Notes and guidance: Component 3 – Composing music (8271/C)

This resource provides information and practical advice to teachers regarding the non-exam assessment (NEA) Component 3 Composing music.

Composition requirements

The composition requirements are on pages 24-25 of the 8271 GCSE Music Specification or on our website.

Each student must compose **two** pieces. One composition must be in response to an externally set brief and the other composition is freely composed by the student. The combined duration of the compositions must be a minimum of **three** minutes.

Both the set brief and free composition must be completed during the academic year of certification. For most students, this will occur during the second year of a GCSE course or Year 11, the assessment window running from mid-September until the following May.

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Writing compositions

Style and structure
- The two compositions can be written in the same style. Students do not need to submit two contrasting pieces.
- Any style of composition is acceptable.
- All ideas must be those of the student. For example, if a student needs to create a drum kit groove, then they must compose this themselves.
- Students can use methods appropriate to the style/genre of their composition and include a combination of vocal/instrumental and technology.
- Structure is very important and should be considered at an early stage of the compositional process. Students should take time to design a clear structure, deciding what will happen in each section of their piece.
- Centres should avoid using a 'shared' structure - one which is used by all students - as this can prevent students from developing compositions in their own unique style.
- In almost all styles of music, there is a contrasting section within the structure. This adds interest and variety to the piece and students should think carefully about this when creating a structure. The 'bridge' in pop or rock songs, the B section in jazz tunes, and the development section in classical sonatas are all good examples of where contrast can be added.

The Elements of Music
- Students must try to develop their ideas into longer pieces by focussing on the different elements of music, including fully exploring the instruments and/or voices for which they are writing.
- In most cases, the style of music chosen will influence what combination of musical elements are used.
- Each composition must use at least four musical elements. The elements are divided into two groups and students must choose at least **two** elements from each one:
  - List 1: two elements from rhythm, metre, texture, melody, structure, form
  - List 2: two elements from harmony, tonality, timbre, dynamics, phrasing, articulation.
- Most students use *more than* two elements from each group.

Using technology
- Do not use pre-recorded presets in the software, such as loops or automatic functions. If a student needs to use loops, they must create their own.
- When repeating ideas be careful of using 'copy and paste.' If a musical phrase or section needs to be repeated, a student should try to vary it. Although this decision will depend on the style of the music, it is always better to develop ideas than simply repeat them.

Set briefs
The set briefs are published by AQA on 15 September of the year of certification and include a wide range of choice. The following is guidance on how some of these briefs may be interpreted.

Notation stimulus

- Where a set of pitches are provided as a stimulus, not all of the pitches need to be used. A selection may be chosen.
- The pitches will include key intervals, and these could be the stimulus, rather than the pitches themselves.
- The pitches can be transposed.
- The melodic 'shape' of the pitches could be the stimulus. For example, this could include using the shape as it is presented, inverting it, using it backwards, or a combination of all three.
- If pitch and rhythm are both provided in the brief, more variety will be possible. In addition to the points above regarding the interpretation of pitch, a short rhythmic 'cell' or group of 'cells' could be developed instead of the whole rhythm.

Poem/lyrics stimulus

- The words do not need to be used in the composition as they are there to provide a stimulus.
- The words can be used as they are presented in the brief, or the order can be changed to suit the composition.

Video stimulus

- The video should be treated purely as a stimulus.
- Students do not need to compose music to 'fit' the length of the video. Usually, the video will be too short and cannot be the same length as the composition due to its brevity.

Final recordings

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

- For each composition, students must submit an audio recording to demonstrate how the music should sound when performed or played using technology.
- Students must ensure if someone else performs in their composition recording that they present evidence in the Candidate record form (CRF) to prove all the ideas were their own.
- Recordings should be of a high quality and not distorted or muffled.
- All parts should be clearly audible to facilitate moderation. It is important to achieve the right balance between parts.
- Recordings can made on a DAW, in a recording studio, or by combining a live input(s) with existing tracks recorded on a DAW.

Scores and annotations

- The audio recording of the composition and the Programme Note must be accompanied by one or more of a staff notated score, a lead sheet, an aural guide and/or and annotation with screen shots.

- Whatever format is chosen, **it is very important that students add as much detail as possible** so that their musical intentions are made clear to the moderator.
- Scores should include all details. In addition to rhythm (which should be quantised) and pitch, a wide range of musical elements such as articulation, dynamics, tempo markings and names of instruments should be added.
- If students compose using a DAW (such as Logic Pro X, Garageband, Cubase, Soundtrap or BandLab) they should submit an annotated screenshot to show the overall structure of their piece.
- Annotated scores should not only include an overview on the first page, but written notes on or around the image to show the structural sections of the piece. Further annotated screenshots will demonstrate specific features heard in the music. This type of annotation comes under the category of 'aural guide' on the Candidate record form.

The Programme note

- All students must write a Programme note of approximately 150 words for each composition.
- The Programme note must inform the moderator of the compositional intention, how the composition was created and what the intended audience/occasion is. It must also describe examples of the musical features chosen from the student's selected elements and give details of the hardware and software used to compose and record the music. These aspects are all equally important as they collectively provide the evidence needed to assess the level of a student's understanding and application of music through composition.
- Each composition must use at least four musical elements, with a minimum of two elements selected from two lists. It is perfectly acceptable to tick more than two boxes from each list as all musical elements that feature prominently in a composition should be acknowledged.
- It may be helpful for a student to imagine they have a few minutes to demonstrate their finished composition to an examiner. What they might say in that conversation is what they have written in their Programme note.

Moderating Compositions

- The assessment grid may be found on pages 44-50 of the 8271 GCSE Music Specification or on our website.
- To help centres understand how GCSE Music composition is assessed, please refer to Notes and guidance: Moderation guidance on our website.
- Apply the marking criteria carefully. Key words are evident in each of the mark bands and these must be selected to reflect the quality of the compositions being moderated. The key words in relation to creativity and insight include 'exceptionally perceptive' (18-16), 'highly perceptive' (15-13), 'secure perception' (12-10), 'moderately perceptive' (9-7), 'limited perception' (6-4) and 'minimal perception' (3-1) abilities. Centres should refer to pages 3-6 of the Notes and guidance: Moderation guidance for details on how to apply the criteria.

- Teachers must describe and give details of any help and assistance given to students. This information is added in the comments sections on the final two pages of the Candidate record form and is extremely helpful when moderating work.
- Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS) materials are available in Centre Services. 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 three minutes for both compositions. 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.
- The Candidate record form, which is used to record individual students' details and marks of each student's performances.
- 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 also added for **both** compositions:

  1. The use of any books, leaflets or other materials (eg DVDs, software packages, internet information) which are not acknowledged in the work itself.
  2. The title, which set brief was chosen, the suggested purpose and audience/occasion, and which two musical elements from the two lists (the elements must be ticked, with at least two or more selected from *each* list).
  3. The Programme note and which format(s) the compositions have been written, choosing from a staff notated score, a lead sheet and/or an aural guide.
  4. The track number (where applicable)
  5. The teacher/assessor's comments.

- Add any additional comments you believe will facilitate moderation on the final two pages.
- 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 uploaded by the NEA deadline.

Organising and naming files

Files should be named as follows:

- 5-digit centre number
- component-code 8271-C
- 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-C_0001_Joe Bloggs piece.mp3
92345_8271-C_0001_Joe Bloggs candidate record form.docx
92345_8271-C_0005_Jane Doe score.docx
92345_8271-C_0010_candidate record form for John Smith.pdf

eg single file with multiple candidates:
92345_8271-C-0005 0010_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.