



Pearson

Examiner's Report
Principal Examiner
Pearson Edexcel GCE AS Level
In Music (8MU0)
Paper 02 Composing

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Introduction

This was the second year of the present specification and centres have mostly adapted very well to those aspects which are different from the previous specification. Few students base both of their compositions on set briefs; most prefer to take advantage of the opportunity to offer one of their pieces as a 'free composition'.

In effect, students who submit a 'free composition' are setting their own brief for that piece. It is important that they describe carefully and fully the style of the piece, and the intended audience and occasion at which it is to be performed. Some students lost marks on the second of the assessment grids because the information that they gave under these headings was too vague to attract marks on the higher levels of that grid. For example, the single word 'concert' is not enough to describe the audience for the performance.

The six set briefs all give in their different ways examples of particular kinds of audience suitable for pieces composed to each brief. Many students did pick up hints from these examples, particularly those who set their own 'Music for Film' brief. It is worth reminding centres that 'free compositions' may be just that and do not have to relate to any of the six areas of study. It is made clear on the Paper on which the set briefs are announced in September that for free compositions candidates may 'draw inspiration or starting points from set works and briefs from previous years, as well as exploring (their) own interests and music from the world around (them)'. It is again emphasised here that, in the case of 'free compositions', whatever the starting point of the piece, clear and suitable information regarding purpose/style and audience/occasion must be given on the front page of the Composing Authentication Sheet.

Assessment Grids

Grid 1 covers the quality of ideas and their development and also structure and coherence.

Grid 2 covers expressive control as demonstrated by the management of moods and effects; it also covers the response to the brief or the intentions as set out by the student in the case of a free composition. The latter point has been dealt with in the Introduction. In the case of pieces composed to a set brief, it is important to read the chosen brief fully and to reflect all aspects of it in the composition. Further attention is drawn to this part of the assessment in the section on the set briefs that follows.

Grid 3 covers the elements of musical composition – melody, rhythm and harmony – and also the scoring of the piece and treatment of the chosen instruments and/or voices. It also covers

the use of texture, particularly variety of texture.

Composition Briefs

1. **Vocal Music:** Among the students who chose this brief, there was a quite a lot of misunderstanding as to what might be suitable for performance at 'a national celebration'. The choice of a poem or other text which is mainly concerned with the self, or one other person, or in some other way is intensely personal, is hardly likely to be suitable for the occasion described. Some submissions under this brief failed to convince in the 'contrasting sections'.
2. **Instrumental Music:** This was one of the most popular briefs and there were some good responses. Again, the full implications of the brief were either not understood or ignored by some candidates. One or two submissions were simply too long for a suitable encore. Some were too serious or even too gloomy for the intended purpose.
Some failed to exploit, as requested, 'the characteristics of all three instruments'.
3. **Music for Film:** This was also a popular brief. Most candidates who chose this were successful in creating music that seemed to suggest 'three contrasted activities'. As has often been stated before in these Reports, the way in which these different sections of music are joined together is an important part of the task. This matter and the overall tonal scheme are both likely to have a considerable impact on the impression of coherence of the work as a whole.
4. **Fusions:** There were not many attempts at this brief, understandably perhaps if it was felt that the task might require quite a lot of research. As it was, those students who submitted compositions under this brief sometimes found difficulty in finding 'two (sufficiently) contrasting styles drawn from the African continent'.
5. **Popular Music and Jazz:** In the year of the Bernstein centenary, it might have been expected that this brief would attract a fair number of students, bearing in mind the obvious model of his score for 'West Side Story'. Though there were some brave attempts at this brief, many of the students who chose it clearly found the combination of 'overture' and 'rock musical' rather daunting and there were not many very successful responses to the brief.
6. **New Directions:** Once again, a topic that was not very popular. However, one or two students who attempted this were among those scoring the highest marks for any of the

compositions. Once again, attention has to be given to the full description of the task, in this case the requirement to 'introduce contemporary music to a school audience'. Those who had thought most about this aspect of the brief found at least some way of recognising it, for example, a clear statement of a tone row, perhaps more than one statement of it, before the texture of the music became too complex for inexperienced listeners to grasp what was happening.

Administration

Once again, thanks are due to centres for mostly smooth administration. There were a few centres where signatures, either of students or teachers or even both, were missing on the Composing Authentication Form.

This is obviously an important requirement and examiners had to contact those places where they were missing.

The recordings were mostly of a good standard but it would be helpful if centres could avoid using either CDs or USB sticks which require complicated programmes to enable any sound to be heard. It is much preferred that USB sticks are new when used for this purpose and not encrypted or needing a password. Most centres sent helpful track lists independently of the students' work – this is very helpful. USBs as well as CDs should be labelled with at the very least the number of the centre. It is also very desirable to pack these in some kind of jiffy bag for safe travel in the post – some CDs were found loose, with no cover, making them very vulnerable in transit.

The compositions were almost all of the required length. However, there were a few cases either of the total length of the two pieces falling short of four and a half minutes, or of an individual piece falling short of two minutes. In these cases, the total mark for the component was 0 (zero) where the overall length was short, or the mark for the single composition was 0 where only one piece was short.