

Component 1: Understanding music – assessment guidance

This resource provides technical guidance for Component 1: Understanding music to help you prepare for GCSE Music (8271). There are no recordings to accompany this document.

Students will concentrate on four Areas of Study (AoS). These were chosen to provide an appropriate focus for students to appraise, develop and demonstrate an in-depth knowledge and understanding of musical elements, musical context and musical language.

The four areas of study are:

1. Western classical tradition 1650–1910
2. Popular music
3. Traditional music
4. Western classical tradition since 1910

Each AoS contains four topic areas and a study piece. See below for the topic areas within each AoS.

1 Western classical tradition 1650 – 1910

- The Coronation Anthems and Oratorios of Handel
- The orchestra music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven
- The piano music of Chopin and Schumann
- The Requiem of the late Romantic period

Study piece

Mozart *Clarinet Concerto in A major*, K. 622, 3rd movement, Rondo.

2 Popular music

- Music of Broadway 1950s to 1990s
- Rock music of the 1960s and 1970s
- Film and computer gaming music 1990s to present
- Pop music 1990s to present

Study piece

Little Shop of Horrors 1982 off-Broadway version. The following three tracks:

- *Prologue/Little Shop of Horrors (overture)*
- *Mushnik and Son*
- *Feed Me*

3 Traditional music

- Blues music from 1920–1950
- Fusion music incorporating African and/or Caribbean music
- Contemporary Latin music
- Contemporary folk music of the British Isles

Study piece

Paul Simon *Graceland* album. The following three tracks:

- *Graceland*
- *Diamonds on the Soles of her Shoes*
- *You can call me Al*

4 Western classical tradition since 1910

- The orchestral music of Copland
- British music of Arnold, Britten, Maxwell-Davies and Tavener
- The orchestral music of Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók
- Minimalist music of John Adams, Steve Reich and Terry Riley

Study piece

Zoltán Kodály: *Battle and Defeat of Napoleon* and *Intermezzo* from *Háry János*.
(Orchestral version with cimbalon and without vocal parts).

Approach and Assessment

Component 1 is assessed through an externally marked exam in two sections lasting one hour and thirty minutes. It is marked out of a total of 96 marks and constitutes 40% of the total marks for the qualification.

In this exam, Ofqual requires students to:

- demonstrate and apply musical knowledge
- use appraising skills to make evaluative and critical judgements about music.

Each of these requirements/Assessment Objectives carry equal weighting in the exam.

Section A: Listening (68 marks)

Section A will consist of eight sets of linked questions covering all AoS. Each question will contain excerpts of music from unfamiliar music representing the styles/genres listed for each AoS. There will be two questions on each AoS. Each pair of questions will be worth 17 marks. 48 of the 68 marks will focus on questions related to the elements of music. The remaining 20 will focus on the context and/or genre within which some of the different excerpts were written.

There will be familiar questions such as:

- 'Name the cadence at the end of this excerpt'

or

- 'Describe the texture of this excerpt'

There will also be questions such as:

- 'Explain three features of the instrumental introduction typical of Rock'n'Roll music.'

Students are expected to spend about one hour on this section.

Section B: Contextual understanding (28 marks)

This section will consist of four sets of linked questions (short and extended), one for each AoS. Students will answer **two** questions on two different study pieces: Question 9 (Mozart) is compulsory, then students choose **one** of the remaining three questions.

These questions are contextual in approach and focus on features of the music which are typical of the genre and/or period during which they were written. There are 14 marks for each question: three of them are worth 2 marks each; the fourth is worth 8 marks and requires an extended answer.

In the compulsory piece, Mozart Clarinet Concerto in A major, K. 622, 3rd movement, Rondo for Area of Study 1, where questions refer to the different sections of the piece, the questions will use the terms appropriate to **rondo form**, such as **rondo theme**, **first episode** and **second episode**.

Students should already be familiar with these different sections within the piece and the composer's use of elements within each one. You may still choose to refer to these sections differently in your analysis in class. However, these terms are in line with our [study guide](#) and will be used as points of reference, where necessary, within the questions.

This is an examined component, marked by our examiners.

Frequently asked questions

Will the exam still have a CD?

Yes, the CD will contain the excerpts of music for Section A. Each question in this section will be announced and the music played a certain number of times.

For the 2021 exam series and onwards, we'll also be releasing electronic (.wav) files on [Centre Services](#) the day before the exam.

Full instructions for downloading these files will be included in the teacher notes released on Centre Services on 15 April and in an email which we'll send to you nearer the time.

There will be no excerpts of music for Section B.

Why are students answering questions about the context of the music?

This is an Ofqual requirement. It's important that students understand how historical and stylistic influences affected the music composed during different periods of music history, in different genres and for different occasions.

Will students be able to take scores and/or recordings of the study pieces into the exam?

No, scores and/or recordings will not be necessary as it's expected that students will know the selected study pieces well after two years of study. Scores are not available for all study pieces.

Will students have to refer to bar numbers during their answers to questions in Section B?

No, that sort of detail will not be required. See our [past papers](#) for examples of the final questions for each of the study pieces.

Can students answer all questions using bullet points?

No, this instruction won't be on the front cover of the Understanding Music exam paper. Short answers are perfectly acceptable where a simple answer is required. Students must answer the final part of the question on each of the study pieces in continuous prose. The assessment guidelines in the mark scheme make this clear.

This is because Ofqual requires that: 'the assessments for a GCSE specification must include questions or tasks which allow learners to provide extended responses. An extended response is evidence generated by a learner, which is of sufficient length to allow the learner to construct and develop a sustained line of reasoning which is coherent, relevant, substantiated and logically structured.'

Where can I find information about the study pieces?

See our [study guides](#) for each of the study pieces.

We have a 'Suggested resources' list where you can find other sources of information.

We also have Classroom Performance editions of excerpts from the study pieces that you can use with your GCSE classes. Playing the music is a vital way of getting to know it and applying some of the musical and/or instrumental techniques to classroom or individual compositional tasks during the course.

Do your study guides contain all the answers to all the questions the students will have to answer?

This cannot be guaranteed. Each of the study guides is detailed, but it's important that the chosen study pieces are examined in detail. It's likely that there will be additional points to discover and we may ask about an aspect of a study piece not referred to in a study guide but, nevertheless, present in the music.

My students are not very keen on classical music. Why do they have to answer question 9? Can't they answer two questions from 10, 11 and 12 instead?

The Western classical tradition 1650-1910 is a compulsory area of study set by Ofqual at GCSE for all of the exam boards. Students cannot answer question 10, 11 or 12 instead.

Can I teach all of the study pieces to my students so that they can choose between questions 10, 11 and 12 when they get into the exam?

Yes, this is possible, but this programme of study would mean you would have to cover a lot of content. It might be better to find out which of the three study pieces from questions 10, 11 and 12 your students prefer and concentrate on looking at them in greater depth.