

Pearson Edexcel A Level Music: Understanding the Composition Assessment Criteria

First teaching in 2016

First assessment 2018



Agenda

Pearson Edexcel A level Music: Understanding the Composition Assessment Criteria

- Introduction
- The Specification
- The Assessment Criteria
- Understanding the Assessment Criteria
- Applying the Assessment Criteria

The Specification

- AO2: To create and develop musical ideas with technical and expressive control and coherence
- 30% of GCE A Level
- 20% of this is the free choice composition
- Minimum length 4 minutes
- Pearson Edexcel briefs OR candidates state the intended purpose/style and intended audience/occasion
- Score – Recording – Authentication Sheet
- All submitted by 15th May each year

The Assessment Criteria

Assessment Grid One: Creating and Developing Musical Ideas with Coherence

- Quality of musical ideas
- Structure: balance of unity and variety
- Overall shape
- Balance of the sections
- Bar to bar coherence

The Assessment Criteria

Assessment Grid Two: Creating and Developing Musical Ideas with Expressive Control

- The expressive effect of the music
- Should be able to show a variety of moods
- Awareness of audience/occasion

The Assessment Criteria

Assessment Grid Three: Creating and Developing Musical Ideas with Technical Control

- Most musical elements are considered here
- Includes the exploitation of the chosen instruments/voices
- Generally, a 'best fit' mark is achieved weighing up the relative handling of the elements

Understanding the Criteria



Candidate 1



Please note: All examples used in this training were from the Summer 2022 examination series, where changes were made to NEA requirements to address the impact of COVID-19. These submissions may therefore not satisfy current requirements as outlined in the specification, whereby *‘One composition must be from either a list of briefs related to the areas of study, or a free composition, carrying 40 marks for this component. This composition must be at least four minutes in duration’*.

- The intended purpose or style of this piece was stated as a serial composition on the theme of a haunted house for a concert audience.
- The candidate has provided a full score and an additional explanatory commentary.
- If candidates submit a score and commentary examiners will read both.

Candidate 1 assessment

- The piece opens with a clear version of the row and proceeds logically, generally maintaining some rhythmic interest and spreading the material across various octaves
- **Assessment Grid 1(AG1):** Sections are clearly audible, with a fugue section, a waltz-like section, and dramatic octaves, for example, and all sections are developing the same or similar material in novel and interesting ways. Sense of wholeness but ultimately lacks the sophistication in its ideas to achieve level five. For example, fluency in the transitions between sections is not always maintained. It does, however, completely fulfil the descriptors for level four and achieved a mark of 11 on this grid.
- **AG2:** Creative and ambitious and in places goes beyond this. Music matches the intended style to depict the haunted house. There are contrasting moods and the waltz section, the dramatic octave passages and use of silence give this a sense of maturity that has elements of level 5, so achieves a mark of 12 in level 5.
- **AG3:** Shows awareness of the serial style by focusing on melodic shapes and rhythm. Exploits extremes of pitch and interplay between instruments. In general, the control of the elements is assured, and melodic shapes are good. This is certainly work in level 5 but probably not at the top mark because of limited use of performance markings for music in this style, and an over-reliance on crotchets and quavers, or bars with no rhythmic variety. This achieved a mark of 12 on this grid.
- **Overall mark of 35/40**

Candidate 2



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- The intended purpose or style of this piece was a hymn for four-part SATB choir with accompaniment of piano and strings.
- It was designed for worship in a church or for a school chamber choir to perform, so could be enjoyed by audiences in a sacred or secular environment.

Candidate 2 assessment

- **AG1:** Basic musical ideas here are not strong. Some attempt at structure but the music lacks direction and fluency. A mark of 4 was given for this grid, not at the top of level 2 because the lack of direction is more than just 'in parts'.
- **AG2:** The music doesn't really match the stated style and audience and it remains fairly one-dimensional. A mark of 5 was achieved in this grid, since it fully matches the descriptors for level 2.
- **AG3:** Mark of 5 because it matched the descriptors. Control of the elements is inconsistent and there are misjudgments in the handling of forces and textures.
- **Overall mark of 14/40**

Candidate 3



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- This music was intended as the soundtrack to a fantasy adventure video game set in Medieval Europe.
- It is scored for full orchestra and designed to be played during the game.

Candidate 3 assessment

- **AG1:** Evidence of the creation and development of ideas, but the melodic lines rely too much on repetition and chunky periodic phrasing. Mostly fluent, but the balance of contrasts is not always successful. Mark of 8, at the top of level 3.
- **AG2:** Creative response to the intended purpose and style – would work well within a video game. Moods were created but weren't always held in balance, so it did not feel well-paced throughout. Achieved a mark of 10 in the middle of level 4, not quite fully matching the descriptors.
- **AG3:** The use of elements is generally secure, but the tonality is a little unvaried, as is the melody, the texture relies heavily on layers of ostinatos, and harmonically there is much reliance on repeated chord sequences. Some sense of style, with effective moments. Mark of 8, at the top of level 3.
- **Overall mark of 26/40**

Candidate 4



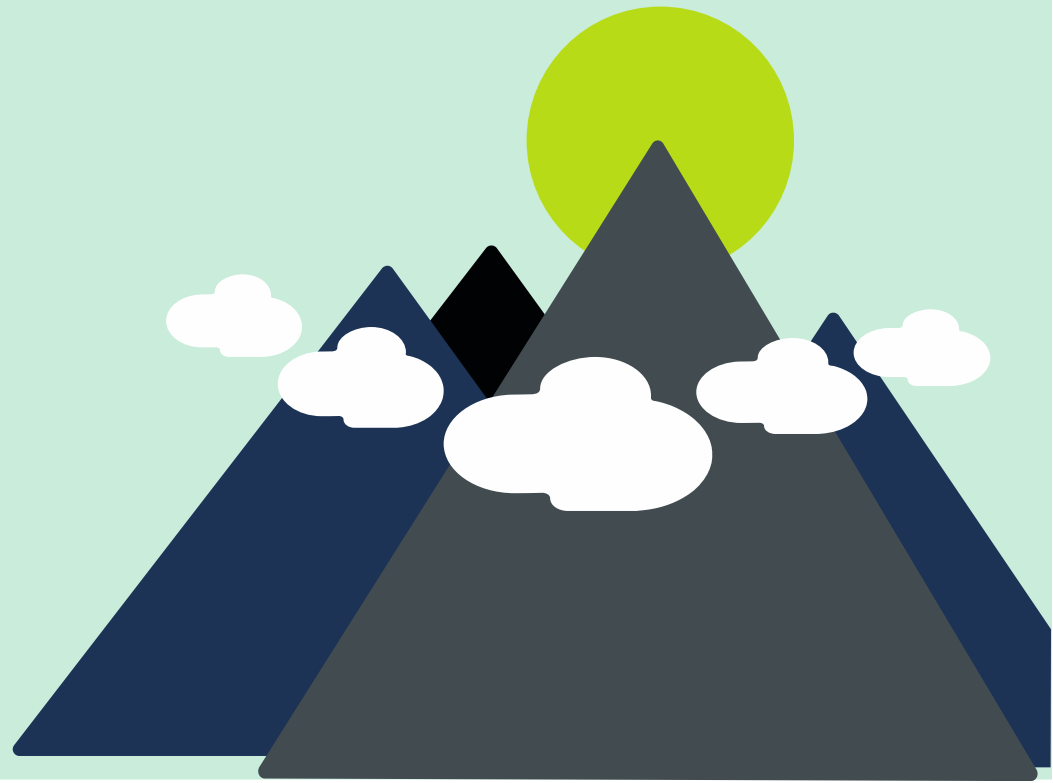
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- Gospel song written for a wedding to accompany the moment when the bride and groom walk down the aisle together.
- There is a score, commentary, and the recording.

Candidate 4 assessment

- **AG1:** Basic but satisfactory structure. The music flows quite well and the main ideas are fairly effective. Some sections have been copied and pasted without development, so whilst this work is at level 3 it does not match the descriptor fully and achieves a mark of 7.
- **AG2:** Limited contrast here, but it is a response to the brief. It is level 3 work, but the lack of contrast places it at the bottom of the level with a mark of 6.
- **AG3:** Control of the elements is generally secure. The basic melodic line has shape, and the word-setting is appropriate. Harmony is effective if a little elementary. The use of forces is fairly functional, and there is limited rhythmic and textural variety. The music achieved a mark of 7 in the middle of level 3.
- **Overall mark of 20/40**

Applying the Criteria



Candidates 5 & 6



Please note: All examples used in this training were from the Summer 2022 examination series, where changes were made to NEA requirements to address the impact of COVID-19. These submissions may therefore not satisfy current requirements as outlined in the specification, whereby *‘One composition must be from either a list of briefs related to the areas of study, or a free composition, carrying 40 marks for this component. This composition must be at least four minutes in duration’*.

- **Candidate 5:** A piece for jazz piano in the style of Bill Evans to be performed at a jazz festival
- **Candidate 6:** A piece for string orchestra combining minimalist ostinatos, dance rhythms and elements of Ravel’s writing for strings for performance by a professional orchestra in a concert.

Candidate 5 assessment

- **AG1:** A mark of 7 was justified by the satisfactory use of basic structure, with some contrast, but lacking fluency and direction at times.
- **AG2:** A creative response to the rather sparsely indicated intended style and audience, with some well-paced moods but also moments, such as the introduction, where communication faltered, achieving a mark of 8.
- **AG3:** Good understanding of the style, and the piano writing was idiomatic if a little unvaried at times. Complex harmonies are used but rhythm and melody lack direction at times. A mark in the middle of level 4 at 10 was achieved.
- **Overall mark of 25/40.**

AG1 (/13)	AG2 (/14)	AG3 (/13)	Total (/40)
7	8	10	25

Canidate 6 assessment

- **AG1:** Strong ideas developed and combined well, with evidence of the stated influence of Ravel, creates an effective piece, with a sense of wholeness and fluency and sufficient creativity to achieve a mark in level 5 but at 12 rather than 13 because there is limited variety.
- **AG2:** The mark of 13 was also in level 5.
- **AG3:** The handling of the musical elements is assured and sophisticated, and the string writing very idiomatic, so full marks of 13 were given on grid 3.
- **Overall mark of 38/40.**

AG1 (/13)	AG2 (/14)	AG3 (/13)	Total (/40)
12	13	13	38

Candidates 7 & 8



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- **Candidate 7:** A piece of vocal music for Armistice Day based on ‘The Last Post’ for performance in a Remembrance Service
- **Candidate 8:** A piece for clarinet and piano in ternary form exploiting the musical characteristics of Gerald Finzi, to be performed in a chamber concert.

Candidate 7 assessment

- Candidate achieved a consistent mark of 7 in each grid.
- **AG1:** There was some fluency and variety, with everything held together by the “In Flanders Field” idea, but many places where the music lost direction.
- **AG2:** There was limited success in capturing the mood of the text.
- **AG3:** Harmony and rhythm were handled inconsistently and whilst there was some variety in the vocal textures there was much reliance on chordal writing.
- **Overall mark of 21/40.**

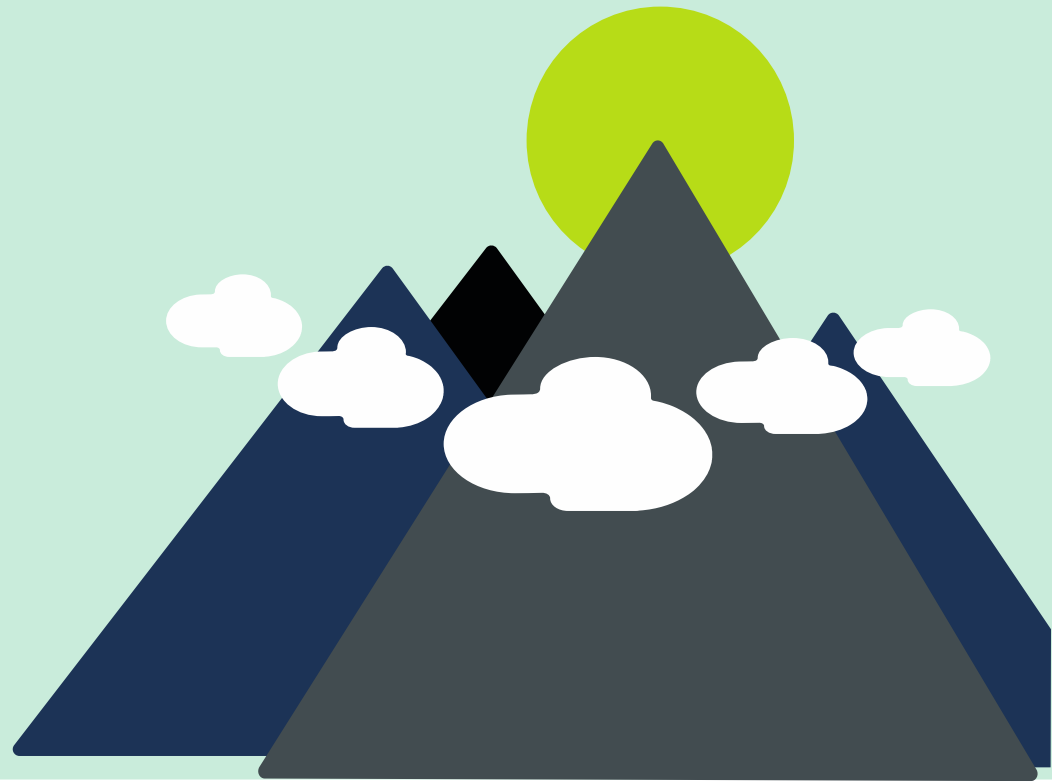
AG1 (/13)	AG2 (/14)	AG3 (/13)	Total (/40)
7	7	7	21

Candidate 8 assessment

- **AG1:** Demonstrates excellent coherence with strong ideas that have character and are developed with assurance.
- **AG2:** It is a mature and sophisticated response to the brief.
- **AG3:** The control of the elements is assured. Melodic, harmonic and rhythmic writing is very strong indeed and stylistic devices are handled convincingly throughout. The writing for both instruments is idiomatic with good contrasts in the range.
- Overall mark of 40/40.

AG1 (/13)	AG2 (/14)	AG3 (/13)	Total (/40)
13	14	13	40

Questions



Thank You!

