



Pearson

How to approach the essay questions for GCSE, AS and A level Music

Teaching

Students need to learn about the following, in order to critically appraise pieces of music (set works and unfamiliar music)

- Form and structure
- How and which musical elements are used
- Appropriate musical vocabulary
- Stylistic features
- Conventions used in different times and places
- How music relates to the context in which it was created
- How to express and justify opinions and preferences

Students need to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of musical elements, contexts and language in relation to music they have studied

The above is important for students when critically appraising any pieces of music in the exams, but is particularly important when approaching the essay questions.

This guidance therefore relates to the following essay questions:

Qualification	Essay question(s)	Approximate minimum time to spend on each question
GCSE	9	30 mins
AS	5 6 (a), (b), (c)	25 mins 30 mins
A level	5 6 (a), (b), (c)	30 mins 40 mins

Guidance

The wording of the question will remain the same year to year. For example, from the GCSE sample assessment material, the question is phrased as:

Evaluate [how effectively Purcell and Vaughan Williams set the texts to music.]

The texts and scores are provided in the Source Booklet.

You should use your knowledge of musical elements, contexts and language in your response.

Text in square brackets will change year to year.

- Students should write their responses as an essay. This should include: an introduction, paragraphs containing their argument(s), a conclusion. Students should not write in bullet points.
- Students will be expected to refer to the scores contained in the resource booklet. There is no requirement for them to bring in scores and/or anthologies to the exam
- Students are heavily encouraged to plan their essay before they begin writing. This plan may consist of prose, bullet points and/or diagrams. Examiners will mark everything on the page, unless it is crossed out, so even if a student runs out of time, their planning may still be taken into account when the marks are awarded
- Students should use musical language in their answers. Please refer to the glossary in each specification for the types of musical language with which students should be familiar
- There is no relationship between the marks per question and the time (aka 'marks a minute')
- There are no marks per point made. The examiner uses the levels based mark scheme to decide on the marks to award, and does not add up musical points and then give a mark based on the total.
- The purpose of the indicative content (in the mark schemes) is to give examples of the types of things students could say in their answer. It is not exhaustive. Before live exams, the senior examining team review students' responses, and update the indicative content with extra (correct) things that students have said in their answers. This updated version is then sent to all examiners to use.
- Students may refer to any other set works, pieces of suggested wider listening, or any other music they know/have heard and which they deem appropriate to use to answer the question set
- Examiners are familiar with most music. Where a student uses a piece of music with which the examiner is unfamiliar then they will conduct their own research to check it's appropriateness and validity and/or contact their examining team leader for further clarification
- Students will never be explicitly assessed in questions on any of the pieces of suggested wider listening. This selection of music is there to give teachers suggestions of extra music they can use in the classroom to teach students about the areas of study. Teachers are entirely free to use different pieces of music to widen students' understanding of the areas of study. Similarly, students may use examples from any piece of music in their answers.