



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel GCE
Music Technology (9MT0)
Paper 01

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Principal Examiner's Report

A level Music Technology Component 1 – Recording

9MT0/01

June 2025

General Introduction

This year, the list of artists provided much scope for candidates to choose from a wide range of songs in a variety of different styles. Whilst Stereophonics proved the most popular choice, there was a good spread across all the artists which was very pleasing.

Some of the best centres encouraged students to choose their own song resulting in a range of different artists and songs with arrangements that were creative and fulfilled the requirements of the task as well as being technically very accomplished with candidates showing clear understanding of the effective use of the DAW technology as well as recording techniques required.

The exam sets candidates a series of requirements that need to be fulfilled. The first requirement is to record a song from the published list of artists, and this is almost without exception, universally achieved. The next requirement is that of instrumentation. Candidates are required to record at least 2 minutes of a drum kit (snare, kick, hi hats and cymbals), bass guitar or double bass, electric guitar, lead vocal and backing vocal, and a minimum of 1 minute of two different additional instruments from the three set options – acoustic melody instrument, acoustic guitar and keyboard. Finally, they are required to produce a balanced final stereo mix demonstrating that they can appropriately apply EQ, control dynamics and apply effects to all the required instruments.

The majority of candidates produced a well-managed mix that fulfilled the requirements of the paper. There is, however, not a requirement to replicate the original song, and a significant number of candidates struggled with this in their submissions, attempting to recreate the original song to the detriment of the requirements. We still regularly get questions on Ask the Expert such as *'I have a candidate that wants to record xxx song by xxx artist, but there are no backing vocals on the track. How can they fulfil the requirement of 2 minutes of backing vocals.'* To fulfil the requirements, candidates will **almost always** need to rearrange some aspects of their chosen song. Examiners do not expect to hear a carbon copy of the original, and where they do, it is often very hard to apply the mark scheme to certain aspects of the submission however the good the track might sound at face value.

The most common issue was that of acoustic guitars. Where a candidate records a song in which electric guitars dominate the original track, acoustic guitar is often one of the additional instruments for a candidates' submission but is often recorded pretty much doubling the electric guitar and as such is completely impossible to distinguish in the final submitted mix. Whilst the log may show that an acoustic guitar has been recorded, examiners mark what they hear in the submitted .wav mix and if the acoustic guitar is

indistinguishable, it becomes impossible to credit it in 'Other Instruments' AG 1,2,3 and 4 and will also have a bearing on the mark awarded in AG5.

The minimum requirement for electric guitar is 2 minutes. If a song is 3 ½ minutes then the electric guitar does not have to play for the entire time, leaving enough time for the acoustic guitar to be clearly and independently heard for 1 minute.

The same issue often also applies to Backing vocals which often get neglected, with little attention in both the recording and mix process. Double tracked vocals do not qualify as backing vocals and a number of candidates fell foul of this resulting in fewer marks for AG1-4 Vocals and AG5. The quality of backing vocals was often far inferior to the lead. It is important that just as much care is taken with backing vocals as is with the lead.

For the purposes of this examination, it should be clarified that any instrument that is played using a keyboard is defined as a keyboard instrument. Acoustic pianos are classified as keyboard and **not** acoustic melody instruments and should not be submitted as such as they will not get credit in that category. Some candidates submitted mixes with a synth as a keyboard instrument and piano as a second acoustic melody instrument which resulted in no marks being credited for a second additional instrument.

Administration

The online submission process worked well. Almost all centres followed the instructions in the Administration Support Guide (ASG) and this was appreciated by examiners. However, a minority of centres did not and there were examples of:

- Centres submitting one ZIP file with all three elements – final mix, logbook and DAW file. **These should be submitted separately – the final mix as a .WAV, logbook as a.pdf and a ZIP file of the DAW.**
- File naming was also mostly very accurate and adhered to the format requested. It is vital for examiners that everything is named as required, so please ensure that all candidates name all files and folders precisely as set out in the ASG.
- There were a few examples of .MP3 files rather than the higher quality .WAV files being submitted.

Logbooks

There were some outstanding examples that were well presented and provided excellent evidence to support the submitted final mix. Some however, were clearly very last-minute jobs and provided little useful information. Examiners will refer to the logbooks to see if the information supports what has been submitted on the final mix. Generally, the two complement each other, but there were some logs which contained inaccuracies.

This year, we required both the grid on page 3 to be completed as well as a screen shot of the DAW arrange window to be included in the log. Most candidates did this and it was very useful for examiners to see both. A few candidates clearly thought that they needed to do one or the other and not both: both are required.

Authenticity

Whilst it is permitted for candidates in a centre to record the same song. However, centres should encourage candidates to choose a song that is unique and to take ownership of their recordings; then candidates will get excited about their recording and want to learn and excel. This would also teach them project management skills ready for University or work.

Examiners find that in centres where all candidates do the same song, rote learning occurs. This yields very similar recordings. In such centres often the candidates do less well on 9MT0/41 because they don't have a deep understanding of recording. Another danger of all candidates doing the same song is malpractice where candidates share audio stems, microphone set-ups, mix settings or photographs. Recordings are forensically analysed to ensure audio stems have not been shared. Penalties for malpractice are severe.

Photographs must be taken at the time of the recording and show a complete set up. For example, a photograph of a set up for a lead vocal should include the singer (whilst singing), not just a picture of a microphone with a pop shield and no singer. A photo of a guitar set up with no guitarist in sight is not helpful to an examiner. Time and date stamps on the photos would be useful.

Sharing of photographs between candidates is malpractice and should never happen as it implies teamwork or collusion between candidates. Similarly, an identical set up photographed from a slightly different angle but clearly at the same time is not appropriate as candidates should be working independently to set up recording sessions, and the evidence supplied should back this up. Group working is not permitted in this task.

Marking criteria

AG1: Capture

Most candidates scored well in AG1. Where elements were inaudible, marks in that category were best fitted as will be stated on Examiner Mark Booklets. This will also be the case in AG 2-4.

AG2 Editing – processing EQ

Most common issues with EQ were poor upper end frequency response on either individual tracks or the mix as a whole, poor lower end frequency response, and swamping around the lower mid frequencies. In drums, kick drums often struggled to cut through a mix.

AG3 – Processing – dynamic processing

Problems with dynamic control were often caused by low gain control on the recording not allowing compression to even out dynamic variation. Poor microphone technique by singers also caused some issues. Occasional over compression (mainly of drums and electric guitars) was observed, but most candidates controlled dynamics reasonably well.

AG4: Processing – use of effects

This was the one aspect where the mix was often at variance to the log. Many candidates could have been a little bolder in their use of effects with some very dry brittle mixes. Bear in mind that an examiner needs something to assess, so a little more can go a long way – this is not a task to replicate a mix but present evidence to the examiner that candidates can apply effects to help create a balanced mix.

AG5: Production – Balance and blend

Whilst there were many excellent examples of well-balanced mixes where all tracks could clearly be heard, there were also a significant number that suffered from masked and inaudible tracks.

AG6: Production – use of stereo

Examiners were looking for tracks with a stereo field that provided good, but not extreme, separation. Most candidates presented a well-managed stereo field, often a little narrow with, for example, BVs and lead vocals fighting for the same space. There were occasionally some very inappropriately wide and over separated use of stereo.

AG7: Management of noise, distortion, master level and audio editing

Most candidates scored 4. Those that didn't mostly had low mastering levels, some unedited noise or a cut start/end – all errors that could easily have been rectified with a little more care and attention in the final bounce process.

Conclusion

The majority of candidates produced work of a good quality fulfilling all the requirements of the examination. Whilst standard of performance is not assessed, poor performances invariably produced poor results as capturing and mixing a substandard performance creates great difficulties. Candidates should always critically listen to their mixes with the instrument requirements in front of them before submission to check that all elements can clearly be heard and an examiner will be able to assess them.