

2015 VCE Music Investigation performance examination report

General comments

In 2015, students presented a diverse array of performances across a range of music styles, genres and traditions. Most students had selected from a prescribed list a work that provided a solid basis for their investigation and presented programs that demonstrated both depth and breadth of understanding about their chosen Focus Area. Students are advised to articulate their Performance Focus, that is, the aspects of the broader Focus Area they will demonstrate in their performance, within the Focus Statement. Additional information that is not directly relevant to performance should be kept to a minimum in the Focus Statement.

In 2015, some students performed only three works, presented works that were too similar in style, demonstrated only a limited number of performance techniques or did not select a relevant work from a current prescribed list.

Students should view the Focus Statement as an opportunity to articulate the core performance characteristics/features that arose through the performance studies undertaken during the year. The Focus Statement together with the selected program should allow the student to demonstrate how a sophisticated use of performance techniques can be used as evidence of a deep stylistic understanding in performance.

In some instances, where more than one student was being assessed within a group, programs were short. Teachers and students (group and solo) are advised to check examination times for soloists and groups in the study design and examination specifications.

The 'structure and composition of groups' as articulated in the examination specifications should be carefully considered. Groups may not include more than one non-student performer within an ensemble (the non-student may change from item to item within the broader program but only one non-student can be present in any one item). Teachers and students are reminded that support performers (students/non-students) used for an assessment can change for each item if required, particularly if this presents the assessed student in the best possible light. A group can comprise between two performers (both must be students) and eight performers (only one non-student).

In both solo and group settings accompanists and support performers must leave the examination room when they are not required for a particular item. They may return to the examination room when/if required later in the program.

In the solo setting, students are advised to consider that a variety of accompaniment formats/options can be used within the one examination. For example, several solo contemporary voice students delivered very effective programs where a combination of piano, guitar and backing tracks were used as a source of accompaniment at various times throughout the presented program.

It was noted that some students, in particular electric guitarists (group and solo), presented without sufficient equipment to ensure the broader program could be presented in an efficient and

considered manner. In these instances guitar and/or microphone leads were often too short or unreliable. A lack of extension cords was also noted.

When planning a performance program based on several students seeking to be assessed within a single group, teachers are advised to reconsider the program length should one or more students elect to withdraw from the study/examination.

In the solo examination setting, assessors identified that some students presented very short programs, sometimes only about half of the maximum 25 minutes available. Students should use as much of the time available to showcase, or highlight, all performance work undertaken throughout the year. Students are advised to plan a program that allows them to demonstrate understanding of the Focus Area and to demonstrate a broad and sophisticated range of performance techniques.

Some students appeared unprepared in terms of being able to set up their equipment within the stipulated time. It is recommended that students rehearse the efficiency and accuracy of their set-up prior to the day of the examination. Time cannot be extended for set-up on the day of the examination. Students should set up and sound-check as much of their equipment as possible in the warm-up room. For solo examinations five minutes of set-up time is provided. If a given investigation topic requires additional set-up time special permission must be sought from the VCAA prior to the day of the assessment. Set-up time extensions cannot be organised on the day of the assessment.

As stated in the examination specifications, 'On entry into the examination room, students should determine the best position for themselves and their equipment'. Students should not presume that the prior placement of a piano or music stand(s) indicates the best place.

Where more than one student is performing on the same instrument (perhaps in a clarinet quintet or a rock band with three guitars) the work of each student must be clearly discernible. Students should ensure that they plan their performance so that the contribution of each assessed performer is evident at all times. This could involve arrangement of the musical parts, or adjusting seating or the height of music stands.

Further, a non-student, non-assessed performer must comply with the examination conditions regarding their contribution to the performance.

Some performances were too loud. As stated in the examination specifications, 'The sound volume during the examination must be within the limits prescribed by health and safety regulations as "safe". The examination may be stopped if the assessors deem the volume of the performance to be at dangerous levels.' Other performances were too soft. In these instances, typically in the solo context, backing tracks were so soft that they prevented the student from accurately and/or authentically demonstrating the stylistic content fundamental to the work(s) being presented.

All students are reminded that any mixing of sound, triggering of samples/loops, etc., that directly manipulate the performance of the assessed performer can only be done by the assessed performer. Non-assessed performers are only permitted to manipulate the sound of their own instrument.

A clear distinction exists with regard to students performing on more than one instrument within the group and solo performance examinations. In solo, the student must nominate a solo instrument. Students are advised not to accompany themselves when presenting as a solo student. No provision exists whereby the recognition of performance skills, presented on an accompanying instrument, can be acknowledged by assessors.

Solo students who select their prescribed work from the Voice – Classical list may not use a microphone. Solo students who select their prescribed work from the Voice – Contemporary Popular may, but are not required to, use a microphone.

In contrast to the solo examination setting, group performance students are assessed on every aspect of performance shown/evidenced.

Teachers and students are advised that where arrangements beyond those listed in the VCAA guidelines are required to facilitate a student's performance, permission is required prior to the day of the assessment. Where permission has not been granted prior to the day of assessment a penalty may be imposed.

Specific information

Assessment criteria

Key terms to consider across the broader assessment criteria include 'skill in' and 'range of'. Teachers and students are advised to highlight these terms when considering the criteria. For each technique or convention demonstrated in the program students should also consider its relevance to the selected Focus Area and depth of sophisticated understanding about the Focus Area that will be demonstrated.

Students and teachers are strongly advised to consider each examination criterion when preparing for the assessment. While a student may achieve a high score in one criterion this in no way automatically predicts similar scores across other criteria. The performance evidence demonstrated must support individual scores (out of ten) achieved across the assessment criteria.

Students and teachers should recognise that while almost every style, genre or musical period may have the potential to facilitate access to the highest scores, not every program selected within those styles, genres or periods will. The program selection continues to be one of the most significant factors in preventing students from achieving higher scores.

Criterion 1 – Compliance with the requirements of the task

In 2015 most students complied with the requirement to select a prescribed work and to submit a Focus Statement. When planning and preparing for the examination students and teachers should carefully consider the skill level that can be demonstrated for each technique that will be demonstrated in the performance. Where parts/scores, etc., appeared to have been purposefully simplified from the original full marks could not be awarded for criterion 1.

Criterion 2 – Skill in performing accurately and with clarity

A significant level of variation in terms of ability was demonstrated within this criterion. Some students presented material that contained a very high level of technical complexity, which was masterfully performed. Others selected less demanding material that was also performed very well.

Criterion 3 – Skill in performing a range of techniques with control and fluency

Central to achieving high scores for this criterion was the selection of works in the performance program. Excessive repetition within a given work or the selection of repertoire that was too similar in style often restricted access to higher scores. Students who scored highly had clearly considered a program that contained a wide range of identifiable performance techniques, which were performed to a high standard of control and fluency.

Criterion 4 – Skill in producing a range of expressive tonal qualities relevant to the Focus Area

Many students who scored highly on this criterion were able to demonstrate sophisticated manipulation of tone, even within sections a single work. Many students seemed to have ignored this criterion in planning their interpretations.

Criterion 5 – Skill in articulating and phrasing

A key term to consider here is sophistication. This criterion deals with ‘communication beyond the source material ... by using appropriate nuances and performance techniques’. Those who scored the highest marks for this criterion were able to use articulation and phrasing to highlight the stylistic subtleties contained in the repertoire while masking the technical difficulties that may have been connected/associated with delivery.

Criterion 6 – Skill in differentiating the structures and textures within each work of the Focus Area

Some students missed performance opportunities in relation to this criterion. In its simplest application this criterion relates to the practical demonstration of how form, or repeated sections within a work, can be interpreted in performance. Some students appeared to simply repeat sections without any consideration of appropriate or necessary variation; for example, through ornamentation or embellishment, dynamics or articulation.

Criterion 7 – Skill in differentiating the musical lines in the selected works as appropriate to the Focus Area

Students were required to demonstrate, or evidence, the capacity to identify (and interpret accordingly) the varied significance/importance of musical lines contained in the repertoire. Where the student simply ‘played the notes’, even to a high level of technical complexity, full marks were not awarded.

In many respects this criterion provides the performance opportunity to demonstrate a practical understanding of compositional techniques and how they can be treated/interpreted in performance.

Criterion 8 – Skill in presenting an interpretation of the works that is informed by historical and/or contemporary practices and conventions relevant to the Focus Area

This criterion provides an opportunity for students to highlight their deep connection to the repertoire being presented, from a practical performance-based perspective. Attention to detail with regard to evidencing how a work would/has been performed by an expert/professional musician comes into play here. Students are advised to spend as much time as possible on focused listening to professional recordings of works relevant to their Focus Area.

Criterion 9 – Skill in performing with musicality through creativity and individuality

Students who demonstrated the highest levels of creativity and individuality were often, but not always, those who were able to demonstrate mastery of technical demands of the repertoire they were performing. The ability to consider repertoire beyond its inherent technical demands provides a platform, or springboard, from which students who achieved the highest marks for this criterion were able to impose their own level of individuality and subsequent creativity.

When levels of creativity were significantly restricted students typically appeared either not adequately prepared for the examination or were lacking in terms of the technical requirements fundamental to the repertoire being presented for assessment.

Criterion 10 – Skill in demonstrating how the musical works in the program are representative of the Focus Area

The key term here is relevance. While the Focus Statement itself is not formally assessed, the relevance of the selected program to the Focus Statement is assessed. While individual repertoire was sometimes performed to a very high level, the connection between the program and the Focus Statement was often tenuous. On occasion repertoire appeared forced into a program.

Criterion 11 – Skill in the presentation of a cohesive program relevant to the Focus Area

Several students had scripted their presentation to the point that the examination was disjointed and did not flow. Teachers and students should bear in mind that there is no requirement to introduce items or add other aspects of stagecraft. The type, sophistication, relevance and execution of all aspects of the performance presented for assessment are scored against the ten-point scale.