

Notes and guidance: Component 2 – Performing music (8271/P)

This resource provides information and practical advice to teachers regarding the non-exam assessment (NEA) Component 2 Performing music.

Performance requirements

The performance requirements may be found on Pages 20-24 of the 8271 GCSE Music Specification or on [our website](#).

One performance must be as a **soloist** and the second, as part of an **ensemble**. The ensemble performance must last for a minimum of **one** minute and the combined total of both performances must last for a minimum of **four** minutes.

The recordings must take place at any time during the academic year of the awarding GCSE qualification. For most students this will occur during the second year of a GCSE course or Year 11, the assessment window running from the beginning of September until the following May.

Preparing performance pieces

When a student is deciding which solo and ensemble pieces to perform, there are a number of factors that should be considered which may affect the final mark. The following guidance will assist a student, in consultation with their teacher, in making the right performance choices.

Choosing Repertoire

- It is important to note that Level of Demand is marked out of 6, whereas technical control (accuracy) and expression/interpretation of a performance are each marked out of 15. It is usually better for a student to perform an easier piece well as they are more likely to gain higher marks for technique and expression/interpretation than they are for the Level of Demand.
- Although centres may choose the same performing task for students, the specification was designed to enable and encourage each student to choose and perform pieces to their individual strengths.
- If a student chooses to perform a popular song, they must not omit any of its key parts. If there is a vocal part but no vocalist to perform the part, it is important to include the melodic line on an instrument to help the student interpret the style and character of the song successfully.
- When a teacher is unsure of the Level of Demand they should contact their NEA Advisor, enclosing a copy of the score to discuss the appropriate Level of Demand.

Piano accompaniments and duets

- If there is a piano accompaniment included in the solo and/or ensemble piece, this must be played so the performance remains faithful to the original. Students are *not* permitted to omit the piano accompaniment.
- Care should be given when marks are awarded for piano duets that include two hands playing in octaves. The lack of independence between the two hands will affect the Level of Demand.
- Piano duets that are performed as an alternative to technical studies for graded exams with a particular board are not typically at the same level of other graded piano pieces, meaning the Level of Demand will be affected.

Making changes to a performance

- Performing repeats: Repeats may or may not be performed, and this at the discretion of the performer. No performance will be penalised for the omission of any repeats.
- Adding repeats: Repeat marks must *not* be added if they are not present in the original music. If a student adds an unauthorised repeat, it must be timed and deducted from the total duration of the overall performance. It should be noted that it is possible for a student's total duration to fall below the minimum time requirements if an unauthorised repeat is added. Centres are strongly advised against doing this.
- Inserting cuts: Cuts are **not** accepted as the performance will no longer be faithful to the original music. If a cut is added in a performance, the original Level of Demand will be reduced to reflect that the music is easier to perform. When a repeat is omitted from a performance, it is not regarded as a cut.

Ensemble performances

- An ensemble performance is where the assessed student performs in conjunction with at least one other musician. There must be a minimum of at least two live performers. For example, this can be a piece for voice and live piano accompaniment but cannot be a backing track unless there is also a second live part with the student.
- If a student performs with another live performer and a backing track, care should be taken to ensure the assessed part is independent from the other performer.
- In an ensemble where a student performs passages that are without another live performer, these will not count in the timing.

Vocal pieces

- The assessed vocalist is not required to sing with a second vocalist to make up an ensemble performance. The requirements are for a minimum of *any* two live performers.
- A vocalist must not double with another vocalist in unison. The parts must be independent of each other. If any doubling occurs, the unison section will be timed and deducted from the total duration of the performance.
- It is acceptable if an original arrangement includes the doubling of the vocalist's part with that of the piano accompaniment (or any other instrument),

Non-standard instruments

Non-standard instruments (ie where no nationally recognised accredited music grades exist) are acceptable and must be moderated using the instrumental/vocal marking criteria.

Holistic performances

Students may fulfil more than one role in a performance: For example, they might wish to sing and accompany themselves on guitar or piano. In such cases, they have the opportunity to have their skills assessed holistically. However, it must be made clear on the Candidate record form (CRF) what was assessed by the teacher.

Improvisations

- Improvisations are permitted when they are included as part of the original music. RSL Awards' graded music exams include many examples where this is evident.
- Performances which are entirely improvised are not permitted because there are no guide tracks or scores available, making assessment almost impossible.
- Where there is an extended improvisation, a full and thorough annotation describing what is being performed **must** be provided to facilitate moderation.

Arrangements

An arrangement of a piece of music is permitted so long as it remains faithful to the original. Extra repeats cannot be added. If a student chooses to perform repeats found in the original, this is acceptable and can be done at their own discretion.

Timing performances

- All performances must be timed so that the minimum duration can be checked when moderated. Centres should be aware that, where there are periods of rest in the music, these must not be included in the overall duration of the performance on the Candidate

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record form. This also applies to lengthy introductions and endings of pieces (ie of 4 bars or more).

- *The Performance Duration Declaration Form* must be completed if a student does not meet the minimum duration for the ensemble performance or entire performance (see below).

Djing

- All Djing skills and requirements are listed on pages 24 of the Specification and may be found on [our website](#).
- Turntables (raw vinyl/CDJ) and/or Digital DJ technology (software controller/DVS) are acceptable.
- The range of Djing skills used by a student will affect the mark awarded for Level of Demand. For example, a mark of 6 can only be attributed when a performance uses *two* basic skills, *two* intermediate skills, *one* advanced skill and *one* additional sound source.
- Solo and ensemble performances must be a minimum of *two* tracks. All tracks must be well matched in terms of their beat, tonality, arrangement and structure, and should be put together effectively as part of the overall performance.
- Students are permitted to DJ with another DJer and/or live performer as part of an ensemble performance.
- A **timeline** of the performance must be submitted with the recording. This will include a description of the tracks and techniques being used and any other relevant information that will facilitate moderation. An example can be found in Centre Services.

Performance via Technology

- All Performance via Technology skills and requirements are listed on pages 22-23 of the Specification and may be found on [our website](#).
- Students who opt for Production via Technology are not marked on their ability to perform, but on the range of skills they use; it is this which affects the mark awarded for Level of Demand. For example, a mark of 6 can only be attributed when a performance includes a variety of textures, dynamics and complex rhythms within two or more of the vocal, instrumental and/or synthesised/midi tracks.
- Performances may be sequenced, multi-tracked, or be a combination of each.
- The solo performance must be a minimum of *three* tracks of which at least one track must be performed live in real time. The tracks may be edited using software features, such as quantise and pitch correction techniques.
- The ensemble performance must be a minimum of *four* tracks, three of which must be performed by the student and one or more tracks performed by at least one other musician. At least one track must be performed live in real time by the student and at least one track must be performed live in real time by at least one other member of the ensemble. These parts do not need to be recorded at the same time.
- The recording of the performances must be accompanied by a copy of the score and/or annotation, including screenshots wherever possible. It would facilitate moderation if a brief summary of the processes, devices and production techniques could be provided.

Recordings and their quality

- The solo and ensemble performances must be recorded **separately**, and each performance must be made in one **continuous** take (ie one recording for the solo **and** another for the ensemble).
- There is no limit on the number of recordings/'takes' a student can make, so long as the final recording is completed during the year of assessment.
- When a student chooses to submit two or more pieces for either their solo or ensemble performances, the 'gaps' between the pieces will be included as part the overall recording because it is being made in a continuous take. However, the timing of the gaps must be subtracted from the overall total duration of the solo or ensemble performance as no performing is taking place.
- The submitted recording should not include multiple attempts to perform a piece but the final version.
- The quality and balance of the recordings is crucial. The assessed part must be clearly audible throughout a performance and microphones should be positioned carefully to achieve the best audible result for students.
- Centres should be careful to avoid any kind of distortion.

Audio formats and video

Supported audio file formats

.amr .3ga .m4a .m4b .m4p .m4r .m4v .aac .mp2 .mp3 .wma .wav .flac .ous .ogg

- MP4 and other video formats are **not** permitted. The only exception is where two DJs perform together as part of an ensemble.

Supported video file formats where two DJs perform together as part of an ensemble

.flv .mp4 .mxf .gxf .ts .ps .3gp .3gpp .mpg .wmv .asf .avi .isma .ismv .dvr-ms .mkv .wave .mov

- Video recordings and *YouTube* hyperlinks are **not** accepted. A guide track taken from a video will need the audio extracted and saved as an audio file before sending to the moderator. Online software is available to enable conversions. Audio tracks are used for comparing performances and are considered fair and reasonable for examination purposes.

Accompanying documentation for performances

- These include either a notated score, lead sheet, guide recording and /or annotation of the performance.
- A stimulus for an improvisation is not permitted. As noted above, a full and thorough annotation must be provided for an extended improvisation.
- It is worth noting that many professional singers do not strictly follow the notated score for songs in a popular or musical theatre style. Therefore, it is acceptable to state on the score that the student used the score as a guide for the purposes of moderation.

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- The submission of lyrics, with or without the inclusion of chords, is not detailed enough to qualify as a lead sheet for any performance.

Moderating performances

- The assessment grid may be found on Pages 34-43 of the 8271 GCSE Music Specification which can be found on [our website](#).
- Apply the marking criteria carefully. Key words are evident in each of the mark bands and these must reflect the quality of the performances being moderated. The key words include exceptional (15-13), highly developed (12-10), secure (9-7), moderate (6-4) and limited (3-1) abilities.
- When a student performs two or more pieces of different grades for their solo or ensemble performances, the following formula must be used:

Gr5 + Gr 5 = Grade 5

Gr5 + Gr4 = Grade 5 - When there is one grade difference, the higher grade applies

Gr5 + Gr3 = Grade 4 - The average grade of the two pieces applies

Gr5 + Gr2 = Grade 4 - The grade above the average applies

- Performance via Technology is moderated differently to all other types of performance. The mark for Level of demand is similar, but 5 marks each are given for accuracy, expression, balance, panning/stereo separation, appropriate use of effects and sense of style.
- The teacher's comments are extremely helpful on the Candidate record form when explaining to the moderator the thinking behind the awarding of marks. However, centres should not quote sentences or phrases from the assessment grids without precise reference to the student's performance. When adding comments about the recordings the teacher/assessor's supporting statement should relate directly to the audio performance.
- Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS) materials are available in Centre Services on our website. Centres are strongly advised to use these materials to help them with their moderation.

Uploading NEA samples to AQA for moderation

Samples must be submitted online through **Centre Services – Centre marks submission**.

Centre documentation

- Ensure a completed Centre declaration sheet (CDS) is uploaded.
- A completed Performance Duration Declaration Form. This details any student that does not meet the minimum duration of one minute for the ensemble performance and/or the four minutes for all performances. Note: The one form covers both performance and composition components.

Candidate media

- Audio tracks for each student.
- Full copies of the scores and/or annotations.
- Guide recordings should be placed immediately before the assessed student's performance.
- The Candidate record form, which is used to document the individual performance details of all students from a centre.
- The Candidate record form may be signed digitally. Handwritten signatures are not required.
- In addition to the centre and student details, declaration signatures and marks, it is important the following *musical* information is included:
 1. The title of each performance piece and the composer/arranger
 2. The name of the instrument/DJ/voice being assessed
 3. The track number (where applicable)
 4. The teacher/assessor's comments, relating directly to the performance
- Include any additional comments you believe will facilitate moderation in the 'Details of additional assistance given' box and/or the 'Concluding comments' box on the final page.
- Check the arithmetic on the Candidate record form and that your marks are added correctly. The final marks must correspond to your Centre marks submission marks which are input on our website by the 7 May NEA deadline.

Organising and naming files

Files should be named as follows:

- 5-digit centre number
- component-code 8271-P
- either:
 - a single 4-digit candidate number
 - multiple 4-digit candidate numbers, separated by a space
- description, which could include details such as:
 - candidate name
 - title of the piece
 - type of document (score/annotations/candidate record form etc)
- file extension, as set by the application.

Each piece of information must be separated by an underscore “_”.

eg individual files:

92345_8271-P_0001_Joe Bloggs vocal piece.mp3

92345_8271-P_0001_Joe Bloggs candidate record form.docx

92345_8271-P_0005_Jane Doe score.docx

92345_8271-P_0010_candidate record form for John Smith.pdf

eg single file with multiple candidates:

92345_8271-P-0005_0010_DJing performance for Jane Doe - John Smith.mp3

Note: the first part of the filename CentreNo_Component-Code_CandidateNo_ is used during the upload process to automatically tag (associate) the file with the candidate number specified.

Following this convention will make to process of uploading and submitting the samples a lot smoother and avoid the need to manually tag files to candidates.

Deadline

GCSE Music NEA samples must be uploaded as soon as possible after the submission date

7 May.

NEA Advisors

All centres are allocated an NEA Advisor. If you have any questions about Components 2 and 3 you can e-mail your Advisor for help and guidance. If you are unsure who your Advisor is, ask your Examination Officer or email music@aqa.org.uk.