



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

Music

MUSC5

(Specification 2270)

Unit 5: Composing: Developing Musical Ideas

Report on the Examination

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MUSC5 Developing Musical Ideas

The submissions for this unit are full of interest and bear witness to the great variety of compositional work and study which is proceeding in schools and colleges week by week. Each year brings new developments: this was the first in which the i-Pad was mentioned as a compositional tool. Traditional skills are also alive and well, and it was a pleasure to discover live recordings of Brief A quartets and Brief B compositions in some packages. Live performances are often impossible and are not required, but their production is no doubt instructive and encouraging for the composer.

Brief A

Question 1

There were some very successful settings of this year's chorale melody, and these were accompanied by reviews which discussed Bach's style with a high level of perception and obvious practical experience. The best solutions appreciated the value of a melodic bass line, and some achieved purposeful quaver movement which was a delight to sing. A large number of candidates had a good repertory of stylistic cadences and some were also alert to the possibilities of modulation. Although the melody could be harmonised entirely in the keys of F major and C major, more imaginative ears also discovered D minor (bars 12-13), A minor (bar 8) and even G minor (bar 6). Some of these keys needed careful handling. It was not advisable to leap from an imperfect cadence in A minor in bar 8 to an F major chord at 9¹, and a move to G minor at bar 6 was only completely successful if the chord changed on the quavers in the second beat.

The most common difficulties were:

- Awkward leaps in the bass or other parts
- Unprepared or unresolved seventh chords. The preparation note for a seventh should be a harmony note.
- Lack of movement beneath a minim in the melody, or minims written in the lower parts below a repeated melody note. This indicated that the writer had forgotten that this is a vocal style with a syllabic text.
- Parallel fifths and octaves. The reviews showed awareness of this fault but they were often missed between the last chord of one phrase and the first of the next, at the end of a system or when moving in contrary motion. Bars 14-15 were a hotspot for this error, as it was tempting to follow a C major chord with F major in root position.
- Awkward disjunctions between phrases. Some strongly suggested a very sectional approach to the harmonisation rather than an awareness of line.
- Last-minute modulations which created unsettling effects. A frequent example was the use of a B flat major chord in bar 9 just before a C major cadence.
- Inaccurate suspensions. It is far more likely that a suspension will occur on the approach chords to a cadence than on its chord of resolution. Many confined suspensions to well-tried cadence patterns, but the falling melody line in bars 13-14 was a golden opportunity for suspensions within the phrase.
- Inability to include the diminished seventh correctly. Good examples were rare but they were triumphantly successful in some settings. For obvious reasons solutions which did not move to a minor key precluded some adventurous harmonies.

Question 2

This was the first appearance of a minuet movement and many candidates ran into difficulties with the notation of part bars and repeat marks. It is possible that the resulting variations in bar numbering led to significant copying errors again this year. The most common were the omission of either bar 2 or bar 3 because of their similarity, removing the anacrusis to the second half, and losing a bar in the open section from bars 25-29. Candidates again need to be reminded that the dynamic markings of the first violin line form part of the question and must not be altered.

A surprising number of candidates seemed unaware of the conventions of a classical Minuet and cadenced in the tonic at bar 16. There were also some solutions which were far too complex for a dance movement, or which set out to compromise the triple rhythm for substantial periods. It was unwise to end with a Picardy 3rd : this is unlikely in the classical period but it also created an awkward move from G major to B flat major at the repeat. *Pizzicato* was often used in uncomfortable, ineffective or even impossible ways.

The following features contributed to an effective setting, although in some cases there were workable alternatives:

- bar 8 An imperfect cadence in G minor, with some interest in the lower parts
- bar 8-12 Recognition of the sequence
- bar 15-16² A characteristic and secure cadence to B flat major
- bar 16³-20 Thematic material in the lower parts
- bar 21 A chromatic chord (diminished seventh or augmented 6th) in response to the strong hint in the melody
- bar 24-25 An imperfect cadence in G minor, with some textural interest
- bar 25-29 Use of the opening material which went beyond an exact copy. The melody could be moved into a lower part (although it did not make a successful bass line without adaptation) or motifs from the given bars could be used in interplay or imitation.
- bar 32-37 Convincing progress to a G minor cadence with some interest in the added parts. Enterprising candidates found opportunities for chromatic chords in this passage including one rare but highly effective Neapolitan 6th in bar 34.

Following the lead of MUSC2 last year, some further guidance on the marking of Brief A has been prepared and is included in the charts which follow.

Brief A Question 1

	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30
Bass line	The bass line is very unsuitable or incomplete	The bass line is sometimes suitable but there are frequent errors and little sense of line	The bass line is generally suitable but will have errors and may lack direction	The bass line has few errors and has a sense of direction at times	The bass line is interesting and often purposeful but may have occasional misjudgements	The bass line is interesting, purposeful and in places adventurous
Cadences and keys	Important keys have not been grasped and cadences are inaccurate	Some cadences are understood but important implications are missed and the key is often insecure	Keys and cadences are mostly understood but will contain errors. The selection of keys used is limited	Keys and cadences are largely effective but may lack variety or interest	Main keys and cadences are well-chosen but there is scope for more interest and variety eg in passing modulation	Cadences are varied and there is an inventive exploration of keys
Chord choice	The chords are often incomplete, inaccurate or unvaried.	Chord choice is weak and progressions often ineffective	Chord choice is often suitable but will have errors and lack variety	Chord choice is largely accurate but may lack variety or interest	Chord choice is secure and varied with some adventurous moments	A wide variety of chords is used fluently and with few significant errors
Part-writing	Errors are very frequent and there is little awareness of part-writing	Errors are significant but a few passages have successful part-writing	There is some awareness of part-writing but parts are ungrateful or uninteresting in places	Grammatical errors occur but most of the part-writing is effective	Some grammatical errors occur but they have little effect on the aural result. Part-writing has melodic direction and few difficulties	Grammatical errors are insignificant and part-writing is fluent and interesting
Stylistic features	There is no evidence of stylistic awareness	Stylistic awareness is very limited	Stylistic awareness is evident at times with some audible Bachian features	Stylistic detail is evident in the majority of the setting	There is interesting stylistic detail but the result is secure rather than imaginative	Stylistic detail is evident throughout, using interesting and imaginative features
Review	A description of the process with limited use of technical language	A limited evaluation of the process, mainly descriptive, with some technical language	An evaluation which lacks detail and is not always accurate. Some use of technical language	An evaluation of the process with some detail and accuracy. Sound use of technical language	An evaluation which is mostly detailed and accurate. Good use of technical language	A detailed and accurate evaluation of the process. Extensive use of technical language

Brief A Question 2

	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30
Harmonic understanding	Little awareness of harmonic implications. Some sections incomplete	Harmonic implications are only occasionally followed	Some grasp of the harmonies but significant errors and a limited vocabulary. The key is sometimes insecure	Harmony and tonality are largely understood but with errors, or an accurate setting which relies on simple chords	A good grasp of harmony and tonality but opportunities for more adventurous chord choices are not always taken	Interesting and imaginative use of harmony with a sure sense of tonality and modulation
Part-writing	Little awareness of suitable part-writing	Many errors in part-writing	Some suitable part-writing but significant errors	Much of the part-writing is accurate but with some misjudgements	Secure part-writing with few significant errors	Effective part-writing with minimal errors
Rhythm	Little understanding of rhythms	Understanding of rhythms occasionally evident	Rhythmic sense appropriate at times	Some interest and variety of rhythms	A good sense of rhythmic style	Effective and interesting rhythmic style
Texture and use of instruments	Little understanding of texture or instruments	Use of instruments and texture is only occasionally suitable	Some awareness of texture but some weak passages	Textures are largely successful but with occasional misjudgements	A good understanding of the instruments and varied textures	Inventive and interesting textures; stylish use of instruments
Style and use of given material	Little understanding of style and given material	Difficulty in using given material; style occasionally suitable	Given material used in a basic way; style partly understood	Given material used well; style mostly understood	Given material developed effectively; a good sense of style	Imaginative use of given material; a clear grasp of classical style
Presentation and editing	Presentation poor; editing absent or unsuitable	Presentation weak; editing sparse	A satisfactory score but with some omissions or errors in editing	Score largely clear with mostly appropriate editing	A clear score with appropriate editing	An accurate score with careful and detailed editing
Review	A description of the process with limited use of technical language	A limited evaluation of the process, mainly descriptive, with some technical language	An evaluation which lacks detail and is not always accurate. Some use of technical language	An evaluation of the process with some detail and accuracy. Sound use of technical language.	An evaluation which is mostly detailed and accurate. Good use of technical language	A detailed and accurate evaluation of the process. Extensive use of technical language

Brief B

The range of styles received in Brief B is always very wide. Studies in other units obviously encouraged some to write in choral and chamber music styles, and the music of Vaughan Williams had made a deep impression on others. There were some excellent jazz examples, especially in a bebop style, and many used their experience in rock bands to good effect. It is particularly rewarding to come across work which has arisen out of an individual enthusiasm beyond the syllabus, and there were a number of examples where the writers were developing an interesting and individual voice.

As mentioned in previous reports, it is not wise to adopt a genre which does not lend itself to the variety, development, advanced harmonies and substantial structures expected at this level. It is also important to develop a very critical ear and to be prepared to revise and discard when the ear is not satisfied. Some works began very well but missed the moment when a change of theme, key or texture had become essential. Reviews sometimes revealed misconceptions when features named in the specification were claimed but did not occur.

A number of candidates stretched too far the requirement to write a single composition. Although this can be in up to three sections or movements, the requirement is not fulfilled by a pair of unrelated songs and in these cases only the stronger of the two songs was marked. The FAQ document in the Teacher Resource Bank makes it clear that *the work presented should be intended to be played as a single performance* and often there was no evidence for this. The unit is entitled *Developing Musical Ideas* and this can best be demonstrated by a longer structure with skilful manipulation of material.

There was an increase this year in submissions whose main aim was the use of technology. It is important to remember that the focus of this unit is on compositional processes and a recording which has very slight musical material cannot achieve satisfactory marks, however skilled the processing of sounds. The specification, the mark scheme and relevant documents in the Teacher Resource Bank make the features expected very clear.

Other features which restricted the marks available can be summarised as follows:

- Melody with little sense of line or phrase, often restricted to triadic patterns derived from the underlying harmony
- Unadventurous harmony, such as rock songs confined to two patterns of four chords for verse and chorus; monotonous harmonic rhythm of one chord per bar
- Ineffective structure. In a programmatic piece the form should be coherent and satisfying whether or not the listener is aware of the storyboard
- Lack of development, including very repetitive harmonic patterns and reluctance to use melodic motif or to vary phrase lengths
- Overuse of a single texture. This often occurred in pastiche piano pieces or in unvarying drum kit parts
- Unimaginative use of instruments, confining flute and violin to the stave and using the piano with one hand only
- Impossible instrumental demands such as treating timpani and harp as fully chromatic
- Lack of tonal control, where the music ended in a different key for no apparent reason, or where tonality was often unsure. In a unit which requires *secure handling of tonality* this cannot be excused by a declared intention to make the tonality ambiguous throughout the piece.

- Avoidance of modulation. It remains rare to find candidates who can move convincingly from one key to another during a phrase.
- Inaccuracies in the review. There were many misunderstandings such as describing a chord as an inversion because of the arrangement of a treble-stave chord, but ignoring the root in the bass; describing a feature in the middle of a phrase as a cadence; and wrongly naming various features of chromatic harmony.

Where an annotation is supplied in place of a score it is very helpful if this is presented in a simple form which can be followed by the listener. Some annotations were arranged in topic headings and contained an unnecessary level of detail. The best guide is to include timings on the recording. Some referred to bar numbers as produced by the software but these were not visible to the examiner and many repeat hearings were needed to locate the structure and assess compositional features.

Brief C

This option attracted only a small number of candidates, although the set piece was more familiar and approachable than in the previous year. The best solutions used a number of ideas from the model and transformed them into a convincing new style, while keeping their presence very evident. Weaker versions adopted parts of the Beethoven movement wholesale and made little attempt to manipulate them, or grafted brief references to the model onto an almost independent piece. The music set for the brief is designed to offer many possibilities for the development of melody, rhythm, bass line or chord sequence but many versions used fragments of melody only. Similarly, the contrasts of key and interesting harmonies were rarely emulated.

It should be remembered that the required guitar or keyboard instrument forms part of a rhythm section and should be used chordally for at least part of the composition.

Administration

Excellent presentation and packaging were the norm. A few CDs had no track information and had to be searched to identify candidates' work. A small amount of work was sent in paper envelopes rather than the standard AQA plastic envelopes. These tend to disintegrate at an early stage of the marking process, especially if very tightly packed, as they need to survive repeated use and long-term storage.

Brief B and C compositions were sometimes presented as very cumbersome scores with few bars on a page, single-sided printing and loose leaves. Candidates are urged to shrink the layout to a study-score size and to print double-sided if possible. It is more difficult to gain an overview of a score with very frequent page-turns and a tendency for pages to fly loose. It should not be necessary to print out on A3 paper.

It is pleasing to report that the number of submissions entered for the wrong brief or sent without a review was significantly smaller this year.

Mark Range and Award of Grades

Grade Boundaries and Cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA website.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion