Unit 10: DJ Performance Techniques

Unit code:	**H/600/6936**
QCF Level 3:	**BTEC National**
Credit value:	**10**
Guided learning hours:	**60**

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to develop DJ performance techniques through preparation of demonstrations and performance to a live audience. Learners will also become familiar with the technology used by DJs by looking at both the technical features and creative capabilities of a range of essential DJ equipment.

● Unit introduction

This unit focuses on the mixing and creative techniques used by the DJ in live performance as well as looking at the equipment available to the DJ. While the traditional 'decks and mixer' setup is still the cornerstone of performance techniques new developments in DJ software and hardware controllers are widening the possibilities of DJ performance. Learners will consider the range of equipment available to DJs looking at the technical features and what can be done creatively.

The mixing and scratching performance skills needed by the modern DJ require many hours of isolated practice, hand/ear coordination, and self-discipline. DJs who have already begun developing these skills may produce high quality work in response to this unit and it is for this reason that some advanced techniques are listed in the content section. It is possible for learners to complete this unit by focusing on developing and perfecting these skills.

Learners who have not previously performed in this way are also able to access this unit by developing creative techniques relevant to a wide range of music genres. Learners can opt to use DJ performance software and associated hardware controllers.

It may be considered that there are two pathways through this unit; the traditional DJ setup utilising mixing and scratching skills and the modern software based setup where manipulation of audio and audio effects may be used creatively. Either approach or combination of approaches can be used provided that the learning outcomes l are met.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

1   Understand the equipment used by a performing DJ

2   Be able to perform DJ mixing techniques

3   Be able to perform creative DJ performance techniques

4   Be able to perform a DJ set to an audience using appropriate techniques.

Unit content

1 Understand the equipment used by a performing DJ

Sound sources: devices for playing and manipulating music tracks eg direct drive turntables, CDJs, MIDI turntables, digital vinyl systems, laptop computers, DJ performance software; technical features eg pitch control, cueing tracks, visual representation of tracks in software, storage and retrieval of music tracks

Mixing console: devices for mixing and controlling music tracks eg DJ mixers, hardware controllers; technical features eg channel faders, cross-fader, EQ controls, switches; input gain controls; output controls; pre-fader listen, earth connections; input connection types, pre-amps, effect sends; level meters

Monitoring: devices that allow monitoring of music tracks; DJ monitors; headphones; issues relating to DJ performance eg working in a DJ booth, timing differences between monitor sound and from main sound system, high sound levels, safe working practices, ear protection

2 Be able to perform DJ mixing techniques

Mixing techniques: use of mixing console eg input gain, monitor levels, pre-fade listen, matching volume/EQ levels, layering tracks, use of switches, panning, fading, cross-fading; manipulation of audio source eg cueing, pitching, beat matching, avoiding/controlling phasing, braking, stop, start

3 Be able to perform creative DJ performance techniques

Creative techniques: eg creative manipulation of software, outboard effects, specialist DJ effects units, combination of turntables with computer software, live sampling, matching samples/sequences to music tracks, real-time manipulation of digital audio, reverse, pitch, time stretch, effects in software, creating beats using delay effects; scratching techniques eg baby scratches, tears, shiver scratches, drills or scribbles, forward scratches, back spinning, transforms, flares and orbits, delays or echoes, tapping, juggling, wind downs, cutting, chasing or doubling, warbling, word play aka lyric cutting, chops or stabs, chirps, rubbing, crab scratches, two-finger crab, shrimp or twiddle

4 Be able perform a DJ set to an audience using appropriate techniques

Planning: selection of material that is appropriate to performance context, genre and audience; order of play; planning the set; planning for audience reaction; running to time; storage of music tracks ready for performance; performance notes; appropriate mixing and creative techniques; equipment connection

Performing: following the performance plan; interaction with audience; adapt to audience reaction; use of DJ equipment; selection of music tracks; building the set; working with other technology/musicians; mixing techniques; creative techniques; keeping to planned performance times

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	**To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:**	**To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:**
P1 explain the technical features of DJ equipment used during performance [IE]	**M1** assess the technical features of DJ equipment used during performance	**D1** critically comment on the technical features of DJ equipment used during performance
P2 perform a practical demonstration of DJ mixing techniques with minor errors that do not detract from the performance [IE, RL, SM]	**M2** perform a practical demonstration of DJ mixing techniques with no errors	**D2** perform a practical demonstration of DJ mixing techniques with artistic flair
P3 perform a practical demonstration of creative DJ techniques competently with minor errors that do not detract from the performance [IE, RL, SM]	**M3** perform a practical demonstration of creative DJ techniques with no errors	**D3** perform a practical demonstration of creative DJ techniques with artistic flair
P4 perform a DJ set to an audience with some errors that do not detract from the performance. [CT, RL, TW, SM, EP]	**M4** perform a DJ set to an audience with no errors.	**D4** perform a DJ set to an audience with creative flair.

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers	RL – reflective learners	SM – self-managers
	CT – creative thinkers	TW – team workers	EP – effective participators

Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

In delivering this unit, tutors may approach the content in different ways. It is possible to look at DJ techniques purely in the context of software, wherein some of the applications available allow learners to creatively manipulate sound in a similar manner to the tried and tested hardware techniques.

On the other hand, there will be many learners who see this unit as an opportunity to reinforce, develop and gain credit for their vinyl manipulation skills by using hardware turntables and a mixer. The majority of learners who opt for this unit might have been inspired by the manual dexterity found in live club performances by DJs, and recorded displays that can be found online.

It is important that the content of this unit can be accessed by as wide a range of learners as possible and so both techniques above are seen as valid. The preferable approach from the point of view of the learner would be to offer the opportunity to develop skills in both hardware and software manipulation of sound in order to develop a broad suite of techniques.

Centres are advised that suitable equipment is essential if high quality outcomes are to be achieved through the delivery of a comprehensive learning experience. However, there is no point in learning techniques and skills unless the final aim is clearly focused, and that is to facilitate a live DJ performance in front of an audience. It can be seen from the grading criteria that learners are expected to use their DJ skills in this way and, consequently, the delivery of content must always relate to live DJ techniques, to be performed in real time. In other words, this unit should not be seen as another offline audio sequencing task.

Learners working on this unit will need to perform a DJ set. An effective way of doing this would be to encourage learners to plan and put on a performance event at which each of them performs a set. This could be linked to the major music project, music project units.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment
Introduction to the unit.
DJ equipment: technical features and creative potential. Equipment reviews: sources of information and reviews.
Assignment 1: DJ Equipment Review – P1, M1, D1 • Introduce assignment. • Research in class – collating/editing evidence. • Report/presentation and assessment feedback.
DJ mixing techniques: practical demonstrations/performance footage. Practical sessions on decks/related resources. DJ creative techniques: practical demonstrations/performance footage. Practical sessions on decks/related resources.
Assignment 2: DJ Techniques Demo – P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3 • Introduce assignment. • DJ demonstrations: recorded as video evidence. • Review: watch the demonstrations back/peer review and assessment feedback.
Music genres, types of venues, choosing suitable tracks. Set lists. Watch DJ performances/online/live shows. Discuss appropriate performance techniques.
Assignment 3: DJ Live Set – P4, M4, D4 • Introduce assignment. • Prepare DJ set: small group and individual work. • Rehearse DJ set: individual work. • Perform DJ set: includes setting up and sound checks. • Review performance: audience reaction/peer review and assessment feedback.

Assessment

The evidence that learners are required to produce for the unit reflects the type of knowledge, technical skills and creative skills a modern DJ needs to get work and stay at the top of their profession. Understanding the potential of the equipment available is essential as is the development of the skills needed to operate traditional and computer-based DJ equipment in a musical way. Both the delivery and the assessment of this unit rely on centres having expertise and up-to-date knowledge of this area of music performance.

Assessment for learning outcome 1 can be presented as a written report, website page, internet 'blog' or oral presentation. This evidence should not be turned into a dry, written exercise but should be kept as close to the type of work someone in this area of the industry would produce for example a DJ magazine article.

Assessment for learning outcomes 2 and 3 should be carried out through practical demonstrations that focus on prepared DJ performance techniques. It is expected that some learners will demonstrate these skills well during performance while others will need the focus that short demonstration sessions will give them. It may not be suitable to rely solely on assessing these skill-based criteria in a performance context. Delivery should be adapted to the resources available and the chosen style of DJ techniques relevant to the music style or genre. Video evidence should be collected where evidence occurs during practice and during a final assessed session.

Assessment for learning outcome 4 should be carried out within a live performance context and with an audience.

To achieve P1, learners must provide an explanation of how the technical features are used by the DJ. They will provide a list of the equipment needed, give a description of what each key item is used for and explain some of the technical features of equipment, including decks or computer, mixing console or hardware controller and monitoring equipment. Explanation evidence is likely to answer questions such as how things work and why they are used.

To achieve M1, learners must assess how the technical features used by the DJ. Here, the learner can focus on one or more item of equipment, assessing the quality and functionality of range of technical features focusing on how they are used during performance. Evidence should include assessment of quality and functionality with questions answered such as: How well does the equipment function? How useful are the features?

To achieve D1, learners must comment critically on the equipment used in a DJ performance. This is likely to be done through direct comparison of makes and models. Learners can focus on one key item of equipment or the wider DJ setup. They will highlight shortcomings, what is missing and what could be improved. Wider issues relating to the equipment and surrounding DJ performance could be discussed.

To achieve P2, learners will be able to show examples of the differing DJ mixing techniques. They may also make some mistakes in their performance, which could distract slightly from the overall effect. These mixing techniques form the core skill of a DJ and the range of evidence presented by the learner should reflect this.

To achieve M2, learners will be able to perform the mixing techniques competently and confidently, although the techniques will be performed at a level where they are technically correct but may be very mechanical.

To achieve D2, learners will provide demonstrations of the mixing techniques that are clearly thought through and planned, as well as demonstrating artistic flair.

To achieve P3, learners will be able to show examples of creative DJ techniques. They may also make some mistakes in their performance, which could distract slightly from the overall effect. These creative techniques will vary so the range of evidence presented by the learner should reflect the chosen style of DJ and equipment used.

To achieve M3, learners will be able to perform the techniques competently, although the techniques will be performed at a level where they are technically correct but may be very mechanical.

To achieve D3, learners will provide demonstrations of creative techniques that are clearly thought through and planned, as well as demonstrating artistic flair.

To achieve P4, learners will perform their set competently but there may be minor errors. For example, the transition from one track to the next may not be as smooth as it could be. There should be evidence of planning and preparation before the live performance. Tutors will need to provide video evidence of the performances.

To achieve M4, learners will perform their set confidently and competently. The performance may, however, be mechanical.

To achieve D4, learners will perform their set to a high standard and with artistic flair. Their mixing and creative techniques will enhance the performance and the flow of the performance will not be interrupted in any way.

Programme of suggested assignments

The following table shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Pearson assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1	DJ Equipment Review	Working for a DJ magazine, learners explain and comment on a range of essential DJ equipment.	Evidence comprising • written report • internet 'blog'.
P2, M2, D2 P3, M3, D3	DJ Techniques Demo	Working as an equipment demonstrator, learners demonstrate a range of DJ mixing and creative techniques.	Evidence comprising • video recordings • peer review.
P4, M4, D4	DJ Live Set	Working as a professional DJ, the learner plans and performs a DJ set to a live audience.	Evidence comprising • video recordings • performance notes • peer review • audience reaction.

Links to other BTEC units

This unit forms part of the BTEC Music and Music Technology sector suite. This unit has particular links with the following unit titles in the BTEC Music and Music Technology suite:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
		Major Music Project
		Music Project
		Music Technology in Performance

Essential resources

Each learner should have access to the essential equipment used by a DJ and have sufficient access to this equipment to develop performance skills. Each setup could be based around two direct drive turntables with a DJ mixer or could be based around a computer running DJ performance software. If using a computer it is recommended that the centre supply a dedicated hardware controller to allow the learner to have adequate control over the software.

In all cases good quality headphones and powered monitors, along with dedicated practice rooms are essential.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

DJs are employed in a wide variety of commercial and specialist contexts. For example, radio broadcast, music clubs, festivals, internet streaming, music compilations for release and music production.

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS)

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are …
Independent enquirers	researching DJ equipment and learning new DJ techniques
Creative thinkers	planning a performance and performing creatively as a DJ
Reflective learners	reviewing A/V evidence and their own practice schedule and development of DJ techniques
Team workers	setting up DJ equipment and associated sound system equipment safely
Self-managers	practising new DJ techniques, rehearsing and performing live
Effective participators	performing live to an audience.

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are …
Independent enquirers	researching a range of technical equipment
Creative thinkers	formulating ideas and arguments based on research choosing repertoire for performance and planning the DJ set
Reflective learners	looking back at own work, including demonstrations, reviews and performances
Team workers	discussing requirements for performance in groups and discussing audience requirements and music trends
Self-managers	managing own practise time
Effective participators	delivering an effective DJ performance.

Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Use ICT systems	
Select, interact with and use ICT systems independently for a complex task to meet a variety of needs	researching DJ equipment online
ICT – Find and select information	
Select and use a variety of sources of information independently for a complex task	researching DJ equipment online
ICT – Develop, present and communicate information	
Bring together information to suit content and purpose	researching DJ equipment online
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	presenting and demonstrating their DJ skills
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	reading technical information relating to DJ equipment from a variety of sources, including the internet
Writing – write documents, including extended writing pieces, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively	writing technical reviews of DJ equipment. This will involve presenting factual information and using it to shape their own ideas and opinions.