

Moderator's Report Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel Level 1 / 2
GCSE (9-1) MUSIC (1MU0)

Component 2 (Composing)

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Introduction

In 2025, external moderation of the component continued. Candidates for Component 2 (Composing) were expected to submit one 'Free' composition and respond to one Set Brief with a portfolio of a minimum length of 3 minutes. To accompany the compositions, a typed CAS (in Excel Spreadsheet or editable PDF formats), two scores or commentaries and two recordings of the music needed to be uploaded to the LWA for each candidate.

The component requirements and guidance information for 2506 were available to centres to download from the GCSE (9-1) Music (1MU0) page on the Pearson/Edexcel website. Free online training for the component was provided in the Autumn Term of 2024 to offer Teacher Assessors support when preparing for the 2506 examination series.

As in 2024, the majority of Teacher Assessors and Examinations Officers should be commended for the time and effort they put into preparing materials to support the effective management of the moderation process.

Performance of Candidates

Based on moderator feedback, as with 1MU0/01, a similar percentage of students as in 2023 and 2024 achieved high/full marks, possibly because:

- 1) The specification requirements are now understood by Teacher Assessors and candidates.
- 2) More candidates are composing based on their musical interests and experiences rather than having 'one size fits all' tasks being prescribed.
- 3) The accessibility and availability of a wide range of music technology resources have allowed more candidates to realise their creative ideas more effectively.
- 4) More Teacher Assessors can accurately judge their candidates' work by applying the Assessment Grids realistically.

In 2025, there were very few low-scoring candidates. The number of under-length compositions was equivalent to the three previous years, possibly because candidates found it easier to create two shorter-length compositions, which in total met the 3-minute requirement. Where centres did not declare their under-length candidates, all candidates' submissions were time-checked by their moderator.

In 2025, moderators reported that candidates are submitting a wide range of compositions. Despite previous reports, feedback to centres and highlighting the concern in the online training, a significant number of Teacher Assessors overlooked the specification requirement for candidates to compose using their musical interests and experiences and instead set generic tasks for the whole cohort. This often generated formulaic and less creative outcomes.

The most commonly selected Free Compositions are listed below:

AOS1: Theme and Variations, Solo Piano pieces (classical/romantic)

AOS2: Popular Songs, Ballads, EDM, music for an event such as Year 11 Assembly

AOS3: Film scores, Programme Music, Computer Game Music

AOS4: (not many) Sea Shanty remixes, Bossa Nova/Latin

Other: Minimalism, Expressionism, Jazz

This is not significantly different than in previous examination series.

It is a specification requirement that candidates provide sufficient musical information in their commentaries and scores to enable others to replicate the music. Over the past three years, many centres have encouraged candidates to produce some excellent commentaries using screenshots in conjunction with exported MIDI parts and detailed musical information. It was more challenging for moderators to understand the candidate's intentions for their compositions when audio tracks for vocal lines or recorded parts when no information beyond a screenshot or a lead sheet was provided. There is a Composition Commentary Guide (with exemplars) available in the Teaching and Learning section of the Pearson website to offer support to candidates who wish to submit this type of score.

Candidates submitting notated scores often included extensive musical information by providing tempo, phrasing and dynamic markings. Articulations and ornaments were also apparent in the most sophisticated scores. Unfortunately, some scores were difficult to interpret because the instrumental parts were unlabelled or unquantized or were over 30 pages in length. For candidates submitting scores or commentaries to accompany film music, it was helpful when the onscreen action was added so that it was clear what action or emotion the music was conveying.

Listening to well-balanced recordings -both 'live' and technology-based- was a pleasure. Errors occurred on the CAS (Composition Assessment Sheet) when the track length rather than the composition length was stated. The correct length of the composition should be calculated from the point where the music starts to where it stops. This was particularly important when portfolios were close to the three-minute minimum time requirement.

Assessment

For 2025, the assessment of Component 2 was mostly accurate. There are cases where the judgment was deemed to be optimistic. This often occurred when the Teacher Assessor's comments did not include references to all of the required bullet points in each Assessment Grid. The most accurate marking occurred when detailed comments and musical references to highlight the key features of their candidates' compositions were included on the CAS.

Assessment grid 1: Developing musical ideas.

For 2025, Teacher assessors should note the following concerning each bullet point within the assessment grid:

- To achieve higher levels, musical ideas must demonstrate at least 'effective' development *and* extension. Often layers were added with the main melodic material copied with some development of ideas and themes, rather than considering the development of the whole ensemble. This is particularly common in EDM and minimalist style compositions.
- Once again, most candidates selected appropriate characteristics for the style of music they were composing. Many managed the style convincingly for most of their compositions.
- When responding to the Set Brief, some candidates overlooked some of the specified requirements:

Set Brief 1 (instrumental Music 1700-1820): Many candidates composed successful pieces of music for soloists with accompaniment. Their responses tended to be very traditional and less creative than in previous years. Most wrote music that was suitable for the occasion. There were numerous incidents where AAs had to send an E6 to the centres because no information was included about the provenance of the stimulus theme. A few candidates ignored the requirement to select a stimulus composed or published between 1700 and 1820. This had a slight impact on their mark for Assessment Grid 1.

Set Brief 2 (Vocal Music): In 2025, many candidates wrote successful songs incorporating the theme of New Year's Eve. Some chose a reflective mood, but the majority perceived that the occasion was a celebration. Most successfully created music using the 32-bar song structure and used the voice and accompaniment convincingly.

Set Brief 3 Music for Stage and Screen): Over half of the sampled candidates similarly selected this set brief to 2023 (Enchanted Forest). This indicates that this set brief was the most accessible to the least able candidates and challenging for those aiming to achieve full marks. The most successful responses were clearly influenced by composers such as John Williams, Danny Elfman and Hans Zimmer. Candidates created a sense of voyage and discovery using full orchestras as well as imaginative and ambitious integration of SFX.

Set Brief 4 (Fusions): This year, the response was similar to 2024. Often candidates choose to compose one section of music in the Reggae style and another in a Latin Style. The fusion element was less convincing than in previous years, but the music was suitable for the specified occasion.

- 23.7 %** of candidates responded to Set Brief 1 compared with 51% in 2024.
- 18.2%** selected Set Brief 2, whereas 27% submitted songs in 2024,
- 51.2** chose Set Brief 3 after only 18% selected this set brief in 2024.
- 6.8%** opted for Set Brief 4, which is comparable to 6% last year.

Assessment grid 2: Demonstrating technical control

Teacher Assessors should note the following findings for 2025:

- The most successful candidates considered all aspects of harmony, rhythm, dynamics and melody, demonstrating secure control of the musical elements. Commonly, melodic writing relied heavily on conjunct movement or overlooked phrasing. There were instances where a lack of harmonic understanding led to awkward harmonic progressions. The most interesting rhythmic ideas were evident in EDM and some of the fusion compositions. As mentioned in previous reports, dynamic markings were given the least attention in many compositions.
- The candidates who achieved the highest levels in 2025 exploited idiomatically and imaginatively all parts within the ensemble. The most creative and appropriate outcomes were when candidates had composed for their own instruments. Although it is not a specification requirement, candidates composing for the voice wrote more convincing parts when live recordings were submitted, especially when word-setting and vocal ranges were considered. It is acceptable to include pre-recorded loops or samples, but it is crucial that candidates explain how they have employed them creatively in their commentaries or scores.
- The most successful compositions varied the texture to create contrast in the music rather than relying too heavily on melody-dominated homophony. Many candidates achieved the higher levels by composing music where the textures were complex as well as varied, and clear.

Assessment grid 3: Composing with musical coherence.

Teacher assessors in 2025 should note the following:

- When judging the coherence of the music, the whole composition needs to be considered.
- The most successful compositions demonstrated fluent transitions between each section of the music and clear contrast. Some opportunities to create contrast were missed because sections were copied exactly rather than varied. This particularly applied to structures such as Rondo Form or verses within songs.

- Many compositions demonstrated a 'good' rather than 'convincing' sense of direction. Most submissions had a clear understanding of structural devices. The most successful compositions came to a pleasing conclusion rather than ending abruptly.

Administration

The variety of formats of CAS made moderation challenging once again. For 1MU0/02, in 2025, centres seemed to prefer the spreadsheet version. It is very disappointing that, despite comments in previous reports, some centres persist in uploading handwritten, outdated versions of the PDF CAS. These CAS are difficult and more time-consuming for the moderator to interpret the information and to add their marks and comments to.

Many centres completed the CAS to a high standard. Again in 2025, many Composition Outline boxes on page 2 failed to adhere to the specification requirement to include an audience or occasion for the composition. This made Assessment Grid 1 more challenging to accurately assess. It is hoped that more centres in 2026 will read the Administrative Support Guide to ensure that the CAS forms or spreadsheet are correctly completed.

In 2025, fewer centres omitted the highest and lowest scoring candidates within their submission, even if they were not part of the requested sample.

As in previous years, moderators took additional time to download audio files and commentaries because they were uploaded to the LWA in the incorrect format. Each candidate's files must be labelled in the manner set out in the ASG so that they are easily identifiable.

Candidates and Teacher Assessors must acknowledge any stimulus material used within the composition process to avoid plagiarism being investigated. This includes the theme used in a Theme and Variation composition (including the response to Set Brief 1 for 2025), any pre-recorded samples or loops and any other influences on the music.

When submitting rap-style compositions, candidates must acknowledge the formality of the GCSE process. Whilst certain terms and phrases may be common in this genre, moderators reported there were some occasions where unacceptable levels of swearing, and inappropriate language were included in the candidates' compositions. There were no reported cases of inappropriate language in 2025.

Again, some centres had out-of-date, or no contact information listed on the Pearson website. This hindered moderators when they needed to request additional or missing materials and delayed the completion of the moderation for the centre.

Moving forward to 2026, centres should:

- Download the E9 Report for feedback on the management of their centre's 2506 submission.
- Prepare students for both a free composition and a Set Brief composition for 2026.
- The 1MU0/02 Set Briefs for submission in May 2026 are published on the Pearson website from 1st September 2025.
- Download and refer to the 2026 Administrative Support Guide to ensure that work is submitted in the correct format and files are uploaded to the LWT with centre and candidate numbers (not student or composition names).
- Submit 2026 CAS forms are typed and submitted **in the correct format** including an audience or occasion for each composition in the Composition Outline box on page 2.
- Check that the length for each composition and its total length is accurately recorded on the CAS.
- Submit a score or detailed commentary for each composition, including enough musical information to **replicate it by other performers**.
- Ensure recordings are ambient, balanced, and at a good level, avoiding any unnecessary background noise such as talking.
- Check the work of the **highest** and **lowest**-scoring candidates is included within the requested sample even if they are not, add these to the submission.
- Subscribe to the 2606 free online training for 1MU0/02 which will be available in the Autumn 2025 term.