

MUSIC

Paper 9703/01

Listening

Key Messages

- Plan the use of time in the examination room carefully
- Support general assertions by reference to musical evidence
- Answer relevantly

General

The first of the above 'key messages' refers to a growing tendency for candidates to run out of time in the middle of answering their third question. In a handful of unfortunate cases no third question was answered at all although it was clear that one had been chosen and thought about. It was more often, but not always, weaker candidates who found themselves in this situation – some otherwise strong candidates may register an unexpectedly lower mark than Centres predicted for exactly this reason. Nor was it always the **Section C** question that suffered in this way as candidates tackled the three sections in different orders. Perhaps, as a rough rule of thumb, Centres might advise their candidates to spend no more than 45 minutes on each of their **Section A** and **B** questions, and 30 mins on **Section C**. In particular, writing a commentary while listening to the whole of a movement may prove too time-consuming – recordings should be used as an *aide-mémoire*, not depended on closely.

The general standard was very good: some impressive papers stood out at the top end of the mark range but most candidates knew the music, understood significant points about it, and were able to describe recognisably, in their own words, what they were hearing. The caution expressed in the previous session's report, however, bears repeating: poor handwriting and/or linguistic sloppiness was several times a barrier to understanding. It should be stressed to candidates that, if the Examiner cannot read or deduce the logic of a point, then it cannot be credited.

Section A

Somewhat surprisingly, candidates seemed generally more comfortable writing about the music of Haydn and Mozart than that of Beethoven.

- 1 Although many candidates wrote very detailed commentaries on the Haydn movement and explained his variation techniques well, disappointingly few showed a similarly secure understanding of the Beethoven movement. Many had a vague appreciation of the differences in style but explanations of the more obvious, tangible points eluded them e.g. the bass + *Prometheus* theme, tempo changes, details of instrumentation.
- 2 This was by far the least popular of the **Section A** questions but it yielded some very fine, detailed commentaries. Some showed such thorough familiarity with the movement that their discussion of motivic development, instrumental, tonal and mood contrasts was securely anchored to a clear account of the principal features of the outline structure. Where there were weaknesses it was usually because of some confusion with what had been (vividly) remembered about the first movement.
- 3 This was the most popular question in this section and achievement covered a wide spectrum of marks. Most candidates showed some appreciation of both the virtuosic and expressive use of the clarinet and of both its soloistic and conversational roles. The principal factor in differentiation between candidates lay in the degree of real familiarity shown with the music rather than in knowledge of technical vocabulary – candidates with little of the latter were nonetheless able to describe their examples perceptively and convincingly.

Section B

This section also produced some very fine answers. The Core Works had been studied very closely.

- 4 The question was generally answered well. Many candidates chose to write about broadly similar moments: the opening of the Act and what it 'foreshadows', the expression of Desdemona's 'innocence', particularly in her *Ave Maria*, the menacing music accompanying Otello's entrance, the murder and Otello's last kiss. There was a good understanding of the role of instrumental colour and of the suggestiveness of recurring themes. There were several quite subtle discussions and comments on details of the Willow Song, and on reminiscences of the love duet from Act I. Some answers described passages in admirably accurate detail. On this occasion some discussion of dynamic levels was relevant but weaker candidates perhaps made too much of this aspect.
- 5 Almost every candidate who answered this question was able to make some relevant points about *Wohin?* Some answers were impressively detailed and perceptive. The treatment of *Ungehduld* and *Mein!* varied considerably, with many candidates writing well about the mood of each song but then having difficulty in making convincing links between technique and effect. Overall, the standard of answers was good.
- 6 Although most candidates had understood the question, disappointingly few really got to grips with its central thrust, i.e. 'a singer's music'. There were many rather basic answers that began (legitimately) with the suitability of particular voice types to conventional roles in opera, but none of these showed any developed understanding of the distinctions. Several candidates listed the 'texture' of a voice as suggestive of character – did they mean 'timbre' or 'tone-quality'? In those answers that discussed musical techniques the most accessible aspect was pitch, rarely convincingly demonstrated, together with mode (major = 'happy' or 'aggressive', minor = 'sad') and word-painting. Some very perceptive commentaries on the relationship between voice and piano in the Schubert songs that had been studied would have been better presented in answer to **Question 5**. Evidence of familiarity with wider repertoire was disappointing.

Section C

While questions may be of a rather general nature in this section, answers should always strive to be as specific as possible. The best candidates organised their thoughts logically and presented them in an orderly essay, point by point, each illustrated by reference to relevant musical matters.

- 7 A great many candidates relished the relatively concrete nature of this task. Most were fairly secure in enumerating sections and common instruments within them. There was wider variation in the level of understanding of the nature of their sounds and their most common roles in orchestral music. For instance, while most could explain something about the role of the timpani in terms of beat or rhythm, very few mentioned that it is a pitched instrument and only one candidate illustrated this observation by citing the opening of the Beethoven *Violin Concerto*, which all had studied. Some particularly knowledgeable candidates added brief histories of the development of the orchestra but the principal focus of differentiation lay in the extent, perceptiveness and relevance of any musical examples that were described. These were rather thin on the ground. Discussions of the clarinet that used the Mozart *Quintet* as their central example betrayed a fundamental (and very common) lack of understanding of the difference between 'orchestral' and 'chamber' music.
- 8 Arguments were made on both sides. A very few made a compelling case for the pre-eminence of the music; some took the matter of a director's interpretation seriously; but the majority of candidates took the line that the visual element was not an 'optional extra' but essential to the full understanding of the story. Of these only a handful was sufficiently specific about which visual elements they valued. The most thoughtful considered the roles of scenery, costume and dancing as well as facial expressions and gesture, but these were rare. One made a strong case for the role of lighting. Examples, though, were largely missing.
- 9 This was the least popular question in this section. Answers that spoke from local experience naturally tended to be the most knowledgeable but were not always the most perceptive and detailed. Most answers were rather vague in their comparisons, lacking convincing examples.
- 10 Candidates seized on this question with apparent gusto and approached it from a variety of relevant perspectives. Many compared the opportunities that technology offers today for the almost instant creation of new music and compared this with what they regarded as a laborious process of writing

with pen and paper. Accessibility, both to a much wider range of potential 'composers' and to larger public audiences was generally welcomed: one or two candidates expressed an almost nostalgic, idealistic anxiety at what they saw as the demise of a highly-cultured elite. Many understood something of the eighteenth-century patronage system and could explain socio-economic changes in the nineteenth century but very few mentioned the growth of public concerts or publishing in this context.

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<p>Paper 9703/02 Practical Musicianship</p>

Key messages

- Exercises submitted for Element 3 should be based on actual music, which should be identified by composer/tradition
- Each composition for Element 4 should be composed for two or more instruments/voices
- All parts of this Component should be submitted together for moderation

General comments

There was a pleasing overall standard of work submitted for this component with some outstanding examples of performing and composing. It was evident that most Centres had considered which elements would be suitable for individual candidates and this meant they were able to demonstrate the best possible level of skills.

Element 1 was offered by almost all candidates. Pianists, guitarists and vocalists predominated, but the full range of orchestral instruments and those from popular music genres, as well as instruments such as the accordion, were also heard. The majority of candidates performed solo, or with piano accompaniment. Any piece which is intended to be accompanied should include the accompaniment – this may be a piano, or other, reduction. A number of vocalists, electric and bass guitarists and drummers performed to appropriate, well-produced, backing tracks. This enabled candidates to present a performance with full instrumentation and facilitated their ability to demonstrate their stylistic understanding. Backing tracks must not include the candidate's part. The performance should be as complete as possible. For example, it is inappropriate to present just the guitar or drum part from a popular song without the vocal or other instrumental lines, thus taking the music completely out of context. Use of a backing track should be considered in such cases where live musicians are not available.

This element requires candidates to include a range of styles and most had clearly given careful thought to this aspect of their programme, though others were rather restrictive in their choices.

The standard of spoken introductions was, on the whole, good, with candidates demonstrating genuine understanding of the music. Inclusion of a spoken introduction is a requirement for Element 1 and, without it, candidates cannot access the full range of marks in **Section E** of the assessment criteria.

For the most part, performing venues were appropriate and accompanists were competent, thus enabling candidates to give of their best.

Almost all candidates who presented **Element 2** offered two disciplines as required. Care should be taken to ensure that the repertoire chosen gives candidates an opportunity to develop and extend their skills appropriate to their own ability. Centres should also ensure that the work submitted for the two disciplines, and the nature of activities undertaken, are sufficiently different from each other.

Documentation was completed correctly by most Centre assessors. Detailed comments on all three assessments for each discipline showing how marks have been awarded are important aids to Moderators in making their assessment with clear understanding of Centre intentions. Most CD/DVD recordings were well documented. Centres are reminded that DVDs are essential for ensemble performance and that individual candidates should be clearly identified.

Only a small number of candidates prepared **Element 3** and the work presented was of a good standard. This element requires candidates to submit a set of six to eight exercises demonstrating understanding of techniques in an established tradition. The work should be dated and presented in chronological order and teachers should give a clear outline of the course undertaken – this is particularly important where the

tradition studied is not western tonal harmony. The candidate's level of progress should also be shown. The exercises must be based on actual music by named composers or identified as traditional, or by region, if from folk or indigenous sources. Candidates are not expected to present full texture without any given material and at least one part should be given throughout. The course should give candidates an opportunity to develop their understanding of one established tradition and should enable them to demonstrate a range of skills appropriate to study at this level. Whatever the chosen tradition, the work submitted should be carefully notated and marks should be awarded for the accuracy of the notation.

There were some good compositions presented for **Element 4** and almost all candidates selected genres and instrumentation with which they were fully familiar. The contrasting nature of the two pieces enabled candidates to demonstrate a range of invention and composing technique in writing for at least two instruments/voices. Scores were, generally, accurately produced with appropriate detail enabling the full range of marks to be accessed. Submission of a written commentary giving details of the composition process is an acceptable alternative to a score for this component and some candidates found this a more appropriate way to demonstrate their intentions. A number of candidates were able to submit live recordings of their compositions, while others presented well edited sequenced versions. Some created very successful renditions by playing one part live over a synthesised recording of the remaining parts.

Most Centres submitted all the necessary paperwork for the component as a whole and provided CD/DVD recordings of good quality. Centres are advised to check CD/DVDs very carefully before they are despatched ensuring that all relevant items are included and that each complete track/file plays correctly. Centres are reminded that all the work for this component should be submitted as one package for moderation.

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Paper 9703/03
Performing

Key messages

- Candidates should provide a spoken introduction to their performance outlining how the music relates to their chosen focus
- The recorded balance between candidate and accompaniment/backing track should be checked prior to the performance
- Content of CDs/DVDs should be verified before submission

General comments

There was a good level of work submitted for this component with all candidates performing to at least a satisfactory standard. Candidates had made appropriate choices of repertoire ensuring that they were able to demonstrate the range of skills required by this component. A range of music was selected with examples of the chosen focus including Broadway musicals, bebop, Schubert sonatas, jazz standards, and French flute music of the early twentieth century.

Preparation of a spoken introduction is an important aspect of the candidate's study for this component. The best spoken introductions gave details of the chosen style and specific examples of how this was reflected in each of the pieces performed. Care should be taken to ensure that introductions focus on the music, as some vocalists merely related the content/mood of the lyrics and thus could not be credited for their understanding of the music itself.

Most Centres provided competent accompanists and suitable venues for the performance to take place. Backing tracks were used to good effect where appropriate live musicians were not available. There were, however, some instances where the lack of balance between candidate and backing track/accompanist was detrimental to the overall performance. Care should be taken with this aspect of the recording.

Most Centres presented their candidates' work on CDs or DVDs of good quality and all had taken care to ensure that individual candidates could be readily identified. There were some instances where the submitted recordings were incomplete or contained duplicate material – careful checking is essential. On a few DVD recordings, candidates' fingers/instruments were obscured by their music stand, so this should be taken into account when positioning the camera.

The majority of Centres submitted the work in a manner that was easy to manage and enclosed all the required paperwork as well as copies of the music to be performed.

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<p>Paper 9703/04 Composing</p>
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General Comments

It was pleasing to see such a diverse range of creativity in the compositional ideas of candidates this series. The standard of technical achievement in the outworking of these ideas demonstrated a commendable level of skill and understanding.

Centres are reminded to be vigilant in their distinguishing between the requirements for Component 2, Element 4 (2 contrasting compositions...) and Component 4: Composing (a single composition... or a group of shorter related pieces conceived as a whole).

In a significant minority of cases, candidates submitted 2 unrelated pieces totalling 8-12 minutes. This does not comply with the focus of the task outlined in the syllabus for Component 4.

There continues to be clear evidence that candidates conceiving their ideas using practical music-making skills are often more successful than those relying entirely on a software based sound world with little attention to the acoustic instruments they are writing for. It is, however, important to acknowledge a pleasing increase in the number of candidates using electronic resources in an idiomatic and informed way.

Materials

Assessment in this area of constructing and shaping musical ideas also considers 'aural familiarity' – the extent to which a candidate's knowledge of the techniques and styles of other composers have consciously or unconsciously permeated their own creative world. Some candidates chose to include a helpful commentary or made clear connections with the focus of their chosen project and in this regard relevant listening and aural familiarity was well-documented by the candidate. Others presented compositions that clearly showed the influence of Tippett or Britten, for example in the string writing; the language of 'cool' jazz with pop-rock tinged sounds was evident in the work of some others.

Some examples of the range of tasks undertaken by candidates are given below, thereby evidencing the scope of possibilities and as an encouragement to pursue the widest range of options presented by this component of the syllabus.

- A group of songs and incidental music as part of a Music Theatre concept
- Writing for strings – smaller ensembles (quartet/quintet) or larger orchestral forces.
- Popular song: ballad; rock-influenced
- Art song: including the setting of the writings of notable poets
- Pieces conceived cinematically
- Technically inspired compositions, e.g. developing of motifs as a focus
- Genuinely instrumental structures for electronic guitars (lead, rhythm, bass) and kit/percussion
- Programmatic works – extra musical influences include photographs and self-generated or pre-existing stories
- Instrument focus: e.g. organ/accordion/piano/solo guitar
- The Suite – a collection of smaller related pieces, sometimes but not always, dance inspired

Use of Materials and Structure

The most successful compositions were those that involved a high level of preparation, planning and an on-going sense of re-working ideas as the work progressed. To complete a piece of the length required cannot easily be successful with a musical 'stream-of-consciousness' outpouring. In a number of compositions, the lack of ability to generate length through development and careful structuring resulted in pieces that started well but lacked continuing ability to engage and sustain the listener's attention. A small number of compositions seemed to have been generated in a quasi-improvisatory manner at the piano or guitar by the

composer. Whilst a certain level of spontaneous creativity could be credited, the lack of in-depth, thoughtful deliberation over the handling of materials was not correspondingly demonstrated and higher marks could not be gained in this section.

Candidates were successful both in their use of traditional structures and in through-composed or minimalist systems. In the former, clear attention to contrast and continuity was important; in the latter, the carefully controlled unfolding or building of textures and materials was a key issue.

Candidates worked confidently with a range of *harmonic* materials – the language from Glass and Nyman to Romantic/early 20th century pastiche, for example, was sufficiently well understood to produce convincing dialogue. Some jazz-based compositions gave the impression of security within a narrow range of harmonic language but candidates are encouraged to research, study and expand their understanding thereby taking themselves to ‘new places’ harmonically. With greater understanding and critical investigation, candidates will find they are able to present a well-informed but more personal language as they shape their own materials.

Use of Medium and Texture

For many candidates, the choice of medium was clearly related to their own expertise and enthusiasms and in many cases led to successful acoustic recordings or mixed sequenced/live representations of their ideas. The availability of competent string players, for example, played a significant part in the way some candidates approached the challenge of writing for forces readily available to them. Candidates who explored the full potential of an instrument – electric guitar, for example – wrote with imagination: a full spectrum of timbral possibilities could be represented in connection with the structuring and inventive intentions for the piece.

Examiners were impressed with a small number of candidates who wrote successfully for large orchestral forces. Candidates had clearly researched and learned about the orchestration techniques required for their chosen style/genre and handled the forces with insight and maturity.

Most candidates writing for voice included a live representation of their intentions in the recording. If this is not possible, candidates must think carefully about the wisdom of writing for voice, as both the compositional process and the final recording are likely to be impaired by the lack of a singer.

Notation and Presentation

A small number of candidates omitted to include a score with their submissions. Whilst some may make the choice to forgo the available marks for notation, it should be noted that other means of indicating the content of the piece could gain credit. A graphic representation showing structure/harmonic basis/changes of texture /melodic shapes/tempi and rhythmic intentions will gain *some* credit even though the detail of the syllabus requirement for staff notation where appropriate, remains.

Another important area for attention is where candidates produce a recording that deviates from the score. If the performer is not identified as the composer, Examiners must choose to take the score as the definitive documentation of the composing intentions. Candidates must always be clear about the relationship between performer and composer. If a song is submitted with notated accompaniment but no notated vocal line, a written statement as to whether the singer is the composer or not must be included to give clarity for the assessment process.

Candidates were not always entirely clear if their compositions were intended for live performance or intended as genuinely synthesised compositions. This is particularly the case in scores indicating saxophone improvisations, for example, that are ‘played in’ by a composer-pianist with little regard for the idiomatic qualities of the acoustic instrument.

Scores contained a great deal of appropriate detail with regard to tempi and dynamics but a persistent weakness is seen in the lack of regard for articulation marks and bowing indications for string players. An oboe part that has no indication of tongued and slurred directions for the performer betrays not only a lack of understanding of the notational requirements for the instrument but also a fundamental flaw in understanding the detailed ‘attack’ options so crucial for any wind player.

Some scores were printed without appropriate consideration as to size and number of pages. To generate scores with only 1 or 2 bars per page is not good practice for a conductor/Examiner or for a sustainable environment.

Administration

Examiners were grateful for the care with which Centres and candidates presented their work for assessment. In the majority of submissions, discs and work were comprehensively labelled and access to the documentation was straightforward. Most audio presentations were fully accessible and Centres have taken care to use multi-platform software to ensure ease of access for assessors.

Concluding Remarks

Candidates sometimes chose to include explanatory details in the form of a brief commentary, which is often very helpful to the Examiner. Whilst there is no requirement in this regard, candidates may nevertheless find it helpful to exemplify important contextual or explanatory information in this way.

Overall, the level of engagement with music devising at this level has been committed and most encouraging this series. Centres and candidates are to be congratulated for the supportive learning environments that have clearly enabled candidates to work to their potential and realise their creative ideas with the dedicated support of musicians around them.

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<p>Paper 9703/05 Investigation and Report</p>

Key messages

- The 'Investigation' should be carried out over a substantial period of time
- Its primary activity should be listening
- Reading must be assimilated, not merely recounted.

General comments

There was, as usual, a wide range of topics and achievement. In the best Reports, enthusiastic interest in the chosen repertoire shone through: these candidates had clearly been thoroughly engaged over a considerable period of time in their listening, their enquiry and their reflection on their findings. Even at more modest levels, however, almost all the Reports were diligently compiled and carefully presented.

The only constraints on the type of focus are (i) that it should not duplicate material used in Component 1 and (ii) for 9703, that there should be a demonstrable link with whichever of Component 3 or 4 is offered at the same time. Very many of the topics were of a contemporary nature (20th and 21st centuries) with a strong representation of jazz and allied genres. These were often extensive explorations of selected aspects of the development of whichever of these genres was reflected in a Recital programme. Some built on prior knowledge built up over a long period of time, others started from scratch, asking and illustrating what the defining characteristics of 'their' genre are.

Several candidates had presented movements from Romantic concertos in their Recital programme: some investigated the history of the genre, some compared interpretations by well-known performers, some 'analysed'. The danger with the latter type of Investigation was that it did not show much evidence of listening (to other performances of the same concerto, or other concertos) and that the 'analysis' became a performer's tour of the work's technically-difficult moments. In this latter type, too often, the voice of the candidate's instrumental teacher could almost be heard at their elbow. The Report must show evidence of broadening out beyond the item(s) performed in the Recital, and of the candidate's own 'critical thinking' on what has been learned.

As has sometimes been the case before, some of the strongest Investigations had been carried out in conjunction with Component 4. Candidates who chose to focus on composing tended to show much more interest in listening to the music of others and had developed a mature ability to reflect on what they were learning (and acknowledged taking) from it. This was also true in some cases of performers of jazz or popular genres, especially where improvisation or very idiomatic performing techniques were involved.

Most candidates included a CD of short, relevant recorded extracts. In general, these were illuminating and good indicators of the level and extent of listening. In a few cases, a CD of as many as twenty or more exceedingly short extracts, all well-referenced in the text, added little more than the MS quotation of an *incipit* might do. A title was mentioned and so the opening bars had been located (usually from YouTube) and transferred to the CD: the extract was not designed to illustrate a specific musical point, it simply demonstrated 'Look, I found it!'

Yet again, the importance of assimilating what has been read needs to be emphasised. Although most candidates were assiduous in their bibliographic referencing, the actual extent of reliance on a particular text was sometimes not fully acknowledged. Where this became apparent then doubt naturally followed as to the extent of the candidate's actual understanding. Teachers are required to countersign the form in which candidates declare that the Report is their own independent work (some Teachers had not done so). In the course of supervising the candidate's work they needed to have reassured themselves that the candidate had assimilated and understood what they had read and were recounting in their own text. This is particularly necessary where a number of musical works are listed as important to the development of a genre: are these just titles copied from a source, or has the candidate actually sought the music out, listened and learned something about it for themselves?