



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel GCE
Music Technology (9MT0)
Paper 02

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9MT0 02 Principal Examiner's Report to Centres 2025

For this paper, there is always a choice of 3 briefs: one is a moving image movie file, one is a set text, and the other is a theme to use as a basis for sampling spoken media, wildlife, urban or other ambient noise, or other sound sources that represent the theme. As such the task has the same scope each year, though the particular stimuli vary to ensure unpredictability.

Candidates are able to choose any of the three briefs, depending on what suits their interests or preferred musical styles.

As in the previous year, a small overall improvement in candidate performance was noted, although many candidates are still not fully integrating sample content suitably into the core of their compositions, notably within responses to brief 3, where the meaning of the brief must be reflected by the samples used, and this must, in turn, integrate musically with the rest of the content.

The Three Briefs

The three briefs had similar focus to previous series. However, unusually, brief three was not only the most popular choice, but clearly a favourite by some way.

Brief 1: The Science of Surfing by Wonderlust

A surf themed animation with approximately 16% of candidates choosing this brief.

With a clear surfing vibe, the animated video opened with a surf related title sequence, before moving through a number of quirky wave related scenes, until finally ending up at the beach for the extended surfing section. The video concludes with friends ending the day with a well-earned drink by the campfire as the sun goes down.

The imagery provided candidates with opportunities to create an interesting and exciting piece of work with thematic ideas, specific hit points and the ability to build upon their ideas as the storyline developed. The best work managed to achieve this whilst also demonstrating effective and musically appropriate use of technology. Manipulating synthesis or sample parameters alongside carefully managed use of creative effects were key components of the strongest work. Weaker work, as has been seen in previous years, often saw significant use and manipulation of technical skills, but frequently at the expense of musicality, consequently compromising the success of the composition. The very weakest work for this brief unfortunately saw a resurgence in the reliance on foley to often, rather unsuccessfully, convey the storyline. It should be noted that instructions in the brief specifically direct against the use of foley in this way.

A number of candidates decided to embrace the surf theme using samples or pastiche of popular artists such as The Beach Boys. Where samples or thematic material was fully integrated into the composition this was reasonably successful, however, for those

that lacked suitable integration, ideas often presented as rather superficial, consequently detracting from the overall coherence of the composition.

It should also be noted that for this brief, candidates are required to compose a piece of music and not simply an underscore or backing track for the video content. The most successful submissions, although written as effective responses to the video content, also worked successfully without it. The weaker responses to this brief were often rather episodic, their reliance on capturing every scene change with different feels/styles often resulting in work which lacked coherence or felt rather bolted together.

In conclusion, the most successful candidates created a coherent piece of music which clearly referenced the video content, and also demonstrated effective use and manipulation of the three technical areas of synthesis, sampling and creative effects use.

Brief 2: Everybody is Doing It (Benjamin Zephaniah)

The least popular of this year's briefs with only 10% of candidates opting for this choice.

A fun poem about dance styles from around the world.

As in previous years, there were two distinct approaches.

- i) Rewriting some or all of the content to form a set of song lyrics.
- ii) Recording portions of the text to use as samples or spoken word.

Once again, integration is key here. For those who chose the song writing option, well written lyrics and the ability to deliver them with solid recording technique is a must. For those opting for option ii) then musical manipulation and integration of their chosen spoken words is important.

Many candidates chose the song writing route and it was very pleasing to hear some excellent songs which were written with maturity and development, and overall, this was probably the more successful option. A number of candidates had chosen to sample words from the poem or simply to narrate the content, and overall, this was a less successful approach. There were a few notable cases where candidates had written raps using the poem as a starting point for their content. When successful, there was evidence of some truly excellent examples.

Finally, the most successful submissions were those that had chosen a style and been consistent with their content, developing themes and musical ideas alongside the use of technology. Unfortunately, a small number of candidates had tried too hard to mix a range of styles, reflecting the content of the poem, but resulting in rather episodic, disjointed work.

Brief 3: Stop:Go

By far the most popular brief of 2025 with 74% of candidates opting for this choice.

An interesting brief giving candidates a range of ideas from which to develop samples and content using the words Stop and Go. Although the words Stop and Go needed to be included in the composition, developing this idea using synonyms, different languages or even writing song lyrics or a rap were all acceptable approaches. However, there are two key points to note. The composition, whichever form it may have taken, *must* have included a minimum of six samples using/related to Stop:Go, and the brief Stop:Go should have been central to the focus of the composition.

Once again there were wide and varied responses to this brief, and it was really interesting to hear work which had developed the idea of Stop:Go beyond simply sampling the words, and created musical or technical reflections of the brief. From the regularly occurring slow down effects from plugins such as Logic's Remix, to candidates who had been incredibly creative, tying technical manipulation to reflective musical ideas and creating a real sense of narrative throughout their composition. As in previous years, the most successful work tended to be where candidates had fully integrated their samples into the musical content of the composition to provide a developed, cohesive piece of music. Many candidates had chosen relevant samples relating to Stop:Go, but these had clearly played a secondary role in the composition and as such, would not have scored highly under response to brief (AG5). Finally, a common theme in the least successful submissions, were that although candidates had used relevant samples, they lacked suitable integration with musical ideas, with the sample content often becoming rather superficial.

Summary of Approaches in the Assessment Component Grids (AG)

AG1

It is really pleasing to see the development of candidate work in this area. Often the strongest of the three technical elements, many candidates are truly embracing the opportunity to manipulate and 'evolve' some of the timbres they are using. It should be noted that the quality and musical effectiveness of work in this area will always score more highly than an approach where overly manipulated or unmusical processing is applied.

Successful work in this area clearly demonstrated movement and musical control in timbres, effectively controlling synthesis parameters over time. Timbres would also be musically chosen to create a balanced sonic palette. Weaker work was often somewhat misjudged, for example poorly timed LFO use, uncontrolled arpeggiators or simply manipulation which did not suit the style or development of the composition.

AG2

Samples must be manipulated in order to access the full range of marks in this area.

Good quality submissions demonstrated an imaginative range of sample content which was manipulated to suit the composition and successfully integrated with other sonic elements. A key component of this assessment area is an ability to properly integrate samples or short pieces of audio with other musical ideas to form a cohesive and positive contribution to the composition as a whole. Many candidates demonstrated the ability to apply sampling techniques such as pitch, time stretching, stuttering, slicing, etc., managing this in a musical and integrated fashion. However, the most imaginative work also saw the development of samples into new instruments to craft interesting melodic or percussive lines.

There are still candidates who are using samples in what could be seen as more of a ROMpler style. There were many examples of preset drum samples and even melodic tones which were listed in this section of the logbook which, unless significant manipulation took place, gained very little credit. For example, using a MIDI drum kit would not be seen as sampling.

Some candidates used found sound or similar starting points to create their own interesting percussion timbres. In many cases this was less than successful as trying to imitate 'real' drum hits with alternative captures often lacked depth and/or clarity. Success in this area more often came from those submissions who had used their new found percussion timbres as additional content to supplement main rhythmic lines. Again, successful integration was vital where this was to be most effective.

AG3

The use of creative effects should provide candidates with a huge range of interesting and explorative opportunities, although once again, integration and musicality should always remain prominent considerations.

It is always pleasing when a candidate has used an effect in an unexpected way, by perhaps automating an unusual parameter, or sidechaining a parameter to something that isn't the kick drum for interesting rhythmic effects, and work at the upper end of this marking criterion demonstrated imagination and creative approach going far beyond the gamut of standard mix effects.

As in previous years, this area proved to be the weakest of the technical elements with many candidates at the lower end using little more than basic reverbs or delays with no thought to additional shaping. The use of a 'mix' reverb, EQ, compression, etc. is a required part of producing a well managed mix, however, these in themselves do not constitute 'creative' effects, rather they are a necessary requirement of the mixing process. Beyond this, candidates often applied bit crushers, various forms of distortion and ring modulation in an attempt to be creative without sufficient thought to process or integration. Vocoding also seemed to be a popular choice this year, again, with various levels of success. As with the assessment of synthesis and sampling, carefully chosen effects, with some degree of modulation, which are successfully integrated with and appropriate to the musical elements, will always attract more marks than those which are arbitrary, superficial or lacking in suitable integration.

AG4

Most candidates are now producing mixes of a reasonable standard and submissions where parts were wildly under or over balanced were rare. However, there were a number of recurring themes. Lack of suitable compression was probably the most commonly overlooked element, particularly where generally well produced mixes lacked suitable vocal dynamic control. Similarly, samples such as sound effects or spoken word often lacked suitable dynamic integration. A good example of this would be in brief 3 where sudden, loud samples of Stop or Go would appear or not be effectively integrated.

Less successful work in this area often highlighted issues of EQ or unintentional distortion, as well as a general lack of control as outlined above. Quiet mixes, lacking enough level to master, or mixes which were extreme in their dynamic range also often struggled to attract significant marks. Some submissions also lost marks in this area due to lack of care, for example, slightly cutting the end of their composition, cutting a reverb tail or similar.

The most successful candidates had clearly approached their mix in a similar fashion to work they may have completed for 9MT0 01, producing mixes with clarity, balance and control.

AG5

The response to brief marks require all aspects of the brief to be successfully addressed. This is not just about reflecting themes as a response to the stimulus, but also the task requirements including the required length, and a successful integration of the brief elements – required samples, use of text where required – with musical and other sonic elements.

The best work in this area managed to successfully combine all of the required brief elements with musically developed content, whereas examples of weaker work often saw reasonably developed compositions, but the required brief elements, such as sample use, bore no relation to the composition, being used in a somewhat superficial manner.

The most common example of candidates losing marks in this area was in brief 3, where submissions often contained the words Stop:Go, but taking a very minor or insignificant role in the composition as a whole. Weaker work in brief 1 lacked reflection of either the mood of the visual material, or had not taken into account clear hit points or scene changes. Similarly, candidates who had chosen to sample words from the poem for brief 2, may have not made these an integral part of the composition.

AG6

Creating a stylistically consistent and well developed composition is the key to scoring highly in this area. High scoring compositions tended to commit to one clear and established style of music and do it well, showing a thorough understanding of the musical content, types of timbres, layering, typical types of melodic lines and harmony, etc. Weaker compositions often struggled for a clear identity or may have been overly repetitive and lacking in development of ideas. Perhaps the most obvious example of weaker work was in brief 1 where candidates had tried too hard to reflect every scene change and hit point with a new idea which resulted in work becoming quite episodic or disjointed.

AG7 – AG11 (Musical Elements)

The musical elements of melody, harmony, rhythm, texture and structure are assessed in these components. Each element is marked, but only the highest three count towards the composition total to account for styles that may focus on some elements more than others.

Across all three briefs there were some excellent examples of thematic material which had been developed in a truly stylistic and musical fashion. In many cases candidates had embraced their chosen style and effectively developed their harmonic and rhythmic content whilst preserving their chosen genres and were consequently able to access the highest marks across all areas.

Melody, Harmony and Rhythm:

A common issue across each area was simply a lack of development. Candidates may develop a reasonable three or four chord harmonic pattern but would simply repeat this throughout the vast majority of their composition.

Similarly, candidates may develop an effective rhythmic pattern, but again, without sufficient variation and development throughout the remainder of their piece. Many candidates went to the trouble of slicing well known percussion loops, but again, simply repeating these without development would not have attracted significant marks. However, rhythm does not only relate to drum or percussion lines. The use of arpeggiators or the rhythmic content of melodic or harmonic lines also contributes to the rhythmic feel of a piece and as such the combination of rhythmic ideas and layering is considered when awarding marks in this area.

In relation to melodic material, many candidates wrote effective melody lines and used these thematically with development. These candidates scored highly. However, at the other end, some candidates wrote melodic content which lacked shape, often appearing as more of an improvisation rather than a carefully developed tune. Unfortunately, there were also some compositions which lacked significant melodic material altogether, feeling almost more like a backing track. Regrettably, these attracted very few marks for melody.

Texture

Light and shade, and use of contrast are all key elements to scoring highly in this area. This year there were some excellent examples of work where candidates were able to use subtle variations in texture to create musical interest, craft excitement through effective builds and drops and use layering of different lines to create interesting and musically developed compositions. Less successful work in this area often exhibited cluttered, overly busy layering of ideas where a lack of space often detracted from the overall success of the composition. An example of this was often seen in Brief 3 where candidates often had too many samples being triggered in the same section, leading to an overly complex and uncontrolled texture.

Structure

Perhaps brief 2 was a good example of some excellent work in this area. Well written songs using accepted formats such as verse, chorus, middle 8, etc. often scored highly with the best work being able to develop ideas consistently, successfully transitioning between sections. Weaker work often lacked direction or was simply overly repetitive with different sections lacking clarity or progression. Some candidates, often but not exclusively in response to brief 1, wrote compositions differentiated into numerous sections, but felt rather bolted together as transitions were unsuccessful or material didn't link effectively. Overall, highly episodic work was rare, but candidates should think carefully about planning the overall structure of their compositions, developing specific ideas, rather than simply aiming to through-compose from start to end.

Logbooks and Administrative Matters

Logbooks

Logbooks still remain wide and varied in their content and usefulness.

The best logbooks contain relevant screenshots and a short description of any editing that has taken place with a view to informing the examiner of the intention of the candidate and a 'heads-up' of what to listen out for. Time references are encouraged. In best practice, for example under synthesis, this would usually be related to control of parameters maybe via LFO or envelope, could be related to filtering or any additional editing of interest. This would normally not include basic EQ changes or simply swapping oscillator types. Similarly, examiners do not require screen shots of every parameter or software instrument or plugin used. It should be noted that logbooks following this pattern often run to more than 50 pages in length of which their value often proves to be quite limited. It also came to my attention that some centres are still submitting logbooks approaching, and in some cases in excess of, 100 pages. Unless there is significant justification, this should be strongly discouraged as the quality of the logbook is rarely matched by the marks attracted by the content of the composition.

There were very few cases this year of almost or completely blank logbooks. Once again, without the necessary information in the logbook, it becomes very difficult to award marks effectively and fully comprehend the input of the candidate in regard to synthesis, sampling and creative effects use.

Administration

As in previous years, the number of missing signatures seems to have reduced once again, although it should be noted that there is no need to submit a separate document containing the teacher and candidate signatures. This creates additional work for both the centre and the examiner which is simply not required.

Most centres appear to have now come to terms with the submission portal, with the vast majority of centres able to upload their work in timely fashion before the May 15th

deadline. However, a small number of centres did not zip DAW folders prior to submission, resulting in a significant number of files appearing on the portal and making it extremely difficult for examiners to download the correct files for assessment. In this scenario, centres are required to remove all work from the portal and upload submissions in the correct format. i.e. a single wave file of the candidate's final composition mix (.wav); a portable document format (.pdf) of the candidate's logbook, signed by both teacher and candidate; a zipped DAW project containing the project session and all associated audio/samples (.zip). This information can be found in the Administrative Support Guide.

Not Answering One Of The Set Briefs

Unfortunately, there were a small number of submissions where candidates had not included any of the poem's content (brief 2) or had not made any use of either the word Stop or the word Go (brief 3). Page 25 of the specification states "Students should choose one technology-based composition brief released for that series with the support of their teacher."

The briefs are carefully designed to challenge candidates at A level and responding to a brief is more difficult than free composition because there are particular problems that need solving. Therefore, if a candidate does not engage with any of the briefs, it is not possible to credit any of the criteria fairly. Unfortunately, if this is the case, candidates that submit compositions that are not any of the three briefs for the year of submission will score 0 marks.