Notes and guidance: Moderation guidance

This guide has been created to help you understand how GCSE Music composition assessment works.

GCSE Music Composition assessment process

1. Students complete their compositions.

2. By 7 May of year of certification, teachers enter their marks into Centre Marks Submission (CMS) on Centre Services or Electronic Data Interchange (EDI).

3. At this point, a moderator's name and address is given, along with a list of the students needed to be sent in a sample.

4. The moderation teams and senior teams meet in April to ensure everybody is clear about the standard. This ensures our judgements are fair and consistent. There are additional processes moderation teams go through to monitor this. Our composition moderators are all experienced music teachers, some who still work in the classroom. They are all passionate about the young people they serve and take time to carefully study every piece of work. Every student has had a unique experience of music and had different barriers to overcome in their learning.

5. When the moderator first receives the work, they go through to check all of the contents are correct. As authentication and compliance are fundamental in the assessment process, a centre's work can't be marked until all these items are present, correctly labelled, and in the case of paperwork, correctly completed. Please see the checklist section below to see what these items are. It might be helpful to keep this to hand as you prepare your next sample.

6. Once all the items are present, moderation can begin.

7. From the sample received, six students are selected for moderators to mark. The selection covers a range of marks within the sample. The moderator studies each student's work and records their mark. Please see the section entitled 'The Process of Marking' below, to see how that works.

8. The moderation mark and the teacher's mark are compared and a decision made on the next action needed. A small degree of tolerance is allowed, but if a student's mark is out of tolerance (marked too harshly or too leniently), a further four students' work is requested for marking. If there is not an obvious pattern in the marking, the rest of the sample is marked, and in some cases it might be necessary to contact the centre to ask for the rest of the students' work to be sent (if a centre has more than 15 students).

9. The best-case scenario is for a centre's marking to be 'in tolerance', meaning that the AQA standard has been understood and the marking is in line with the standard. In this case, the moderator marks will be used and no further work will be required. At this point, the teacher's marks will stand.

10. In a situation where work has been marked 'out of tolerance', we may use regression analysis to make adjustments. If there is a clear pattern, as analysed

by the computer program, this can lead to a reduction or increase in the students' marks, necessary to make the assessment in line with the AQA standard.

11. At the end of each series, your moderator will complete a feedback form to communicate which aspects of the assessment have been understood. If marks are changed during the moderation, the moderator will provide examples to support the development of understanding of the AQA standard and process in preparation for the next series. Review the feedback and look back over the work. Contact your NEA advisor if you would like additional support. Look out for the next teacher online standardisation (TOLS) materials for composition.

The process of marking

Every student is unique, and therefore, every composition is unique. It's important for students to be able to work in their own choice of style.

To make this possible within the same assessment framework, the mark scheme has to be as open as possible, but with defined levels called marking bands. If we understand which pieces fit into which marking bands, we've almost understood what we need, but the range of marks within each band just allows us to be more precise with our marking, based on if the work is 'just', 'clearly', or 'convincingly' in that band.

The highest possible mark for a composition is 36. We reach this by giving two marks out of 18, one for each group of elements (as below), and adding them together.

- Group 1: Rhythm, Metre, Texture, Melody, Structure, Form
- Group 2: Harmony, Tonality, Sonority (Timbre), Dynamics, Phrasing, Articulation

It's a requirement of the qualification for students to select a minimum of two elements from each group. As students initially discover the elements of music, they learn about them one by one, then as they become more confident, they are able to think about a few elements at a time.

However, it's a very advanced skill to think about all the elements together and for many students this can be overwhelming. The process of choosing the elements can be a helpful tool to support students to consider what these features are doing in their music.

It's important to know that when we mark the work, we are marking holistically and not based only on the elements a student has selected. Students shouldn't feel restricted to only select two from each group. If they have focused on more elements, they should select more. It's quite normal for some students to select all the elements.

What to think about as we mark

A helpful starting place is the 12–10 band. Music in this band has 'secure creativity and effectiveness'.

- Is the student in control of the music they've created?
- Does the music demonstrate a secure understanding of the music they've created in context with the purpose?
- Is there a sense of structure in context with the chosen genre?
- In contexts where harmony is present, do the parts work together as intended?

Please note, 'technical and expressive is not always consistent' is also a feature of the 12–10 band.

It's possible for repetitive music to receive a mark in the 12–10 band if elements are used coherently within the chosen genre. If music is simple and over-repetitive, it's more suited to a mark in the 9–7 band or below. We also need to judge whether there is enough work to reach the 12–10 band.

Marking beyond 12–10

If the work does fit the 12–10 band, does it fit the 15–13 band?

- Is it 'highly creative and effective'?
- Is there more than a first idea?
- Is there a sense of development?
- Are ideas more complex?
- Is there a variety of the use of elements, for example if rhythm is a feature, is there a variety of rhythmic devices?
- If texture is a feature, is there a variety of textures?

If it does fit 15–13, is it top band (18–16)?

- Is it 'exceptionally creative and effective'?
- Does the student demonstrate 'sophisticated understanding of composition'?
- Is there a consistent sense of musical complexity in context with the chosen genre?
- Is there evidence of inventiveness?
- Is there a sense of uniqueness?
- Is there evidence of advanced musical understanding and detail?

Marking below 12–10

Does it fit the 9–7 band?

- Is it 'moderately creative and effective'?
- Is there control in some of the composition? 'Occasionally lacks coherence' is helpful.
- Is there an element that isn't in control?
- Are there unintentional clashes in the harmony?
- Would you say 'technical and expressive control are limited'?
- Is the selection of elements more simple (for example see the indicative examples)?

Does it fit the 6–4 band?
- Is there 'limited creativity and effectiveness'?
- Is it 'often lacking coherence'?
- Is there control of a simple musical idea, even though material in the rest of the piece is incoherent or unrelated?

Does it fit the 3–1 band?
- Is it incoherent?
- Is there 'very little evidence of technical and expressive control'?

Having selected the correct band, decide if the work is convincingly in that band, clearly, or just.

The two groups give us flexibility to award different marks for the two groups of elements.

For example, if the criteria has been reached for a 12–10 mark, but there is evidence of some rhythmic or melodic development, the marks could be Group 1 = 13/18 and Group 2 = 12/18, or other values across two bands. This creates an opportunity to award a mark in between two bands.

It's not possible to award a mark for one group in the 15–13 band and the other group in the 9–7 band as 'consistent technical control throughout' (15–13) and 'occasionally lacks coherence' (9–7) can't both be achieved.

Guidance about the level of help we're allowed to offer our GCSE Music students

For any mark scheme for practical music making, including at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, it's helpful if the students understand the marking bands for their assessment. It helps them to make progress in their understanding, and creates opportunities for additional dialogue with their teachers and parents. You might like to simplify the mark scheme to make this accessible for all and to create opportunities for discussions in composition workshops.

For example:

18–16 Invention, detailed, consistent, complex
15–13 Everything works and there's a sense of development and/or contrast
12–10 We have control, everything works together
9–7   There are a few problems to solve or more to do
6–4   There's one good idea, but lots of problems to solve
3–1   It's not working yet, focus on developing a good first idea

It's helpful to refer to the specification.

Both compositions must be assessed on the student's ability to demonstrate:
- creative and effective selection and use of elements
- appropriate selection and use of musical elements (to the compositional intention)
- technical and expressive control in the use of musical elements.'

It's very important that students make all decisions relating to their composition coursework. This includes choosing:
- the purpose/audience/occasion of a free composition
- which of the four brief compositions they will focus on
- which instruments or voices they will compose for
- which key(s) to compose in
- the method of composition (ie which music software to use, or if pencil and paper is preferred)
- which elements they will focus on in each group, etc.

We can only award marks based on the music the student has created. For example, the use of loops is appropriate and expected in some genres of music, but the student must have created their own loops.

If another student or a teacher performs a part on the recording, there must be clear evidence of how the part was developed by the student in order to award them the marks for that part.

When we give feedback to students about their work, it's appropriate to tell them which band they've reached so far. It's helpful to use the statement 'based on the evidence of the music you've created…', as essentially that is what the assessment is looking for. The student is creating musical evidence demonstrating their level of musical understanding.

It's appropriate to study the student's chosen genre with them.

It's appropriate to set a range of tasks in advance of, and during the creation of coursework, to help them to develop their understanding.

It's not appropriate to show them in detail how to improve their work. An example of an appropriate teacher comment to the student during the process of composition could be: 'You're doing a great job. There's a clear sense of structure and your melody and harmony parts work well together. The melody is very simple, which is not necessarily a weakness, but currently the melody is quite repetitive. Based on the evidence so far, I estimate you would receive a mark in the 9–7 band for both groups.'

An example of an inappropriate teacher comment to the same student during the process of composition could be: 'You're doing a great job. At the moment you would get a mark in the 9–7 band. To improve the mark, change the D in bar 2 to an F# , and add some triplets and dotted notes to make the melody more complex. Put an A7 chord in bar 15 and a D chord in bar 16. I would also add a cello.'

The 'appropriate example' above, is also a good example of how to approach the 'teacher's comment' on the candidate record form (CRF).

When approaching the 150-word programme note, students could imagine they have a few minutes with their moderator to draw together the evidence of their understanding. The programme note must include details of the audience or occasion for which the music is intended, should describe examples of musical features from their chosen elements and should give details of the hardware and software used to compose and record the music.

GCSE AQA Music Composition 8271C Checklist

Before beginning to mark, look at the Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS) to remind yourself of the AQA standard for each marking band. This is available on Centre Services.

Requirements

- Every student must complete a Student Record Form (CRF).
- The front page of the CRF must be signed by both the student and the teacher. These can now be typed.
- The combined minimum duration of the two compositions is three minutes.
- For the brief composition, students must tick the box of the number of the brief they've chosen, give a title and tick their choices of at least two elements in each group.
- For the free composition, students must give a title, a suggested audience/occasion and tick their choices of at least two elements in each group.
- For both compositions, students must also tick to show the type of score they are presenting. (For students using digital audio workstations (DAWs) such as Logic Pro or Cubase, it can be easier to demonstrate their intentions by submitting an annotated screenshot instead of a notated score. If they choose this type of score, they should tick 'Aural Guide'.)
- For each composition, students must declare any specific additional help they've received and details of who performed (created) each part.
- For each composition, students must include a 150-word programme note, containing information about:
  - the compositional intention (purpose), including the intended audience/occasion
  - the musical features in their music
  - details of the software/hardware they've chosen to use in the composition process.

Administration

- Please check the addition of the marks.
- Brief composition /36 + Free composition /36 = Total /72 for each student.
- Please check the total mark written on the candidate record form (CRF) is the same mark entered online for each student.

The sample you send to your moderator must include the following:

- a completed and signed centre declaration sheet
- a completed CRF and two scores for each student in the sample. Scores should be clearly labelled with the name and student number clearly shown on each page. It's helpful for the work of each student to be sent in a separate plastic wallet
- please present the work in student number order
- a clearly labelled USB pen drive or CD containing all the students' work. If sending a USB pen drive, it's helpful to use the following filenames format so that the work can be easily sorted to appear in order as shown below:
  - 1134 Anderson brief

- o 1134 Anderson free
- o 1345 Smith brief
- o 1345 Smith free.

- if sending a CD, please create the order of tracks as above and include a track list and write the track numbers in the boxes on the CRF
- finally, please ensure you send the composition work to the composition moderator. You will have a different moderator for the performance unit and it's important they receive the correct sample, so that the process of moderation is not delayed.