

2019 VCE Music Style and Composition: Externally assessed Task (EAT) examination report

General comments

The 2019 Externally Assessed Task (EAT) had two sections, covering Unit 3 and Unit 4. 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, the majority of the work was in the middle band. Overall the work submitted for Unit 3 was of a competent standard, and Unit 4 music works showed a sound understanding of the required task. Although some works showed limited exploitation of compositional devices and musical elements, most of the Unit 4 work was competent and thorough. Few complex examples were submitted for Unit 4.

Some high-scoring submissions demonstrated creative, sophisticated and functional use of compositional devices, while those in the lower mark range showed limited treatment and development of the musical work. There was a lack of functional application in some works, which did not allow for the idiosyncrasies of specific instruments. This may have been avoided by appropriate instrument selection early in the unit. In addition to carefully reading the study design, teachers and students should familiarise themselves with the assessment criteria and performance descriptors.

Most materials were labelled appropriately, but schools are reminded that all submitted work must be de-identified. Teachers are also encouraged to note if the recording of the work is in Sibelius or a similar program, and that it should be uploaded to the music notation file. While not compulsory, live recordings of both the exercises and music works are encouraged wherever practicable, as they demonstrate a higher degree of sophistication and playability of the work.

Electronic music continues to be popular and accounts for an increasing proportion of the cohort. Electronic music is very welcome; however, students should clearly outline the creative process and purpose of the composition. To access the highest marks, computer-generated music needs explicit, well-explained documentation outlining the creative process. A large percentage of the cohort had difficulty with music notation in this medium; however, some students dealt with this very successfully by having a table and/or a clear outline of what the graphics represented and the direction of the composition. A screenshot or photo of an amplifier button does not meet the required EAT standards; nor does it provide the necessary information to enable assessors to follow the music and creative process. Graphic notation should allow for the re-creation of the music work by providing a clear indication of how to replay the work. While there were some detailed formats representing how to recreate the work, many of the electronic music submissions did not provide adequate notation or correlation to the musical work.

Documentation

Although most of the documentation for both units was within the specified word limit, students should avoid submitting large unexplained screenshots or random music bar pictures, as these often have no bearing on or relation to the task. The word count should include annotated scores for both units.

Specific information

Unit 3

Creative exercises

The overall standard of exercises was competent, with many students demonstrating a clear connection to the studied work and understanding of the stimulus material.

While most works submitted scored in the middle marking range, most students demonstrated a clear link to the musical stimulus. Most students adhered to the length/time limit outlined in the study design.

All students displayed in their work a compositional device of repetition, variation and or contrast. At the highest level the students' exercises demonstrated imaginative and complex manipulation of the elements and development of musical ideas. A small number of students, however, did not connect their work to the stimulus material at all. Students are encouraged to clearly identify which compositional device they have chosen to work with (all three may be represented) and how it links to their works.

A wide variety of female and male Australian composers and genres were represented.

Documentation

Documentation for Unit 3 was mostly clear, explaining the creative process and link to the studied work.

The highest-scoring responses provided insightful information that described the relationship between the studied music and creative work. A small number of submissions did not identify the composer or work studied, making it difficult to ascertain a clear connection between the creative exercise and studied work.

Unit 4

Original music work

A range of musical styles and genres was presented, and the marks were spread across the full range of scores, with few students scoring in the lower range. The higher-scoring musical works demonstrated innovative manipulation of the musical elements and thorough use of the compositional devices of repetition, variation and contrast. The lower-scoring works did not develop musical ideas, were brief or did not meet the required criteria.

Orchestration skills and idiomatic understanding varied widely. Some submissions relied on MIDI renditions without demonstrating any real idiomatic understanding of instrument/voice capabilities,

but a small number of composers demonstrated an understanding of exactly what they wanted to achieve and presented their ideas successfully in their work. 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 instruments. In some of the higher-scoring works, the meter was well manipulated and woven into the structure of the piece, adding to the sophistication of the work.

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 practicable or appropriate. Sequenced recordings were mainly well balanced and provided clear renditions of music works.

Documentation

Students need to clearly outline the creative process in their documentation and it should be reflective of the musical work. Most of the documentation for Unit 4 was thorough, providing information on the work from initial intention, and the decisions made during the process to final realisation. Students who scored highly used sophisticated language and terminology to present insightful description of the creative process and detailed explanation of decisions made throughout the stages of the creative process.

Notation

Notation ranged from non-existent to very good. Generally, it was good and representative of the musical work. Students who scored highly showed greater detail on their scores such as dynamics, tempo markings, bowing and pedal techniques, ties, slurs and phrase markings.

In some scores time signatures were missing, key signatures had multiple bars at the end or within a section of the work, and no accurate information was provided on how to perform the work or the intended instrument. Students are reminded to allow time for score cleaning and proofreading before submitting the work.

For electronic scores, a clear, detailed graphic notation score or soundscape would assist in the accurate reproduction of the work. Screenshots of a soundwave are inadequate as notation and do not fulfil EAT requirements. 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, also do not fulfil the requirements as outlined in the 'expected qualities' section of the assessment criteria.