

2018 VCE Music Style and Composition: Externally assessed Task (EAT) examination report

General comments

The 2018 Externally assessed Task (EAT) had two sections covering Unit 3 and Unit 4 respectively. Both sections were compulsory and students were required to follow the guidelines published by the VCAA. While there was a spread of marks across the possible scoring range, a majority of the work was in the middle to upper range. Overall the work submitted for Unit 3 was sound, and Unit 4 Music Works showed appropriate understanding of the task. Some high-scoring submissions showed deep musical understanding and creative approaches. Other examples lacked adherence to the guidelines, which specify imaginative development of musical ideas through stylistically appropriate, imaginative and controlled use of musical devices and elements. It is recommended that teachers and students carefully read the study design, assessment criteria and VCAA supporting materials.

Most materials were labelled appropriately, but schools are reminded that all submitted work must be de-identified. While not compulsory, live recordings of both exercises and music works are encouraged wherever possible as they show the playability of the music.

Specific information

Unit 3

Creative exercises

The standard of exercises was sound, with many students writing creative and lively responses that showed a sense of enjoyment in their musical responses. A majority of submissions were in the middle to upper marking range, showing clear and relevant links to studied works.

Most submissions adhered to the time limit/bar length. The required compositional devices of variation, contrast and repetition were mostly manipulated appropriately. At the highest level the exercises were sophisticated miniature works or compositions, and in general the exercises used musical elements in conjunction with compositional devices. This appeared to have a flow-through effect to a generally sound standard of composition in Unit 4. There were submissions where the connections were tenuous and the exercises seemed like independent pieces rather than responses to studied works. In some cases the inclusion of compositional devices was reflective of the stimulus work rather than directly linked to it.

It is recommended that there be one clear compositional device used in each exercise, even if others are included. The exploration of the wide range of possible stimulus works for Unit 3, including works by Australian female composers, is encouraged.

Documentation

Documentation for Unit 3 was mainly in the upper–middle range. The highest-scoring responses included clear links to studied works in conjunction with the specified compositional devices and treatment of musical elements. Much of the documentation recognised the importance of clearly connecting the studied work to the composed work from a variety of points of view. Other submissions omitted the name and composer of the stimulus work and so connections between the studied music and the creative exercise were difficult to ascertain. Most of the documentation was within the specified word limit.

It is recommended that large, unexplained sections of scores are not superimposed into the documentation. It is the responsibility of the student to explain their work fully. Harmonic skills development could also be addressed as this was often not strong in the Unit 3 exercises. The word count should include annotations.

Unit 4

Original music work

A range of musical styles and genres were presented and the marks were spread across the full range of scores, with few scoring in the low range. The characteristics of the highest-scoring examples were: clever and innovative manipulation of the musical elements and inclusion of the compositional devices repetition, variation and contrast in novel and creative ways. The low-scoring compositions were limited in the development of musical material, showed limitations in structural understanding and lacked exploration of the musical elements.

Orchestration skills and idiomatic understanding varied widely. Some submissions relied on MIDI renditions without demonstrating any real idiomatic understanding of instrument/voice capabilities or how they blended, while others were excellent. It is recommended that the size of the ensemble being composed for is monitored, to ensure that students have the necessary knowledge to write for the selected forces. Structure was an area for improvement, although some pieces were shaped well.

It is important to note that while some of the works presented were beautiful pieces of music, they did not always fulfil the specified requirements of the task in terms of variation, contrast and repetition. Students need to be aware that all three of these compositional devices should be explored in depth to achieve the highest marks. This is a task with parameters, not just an exercise in composition.

Many compositions were recorded live, although this is not a requirement. Live recordings are encouraged whenever possible as they demonstrate the playability of the works and give a more realistic representation of the composer's intentions. However, this is not always possible or appropriate. Sequenced recordings were mainly well balanced and provided clear renditions of music works.

Documentation

A majority of the documentation for the Unit 4 music work was presented appropriately, and at the highest level there were clear explanations of compositional processes in conjunction with musical devices. In the highest-scoring submissions, detailed communication of compositional intent and processes, with links to stimulus material and compositional crafting, were explained. More generally, specific music language was present to describe the manipulation of repetition, contrast and variation in the compositional process, and stages of development were outlined. More detail, including specific acknowledgment of key changes identifying the actual key, would have strengthened a number of documentation submissions.

Overall, explanations of how and why the musical elements were manipulated and the reasons for this were clear, but at times narrative and metaphor overrode musical explanations. Although stories are often important in the compositional process, they need to be wound together with compositional processes. Students should proofread documentation prior to submission.

Overall notation

Notation ranged from non-existent to very good. Generally it was clear and appropriate; however, finer detail was missing, including dynamics and tempo markings, incorrect rhythmic notation, inaccurate note beaming, inaccurate ties and slurs. In some scores there were no clefs, time signatures or key signatures; however, some scores were presented at a publishable standard. Attention to detail is recommended, and students need to be encouraged to explore and develop their musical literacy skills and conduct manual checking of electronically generated scores.

Score order was not always thought through. The order of instruments in non-standard scores needs to be logical, with melodic lines at the top of the score. Some electronic scores were problematic. While some showed the detail of the composition and were appropriate, others were simply screenshots of MIDI processes and this did not fulfil the requirements of the EAT. Screenshots of a soundwave are also inadequate as notation. It is recommended that notation for electronic score include screenshots and explanations of the processes that create the sounds being heard.

It is important to note that notation is style-specific, and so soundwave-type graphic scores for pieces that would usually be presented as traditional notation do not fulfil the requirements as outlined in the 'expected qualities' section of the assessment criteria.