



2010 Music Group Performance GA 3: Aural and written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

This was the last year of the current study design. Sample questions for the 2011 Music Performance Aural and Written examination are available on the VCAA website.

The format of the 2010 paper was consistent with the guidelines in the sample examination material on the VCAA website on the Music Performance study page and comprised 105 marks across three sections. Students had to answer 10 of the 11 questions, with the option of responding to either Question 10 (part writing) or Question 11 (improvisation) in Section C. More students attempted the entire paper but the standard of results decreased to the median score of 47 per cent. As in previous years, many students were unable to achieve equal results across all areas of the examination. However, this year there was a general lack of music literacy and lack of an understanding of music terms, including the specified elements of music. These concepts and skills are also included in the 2011 study and should be taught in a systematic and developmental manner across Units 1–4.

Students should be advised to use a sharp pencil for Section A, especially for melody and rhythm transcription tasks, as illegible responses cannot be awarded marks.

Examination technique

Students are advised to use reading time to carefully read each question and to begin considering possible responses, formats or key issues. Using blank pages for further planning of responses is also a useful technique. In Sections B and C, many students gave responses that were either generic or relevant to questions from previous years' papers. Such responses did not answer the questions on this examination. It is strongly recommended that students do not attempt to guess what will be on the examination or prepare responses beforehand and then attempt to reshape them for the questions asked. This is very important, as the study design has changed for 2011.

Many students planned their responses through a series of key words linked by arrows, which helped jog their memory and keep them 'on task'. Many of the high-achieving students continued to highlight (and/or underline) exactly what was required in each part of each question so that, once they had read and analysed the question, they were able to use these highlighted/underlined components to present a succinct, salient, focused and well-organised response. Most of the stronger students used dot points and/or tables for most responses, which assisted in presenting clear, deliberate and cogent comments and arguments.

Students and teachers need to be aware that the students' choice of instrument or voice brings different experiences and perspectives. These varied experiences should be considered by teachers in planning teaching activities. Please note that music notation in only the treble and bass clef is required from 2011. Tablature and the alto clef are no longer alternatives for music notation questions.

The most common areas of weakness included:

- a lack of basic theoretical knowledge, especially regarding the correct names and numbers for intervals and the correct terminology used for chords
- limited aural skills, including difficulty identifying tonalities (scale forms) and intervals within a melodic and scalar context, notating rhythms (on their own) and melodies (pitch and rhythm), both from within score-based settings (Questions 3 and 6)
- limited ability to use the other (not-to-be-transcribed) parts of the printed score in transcription questions (Questions 3 and 6) to assist with the transcription task
- confusion about the structure of chords with sevenths and fourths, and primary triads
- confusion about or misunderstanding of basic terminology that was taken directly from the study design
- not using the reading time wisely, so that questions were not thoroughly understood and responses were not focused appropriately.

Other concerns included the following.

- Some students did not attempt to answer some of the questions, especially in Section A and Section C.
- Many students wrote prose answers that were very hard to decipher, often due to illegible writing, extremely blunt pencils or poor spelling and grammar. Students should write in a way that communicates their response clearly.
- Confusion or lack of awareness about the meanings of musical terms arose frequently. 'Melody', 'expressive devices', 'phrasing', 'rhythmic characteristics', 'texture' and 'harmony', 'articulation' and 'dynamics', were



often dealt with inappropriately or incorrectly. Many students approached issues of ‘dynamics’ from the perspective of ‘dynamism’, ‘liveliness’ or ‘energy’ rather than relative volume and/or volume-based relationships. Most students who wrote about ‘expressive devices’ placed them within the context of the use of electronic effects/audio processing devices, which was not correct. Limited understanding of ‘texture’ as a musical characteristic was evident in the majority of instances where students chose to write about textural differences. It was clear that these terms and concepts, which are taken directly from the study design (see Appendix, Music performance, pages 99–102), need to be defined and discussed, and used more regularly in teaching and learning programs.

- Many students did not appear to know the characteristics, requirements or components of different prose-based response formats. For example, they did not understand the different requirements of ‘identify’, ‘describe’, ‘evaluate’ and ‘discuss’. Only ‘identify’ allows students to simply name or make a list. ‘Evaluate’ requires a degree of analysis and ‘describe’ requires the demonstration of knowledge, especially with respect to salient characteristics, components or elements. ‘Discuss’ requires the application of knowledge to demonstrate understanding, demanding a higher level of insight. The relative marks available for each response type should provide an indication of the level of depth and breadth necessary for a high-scoring answer.

Advice

- Students need to be aware of the requirements of various question types (see above) and should practise answering questions of each type.
- Students should use the 15 minutes of reading time productively and ensure that they have read each question carefully.
- Students should write as clearly as possible, especially when notating on a staff. When notating music, students should use a pencil and eraser rather than a pen.
- When undertaking transcription questions, students are advised to do their rough work on the blank manuscript paper provided and then transfer a neat, legible copy of their final response to the space provided for the answer.
- If students do their rough rhythmic transcription work using ‘stick’ notation (stems and flags without note heads) or slashes across lines representing rhythmic subdivisions/segments of each beat, they need to be very careful when they transfer their work across from the ‘rough work’ page to the answer space. Often, students’ work was more accurate on the ‘rough work’ manuscript page than on the staves provided for the answer. It is not advisable for students to write their final answer using ‘stick’ notation unless it is perfectly clear at all times. Dotted rhythms tend to become muddled with this style of notation.
- Where possible, students should have access to appropriate aural training software and a computer music sequencer, especially to program rhythms, chords and chord progressions for aural training.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

For each question, an answer (or answers) is provided. In some cases, the answer given is not the only answer that could have been awarded marks.

The lists of possible responses or characteristics are examples of salient points and/or aspects of the question’s components.

Section A – Music language and aural perception

Part 1: Intervals, scales and melody

Question 1 – Music language – Scales and intervals

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	33	1	13	6	11	4	12	2	3	16	3.6

- D Mixolydian – D – E – F#- G –A- B- C- D (Major 2nd, Major 2nd, minor 2nd, Major 2nd, Major 2nd minor 2nd Major 2nd)
- Eb Major pentatonic – Eb – F – G – Bb – C – Eb (Major 2nd, Major 2nd, minor 3rd, Major 2nd, minor 3rd)B Melodic minor (ascending and descending) B – C#- D – E – F# – G# – A# – B – A natural – G natural – F# – E – D – C# - B (Major 2nd, minor 2nd, Major 2nd, Major 2nd, Major 2nd, Major 2nd, minor 2nd, Major 2nd, Major 2nd, minor 2nd, Major 2nd, Major 2nd, minor 2nd, Major 2nd)

Most students found this question very difficult. Many students attempted the scales using the treble clef. Most students either did not include the intervals or wrote them incorrectly.

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Question 2 – Aural perception – Recognition of intervals and scales

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	58	26	16	0.6

First interval: minor 7th

Last interval: Major 6th

Many students were unable to identify either interval correctly. Quite a few responses heard the intervals the other way, Major 6th and minor 7th. Students need to continue to listen and identify both isolated intervals and within a melodic context.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	65	1	35	0.7

Tonality: Dorian mode (major scale with a flattened 3rd and flattened 7th)

Many students did not identify this Dorian mode and instead identified it as Mixolydian mode.

Question 3 – Aural perception – Melodic transcription

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	18	28	17	13	8	7	5	5	2.3

Trumpet in C

Piano

Guitar (as written)

Electric bass

The overall standard of responses demonstrated that students should practise with melodic transcription in four-part contexts on a regular basis as they prepare for the examination. Many students clearly did not understand the relationships between the melody and harmony provided (including chord types).

Students did not use the notes of the chords given to them, for example:

- bar 2, beat 2 – A and B (acting as an passing notes)
- bar 2, beat 3 – D and B, notes taken from the E minor 7 chord
- bar 2, beat 4 – E and D (E is a note of the chord, D is a passing note)
- bar 3, beat 1 – C and B (C is a note from the bass given, B is a note of the chord given)
- bar 3, beat 2 – A, G, B as a triplet (was difficult both rhythmically and melodically)

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- bar 3, beat 3 – A, B, A as a quaver follower by two semiquavers
- bar 3, beat 4 – F# and D, both notes of the B minor chord.

Students and teachers are advised to spend time on activities that develop students' skill and understanding regarding the relationship between the underlying harmony and a melody. This knowledge will assist students to take an informed approach to responding to discriminating questions such as this one.

Part 2: Harmony

Question 4 – Music language – Structure of chords

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	19	13	14	20	33	2.4

- Chord 1: F#, A, C# (minor triad)
- Chord 2: D, F#, A# (Augmented triad)
- Chord 3: E, G, Bb, D (half diminished (minor 7/flat5) chord)
- Chord 4: B-flat, E-flat, F (suspended 4)

Students needed to have a good understanding of chord types, including sevenths, in order to answer this question successfully.

Some of the common errors displayed in student responses included:

- not knowing the fundamentals of how chords are constructed, what comprises them and how they differ
- placing accidentals on lines and spaces of other notes
- confusing the suspended 4 chord by using 1, 3, 4 instead of 1, 4, 5
- writing chords in every block of both clefs, which were often contradictory.

Question 5 – Aural perception – Recognition of a chord progression

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	10	12	6	4	1	23	2	42	4.6

Many students were able to identify chords from this chord progression correctly. Generally, the exception was the V7 chord.



Part 3: Rhythm

Question 6 – Aural perception – Transcription of rhythms

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	11	14	14	11	10	10	8	7	16	3.9

The musical score consists of four staves: Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in C, and Bassoon. The key signature is two flats (Bb, Eb) and the time signature is 4/4. The Flute part has a triplet in bar 3. The Oboe part has a triplet in bar 2. The Clarinet in C part has a syncopated rhythm in bar 3. The Bassoon part has a triplet in bar 3. The score is divided into two systems of two staves each.

Students are advised to practise using information from given parts to respond to questions such as this. The first beat of bar 3 was often mistaken by the triplet in the oboe part. Some students lost track of the pulse, particularly in bar 2 beat 3. In bar 3, many students missed the syncopation, thus placing the next beats incorrectly. As this will continue to be assessed in the new study design, students must improve their notation skills. Also, many students were unable to group rhythms correctly.

Part 4: Characteristics of a pre-recorded work

Question 7 – Aural perception and evaluation of the characteristics of a pre-recorded work

Question 7a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	16	23	25	18	15	2.9

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Many students began their response with the rhythm, or the articulation, or the tone colour, thus having a prepared answer for any excerpt but not answering this particular question. Students needed a clear understanding of what melody is to respond to this question successfully.

When time is a factor in completing the question, students should not repeat the question in their responses. They need to make sure their answers are easy to read and understand. Following are some possible points that students could have made.

First section:

- melody is diatonic in major key
- the melodic range is a 9th
- most phrases are short and organised as an ascending sequence
- the melody in this section ascends for about four bars
- each short phrase starts with an ascending contour
- each short phrase ends with a descending triadic contour.

Second section:

- repeated notes at the beginning of each phrase
- more pitch repetition in this section than in section one
- the tessitura is higher than in section one
- the melodic range is now a 10th, which is slightly higher than in section one.

Question 7b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	5	16	24	23	18	8	6	2.8

Students were asked to describe the rhythmic characteristics of the two sections. Students who used a table presented responses that were clearer and easier to read. Following are some possible points students could have made about the two excerpts.

First section:

- nine-bar phrase
- extensive use of quavers in the hi-hats, bass, keyboards and vocals
- not much use of syncopation, apart from the entries
- snare drum playing on beats 2 and 4 (providing a backbeat) with fills in bars 4 and 9
- use of harmonic rhythm, mostly 2 chord changes per bar.

Second section:

- six-and-a-half-bar phrase
- tempo is the same in both sections; however, the first section is busier, with many instruments playing quavers
- phrase entries likewise on off beats including simple syncopations
- this section is comparatively sparse with a stronger emphasis on each crotchet beat
- piano playing strong crotchet pulses in the right hand nearly all the way through
- bass and left-hand piano playing syncopated unison riff/*ostinato* (three times) short
- melodic line made up of mostly quavers
- phrase lengths are comparatively short.

Question 7c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	3	6	12	18	15	15	13	8	6	4	4.4

The following are possible responses from the list provided.

Articulation

- the melody consists of mostly staccato notes throughout
- accented unison staccato notes in rhythm section in the first phrase
- the second phrase has less accent with introduction of *legato* backing vocal line and broken piano chords
- prominent *vibrato* in vocal counter melody



- longer note lengths and altered articulation used for emphasis of the given word ('you' for example)

Dynamics

- the lead vocal was moderately loud, but not increasing in dynamic intensity with each phrase
- the addition of instruments and backing vocals is increasing the dynamic output/volume level, not the lead vocalist
- the backing vocals were increasing in volume throughout each section ending on a loud high note
- the 'ff' downbeats from the instruments in the first phrase
- the rhythm section was loud throughout this section, with a crescendo in the last two bars leading into the next section

Phrasing

- there were three phrases
- there were four bars in each phrase
- each phrase becomes more rhythmically active
- the first of the three phrases features only 'stabs' on the downbeat
- the lead vocal line – ascending-descending phrase contour featuring conjunct antecedent and disjunct consequent
- the second phrase of backing vocals is legato, ascending essentially linear sequence that is virtually an inversion of the second
- a descending sequential phrase of the backing vocals

Harmony

- the harmonic rhythm is one chord per bar
- four chords are used in this section
- the other excerpts have used chords I, IV and V in D Major
- there is a transition to the tonic minor – in the key of D minor chords III, IV, I, V are used (F, G, D minor, A)
- the backing vocals used in harmonic context

The role of the instruments

- lead vocals – provides melody
- backing vocals – supports lead vocal, provides counter melody and harmony, adds stylistic element, thickens texture and builds section ending on high 'operatic' note
- bass guitar – provides harmonic framework, plays accented notes with rhythm section, then unison quavers in the last two bars to lead into the next section
- keyboard/piano – plays unison with organ, then plays broken chords in quavers, then unison quavers in the last two bars to lead into the next section
- organ – plays chords 'stabs' on the same beats
- drums – provides accented 'hits', then plays rock beat to build section, plays quavers in the last two bars to lead into the next section
- guitar – plays unison accented notes/chords, then sustained chords in the third phrase, then unison quavers in the last two bars to lead into the next section

Texture

- this section is mostly homophonic
- characteristics of recitative ('secco' to 'accompagnata')
- layering of instruments and backing vocals used to increase textual density
- backing vocals enter, singing a counter melody, creating polyphony between the lead and backing vocals
- contrary motion between backing vocals and lead vocals (especially in the third phrase) highlighting register differentiation and quality of tone (vocal texture)
- *false* vocal quality used in backing vocals
- close vibrato used in lead and backing

The majority of students attempted this question. These were generally well-organised and well thought out. However, there were also many superficial responses, and some students still did not demonstrate an understanding of key words relating to the elements of music, as listed in the study design.



Section B – Aspects of performance

Question 8 – Aspects of performance – Performance environment

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	1	1	2	4	10	11	12	15	14	10	10	5	4	7

Students wrote about how to optimise their performance of one or more of the works from a performance program that they had prepared and evaluated the acoustic properties of the performance venue. Students had to describe what their ensemble did to ensure effective sound production and/or sound reinforcement for their performance of works.

Optimising the performance with regard to acoustic properties and the outcomes of this were the most important parts of the response. Strong responses established a link between evaluation, the process and the outcome. At least one of the dot points below must have been included somewhere in the response in order to gain high marks. A high-scoring response would have included considerable depth and understanding of the relevant issues.

Ways of responding to some of the issues on the list might include:

- structural materials
- seating capacity of the performance space, ‘fly space’ above a proscenium stage
- use of sound enhancement/alteration devices
- use of graphic equalisation
- intonation and tuning
- use of acoustic baffles to try to eliminate resonant frequencies, false accentuation of frequencies and timbres
- changing instruments
- use and/or selection of microphones
- mutes
- tempo alterations
- balance.

Question 9 – Aspects of performance – Presentation of, and preparation for, performance

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	4	3	6	9	15	12	13	11	9	6	5	2	2	5.6

Most students attempted this question. At least two of the dot points below needed to be discussed in the response in order to obtain high marks. Many students had difficulties reading or understanding the question, as they did not describe strategies involving aural/listening skills that they used in their ensemble performance. It was disappointing that the average for this question was below 50 per cent.

The focus of this question was the use and/or development of aural and listening skills to enhance performance outcomes. Students were expected to clearly identify their skills and show how they developed these skills in their performance. In addition, discussion of the notion of enhancing one’s contribution to their ensemble’s performance with an evaluation of one’s ensemble and applying how the aural/listening skills developed as a contribution to improving or enhancing the standard of the ensemble were features of high-level responses.

Students needed to establish clearly that they had personally developed or used aural/listening skills and made it clear that this use or development was from within the realms of at least two skills.

A shortlist of other aural/listening skills that might have been addressed includes:

- interval relationships, such as sequences balance of parts
- issues related to phrasing
- awareness of structure/arrangement
- spontaneous response to other ensemble members
- adjustment of instrumental/vocal tone and/or texture
- issues related to accurate articulation
- issues related to rhythmic accuracy.

Section C – Part-writing or improvisation

Question chosen	None	1	2
%	6	53	41

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Part a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	15	5	11	12	12	12	15	7	11	4

Part b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	15	12	73	1.6

Part c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	19	7	10	10	11	9	8	7	7	5	5	2	3	4.3

Most students attempted this section.

Question 10 – Part-writing

Question 10a.

Many students did not describe two arrangement techniques used by a **professional** arranger, but instead described their own arrangement and techniques.

The following are some arrangement techniques that may have been included.

Basic arrangement techniques may have included the following.

- instrumental combinations to create different tone colours, densities and/or sonic effects
- issues related to instrumental ‘doubling’
- contrary versus parallel motion between parts, both in the same register and in different registers
- harmonic density (for example, how many instruments should deliver the chords)
- the use of different inversions in the chording instruments in order to ‘spread’ the sonority across the registers
- the ‘groove’, the role of rhythm and the ‘rhythm section’ (if used)
- the general (and specific) interrelationships between melody, harmony and rhythm

Relationship between parts

- parallel harmonisation
- contrary motion
- conjunct versus disjunct motion
- polyphony
- direct imitation
- call and response
- homophony
- ‘free-part’ style
- heterophony (for example, simultaneous variation)

Harmonic rhythm

- consistent/regular changes of harmonies
- chordal *ostinati*
- harmonic cycles created via the use of additive rhythms
- extended segments (phrases) with regular or irregular subdivisions
- multiple rhythmic strata aligned to harmonic ‘macro events’

Voice leading

- Particularly with instrumental or vocal arrangements where voice leading is an issue, such responses should have highlighted some level of consideration being given to the use of ‘non-traditional’ consecutive intervals (particularly 5ths and 8ths). This does not mean, however, that the use of such consecutives is to be deemed as being somehow ‘incorrect’.
- The notion of voice leading within the accompaniment was also presented; for example, similar consideration regarding the parts of chording instruments, especially piano/keyboards and guitars.



Question 10b.

Students were required to identify two different arrangement techniques that they used.

Question 10c.

Some of the low scores evident in the table above were clearly due to poor time management. Other low scores reflect students' lack of understanding of the key knowledge required in the study design.

Students were required to describe techniques they used in their arrangement created in Unit 4. Many superficial responses did not answer the question fully. Strong responses identified the style and the students made it clear that they understood the relevant aspects, components or characteristics that defined or quantified the style within which they were writing or harmonising.

Following are general responses to the listed expressive elements.

Phrasing

- balanced/unbalanced (used in an expressive context)
- *legato* to *marcato* (and all points in between)
- contour
- contrasted ranges
- contrary versus parallel motion between parts, both in the same register and in different registers
- general and specific relationships between melody, harmony and rhythm
- use of fermata
- harmonic phrasing
- rhythmic shaping
- issues relating to subtleties of phrasing

Articulations

- accents
- *legato* to *staccato*
- ornaments and embellishments
- ghosting
- diction-related issues

Dynamics

- loud/soft
- balance-related considerations
- changes in volume (*subito*, *crescendo*, *decrescendo* and so on)
- contrast
- layering
- terracing

Other possible expressive considerations may include:

- textural density alterations
- alterations to ranges of individual parts/voices.

Question 11 – Improvisation

Question 11a.

A list of relevant improvisation techniques used by a featured improviser might have included:

- call/response
- blue notes
- elaborations, which may have included runs, decorations and melismas
- scale-based approaches, including pentatonic, blues scales, bebop scales, modes, directly diatonic, non-western, hybrid and so on
- exploring the instrument's range
- imitation/variation
- long tones
- chromaticism

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- rhythmic variation/development
- use of silence
- contour imitation
- thematic transformation
- dynamics
- instrument specific techniques
- textural issues
- augmentation
- diminution.

Many students completed this question but did not always describe the way professional musicians used the improvisational techniques in detail.

Question 11b.

Many students identified 'valid' improvisation techniques and were awarded high marks for this question.

Question 11c.

Students were required to describe techniques they used in their improvisation created in Unit 4. Many superficial responses did not answer the question fully.

Possible relevant expressive elements used in their improvisation may have included:

Articulation

- accents
- *legato* to *staccato*
- ornaments and embellishments
- ghosting
- diction

Phrasing

- balanced/unbalanced (used in an expressive context)
- *legato* to *marcato* (and all points in between)
- contour
- contrasted ranges
- the general (and specific) interrelationships between melody, harmony and rhythm
- harmonic phrasing
- rhythmic shaping
- issues relating to 'subtleties' of phrasing – purposeful use of rhythm, for example

Dynamics

- loud/soft
- balance related considerations
- changes in volume (*subito*, *crescendo*, *decrescendo* and so on)
- contrast
- terracing

Other expressive elements may include:

- tonal/textural alterations/colourations
- 'quoting'
- musical conversation response, via a spontaneous change of:
 - the 'groove' – to double time, for example
 - the harmonisation – use of substitutions, for example;
 - the metric structure (from 'swung 4' to 'swung 3')
- syllable selections/alterations when 'scatting'
- alterations of vibrato type (lip vibrato to throat vibrato, for example).