



## Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Music

MUSC5 Writing a Review

including examples of reviews



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## MUSC5 ADVICE ON WRITING A REVIEW

MUSC5 compositions for all Briefs should be accompanied by a review with a maximum length of five hundred words. The review is considered with the composition in the mark scheme. It should help the examiner to understand the work submitted and include an assessment of how the composition has achieved its aims. The review may be written after the controlled time is completed but it must be the candidate's unaided work.

Examples of reviews for all three Briefs are given below, with some explanatory comment. They are given as examples of actual work submitted and may not be accurate in every detail. Reviews may be written in paragraphs or as bullet points.

### BRIEF A

In Brief A the review may be relatively short. It should include any observations which arise during the composing process (e.g. about the style of the set string quartet extract) and discuss any important features of the solution. It is helpful to mention any passages where different possibilities were tried (e.g. alternative cadences in a chorale) giving reasons for the final choice.

#### Review 1

The writer picks out points of Bach's style which are felt to be important. The intended modulations are made clear and difficulties mentioned.

In the string quartet, the review describes the use of given or developed material in the added parts and discusses the section of the setting where pre-existing material must be used (in this case, bars 24-28). There is no mention of keys, modulations or possible chromatic chords, which would have been illuminating.

In both questions there is welcome reference to the material studied before the questions were attempted.

### Analysis of MUSC5

During my AS year I found the harmonisation of a 16bar melody difficult as it was my first time working with Baroque harmony and counterpoint. This year however, I was quickly able to identify changes of key and chord inversions, whereas last year it was quite laborious. This is due to completing numerous examples and learning more stock progressions.

In my chorale I used cliché style cadences, making use of perfect cadences (Ic -v7 I and IIb7-V7-I) and imperfect cadences (x-V). Where possible I have used a falling 7<sup>th</sup> in the V chord in order to strengthen the cadence. I made a point of using conjunct quaver movement in the bass part as much as possible, in the same stylistic vein that Bach existed within. Examples of this are in phrases 1, 2, 6 and 7. I have also used a quaver and 2 x semiquaver movements in the bass, something I've noticed

occurs often in the Riemenschneider often. In the third phrase I have used chromatic harmony, beginning in G Minor, using a V7d to III, before a perfect cadence in F Major. In the same phrase I have used a 7/6 suspension. I found placing suspensions in particular difficult, but through practice was able to make use of them. In my final phrase I have used a clashing and then resolving dim7 chord, something else I found particularly difficult but was able to overcome through practice.

I found the string quartet much more difficult than the chorale as it was my first experience with writing for strings, and therefore found some of the nuances of string writing difficult to comprehend at first. Through listening to many Haydn string quartets however, I've developed a strong understanding of the string section.

When writing my quartet I paid particular attention to thematic development, in particular the use of imitation and sequence. Between bars 17 and 20, I've developed the semiquaver theme from the first violin in bar 3, through sequence and the swapping of the motif between viola and 2<sup>nd</sup> violin. In bars 25 to 28 I've further imitated the beginning of the piece through the use of the previously used semiquaver motif as well as the melodic motifs from the first beats of bars 1 and 3. Here in the second violin and partially in the violin I have pre-empted the staccato first violin rhythm from bars 29 to end.

I made an effort to mimic Haydn's work via texture. Through bars 5 to 16 I imitated the opening's staccato texture, and kept the parts as simplistic as possible, keeping the opening rhythms prevalent. Through bars 17 to 28 I developed this theme, altering it through use of semiquavers, dotted crotchets and in bar 25 and 26, a pedal note in the bass in a similar way to which that of Haydn.

I feel that both of my pieces are successful, imitating the clichés of their respective periods, and fulfilling the specifications of their briefs.

## Review 2

There is a lot of information in this review but much of the detail is obvious from the score. It seems that the possibility of beginning the chorale in G minor was not considered – perhaps surprising as the chorale ends in that key. The frequent references to a 'stock progression' might imply a rather mechanical approach to the harmonisation, but the detail given shows considerable experience of the style. The reference to an *exciting passage using many passing notes in the bass prior to the calm cadence* suggests a real awareness of the aural effect of the music.

The quartet review makes the intentions clear, but does not say much which could not be deduced from the score. It would be helpful here to know more of the possible alternatives which were considered.

## AQA MUSC5 Unit 5 Developing Musical Ideas

### Brief A- Compositional Techniques

#### Question 1 – Harmonisation of a Bach Chorale Melody

The Chorale begins in B flat major with an anacrusis, and as there are repeated melody notes I used the chord progression I - Ib to begin the piece. I added a 9/8 suspension in g minor (the relative minor) in bars 1-2, using chords V7b - I, to create interest using dissonance and resolution. There is a transient modulation to D minor at the end of bar 2.

I used an imperfect cadence in bar 4 with the chords I - Ib - V and a running quaver bass line. I could have used other progressions such as Ic - V or IVb - V, but I chose the above as this was Bach's favourite for such cadences.

In bar 5 I noticed an opportunity to use an ascending stock progression, so I remained in G minor and used the progression Ib - VIIb - I with 7/6 suspension, and although Bach preferred this to I - Vc - Ib, I demonstrated that I could also vary my treatment of this sequence by using the second inversion chord in bar 7 with the descending stock progression.

I used a cadential stock progression for the descending phrase in bar 8 in the key of F major as it is the dominant of B flat major, and allowed me to harmonise the progression of mediant - supertonic - tonic with the chords Ic - V(7) - I with the seventh added as a passing note.

There is another ascending stock progression in bar 9 for which I modulated back to B flat major and repeated Bach's favoured progression; Ib - VIIb - I.

In bar 10 I used a perfect cadence in B flat major to harmonise the tonic - leading note - tonic progression, and therefore used Ic - V(7) - I, introducing the seventh as an arpeggiated note leaping from the fifth in chord V and resolving onto chord I.

From beat 4 in bar 10 to beat 3 in bar 12 I chose to use the relative minor, G minor, and created an exciting passage using many passing notes in the bass prior to the calm cadence, using the chords I - VI - VIb - IVb - IV - Ic - V - I.

Remaining in G minor until the end, I finalised the piece using the progression II7b - V - I for the long supertonic to tonic, in which I added a picardie third.

**AQA MUSC5 Unit 5 Developing Musical Ideas**  
**Brief A- Compositional Techniques**  
**Question 2 – The Classical String Quartet**

The given material comprises two elements; theme and accompaniment. I preserved the simplicity of the accompaniment throughout, whilst incorporating aspects of the melody within the texture at certain points, e.g. bar 13.

From bars 24 to 28 I created a section reflecting the opening melody where the position of the theme passes through all four voices, building to a climax before the final section (bar 29-36).

Harmonically, starting in G major, I modulated to D major (dominant) using a retardation and a 4/3 suspension. In bars 9-12 I tried to capture the flavour of the melodic sequence in all parts. Following an imperfect cadence (Ic-V) in bar 16, I harmonised the melody first in the tonic minor (G minor) and then E flat major. Bars 21-24 pass sequentially through G major and D major before returning to G major at bar 25. In bars 29-32 I decided to vary the harmony to give variety to the repeated bars, harmonising them in G major and E minor successively.

The final four bars returns to the simplicity of the opening with the last two bars providing a homophonic conclusion.

**BRIEF B**

**Review 3**

This is a thorough review, giving information about the genesis of the piece, its intentions, its structure and the resulting recording. The writer has considered the finished piece thoughtfully and uses precise and evocative language.

**Review of Composition**

I decided to do the 'free composition' option for this unit and set myself the task of writing a choral piece for upper voice choir. Searching for the correct text really made me think about what direction I wanted the piece to head in and I felt I wanted to compose something that was traditional in style, yet had contemporary elements in it. I settled on the Latin text of the Mass, choosing the Lacrymosa for its dramatic implications and the mood it suggests. Having studied closely the text and its meaning I began constructing my musical ideas and themes. The organ introduction really sets the dark C minor mood of the earlier sections of my piece. The organ was a conscious and obvious choice, after deciding upon the text, as I wanted to provide the rich texture of conventional church music. However, I feel the use of a flute stop ensures that the voices, even if the piece was to be performed by three soloists, or a small chamber choir, would not be overpowered. This is especially important due to my setting for the upper voice parts, SSA. Composing for such a combination gave me the opportunity to use some slightly more unusual close harmonies than are conventionally found in SATB writing, creating a sense of tension and uncertainty that is certainly present in the text; the phrase "doomed to judgement, lost and guilty" being my inspiration for this aim.

This leads me to my approach to tonality. From the outset I was clear I wanted to create what is essentially sacred music, but with a contemporary twist and I feel in the early sections of the piece I have established a mood that is both slightly modal, as in very early church music, but also faintly draws upon subtle dissonances giving the music a more uncomfortable edge which suits the text. Fulfilling the atmosphere generated by the text was an important aspect I wanted to achieve and word painting became a key concern. I feel have achieved this, particularly with the opening soprano melody. The descending quaver pattern is almost like a sob and conjures up images of lamenting and falling tears. A slightly new direction for "*Qua resurget ex favilla*", building to a climactic point at bar 31 with a dramatic crescendo, effectively communicates the depiction of man rising from the ashes, whilst the descending sequence beginning at bar 45 helps the projection of a plea for pity; the repeated 'Deus' a desperate entreaty to God.

I chose to divide my composition into several distinct sections, again to draw attention to the different meanings of parts of the text. The first; "*Lacrymosa dies illa*" (Day of bitter lamentation) is simple, the monophonic texture designed to be austere and hopefully slightly haunting in its nature. Later the "*Pie Jesu*" takes the music in a new direction. Due to the intimate nature of the earlier sections I wanted to move subtly away from this and into a more contrasting section, whilst still retaining a continuation of style. I feel that I have achieved this, moving into the warmer related key of Eb major with a more animated tempo, but holding onto some of the tense suspensions characteristic of the previous sections. The final 'Amen' section combines understated dissonance and interlocking suspensions. Its unaccompanied nature makes it more symbolic and prayer-like in character, enhanced by the dynamics and slower tempo.

I believe my composition is challenging to singers due to the wide range required within each part, yet also in places the close proximity of the parts; close harmony is particularly testing for singers. I could not find any suitable singers within my school community to perform the piece, so in order to achieve a realisation of it I multi-tracked each part myself. This led to difficulties with timing and tuning, but the recording is as faithful to the score as I could have hoped using this method, and I feel it gives a good indication of my intentions.

#### Review 4

The review gives an excellent introduction to the music, explaining well the intentions and the process of composition. It is particularly helpful in Brief B to explain the intended structure of the piece and to comment on any unavoidable shortcomings in the score or the recording.

#### Review

I listen to a range of music, from rock music to classical guitar music and I wanted to incorporate these styles into one work. Separating the work into three movements allowed me to do this. Another option for my controlled time was arranging a classical piece into a rock song – I liked the idea but I wanted to challenge myself to arrange my own ideas in the same way. I therefore decided on a free composition of three movements, varying in style but being interlinked with certain characteristics. I took inspiration from Vaughan Williams' fifth symphony, where confusion between keys is created between C and D, making the eventual resolution to D incredibly beautiful. I attempted this in my work with E and G, albeit to a lesser extent. He also develops motifs with 'organic growth' – something which I used to link the movements together.

The first movement embraces a classical style. The second movement was planned this way; however I felt effects and extra layers varied the piece, adding the beautiful mellow tone I wanted. The third movement simply fell into place; many ideas from the third were developed from the previous movements. I am happy that it came as naturally as this confirmed the pieces are genuinely linked. I chose to place the movements in this order as the first establishes most of the main themes, whilst the third has the climatic ending.

I am also pleased I was able to capture many different moods. Movement one is overall sad but has a strong major uplift, whilst the second varies from uplifting to sinister. The third brings aggression, before a dramatic climatic section and a calm conclusion. Many of the mood changes were brought about through key changes. I concentrated on the tonic, the subdominant, and their relative minors, as these bring a slightly darker feel to the piece. I did not feel that the brightness of the dominant key was fitting. The style is also varied, from classical finger picked guitar in the first movement, to rock guitar in the last.

Texture is well varied also; ranging from polyphony in the first movement, with arpeggio accompaniment to the melodies, to strong chord and melody homophony in the third, allowing the solos to shine.

With regards to the recording of the pieces I felt that a computer programme version of the work would never do it justice and so a recording was essential. The scratchy acoustic guitar in the first movement reflected the mood perfectly. Although the quality is not fantastic, I am pleased considering I recorded these pieces at home. Given that the recording took place outside of the allotted controlled time, I changed nothing to the scores after starting the final recording. This shows that my pieces were well planned and I had a clear idea of what I wanted to achieve.

To conclude therefore I feel as though I have created an enjoyable and interesting work and I am very proud of the recordings.

## **BRIEF C**

The two reviews which follow are of high quality.

- Technical language is used well.
- The jazz/pop/rock style adopted is discussed, with detail about the features to be used.
- The structure of the resulting piece is outlined.
- Some of the difficulties in adapting the given material are mentioned.
- The overall impression is of an informative, considered and helpful introduction to the music.

## Review 5

### Commentary

Deciding to choose the arrangement option for my composition module was an easy decision. I enjoy modern music styles and thought it would be a fun, yet challenging choice. I decided to write a jazz arrangement and began by compiling recordings of famous jazz pieces and studying a wide range of typical styles. Among my influences were Cab Calloway, Buddy Rich, Quincy Jones, Charlie Barnet, Scott Joplin and Maynard Ferguson. However, some composers I came across had a greater influence than others. Glenn Miller's saxophone voicing was a particular inspiration topped off by the clarinet. Added 6th chords are common throughout my arrangement, particularly in the saxophones, and also in the piano harmonies. I listened to several of Miller's pieces including "String of Pearls" and "In The Mood". George Shearing's signature tune "Lullaby of Birdland" also inspired me, particularly his 'locked hands' style, which he in turn, had borrowed from Milt Buckner.

From listening to these talented composers and performers, I drew a list of what I felt was common between all of their music and what I felt I should include in my arrangement of Brahms' 'Hungarian Dance No. 5'. I realised I must incorporate diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chords, added 6<sup>th</sup> chords, a walking bass, light percussion, soli, occasional improvisation, triplets and lots of syncopation. Other features such as scat singing were not suitable. My choice of instruments boiled down to a full saxophone section, tuba (a solitary brass player), percussion, double bass, clarinet and piano. Details in the performance such as the use of quintuplets in the piano were used to create a syncopated rhythm; a classic feature of jazz. I also used dotted rhythms throughout and triplets in the percussion to create a typical jazz rhythm.



I managed to include the majority of the typical jazz features I recognised from listening to classic jazz pieces such as walking bass and soli in different instruments, including the baritone saxophone and alto saxophone. The piece's texture varies throughout. Where it is not polyphonic it is homophonic, but never monophonic. Monophony is rare in jazz so there are always at least three voices sounding at one moment. The piece is primarily in G minor but it does modulate to G major at one point and later to Bflat minor. I use diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chords and added 6<sup>th</sup> chords. The form of the piece remains similar to Brahms' original structure and is in a modified rondo form. I have used rehearsal marks at points to ensure easy rehearsing for the players.

I feel my arrangement of 'Hungarian Dance No. 5' was successful in that I encapsulated all that I felt was typical of a jazz piece.



## Review 6

### Jazz Composition Review

In choosing to arrange the Hungarian dance melody no.5 into a Jazz style, I decided that imaginative outcome. I planned to incorporate all the styles that had inspired me into my composition. I kept the time signature the same and swung the whole piece to compensate for the lack of consistency produced by having each section inspired by different composers. This was a difficult choice to make because the sections inspired by the piece 'Elite Syncopations' would have to be swung, differing from the traditional rhythmically 'perfect' style of playing ragtime.

I wished to compose the piece for as few as few instruments as possible, because in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the more performers in the band the more expensive it would cost to run. The challenge was to replicate the sound of a big band in the last section of the piece, with just five instruments, by utilising each one to its full potential.

I attempted to write a Gershwin style piano solo in the 2<sup>nd</sup> minor section of the piece. To achieve this sound I tried to avoid notes of the chord and use many passing notes. This swiftly moved onto a 'one-off' chord sequence with short solos on top of it. The rushed effect created makes it clear that there are more styles to be played before any sort of climax.

The second major section that takes place is designed in a Glen Miller format. The melody is moved from the piano to the saxophone and trombone. As expected, a walking bass line is played but the piano is used to replace the spiked notes that the trumpet section would normally produce.

In the penultimate section I aimed to create a similar sound to which the 'blues brothers' use.

Unfortunately the use of an electric guitar and bass guitar would not be well fitted in the styles from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, so I used the trombone and double bass to drive the music as appropriate.

When realising the last two sections, I noticed the solos in between the melody didn't have enough time to flourish. The obvious solution to this would be to reduce tempo. I then felt that with instruments slowing down towards the end of the piece, an anticlimax had appeared which was not the effect I had intended to create. To solve this problem I simply made the drum kit play as double time, creating the illusion of a sudden accelerando.

While recording the composition on 'Logic', certain problems specific to instruments arose. For example the studio keyboard I used to input the notes was only 3 octaves long. This meant I had to record the right hand part separate to the left hand part, because as a whole there was a range of over five octaves. Having been recorded separately the relationship between the right hand and left hand parts is distant, in terms of expressing dynamics and articulation. I was able to mix the recordings afterwards using Logic's 'automation' function making this less of a problem.