

*We seek to use lively minds, to work hard, to develop all our talents and to grow through sharing, to be the best version of ourselves*



**A LEVEL  
MUSIC  
TRANSITION  
MATERIAL**

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## **Choosing Music A Level**

Music at A level is varied, practical, and intellectually stimulating. GCSE is not always necessarily a prerequisite but being proficient on an instrument is. A minimum of grade 7 on an instrument, including singing is necessary to be able to access maximum marks at A-Level at the end of the course. It is useful to have grade 5 theory, but this can be taken as part of the course.

You will hone numerous skills; listening, analysing, essay writing, and forming arguments, alongside the creative skills Music fosters so successfully. This marriage of skills makes Music A Level a respected and well-rounded qualification. We also aim to deliver the qualification in an engaging and practical manner, through performance and composition tasks which link to the set works.

### **Top tips for the course**

1. Listen to as much music as you can. Vary the genre, explore composers and artists you have not previously listened to.
2. Begin to discover a basic history of music; eras, composers, particular features of genres. Read books and do some research online.
4. It is necessary to be able to read staff notation and have a good understanding of the basics of musical theory. Graded exams are not necessary but are preferred as they are a good way of determining standards. Revise notation and theoretical vocabulary and perform as much as you can!
5. Compose without the fear of doing it 'wrong'! Find a way which works for you: with an instrument, at the piano, using technology, or even paper and pencil!

Every subject at A Level is a step up from the GCSE qualification. Remember that we have two years to cover the course content and consolidate the knowledge and skills required. We structure the set works and course to ensure the transition is as seamless as possible, with good progression from GCSE.

This booklet will give an overview of the whole course, as well as some suggestions of how you can begin to prepare for the transition from GCSE to A level. The tasks and recommendations are merely suggestions but have been designed to give you a complete preparation for the course.

## **What does the course consist of?**

Three components make up Edexcel A Level Music, as shown below:

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<b>Component 1: Performing (*Component code: 9MU0/01)</b>
<b><i>Non-examined assessment: externally assessed</i></b> <b><i>30% of the qualification</i></b> <b><i>60 marks</i></b>
<b>Content overview</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Approaches to performing.</li></ul>
<b>Assessment overview</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A public performance of one or more pieces, performed as a recital.</li><li>• Performance can be playing or singing solo, in an ensemble, improvising, or realising music using music technology.</li><li>• The total performance time across all pieces must be a minimum of 8 minutes.</li></ul>
<b>Component 2: Composing (*Component code: 9MU0/02)</b>
<b><i>Non-examined assessment: externally assessed</i></b> <b><i>30% of the qualification</i></b> <b><i>60 marks</i></b>
<b>Content overview</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Approaches to composing.</li></ul>
<b>Assessment overview</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A total of two compositions, one to a brief set by Pearson and one either free composition or also to a brief.</li><li>• One composition must be from either a list of briefs related to the areas of study, or a free composition, carrying 40 marks for this component. This composition must be at least 4 minutes in duration.</li><li>• One composition must be from a list of briefs assessing compositional technique, carrying 20 marks for this component. This composition must be at least 1 minute in duration, unless the brief specifies a longer minimum duration.</li><li>• The total time across both submissions must be a minimum of 6 minutes.</li></ul>
<b>Component 3: Appraising (*Component code: 9MU0/03)</b>
<b><i>Written examination: 90 minutes</i></b> <b><i>40% of the qualification</i></b> <b><i>100 marks</i></b>
<b>Content overview</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Knowledge and understanding of musical elements, contexts and language.</li><li>• Application of knowledge through the context of six areas of study, each with three set works.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Vocal Music,</li><li>– Instrumental Music,</li><li>– Music for Film,</li><li>– Popular Music and Jazz,</li><li>– Fusions,</li><li>– New Directions.</li></ul></li><li>• Application of knowledge to unfamiliar works.</li></ul>

**\*Public performance means a recording is made of your performance with at least 2 people in the room**

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## **How to prepare for Component 1 (Performance)**

On or after 1<sup>st</sup> March of Year 13, a recital lasting 8 minutes will be recorded. Your performance will be a solo with accompaniment where the music has one and music should be of the highest difficulty you can play accurately, fluently, and expressively. There is a significant mark boost available for performing pieces which are Grade 8 (more difficult) and a slight increase for Grade 7 pieces (standard difficulty). No additional marks are awarded for Grade 6 level pieces.

Performances are recorded and marked by an external Edexcel examiner. The 60 marks available for performance are awarded across three areas:

1. Technical control
2. Accuracy and fluency
3. Expression and interpretation

### **So what can you do?**

- Have regular lessons with a peripatetic teacher
- Practice and perform regularly. Take opportunities to perform in front of an audience.
- Focus as much on expression (dynamics and articulation) as accuracy and fluency. There are a lot of marks for expression alone. Read the music and think HOW the COMPOSER wants their music to be played.
- Choose repertoire which shows you at your best. Pieces do not have to be classical; it's

the level of difficulty and how accurately and expressively you can perform that matters.

- Join school ensembles, especially with the voice/instrument you intend to use for A level performance. Play /sing in ensembles and orchestras and be involved in as much music making as possible.

If you wish to check the level of difficulty for pieces you know or are in the process of learning, Edexcel have made the resource below to help:

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/A%20Level/Music/2016/Specification%20and%20sample%20assessments/GCSE-AS-and-A-level-Music-Difficulty-Levels-Booklet.pdf>

## **How to prepare for Component 2 (Composition)**

Composition is broken down into two sections, shown below:

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<b>Free choice composition (40 marks)</b>	<b>Briefs assessing technique (20 marks)</b>
Briefs relating to areas of study 1. Vocal Music 2. Instrumental Music 3. Music for Film 4. Popular Music and Jazz 5. Fusion 6. New Directions  OR  Free composition	Briefs assessing technique 1. Bach chorale 2. Two-part counterpoint 3. Arrangement 4. Remix

You will complete the Bach Chorale for the Technical Study (20 marks).

Much like GCSE Music, students choose one of a selection of briefs relating to the areas of study **or** students can choose to complete a free composition for which they will need to write their own brief for their chosen audience or purpose (40 marks).

The free choice composition should last a minimum of 4 minutes. The technical study should be at least 1 minute in duration, however, the Bach chorales are given to you so there is no option to change the length of the piece.

The Free choice composition is marked across 3 areas which are:

1. Structure and developing musical material
2. Response to the brief, with a sense for the audience and occasion
3. The control and use of musical elements

### **What can I do to prepare?**

- Compose in a range of styles
- Listen to as much music as you can and note any common features of particular styles
- Try not to overcomplicate it; keep it simple initially
- Create numerous small ideas rather than one large composition for now
- Find a way which works for you: with an instrument, at the piano, using technology, or even paper and pencil!

### **How to prepare for Component 3 (Appraisal)**

Students will develop their listening and appraising skills through the study of music across a variety of styles and genres. The content is grouped into six areas of study, each of which contains three set works, shown below:

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Area of Study	Set Works
Vocal Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ein Feste Burg (movements 1, 2 and 8) - J.S. Bach</li><li>• On Wenlock Edge (nos. 1, 3 and 5) – Vaughan Williams</li></ul>
Instrumental Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Piano Trio in G minor (movement 1) – Clara Schumann</li><li>• Symphonie Fantastique (movement 1) - Berlioz</li></ul>
Music for Film	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Batman Returns (excerpts) - Danny Elfman</li><li>• Psycho (excerpts) - Bernard Herrmann</li></ul>
Popular Music and Jazz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hounds of Love, Cloudbusting, Under Ice, and Dream of Sheep – Kate Bush</li><li>• Back in the Day: Inner State (of Mind), Lady Day (and John Coltrane) and Love and Affection – Courtney Pine</li><li>• Revolver: Here, there, and everywhere, I want to tell you, and Tomorrow never knows – The Beatles</li></ul>
Fusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Estampes Numbers 1 and 2 – Debussy</li><li>• Burn, Breathing Under Water, Easy – Anoushka Shankar</li></ul>
New Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Petals – Kaija Saariaho</li><li>• The Rite of Spring (excerpts) - Stravinsky</li></ul>

Short form listening questions and a 30-mark essay question will be based on these set works in the appraisal exam at the end of Year 13. We aim to perform the set works or complete short compositions based on similar techniques to make learning the analysis engaging and practical.

### **Preparing for Appraisal**

- Listen to as much music as you can of a variety of genres
- As you listen, aim to do some basic analysis: time signature, tonality, instrumentation, melodic features etc.
- Create an extended piece of writing on some of your favourite pieces of music, creating an argument and evidencing it with musical features; E.g. The Beatles' use of sonority was groundbreaking or John Williams' melodic writing for the Star Wars films has influenced film music since its creation.

### **Listening, performing, and composing**

Now is a good time to make use of the many resources available online. Whether related to the set works or not, it is worth familiarising yourself with as much music as you can. Here are some suggestions:

Full performance of Mozart's 'The Magic Flute

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02u4Jf\\_aNPI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02u4Jf_aNPI)

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Ted talks on many different areas of music

<https://www.ted.com/playlists/browse?topics=music>

### **BBC Radio 3**

A variety of programmes and radio shows across numerous genres. Composer of the week is also useful.

Programmes: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/schedules/p00fzl8t>

Composer of the week:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02nrvd3/episodes/downloads>

San Francisco Symphony Orchestra

Podcasts and information on a variety of composers

<https://www.sfsymphony.org/Discover-the-Music/Listen-to-Podcasts/Program-Notes-Series>

### **Tasks**

#### **Performance**

1. Finesse a piece you know how to play well. Focus on **expression and interpretation**
2. Start to learn a new piece with an emphasis on **accuracy and fluency**
3. Perform a piece you know well and see how **stylistic** you can make it; know the features of the style in which you are playing
4. **Record yourself** performing a piece you are familiar with. **Analyse** it critically with what you did well and what you need to improve
5. Listen to a performance online / go to see a concert. What makes a successful performance other than accuracy and fluency?

#### **Composition**

1. Write a composition using one pitch. For example, only use B but you are permitted to use different octaves.
2. Take the following chord progression. Make the triads more complex by adding notes (e.g. sus4, 7<sup>th</sup>) and create a rhythm to play the chords to. Am G C F
3. Create a 4 bar leitmotif on any instrument to represent a character from Greek / Roman mythology (Zeus, Hera, Hephaestus etc). Write a short paragraph explaining the musical features used to depict that character
4. Explore various ranges, techniques, and characteristics of your first instrument. Can you create something interesting and unusual to exploit these characteristics of your instrument?
5. Read the following blog:  
<https://manwaringmusic.blog/2020/04/02/composing-at-home-1/>

### **Appraisal**

1. Familiarise yourself with the **MADTSHIRTS** mnemonic for A level:

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**MELODY, ARTICULATION, DYNAMICS, TEMPO, TEXTURE, TONALITY, STRUCTURE, HARMONY, INSTRUMENTATION, RHYTHM, TONALITY, SONORITY.**

2. **Write as many keywords** / features of those areas as you can. E.g. Rhythm may include syncopation, andante, hemiola.
3. Choose a composer, a piece by that composer and listen to it. Why do you enjoy this piece? What musical features make it so satisfying? Give the composer, title of the piece, era of music e.g. Baroque.
4. Argue the following question: ***“What’s the point of having music in a film?”*** Provide relevant musical examples of film music and come to some conclusion at the end of your writing. Aim to write a side of A4.
5. Stockhausen said all music which is tonal (i.e. in a particular major or minor key) has already been written and that he would end up merely repeating music which had already been composed. To what extent do you think all tonal music has already been composed and we are merely repeating what already exists?
6. ‘Popular music deserves more recognition and is equal to Classical music’.  
Discuss and  
provide relevant musical examples.

### **Reading**

The Story of Music by Howard Goodall

A History of Western Music by Grout

ABRSM: The AB Guide to Music Theory, Part 1 or <https://www.musictheory.net/lessons>

I will provide you with all of the resources you will need and we will be using the following to help with our studies:

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