

Unit 23: Music Performance Techniques

Unit code:	R/600/6978
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to enable learners to develop their techniques for both solo and group performance, from practice through to performance.

● Unit introduction

Professional musicians work in a highly competitive environment. They must be able to deliver performances in a wide range of situations; in the studio, as a solo performer, as part of a group or in a live venue, often under great pressure. To be able to work in this environment musicians rely upon the foundation of polished technique, timing, tone and control. Coupled with this, they have to develop an adaptive, professional approach to continuous improvement of their musical and vocal skills.

This unit focuses on two areas: firstly the ability to play or sing with fluency, dexterity and the authority of a seasoned performer, and secondly arriving at that point through a logical and structured practice routine. Tone production, timing and rhythmic control are fundamental to this unit.

When musicians develop and use a structured practice routine they 'break down' the areas of their playing or singing that need attention. A reflective and dedicated approach to practice will enable performers to maximise their improvements.

The best way to consolidate and reinforce technical skills is to practise and then perform. A wide variety of music and situations will exercise and extend each performer's techniques and reveal where further practice is needed. Working in studio sessions, solo gigs, group rehearsals and gigs will all contribute to a musician gaining the authority of a seasoned performer. Learners will be encouraged to use technical skills creatively and apply them to enhance artistic expression.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Know effective instrumental or vocal technique through a structured practice routine
- 2 Be able to apply effective instrumental or vocal technique in solo performance
- 3 Be able to apply effective instrumental or vocal technique in group performance.

Unit content

1 Know effective instrumental or vocal technique through a structured practice routine

Effective: considered; specific; measurable achievable; relevant; time bound

Technique: development of a range of physical motor skills; timing; speed and dexterity technical exercises; tone and sound production; dynamics and expression; scales, rhythmic exercises

Structured practice: progressive, qualitative, realistic and obtainable goals related to defined timescales; negotiate and form strategies for improvement; set targets, structures and review progress; regular individual practice; planning and taking part in group rehearsals, leading rehearsals, taking direction

2 Be able to apply effective instrumental or vocal technique in solo performance

Apply in performance: confident physical coordination; fluency; dexterity; accuracy (timing, tone, intonation, dynamics and tempo); rhythmic control

Apply through interpretation: prepared and unprepared; with confidence; authority; musicality; dynamics; expression; phrasing; detail and control of timing and tempo

3 Be able to apply effective instrumental or vocal technique in group performance

Apply in performance: confident physical coordination; fluency; dexterity; accuracy (timing, tone, intonation, dynamics and tempo); rhythmic control

Apply through interpretation: prepared and unprepared; with confidence; authority; musicality; dynamics; expression; phrasing; detail and control of timing and tempo

Apply in a group: communicating with other players; musical connectivity and 'tightness'; eye contact; sensitivity to sensible dynamics; tempo and rhythmic control, tone production and volume control

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 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 identify an effective strategy for technical improvement through a structured practice routine [IE, RL]	M1 describe an effective strategy for technical improvement through a structured practice routine	D1 explain an effective strategy for technical improvement through a structured practice routine
P2 perform as a soloist competently with minor technical errors that do not detract from the overall performances [SM]	M2 perform as a soloist showing confidence and technical competence	D2 perform as a soloist, with technical skill, confidence, musicality and a sense of interpretive style
P3 perform an individual part as a member of a group with minor technical errors that do not detract from the overall performance. [EP, TW]	M3 perform an individual part as a member of a group, with technical competence and confidence.	D3 perform an individual part as a member of a group, showing technical skill, confidence, a sense of ensemble and interpretive style.

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

Learners should work with a specialist instrumental or vocal teacher.

Typically, most centres are not big enough to be able to resource instrument specific classroom delivery and tutors will be faced with the task of ensuring that a range of instrumentalists and vocalists can work alongside each other in the delivery of this unit.

Larger centres may have the luxury of being able to separate learners into different disciplines. This is happening more and more as musical education evolves reflecting the fact that learners welcome instrument specific learning opportunities. In this case the successful delivery of this unit is largely dependent on the course manager sourcing suitably qualified specialist tutors. It would be beneficial if these tutors could articulate a logical and established study path for their chosen discipline and produce their own course support material where necessary. Many of these tutors will be industry practitioners and some care should be taken in their selection. Additionally many will have to be encouraged to undertake appropriate teaching qualifications. Tutors are encouraged to research current developments in the recognised study paths of relatively 'new' instruments such as the electric guitar and bass. In this environment it is enormously helpful if the tutors for each discipline communicate well and create opportunities for synergy across the disciplines.

Regardless of whether delivery is instrument specific or a cross-instrument approach, the tutor's main responsibility is to set up a culture of planning, monitoring and reviewing progress. Learners should recognise the difference between playing over favourite pieces and purposeful practising. Therefore tutors should constantly focus attention on the development of new skills and solutions to technical problems. By the end of this unit, learners should have improved their overall skill level and overcome many bad habits or flaws in their technique.

It is helpful if learners are fully engaged in the process and contribute to all aspects of the formulation of their colleagues practice planning and technical development. 'Troubleshooting' relating to technical issues and challenges and peer assessment exercises are all useful techniques to encourage engagement.

Learners who do not have access to good quality private instrumental tuition might have to be supported in a variety of ways to reach their full potential, these might include: distinct group instrumental mate classes in dedicated disciplines ie vocalists or drummers; one-to-one tuition if practical; access to DVD or video instructional videos and musicians' journals and publications. Learners may also be encouraged to undertake their own research into the various approaches to study on their chosen instrument.

Tutors need to use discretion when directing musicians on technical matters and sensitivity and an appreciation of different approaches should be exercised. Careful judgement will be called for when discerning whether an idiosyncratic or unorthodox approach is an endearing part of an individual style or a potential problem that might impede a musician's progress.

Music tutors are increasingly faced with the task of engaging with musicians who may be self-taught or have relied on magazines, books and websites to develop their musical skills. In addition to this the standard of private tuition available to the practising musician varies enormously. Consequently a significant percentage of modern music students need help in the development of a structured effective practice planning.

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 and structure of the programme of learning.
Whole class sessions on effective practice routine including methods and choice of repertoire.
Assignment 1: Practice, Practice, Practice – P1, M1, D1 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual, group and class sessions – example and method.• Practice/preparation of repertoire.• Assessment, feedback and review.
Whole class sessions covering solo skills on a range of instruments.
Assignment 2: Performing Solo – P2, M2, D2 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual, group and class sessions – example and method.• Practice.• Assessment, feedback and review.
Whole class sessions covering solo skills within group performance.
Assignment 3: Performing as a Member of a Group – P3, M3, D3 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual, group and class sessions – example and method.• Practice.• Assessment, feedback and review.
Review of assignments and unit coverage.

Assessment

This unit and the three learning outcomes can be assessed in a range of ways. Assessors can be creative and the assessment process can be both rigorous and highly stimulating for the musician. As technical accomplishment and the strategies employed to develop those skills are being assessed, musicians need the chance to stretch themselves musically and push the boundaries of their own capabilities.

Learning outcome 1 – A major portion of evidence required to meet this LO will be generated by the maintenance of a practice diary. This should include an evaluation of learners' abilities at the start of the unit, the setting of measurable targets for completion by the end of the unit, and periodic reviews of progress against these targets. Supporting this, further evidence will contain materials demonstrating practical performance activities, especially as they show improvement over time. The diary format can remain open and a large degree of freedom can be afforded to the individual but the document should be: 'Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-Bound' (SMART). It is recommended that the rationale and parameters around the work are set carefully to ensure that the diary does not become too broad in its scope and the project become too ambitious. It would be helpful if learners were able to establish through discussion and analysis with their peers and tutors their current strengths and weaknesses. Short, medium and long term goals could then be identified, again by a process of negotiation and discussion. The practical steps and fine detail within a daily, weekly and monthly practice diary could then be analysed and described in detail.

For P1, it would be sufficient for learners to operate to a structured routine following the path set down by a tutor, or text book, etc and achieve progress as a result. Learners will identify what they have done in their routine and how it has affected their technical skill. A requirement for M1 would be an obvious and evidenced refinement of the strategy over time and a corresponding accomplished level of tone production, timing, mechanical skill and phrasing. Learners would also need to describe how their practice using specific exercises has led to the skill improvement. Referring particular studies to particular sections of the performance pieces may help to illustrate this. D1 learners would use a higher level of analysis of their strategy for technical improvement. Learners would need to comment on why they chose specific exercises for specific aspects of their study and perhaps comment on other exercises that they may have tried. They may also refer to anything that they changed during their practice routine. For example, they may provide details of some elements that proved more difficult to master than others.

There is also a place for oral questioning and discussion in determining learners' approach to their own development if this is carefully evidenced and managed.

In learning outcomes 2 and 3 the assessor is looking to see evidence or demonstration of the *application* of the technical skills and knowledge in a solo and ensemble performance context. For P2 and P3, a musician should execute appropriate repertoire confidently and competently, demonstrating the practical application of technical learning, although there may be minor errors as long as they do not detract from the performance.

A requirement for M2 and M3 performance will include technical competence, which will result in a satisfying performance. There will be no noticeable errors in a merit performance. For D2 and D3, a musician will demonstrate a true command of instrument or voice, ability to make adaptation within the performance as a soloist, with technical confidence and technical skill, musicality, a sense of interpretive style and ensemble.

Skills should be assessed in both solo (with or without an accompanist) and group performance. Whilst the emphasis of this unit is on the development of fundamental musical and instrumental skills, this should be set in the context of work towards performances throughout the year. Performances should be recorded and grading comment carefully recorded.

Practical activities can be recorded using A/V resources with supporting evidence through tutor observation/witness documentation and peer observation where appropriate.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below 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 Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1 M1 D1	Practice, Practice, Practice	Learners will undertake a practice routine to include the selection of repertoire and the completion of a detailed practice diary which focuses on technical improvement.	Evidence may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practice diary • AV evidence.
P2 M2 D2	Performing Solo	Learners will perform solo in front of an invited audience – repertoire to include at least three contrasting pieces.	Evidence may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AV evidence • tutor observation.
P3 M3 D3	Performing as a Member of a Group	Learners will perform individual lines or parts as a member of a group in front of an invited audience – repertoire to include at least three contrasting pieces.	Evidence may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AV evidence • tutor observation.

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units and qualifications

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
	Solo Musical Performance	Major Music Project
	Exploring Musical Improvisation	Working and Developing as a Musical Ensemble
	Developing as a Musical Performer	Singing Techniques and Performance
	Working as a Musical Ensemble	Improvising Music
		Music Project

Essential resources

Learners of an instrument will be required to maintain it in a serviceable condition and, where appropriate, will need access to larger equipment on the centre's premises, eg amplification, synthesisers, pianos, drum kits. All learners, and singers in particular, need to be made aware that their health is a resource that should be looked after as much as their instrument.

Indicative reading for learners

Each instrument will have its own set of technique development material that can be found in libraries, music shops and instrument specific periodicals. Care should be taken to ensure that all learners are working towards a defined study path on their chosen discipline. For those learners without access to one-to-one tuition or specialised graded courses, well-chosen textbooks can be an essential aid to ensuring that all musicians reach their potential.

Textbooks

Bruser M – *The Art Of Practicing: A Guide To Making Music From The Heart* (Bell Tower, 1999)
ISBN 978-0609801772

Laitz S – *The Complete Musician Student Workbook, Volume 1: An Integrated Approach to Tonal Theory, Analysis, and Listening* (Oxford University Press Inc., 2008) ISBN 978-0195301090

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills

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	identifying material for repertoire
Creative thinkers	improvising within performance
Reflective learners	reviewing performance to develop technique
Team workers	rehearsing and performing in a group
Self-managers	developing technique
Effective participators	working as a member of a group.

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	considering the needs of the audience
Self-managers	ensuring deadlines are met.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Develop, present and communicate information	
Present information in ways that are fit for purpose and audience	using ITC to create publicity materials
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	discussing the group repertoire
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	preparing rehearsal diary
Writing – write documents, including extended writing pieces, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively	producing rehearsal diary.