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Examiners' Report  
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel GCE  
Music Technology (8MT0)  
Paper 2

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## **AS Music Technology Component 2: 8MT0/02**

### **Technology-based Composition: Examiners report, 2023**

Submissions for 2023 produced a range of technologically musical responses with marks ranging from 9-55 with most candidates appearing between the 21-44 region.

This year saw an improvement in candidates use of synthesis and sampling techniques for musical purposes. There were fewer examples of candidates using a plethora of synthesis and sampling techniques and sounding them at unmusical points in the piece. Instead, there were more considered uses of, and placements of, a variety of synthesis and sampling techniques that served and created a musical purpose within the work.

The unfortunate habit of candidates cutting their compositions off at the 2:30 time limit continued this year in some centres. This hugely impact on the coherence and flow of the piece as well as demonstrating a very poor handling of structure and texture. Candidates should be reminded that the piece should come to a natural and musically satisfying conclusion at the 2:30 mark.

The provision of the samples as part of the task ensured excellent scaffolding for the composing process. Sample 1 provided candidates with a range of pitches, slides, and note durations from which to manipulate and incorporate within their piece. Sample 2 provided candidates with the most famous of all breakbeats, the 'Amen Break' from the Winston's song 'Amen Brother'. The breakbeat provided candidates with the iconic kick, snare, ride, and hi-hat 'one shot' samples from the beat.

#### **Administration**

Some centres failed to read the Administrative Support Guidance (ASG) document, so were therefore unaware that there is now a requirement to upload the data files for the DAW sessions. This created unnecessary chasing for these files and additional work for all involved.

Uploads: Thank you to centres who were patient with the uploading procedures this year. As with previous years, there were some centres who had incorrectly labelled their files with either the wrong candidate number and/or component code or had uploaded another candidate's work for someone else. Teacher's cooperation with these matters is always professional and prompt, so thank you for that; it makes the whole process smoother for everyone.

Logbook uploads: Thank you to teachers who did not encourage their students to submit additional screenshots, written accounts and/or diaries with the log books. The space in the log book is more than enough to provide examiners with the information that they need in order to mark the work. Higher-end candidates had submitted accurate information about the synthesis creation, sampling techniques, and creative FX applied to the main parts in their work. Lower-end candidates tended to either write very little or wrote a lot without providing any relevant information.

#### **Assessment Grid 1: Synthesis**

At the lower-end of the cohort, candidates used minimal synthesis timbres in their work. When they were included, they tended to be pre-set timbres with minimal/no editing. They also appeared as sporadic, fragmented token gestures, rather than being features of the work. Higher-end candidates used a good range of synthesis techniques and created most of the timbres themselves using subtractive soft-synths. These techniques were then used in musical ways to add tension, create dynamic and/or timbral build, or for rhythmical/melodic purposes. Common techniques used were: Oscillators octaves apart and blended, sometimes with some subtle de-tuning; filtering using a LPF with some cut-off movement; attention to long/short attack and decay/sustain settings were used. Envelope Generators on Filters were popular at the higher end as were creative uses of LFO's. Stylistically appropriate synthesis techniques in styles such as EDM and Drum 'n' Bass, were clearly researched in some work, which not only showed a clear demonstration of synthesis knowledge, but also demonstrated stylistic awareness and application. Candidates who tried to fit in as many synthesis techniques as possible without employing them in a musical fashion only scored a maximum of 4 marks in this area due to the misjudgement of their musical use.

### **Assessment Grid 2: Sampling**

Candidates were assessed on their sampling techniques here, not only on the provided samples, but also on any other samples that they have included themselves. Examiners were assessing techniques commonly found on both traditional hardware samplers and software samplers. Lower-end candidates had explored minimal sampling techniques. Typically, sample 1 was cut-up and re-triggered, perhaps with some small tokens of pitch mapping. Sample 2 tended to simply be looped with the odd kick and snare cut out and re-triggered. Higher-end candidates explored a variety of sampling techniques, mostly from the supplied samples, and included some or all of the following: Cutting up; re-triggering; stuttering; pitch mapping; filtering (commonly LPF) sometimes with variable resonance and automated; stretching; reversing; pitch bending.

As with synthesis, candidates who tried to fit in as many sampling techniques as possible without employing them in a musical fashion only scored a maximum of 4 marks in this area due to the misjudgement of their musical use.

Candidates scored particularly high when they transformed the samples beyond their original musical state. For example, using melodyne or pitch-mapping to manipulate the pitches and rhythms of the supplied vocal sample to create a new melodic/harmonic idea. Some candidates used their own samples from 'crate-digging' but tended to simply loop large sections of other's work, rather than manipulate them. There is no credit for selecting a sample from somebody else's work and simply repeating it and adding a new 'beat' to it.

### **Assessment Grid 3: Creative FX**

Any processes applied to the samples that cannot be found on a sampler were assessed here. Lower end candidates used very few creative FX and tended to limit themselves to reverb, delay and a little bit of distortion. Higher end candidates explored the plethora of creative FX a modern DAW can offer which could have included; creative and musical use of reverbs and delays; flange; phase; distortions; tremolo and chorus. Side-chaining dynamic processors were also popular, however, it yielded mixed musical results.

Candidates who chose to use as many FX as they could, tended to yield poor musical results. There was often little care for the mix clarity of the FX being used, and more importantly, on the musical purpose that the effect produced within the piece.

#### **Assessment Grid 4: Editing of mix**

A well-balanced mix with all parts clear and evenly spread across the stereo field was required, as well as care and attention to EQ, compression and reverb use for mix purposes. A suitably strong signal to noise ratio was expected without the need for extreme loudness from 'mastering' processes. Lower end candidates tended to have a confused and inconsistent balance, often with muddy synths and uncontrolled dynamics in most parts. Higher end candidates produced carefully crafted mixes that had clearly been mixed on monitors with suitable EQ and compression decisions taken. They also contained a musical spread across the stereo field which enhanced the structure and texture of the work as and when necessary. Candidates were often cutting short reverb/delay tails again this year, as well as simply cutting off the music abruptly at 2:30 to keep within the time frame, and this was not pleasing to hear; more care should be taken when such decisions are being made.

#### **Assessment Grid 5: Response to brief**

Students were assessed on two factors here: How well they had kept to the 2:30 time of the brief and how well they had incorporated the given samples into their work. Lower end candidates tended to either sound the samples sporadically throughout the piece in an unmusical fashion or looped them, often throughout the whole piece. Higher end candidates transformed the given samples creating new musical ideas from them. Very high-attaining candidates did this several times throughout the piece. However, it is important to note that whilst some candidates did attempt to transform the samples into new musical ideas, some did not do so in a convincingly musical fashion. Some candidates tended to focus on creating new musical ideas out of just one of the samples, normally the vocal and tended to disregard the drum loop and sounding it in loop form in a small section of the song.

Some candidates this year had some success composing new vocal lines that incorporated the provided vocal sample, and this often produced musical results.

Some candidates also took a literal interpretation of the lyric "couldn't reach the moon" and incorporated a whole theme around space travel into their work. Whilst this was fine and produced some musical results, the lyric was a metaphorical one about aiming for personal goals, and pushing yourself, rather than actually going to the moon.

Teachers are reminded that the samples are there to assess the students' knowledge of technological techniques and how they employ these in a musical setting, as well as providing a scaffold and a starting point from which to begin their composition. They are a central part of the task and are not to be used as small gestures within a different piece.

#### **Assessment Grid 6: Style and coherence**

Examples of styles successfully worked in this year included: Drum 'n' Bass Industrial, Rock, Chill-out, House; and fusions of all the previously mentioned. However, overall, there was a lack of emphasis on composing within a certain style, with some candidates simply composing without a clear direction of style. Lower end candidates tended to have a confused style without any real sense of drive and an over-reliance on copy and paste with no musical developments of copy-and-pasted material. Higher end candidates were composing in a variety of different pastiche styles with varying moods/atmospheres created within each composition. Pieces written in naturally repetitive styles, such as Grime and Drum 'n' Bass, contained constant evolution of the textures used in order to maintain interest. Higher end work also had a constant sense of drive, interest, and momentum throughout, with the 2:30 time limit feeling very short.

Teachers are reminded that composing within a style's features provides a framework for the candidates to work within so that they can then go and develop their own sonic voice.

### **Assessment Grids 7-11: Musical elements**

Melody, Harmony, Rhythm, Texture and Structure are all assessed for each candidate, with the highest three marks being carried forward to the composition mark total. This facilitates work in different styles to be rewarded equally. Lower-end compositions tended to be simplistic and functional in nature. There was often an over-reliance on copy-and-paste in most parts and no real attempt to sculpt contrasting textures to create a guided structure to the piece. Higher-end candidates tended to score highly in all elements and utilised a lot of different musical techniques, devices, textures, and structures to craft the composition. It is important to note that high end candidates all had a carefully crafted structure that neatly took in to account the 2:30 time limit of the task.