. Creating genre templates with different instruments and loops inside can help someone get used to the sound or overall vibe that might be expected in a project.

### Example Rock Template

Electric Guita
Electric Bass
Rhythm Guita
Drum Kit
Vocals
Lead Synth
Synth Pad
Solo Guitar

### Example Classical Template

Piano
Harpsicord
Violin
Viola
Cello
Bass
Glockenspiel
Timpani

## Section 2: The Studio

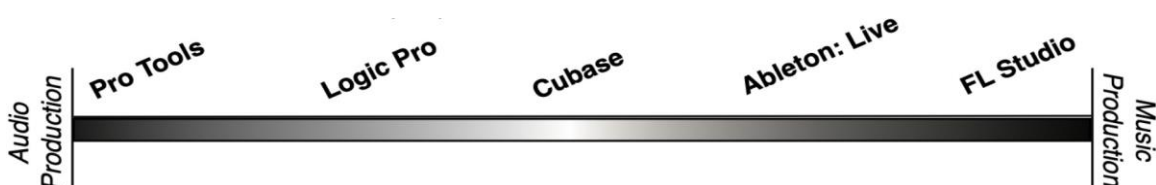
The studio is an extremely open-ended space for learning and exploring. In this section, we will look at different approaches for teaching and learning about music production.

### Orientation

Music software is designed to help you make music almost automatically. When learning to make music using a DAW or other software you're learning to use the tool or machine more than you're learning about music per se. Therefore, orientation is more crucial than learning by traditional means like music theory or learning a traditional instrument. Orientation is the best way to show new artists around the software. Some will automatically gravitate to trying new things and exploring the different areas of the software, others will be afraid to break something or do something wrong and will need help and encouragement to look around and try things.

Orientation should always include periods of creative expression. This is music after all! Spend time with new artists exploring different aspects of the DAW, let them lead the way. Then, try out some of the new things they found and make something with it. It doesn't need to be major or complete. As artists get more advanced and familiar you may need to encourage them to try new things or explore different areas that they're less familiar with. Sometimes that means learning something more technical like how a compressor really works. Other times it means just finding a new tool to work with.

When choosing a DAW for the first time, you should feel free to go by feel. If a DAW looks interesting or feels exciting that's the only direction to go. Technical considerations shouldn't be a part of the deal. Sometimes with the orientation process some perspective is helpful. It's very common to switch DAWs or tools while learning. If you have the option, try and provide different DAWs and let new artists explore them.



It's also important to remember that muscle memory and reflexes are part of using the software. It might even be someone's first time using a PC with a mouse and keyboard. Touch screens are ubiquitous now, but most DAWs are still engaged with using mouse and keyboard. Also, clicking or tapping buttons, faders, and knobs proficiently requires hand-eye coordination. This skill can only be developed through patient practice. You can speed it up somewhat by encouraging new artists to play games using the input device they use to make music.

## Learning Through Loops

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**Sample pack concept 1: Check WhoSampled and use a sampled song in a new way. Ex: Gang Starr-Mass Appeal sampled Vic Juris-Horizon Drive.**

**Sample pack concept 2: A selection of cuts from a particular era in music history prepared for sampling with a playlist to listen to.**



## Learning Through the Tools

For some artists, the tools themselves are inspiring. Turning knobs or learning about how the software works becomes a focus for their creativity. Some even go so far as to utilize music programming and coding software, but here we'll focus on the types of tools you can find in a DAW.

For artists who prioritize learning and expression through their tools, delving into the intricacies of software, such as knobs, MIDI patterns, and other details, is crucial. Many find fascination in these elements, using FX and synths to express themselves creatively, even without a clear sonic destination in mind. For them, the process of experimentation and exploration is essential, as it allows them to discover new sounds and techniques while honing their unique artistic voice.

In today's artistic landscape, technology plays a crucial role in shaping expression. With digital tools constantly evolving, artists have unprecedented opportunities to explore new avenues of their craft. The process involves a lot of trial and error. Practice patience, taking time to listen to each new decision before trying something else. Try new things, explore free plugins and samples. Learning more about the tools is as easy as opening the manual, or looking at YouTube tutorials. Here's a good search template for learning more "how to use [effect name] in music production".

Inspire new artists and musicians who work like this to explore as much as possible. Encourage them to try new things and push their own limits. This helps them grow and keeps their creative community buzzing with excitement and curiosity.

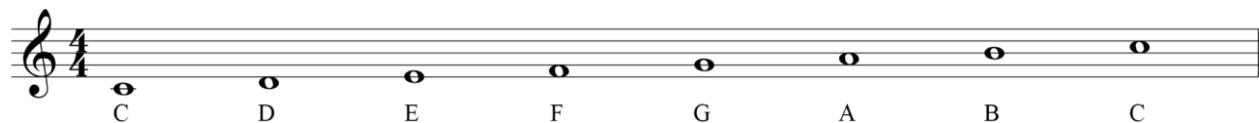


## Learning through Theory/ Genre

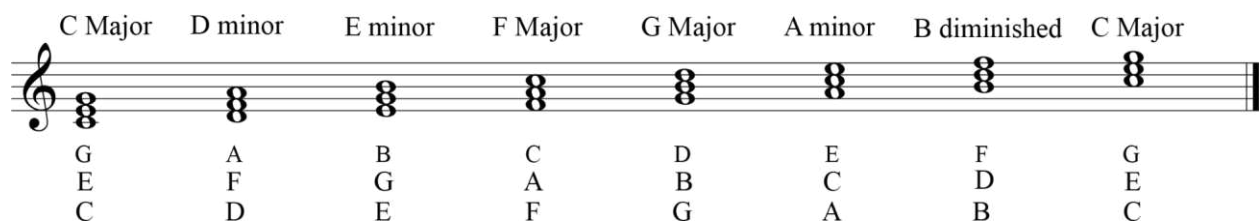
For some artists, learning in a top-down way by starting with loops won't make as much sense. They will prefer to learn from the ground up and think about as many details as possible when making music. Many musicians who start at this point already have ideas for what they want their music to sound like, or what they want to do with music in the first place. Within music production we have so many ways to explore this space. Music theory and genres are the primary areas that you can explore this more detailed approach.

Music theory as a whole, while beyond the scope of this resource, can be thought of in a few foundational ways. One is the idea of tonality, which exists in many musical traditions, and speaks to the idea of music often living in "keys" or tonal centers. Two common ways of communicating tonality, or tonal centers, are scales and chords.

Scales are any set of musical pitches ordered by fundamental, or lowest, pitch upwards, which can be moved through in any linear way. Here is an example of what is called a major scale in the key of C written in musical notation. (In this key all white keys on a keyboard)



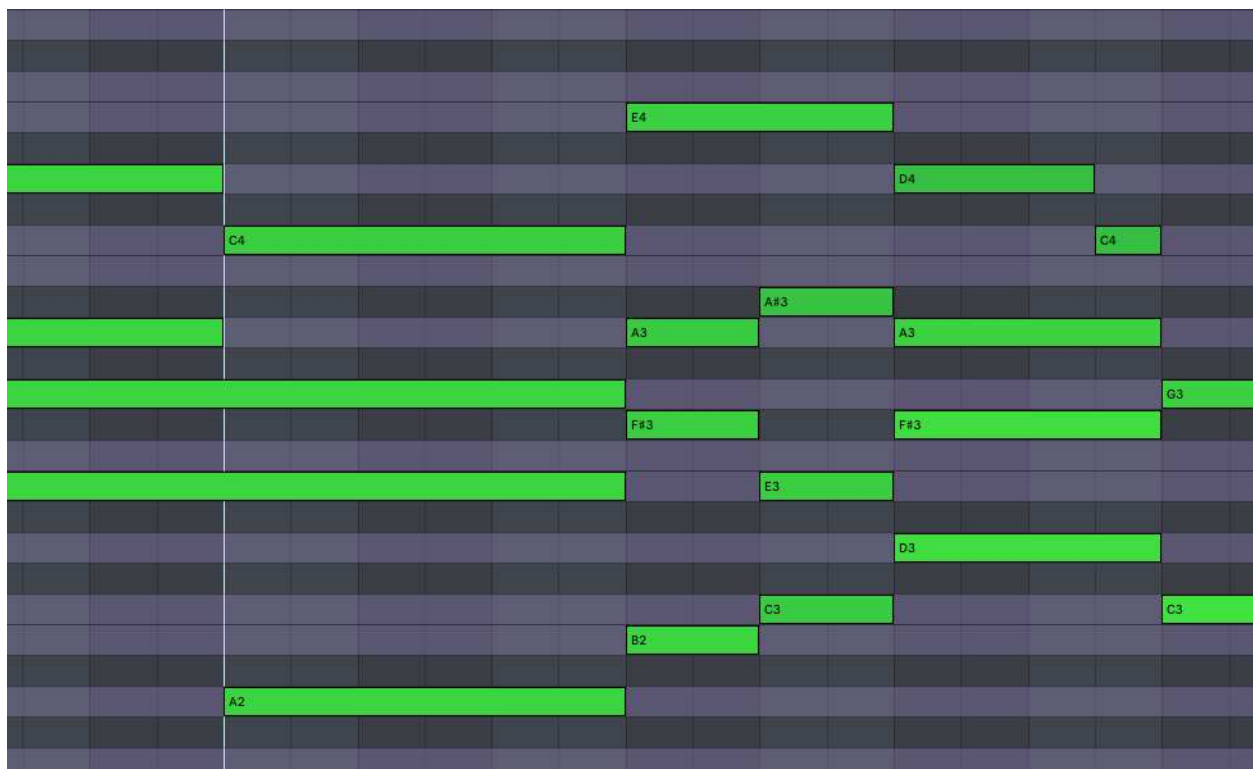
Chords are usually three or more pitches heard simultaneously that are often derived from a key. Here is an example of chords that are derived from the key of C written in musical notation. (In this key all white keys on a keyboard)



Musical pieces will often be a combination of scales and chords and it's not uncommon for creators to think in these terms. This is not essential knowledge for music making, but for musicians that like to create this way, giving them opportunities and challenges to explore and

memorize different technical concepts such as chords and scales is invaluable. Also, in most DAWs there are ways to lock scales, automatically create chords, and more features to automatically use theoretical concepts. These can be utilized early on to help smooth out the process of memorization. For some musicians, they might even prefer to use these tools over memorization and it should be encouraged. Creating many small projects or short MIDI patterns to explore scales and chords should be encouraged.

Genre can be seen as a step above music theory while still being more detail oriented than working with loops. Learning about the details of different genres or styles of music can be a way to learn general concepts about arranging and instrumentation. This can be done in combination with song starting templates to great effect! Research different genres and styles and try to create something related. For example, do a classical music project where new artists listen to a playlist of classical music, then go and make a new project using a template containing pianos, string instruments, and classical percussion.



## Learning by Breaking

In 2024, the difference between a more accessible creative tool such as your phone camera or a beginner DAW like Ekwe and a DSLR or pro DAW like Ableton: Live is your ability to customize, or break, it. Therefore, getting comfortable, and getting new artists comfortable, with breaking things is essential to becoming an artist. Much like the previous sections, this is another way into creative thinking about music. We can learn through constructing new styles and concepts through loops. We can learn to craft detailed new ideas and sounds through learning music theory and different genres. And we can learn about the system and the machine itself through breaking it. Pushing tracks into distortion, cut and paste music, and finding glitches are all examples of creative expression through breaking. Even overloading a DAW with plugins until it crashes should be seen as learning through breaking.

Breaking involves seeking out and pushing against boundaries. Pushing at boundaries not only shows us where those boundaries are, but gives new artists a better understanding of the capabilities of the system they're working in. Plus, breaking those boundaries can show artists valuable directions to go in all while revealing useful information about the system. Everyone has different boundaries that they might move toward or against as they learn to be more creative. What are some ways to enable boundary pushers to express themselves and learn without causing problems for others in the process?





One way is to create outlets. Music is traditionally an outlet perfect for learning through breaking. For some, the most breaking they'll do is breaking with tradition and making something with a very different sound or aesthetic from others. For others, they'll literally want to hear something blow up. Learning the fundamentals is not necessary to learn where boundaries are, often those who are drawn to this way of working naturally seek boundaries and push them. They might look at samples with strange names first, or scroll to the very bottom of a list, or the last folder in a file system to find something that others' might miss.

Artists like this need a lot of hands-on guidance and experience. They might work very quickly but when running into new things might think it's not for them or miss something useful to them just because it seems familiar or like something that other people would tend to use. These artists might be interested in unusual genres or styles that have mature themes. Holding space for artists like this can be difficult in shared spaces, so it can be helpful to give them guidance to places like venues or online communities to express themselves in full and honest ways. Your space and tools are still valuable to them, and they are still valuable to your space.



## Playing Without Breaking

Playing without breaking happens early for some, and late for others. For the artists interested in creating new sounds and genres from scratch, this will come early. For the artists interested in creating new sounds by breaking this will come later. Either way, playing without breaking is an essential practice. When we create whole new songs, create covers, or perform we are playing without breaking. When artists learn to express themselves they are trying to connect who they are with the world. For artists who learn through theory or loops, this can happen in a place when they start to combine original material with their loops. After an artist that breaks has effectively found the boundaries they're seeking, they can learn to fill that space with original work.

The process of doing that can be seen as playing as themselves while fitting into the system they've learned to understand. An artist who has been using EDM loops for a year might try and recreate a melody or create a simple drum pattern from scratch. When they're successful and create something indistinguishable from the material they were using before or that they're familiar with, they are playing without breaking. Making original material requires play— there is no point at all in an artist's journey where they sit down to work and never play, experiment, or improvise. Through that play you find the boundary that your expression lies on or beyond and apply it there.



## Section 3: Distribution and Sharing

Sharing is fundamental to the growth and development of an artist, as it allows for valuable feedback, exposure to new perspectives, and collaboration opportunities. By sharing their work with others, artists invite constructive criticism that can help refine their skills and artistic vision. Furthermore, sharing fosters a sense of community and connection with fellow creatives, leading to potential collaborations that can expand horizons and push artistic boundaries. In this section we'll look at some key ways to incorporate sharing in your community.

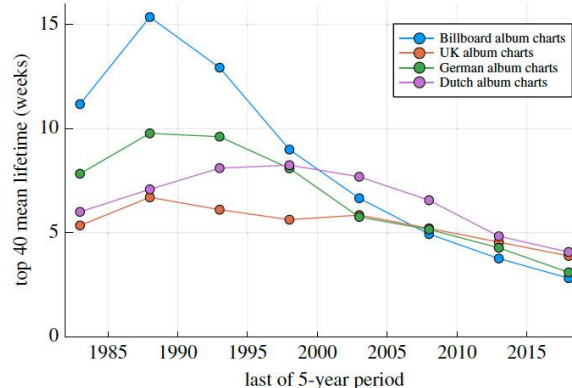
### Distribution Services (The Music Industry)

The primary way for sharing music in 2024 is through social media and streaming services. However, it's important to remember that these are music industry paths for sharing. What this means is, that ultimately the reason to put music on these platforms is to share with a broad variety of people and audience. To reach many people, and possibly make money off that visibility. There are certain types of music that need to be shared through these spaces at some point. This is music in popular and trendy genres that needs to be tested and validated through metrics.

The idea here is to make something that you hope a lot of people will like, maybe even the whole world! Then you put that into the world and see how it does. How did people respond?

Did anyone hear it? Did they stick around to

hear more? Respond to questions and issues like this to then update and upgrade your approach. Did people like the beat? Keep doing it! Did they dislike the lyrics? Switch them up! Rinse and repeat all while using streaming services and social media like a megaphone to reach as many people as possible.



## Sharing music in general

This might sound obvious, but sharing is one of the most important aspects of making art. In 2024, social media and streaming services have become some of the most popular ways to share music. In fact, you could argue that music production in particular has no better home today. As a result, the music industry mode of sharing has become largely assumed as the most valid way to express oneself. It's important to remember that sharing directly with others' in community, outside of the industry, is still and forever will be the best way to grow as an artist.

Try to encourage budding artists in your community to share their work with you, peers or family. Encourage them to take criticism and incorporate the people they share with into their work. You can also make space for sharing new music. Maybe you can share new music made in your space on your social media or in a newsletter. Try having listening sessions and inviting everyone to come out to listen to new projects.

Releasing one's music on a service such as Distrokid, YouTube, etc. can be very valuable if you need to spread the word far and wide or make your music accessible but is not the only way for a creator to share their music with the world. Exploring interdisciplinary activities such as combining music with images, either video or film, making stems and sound elements for DJs to work with, and/or combining audio with other media arts available in platforms like Adobe suites encourages collaboration and fosters inspiration. Music can be used as a vehicle for so many things, so encourage teamwork as a way to share music in community.

### Create:

- The **music** using music software
- The **album art** using Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator
- The **shirts** using screen printing or heat press
- The **content** using cameras



1 PM  
2 PM  
3 PM  
4 PM  
5 PM  
6 PM  
7 PM  
8 PM  
9 PM  
10 PM

**Listening Night** Daily

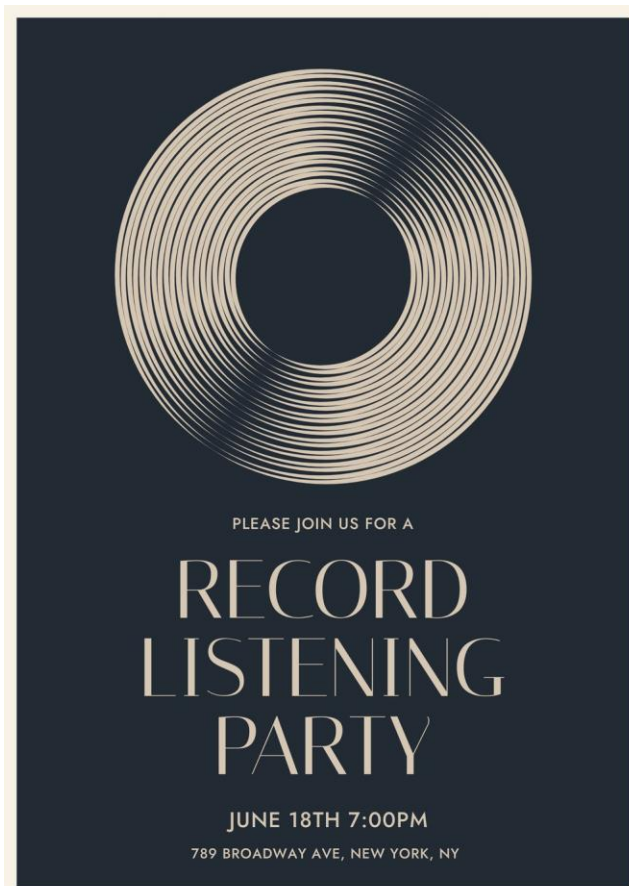
Add Location or Video Call

Friday, Jun 28 7 PM to 9 PM

Add Invitees

Get snacks and drinks  
Check in with Charles about his tune  
Pickup speakers from rental

Add URL  
Add Attachment...



## Content Creation

One of the most popular ways of sharing art in 2024 is through something we call content creation. Content creation can take many forms, but generally involves creating art to be viewed or listened to through social media. Often creating content involves a goal of making money, but doesn't need to. Social media platforms use computer algorithms and AI which help connect artists with audiences, however every platform is different in terms of how it monetizes their creators. The monetization scheme is more important than the algorithm that platform uses. For example, in 2024 one platform has a strong live streaming presence. This platform gates the ability to live stream behind having a certain amount of followers. Once a creator breaks through the limit, they can start to make money through live streaming. If you're working with content creation it can help to draw inspiration from the platform, or use it on a daily basis.

Content creation involves many moving parts and usually involves combining different expressions into one form. For example, a musician who wants to create content will need to learn to record themselves through video for the platform, make their music sound good for the platform, and create music that appeals to other users of that platform. These jobs can all be done as a team, and you should encourage participants at your space to do so. Content creation is also a marketing game, meaning that you can also use the pacing and expectations of the platform to create work. For example, there might be a trend with a certain aesthetic or dance that you could add to using original music.

Ultimately, content creation falls into the category of business. Learning to express yourself on different platforms involves combinations of business decisions and time investments all while considering current trends. Consider creating a social media channel, account, or page for your community to jumpstart your participants' access to the platform all while spreading the word about your community.

## Listening Parties & Live Shows

Hosting listening parties can be a great way to celebrate the achievements of producers and artists in your community. Many artists and producers prefer behind-the-scenes rolls, so rather than emphasizing live performance, you can host regular listening parties to help artists and producers put themselves out there.

Listening parties don't have to be especially complicated. Having a set of speakers and a place to hang out is more than enough, especially if you have other things to do while the music is playing. Having snacks or other refreshments and letting people talk amongst themselves is an important part of the experience. Just make sure your speakers are loud enough to play over everyone!

For other artists and producers, live shows can be invaluable. Artists need experience being in front of crowds and even dealing with how it feels to have no one show up. Setting up a venue or creating a performance space can give artists and producers a goal to achieve. You could even partner with a venue or school in your area to bring artists in your community to and from your space. Seeing skilled and professional artists in the same space that they learn in is extremely encouraging.

