

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2018

Pearson Edexcel GCE
Technology-based composition
(8MT0) Paper 02

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General Introduction

Submissions for this task on the new specification produced a huge variety of responses from students. The new mark scheme, which contains a shift from 15% on the legacy specification, to 40% on the new specification for using technology, worked very well and produced a variety of technologically musical responses.

The marks ranged from 13-60 with most students appearing between the 20-48 region.

Students and centres who had studied the specification and mark scheme in detail yielded higher marks overall. The splitting of synthesis, sampling and creative FX in to separate assessment grids ensured students demonstrated musical uses of these technologies throughout their work. Students who did not explore all of the three categories in their work therefore tended to score lower as a result.

The provision of the samples as part of the task ensured excellent scaffolding for the composing process. Sample 1 provided students with a large range of pitches and note durations from which to manipulate and incorporate within their piece. Sample 2 provided students with one of the most famous samples of all time, the 'funky drummer' breakbeat from the James Brown song 'Funky Drummer'. The breakbeat provided students with a range of individual kick, snare and hi-hat 'one shot' samples, as well as James Brown shouts and complex fills, from which to manipulate, explore and incorporate in to their work.

Administration

Disks: Thank you to the vast majority of centres who read the Administrative Support Guide (ASG) on the Pearson website and ensured that all students were submitted correctly. Some centres, however, need to ensure that they read this important document in the months leading up to the submission date. The requirement for sending proprietary files on a separate 'data disk' lead to some confusion from some centres. Examiners require an audio CD with the final mix on, as per the legacy specification, and a separate data disk containing the project file.

Can I also please encourage all centres to ensure that student information, such as name and numbers, are written on to the actual disks themselves rather than just on the cases that they are submitted in.

Logbooks: Thank you to teachers who did not encourage their students to submit additional screenshots, written accounts and/or diaries with the log books this year. The space in the log book is more than enough to provide examiners with the information that they need in order to mark the work. Higher end students had given brief but accurate information about the synthesis creation, sampling techniques and creative FX applied to the main

parts in their work. Lower end students tended to either write very little, or wrote a lot without providing any relevant information.

Assessment Grid 1: Synthesis

At the lower end of the cohort, students used minimal synthesis timbres in their work. When they were included they tended to be pre-set timbres with minimal/no editing. They also appeared as sporadic, fragmented token gestures, rather than being features of the work. Higher end students had used a good range of synthesis techniques and created most of the timbres themselves using subtractive soft-synths. Common techniques used were: Oscillators octaves apart and blended, sometimes with some subtle de-tuning. Filtering using a LPF with some cut-off movement. Attention to long/short attack and decay/sustain settings were used. Pitch bend and/or Glide were also common features. Envelope Generators on Filters were popular at the higher end as were creative uses of LFO's. Stylistically appropriate synthesis techniques were clearly researched in some pieces, which not only showed a clear demonstration of synthesis knowledge, but also demonstrated stylistic awareness and application.

Assessment Grid 2: Sampling

Students were assessed on their sampling techniques here, not only on the provided samples, but also on any other samples that they have included themselves. Examiners were assessing techniques commonly found on both traditional hardware samplers and software samplers. Lower end students had explored minimal sampling techniques. Typically, sample 1 was cut-up and re-triggered, perhaps with some small tokens of pitch mapping. Sample 2 tended to simply be looped with the odd kick and snare cut out and re-triggered. Higher end students explored a variety of sampling techniques, mostly from the supplied samples, and included some or all of the following: Cutting up, re-triggering, stuttering, pitch mapping, filtering (commonly LPF) sometimes with variable resonance and automated, stretching, reversing, pitch bending.

Assessment Grid 3: Creative FX

Any processes applied to the samples that cannot be found on a sampler were assessed here. Lower end students used very few creative FX and tended to limit themselves to reverb, delay and a little bit of distortion. Higher end students explored the plethora of creative FX a modern DAW can offer which could have included; creative and musical use of reverbs and delays, flange, phase, distortions, tremolo and chorus. Re-pitching the sample with flex-pitch/vocal transformer to create new melody and harmony was also popular,

as was vocoding on the vocal sample. Side chaining dynamic processors was also popular however it yielded mixed musical results.

Students who chose to use as many FX as they could, tended to yield poor musical results. There was often little care for the mix clarity of the FX being used, and more importantly, on the musical purpose that the effect produced within the piece.

Assessment Grid 4: Editing of mix

A well balanced mix with all parts clear with all parts evenly spread across the stereo field was required, as well as care and attention to EQ, compression and reverb use for mix purposes. A suitably strong signal to noise ratio was expected without the need for extreme loudness from 'mastering' processes. Lower end students tended to have a confused and inconsistent balance, often with muddy synths and uncontrolled dynamics in most parts. Higher end students produced carefully crafted mixes, that had clearly been mixed on monitors with suitable EQ and compression decisions taken. They also contained a musical spread across the stereo field which enhanced the structure and texture of the work as and when necessary.

Assessment Grid 5: Response to brief

Students were assessed on two factors here: How well they had kept to the 2:30 time of the brief and how well they had incorporated the given samples in to their work. Lower end students tended to either sound the samples sporadically throughout the piece or looped them, often throughout the whole piece. Higher end students transformed the given samples creating new musical ideas from them, and very high attaining students did this several times throughout the piece. However, it is important to note that whilst some students did attempt to transform the samples in to new musical ideas, some did not do so in a convincingly musical fashion.

Assessment Grid 6: Style and coherence

Examples of styles successfully worked in this year included: Grime, Drum 'n' Bass, Dubstep, Trap, EDM, Metal, Rock, acoustic/electro-folk, Jazz, Funk, Disco, Reggae, Chill-out, House, Pop; and fusions of all of the previously mentioned. Lower end students tended to have a confused style without any real sense of drive. Higher end students were composing in a variety of different pastiche styles with varying moods/atmospheres created within each composition. Pieces written in naturally repetitive styles, such as Grime and Drum 'n' Bass, contained constant evolution of the textures used in order to maintain interest. Higher end work also had a constant sense of drive, interest and momentum throughout, with the two-and-a-half-minute time limit feeling very short.

Assessment Grids 7-11: Musical elements

Melody, Harmony, Rhythm, Texture and Structure are all assessed for each student, with the highest three marks being carried forward to the composition mark total. This is the same as the legacy specification and facilitates work in different styles to be rewarded equally. Lower end compositions tended to be simplistic and functional in nature. There was often an over-reliance on copy and paste in most parts and no real attempt to sculpt contrasting textures to create a guided structure to the piece. Higher end students tended to score highly in all elements and utilised a lot of different musical techniques, devices, textures and structures to craft the composition. It is important to note that high end students all had a carefully crafted structure that neatly took in to account the 2:30 time limit of the task.

Grade Boundaries

In line with the ResultsPlus Examiners' Reports which are produced on ERA, grade boundaries are no longer included at the end of the report. Instead, the below generic paragraph must be inserted at the end of your reports:

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