



2009 Music Solo Performance GA 2: Performance Examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

This graded assessment task (GA 2) is the major focus of VCE Music Solo Performance and carries a weighting of 50 per cent. The standard of performance is often very high, with many students bringing more than 10 years of experience on their instrument to their performance. Statistics from this exam clearly show that many students who take this study are extremely committed to a very disciplined practice regime, and have had a great deal of experience in performing on their chosen instrument. Assessors often comment on how the standard is continually becoming higher and higher every year. The enthusiasm, joy and passion evident in students' performance is also commented on frequently by assessors. Performances at the highest level are often of a very high standard of playing, and fully exploit the assessment criteria for this exam within the 25 minutes allowed.

It is particularly noteworthy that greater discipline in performance and adherence to the published criteria was evident in 2009 throughout the 34 different instruments on which students performed. The rather large number of students who failed to fully comply with the requirements of the task in 2008 was halved in 2009, demonstrating a greater rigor towards the study this year. Note that program sheets are only available as VASS downloads and cannot be downloaded from the Solo Performance page on the VCAA website.

In 2009, students generally completed their Program Sheets carefully. This made it much easier for assessors to correctly identify the approved works and categories. Students are advised to identify the works in their program exactly as they are identified in the prescribed lists.

One area of concern in this examination, which is particularly pertinent to wind, brass and vocal students, is the careful selection of a program that will not only best exploit the criteria, but will also take into account the stamina required by a student to deliver that program. Students' physical development needs to be carefully considered. Some students are able to play each of the individual works they have chosen well, but they don't have sufficient stamina to perform the works in a sequential manner under exam conditions within the 25-minute time limit. Some students do have enough stamina to perform for 25 minutes, but play too hard in their warm-up, therefore diminishing their energy in the examination. Students are advised to practise running through their entire performance, including an appropriate warm-up routine, prior to the examination. Preferably, this activity should be undertaken a number of times prior to the examination.

Most students are required to perform with an accompanist or recorded backing. The importance of the role of an accompanist cannot be too highly stressed. The highest-scoring students chose to work with highly competent, supportive and professional accompanists. They demonstrated exhaustive rehearsal of the program through precise synchronisation, sensitive balance of the musical material, and the ability to each lead or follow as appropriate to every part of each work. Some of the problems for students who did not gain a high score were choosing an accompanist who continually dominated the musical texture, who failed to allow the student to lead the performance as required, or who performed in such a way as to distract assessors from the student. While the accompanist is not assessed, the student's ability to interact with accompaniment is assessed (criterion 8). Students and teachers are advised to use the best accompanists they can, and to start rehearsals early in the year.

It is important that students and teachers carefully plan their programs to allow for changeover time between works, including re-tuning, and carefully consider any additions to already lengthy programs. If a student's program is fully compliant (with all categories included) and includes a range of styles, tones, performance techniques and so on, the inclusion of an extra work must be carefully considered. Students and teachers should consider whether its inclusion will further enhance the ability of the student to demonstrate the criteria (through the performance of a technique or style not already performed), or if it merely duplicates other styles, techniques, tones, etc., already evident in the program. If the extra work is not of the same standard as the other works in the program, it may be detrimental to the student's ability to demonstrate the criteria to the highest level. Students and teachers might also wish to consider the ordering of works in a long program to ensure that all required categories are performed within the 25-minute time limit. If the performance goes over time before a required work is performed, that work will not be included in the assessment.

A problem which occurred again in 2009 was that a number of students were enrolled in the wrong instrument. VASS Coordinators at schools need to be aware that the correct code must be entered for each student. If a student is enrolled in voice, for example, the code could be VP or VO (Voice Contemporary Popular or Voice Classical). These are



different instruments with different repertoire, techniques and styles. Scheduling of examinations is based on this information. To ensure the smooth running of the examinations, students must be correctly enrolled.

The 2010 *Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works* is available on the VCAA website and is the only list that should be used in 2010. Students and teachers should ensure that they consult this list for any changes from the previous list(s). Changes are highlighted in red text.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Criteria

1. Compliance with the requirement of the task

The majority of students fully satisfied this criterion and were awarded full marks. Some typical issues included:

- poorly timed programs where a required work was not performed within the 25-minute time allocation
- use of CD backing that was not the one prescribed (some contemporary popular [CP] instruments have a specific backing that is required)
- performing an accompanied work without accompaniment (or omitting an unaccompanied work)
- selecting the wrong piece (a different arrangement to the one specified or a different opus/catalogue number to the one specified)
- omitting a required movement or section (for example, where two movements are specified 'to be counted as one work')
- not presenting the minimum required works (there was some confusion for electric bass students who performed the required minimum for guitar – contemporary popular)
- singers using sheet music when memory was required
- voice – classical singers omitting the required recitative and performing only the aria
- playback equipment not brought to the assessment or not tested with the student's burnt CD (in some cases this meant that students did not perform any of the required accompanied works).

If performing a 20th century work where two movements are to count as one work, then a second work must also be performed in order to comply with the rule that two 20th century works must be performed.

2. Differentiation of a range of styles and characters in the program

Generally, students had selected programs which reflected the range of styles in the prescribed list. Many students who did not achieve a high mark in this criterion failed to adequately explore the range of styles in the list. This, at times, was equally detrimental to both stronger and weaker students. Some students who presented only 'virtuosic' works could have achieved a higher mark in this criterion by demonstrating more stylistic variety. In other cases, either because of technical limitations or simply due to poor choice of repertoire, students' programs failed to explore a wide enough range of styles. Some of these programs were constructed of simple pieces all in a similar style. Students who achieved the highest marks performed programs that were extremely well thought out. Each piece had a different style for the performer to explore (for example, polyphonic, lyrical, extended form such as a sonata movement, jazz or contemporary, or avante garde).

Some students chose works of varying styles, but performed them all in a similar style (for example, all in a 'romantic' style, or in a very dry and clinical manner). Apart from having the most varied programs, students who achieved the highest marks in this criterion also approached each piece in a unique way. These performers obviously had a keen aural awareness of different styles, perhaps through listening extensively to both live and recorded performances. They approached each work in a unique manner, using a range of different performance techniques to demonstrate their ability to play in different styles.

3. Accuracy and clarity in performance of the works as notated

Accuracy of the performance is a very important criterion in itself and it also affects other criteria. This criterion specifically assesses students' ability to perform the correct notes, rhythms and so on, as notated in the score. There were some students who performed with exceptional accuracy and others who performed quite inaccurately. Some instrumentalists who memorised their performance (a requirement for singers and optional for all other instruments) failed to perform with the highest accuracy. Others played from memory and displayed a high level of accuracy.

Students should remember that the Music Solo Performance examination is a recital task; that is, the recitation of notated music. For some contemporary popular instruments, an amount of improvisation is allowed in demonstrating a stylistic understanding of the music; however, this is not an assessed part of the performance. Students should ensure



that they keep to task and focus on the preparation of the notated material. There were a few students (particularly in the contemporary instruments) who took too much liberty with the notated work. The students who scored highest in this criterion clearly demonstrated their disciplined approach.

4. Fluency and control in a range of performance techniques

This criterion focuses on both fluency in performance and fluency of technique demonstrated through technical control over all musical elements. The students who scored most highly chose varied programs in which they demonstrated numerous performing techniques at the highest level. At the same time, many of these programs also demonstrated a good range of styles, tonal colours, structures and so on. Students needed to control passages at a strict tempo and with a uniform articulation, and to also control tempo changes, articulation, dynamics, subtle pitch adjustments and so on. Some students chose pieces that explored contemporary techniques, such as multiphonics (reed instruments), a range of distortions (electric instruments), contemporary bowing techniques (string instruments) or several vocal effects and techniques (voice). Others explored a wide range of traditional techniques, including virtuosic, lyrical and various period techniques.

Students who did not gain high marks for this criterion failed to display a wide range of performance techniques through limited performance programs. Some also displayed much hesitation in their performance. Others, while maintaining basic fluency, clearly lacked fluent technical resources and control in their performance. This became particularly evident in attempts to alter tempi to create tension or release, resulting in unevenness in the playing. Poor fluency in technique was also reflected in the limited range of dynamics used, as well as performances that were clearly under tempo.

5. Characteristic tone, artistic variation of tone and expressiveness in tone

One of the most important aspects of this criterion is the student's ability to perform using a wide range of tonal effects reflective of the works in the prescribed list. The starting point for best practice in the use of a range of tonal devices is the program itself. For example, a voice program that consists of a diverse range of styles, genres, tempi, keys, periods and locations will create opportunities for a singer to use many tonal effects. For a drum kit player, a program of rock, jazz, Latin and blues will enable the performer to use many more tonal effects than a program with only one genre represented. The effective use of distortion pedals within a Contemporary Popular Guitar program and the use of an acoustic guitar for one work would enable a student to more fully demonstrate a wide variety of tonal effects. Sample programs published with the prescribed list provide a guide to choosing an appropriate range of works. Students who performed best in this criterion performed programs that consisted of a wide variety of styles. They also considered the appropriate use of a range of tonal effects.

The other aspect of best practice in the use of tone involves having a refined technique that enables a performer to create the best tone possible across a variety of different tonal effects. For string players this is controlled largely in the bowing; for pianists it is to do with a key's speed of attack and its relationship to the rest of the keys played; for wind and brass players it is in the embouchure with relation to breath control as well as appropriate use of vibrato; for percussion it is created through absolute control in mallet or stick technique. Students who most fully satisfied this criterion were able to control the tone of their instrument to the highest level and create the greatest diversity of tonal effects. Best practice was evident through a disciplined and thoughtful use of tonal effects throughout the performance. This discipline was so integrated into these students' performances that, with a finely developed aural sensitivity, students were able to adjust to the performance conditions. For example, the most successful drum kit students performed with many different tonal effects that were at a level appropriate to the performance space while using tonal effects at all dynamic levels. They did this without creating harshness at the loudest levels, and maintained sonority at the softest levels. This was often the defining aspect of students' best practice (all instruments) in the use of tone.

6. Skill in shaping and expressively communicating music ideas, as appropriate to the style of each work in the program

The most captivating performances were the ones that seemed to say something to the audience. Students who managed to do this expressively created shape in phrases in much the same way as a good orator tells a story. Tension and release were created through a variety of elements such as changes in dynamics, articulation and tempi, as well as the use of elements such as silence, surprise and predictability. These performances were dramatic, poignant, moving, disturbing, challenging and whimsical. Students were able to take the notated score and make it their own while still maintaining its integrity. In some cases, communication beyond the notation of the work included enhancing a notated dynamic or tempo change to build tension. In other cases, it involved particularly effective use of rubato or accent. Best practice in the use of these elements involved enhancing the score within stylistic conventions.



Students who failed to score high marks in this criterion often just played the notes without much expression or nuance. Musical phrases often lacked direction or a point of climax. This is one of the most basic concepts of pronunciation in a language, and should not be overlooked within the language of music. Some students performed as if they were afraid to try to use any variation. Without an aural awareness of the musical styles being performed, they failed to engage in the task of communication and expression.

7. Differentiation of the parts of the structure and characteristics of each work

Students who effectively demonstrated a sense of structure in performance seemed to have a clear understanding of the structures based on analysis and study independent of actually playing the work. They were able to follow themes and motifs with sensitivity and consistency. They also created a clear sense of the major climax(es) within a work through the use of dynamics, forward motion and/or variation. Different types of musical structures create different challenges for the performer. The programs performed by the highest-scoring students consisted of a wide variety of different types of musical structures, enabling maximum opportunity to demonstrate each of these different challenges.

Students who did not achieve high marks in this criterion generally had difficulty demonstrating their ability to differentiate the parts and structures in their works. Important themes were not particularly highlighted and there was little attempt to create any sort of tension and release in the performance. They also tended to have little structural variety in their performance programs, often choosing the shortest works from the list, omitting any extended 'meaty' work(s) in which they might have the opportunity to demonstrate an ability to develop a sense of structure in a performance. Similarly, students who performed only large structures failed to demonstrate their ability to make sense of a short work.

8. Artistic interaction, balance and coordination between the parts, the solo and the accompaniment, and between the main melody and accompaniment, as appropriate to the instrument and style of each work

With regard to instruments which require accompaniment, the ensemble created by two musicians is a most exciting form of music making. Students who demonstrated the tightest ensemble with their accompanists gained the highest scores in this criterion. In strong performances, the role of each performer at any given point in the work was clear, excellent balance was created where the main theme had predominance whether in the solo or accompaniment, and the accompanist was highly competent and played a supportive but not dominant role in the ensemble. Students who did not perform highly in this criterion typically used accompanists who failed to provide adequate support. This meant that the ensemble was not properly synchronised, the accompanist dominated or overpowered the soloist, or the accompanist lost their place. While the accompanist was not being assessed, their role let the student down, making it difficult for the student to realise their potential to create artistic interaction and balance.

With regard to instruments such as pianoforte or classical guitar (as well as voice and single line instruments where unaccompanied performances are required) there are parts of all works that are less important or more important within the texture. At times there may be a false melody that needs to be understood and projected. In a piano or classical guitar work, there may be melody and accompaniment (sometimes even three or more textures across a complete work), which needs to be treated as if in an ensemble situation, with appropriate voicing of each texture. Students who were awarded high marks in this criterion had sufficient technical control and musical understanding to create appropriate balance between melody and accompaniment, and between the parts and structures of the score. They were able to 'orchestrate' the various musical textures and demonstrate their understanding of the complexity of the parts and structures. Students who gained low marks often did not perform this complex 'orchestration' of a score, and thus created a performance that was confusing and difficult for the listener to understand.

9. Skill in historical and/or authentic interpretation in performance and use of contemporary conventions in interpretation

Students who performed best in this criterion had obviously spent time studying the style of the works in their program, for example, by listening to recordings of not only the works they performed, but also of other works in the styles presented. This preparation was evident through an adherence to stylistic conventions in the performance of each work presented and the performance conventions they both mimicked and borrowed from. These students also demonstrated their ability to perform works from a variety of different styles and geographical locations.

Students who did not achieve high marks often presented programs of works in a similar style. Some students presented a narrow range of styles, failing to explore a representation of the variety in the prescribed lists. Students who performed only the minimum number of works required sometimes failed to explore an adequate range of styles representative of the list. Where two of these works were of a similar style, students had even less opportunity to demonstrate an adequate range of historical styles. While there is no minimum time specified for the performance



examination, students do have up to 25 minutes to demonstrate the extent to which they fulfil each criterion. Students should plan to use this time to fully meet each criterion.

10. Skill in personal interpretation and projection of musical intentions in performance

In this criterion students are invited to give something of themselves in their performance. Any performer who knows the work they are presenting with absolute confidence and security will apply their own interpretation to a performance, either deliberately or accidentally. Students who gained the highest marks in this criterion successfully maintained the tension of performing within strict guidelines of accuracy and stylistic conventions, and performing as a means of personal expression. Through resolving this conflict, these students were best able to project musical intentions in performance. There is a clear correlation between performances that are clearly lacking in projection of musical intention and performances that are also lacking security of notation.

It is also vital that students understand this criterion in relation to the others. Some students who performed with a very 'personal interpretation' were off task in many of the other criteria, where these interpretations made little reference to the original notation. Perhaps the word 'skill' in the criterion was overlooked in these students' preparation.

11. Presentation techniques appropriate to the styles represented in the works and to the conventions of performance in a formal recital

The best performances demonstrated great poise and focus. They flowed well from one work to the next, and were presented as recitals. This was equally true for classical as well as contemporary popular instruments. The best students not only faced their audience, but also, and more importantly, musically addressed their audience in performance. These students used appropriate and varied volume levels (particularly pertinent for drum kit and other amplified instruments), and they incorporated excellent performance techniques throughout their performance. In some instances, this involved a thoughtful programming order to create and maintain maximum variety and interest. Where much equipment was used (such as amplifiers, drum kits and percussion equipment), it was prepared prior to the performance time. Recorded backings were tested and the logistics of their use was well rehearsed (for example, starting, stopping and tracking recorded backings). Often these students also dressed appropriately, which assisted them in creating a sense of 'occasion' for the performance. These students arrived at the performance venue with plenty of time to spare, and in some instances arranged for equipment to be delivered to the venue ahead of time. Students who performed poorly in this criterion were often ill prepared. One of the most common equipment problems involved the use of burnt CDs which had not been tested in the CD player that was used in the performance. Students are reminded that not all CD players will play burnt CDs. Some students who used MP3 players for their backing tracks could have benefited by making up a playlist for their performance.

In their preparation for their performance, students are advised to attend live performances in order to gain the best understanding of how to present their works in a program that has flow and purpose. Problems encountered in this criterion included students facing away from the audience, taking excessive breaks (or no breaks) between performances, use of inappropriate gestures when they made mistakes, failing to tune or retune instruments, constantly playing licks between works, lack of control over nerves (perhaps through a lack of performing experience), overuse or inappropriate use of water bottles, poorly rehearsed page turns, inappropriate levels for CD backings, using loose photocopies of music (that blew off the music stand) and playing into the music stand, causing a physical barrier between the student and the audience.

It is worth mentioning something about the physical space around the performer. Some performers brought into the exam an array of things, including sheet music, CDs, water bottles, towels, spare strings, extra cables and playback equipment. Although these may be necessary, it can diminish a students' presentation if they are strewn around the floor in an untidy manner. Excessive slurping from water bottles can also detract from a performance. Best practice in a professional performance would not be to take an untidy and noisy slurp from a water bottle between every piece. It might be more appropriate to move slightly out of the main performance space and have a sip from a cup after a bracket of pieces.

Comments on particular instruments

The following provides guidance for preparation of successful programs for particular instruments and may be useful for students and teachers. These comments are made in relation to specific instruments but many have broad applicability for all instruments.

Contemporary popular guitar and drum kit

- Students and teachers should check the *Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works* on the VCAA website and read it carefully to establish that the requirements have been met. The arrangement/edition used is critical as



arrangements other than the ones listed may constitute a different piece to the one prescribed, and thus incur a penalty. Some guitar students who have downloaded a TAB from the Internet may not have the correct edition or arrangement.

- Despite the minimum number of works for compliance, it is recommended that students consider how they can maximise their marks by playing the widest variety of styles possible within the 25-minute time allocation.
- Students should ensure that volumes are appropriate for the performance space and that the volume of backings is appropriately balanced. Students must not perform at levels that are occupationally unsafe. Additional warm-up/set-up time is allocated to assist.
- Where possible, students should consider using some 'live' backing accompaniments to demonstrate a different approach of artistic interaction.
- Drum kit students should aim to demonstrate a wide range of dynamic control and stylistic variation.
- Students should ensure that the CD backing(s) used are specified on the prescribed list.
- Students should make sure that the 'performance' is thoroughly rehearsed (and not just a compilation of pieces played without consideration for the movement from one piece to another).
- If using a music stand, students should position it discreetly so that it doesn't form a barrier between performer and audience.
- Students must ensure precise timing of effects pedals (on and off).
- Where backing tracks have fade-outs, these need to be rehearsed by the soloist.
- Guitarists might consider performing standing up in order to enhance presentation techniques.

Electric bass

- The minimum number of works required is six. Students should check the list carefully and ensure that all areas of compliance are met.
- Refer to points for contemporary popular guitar (above).
- All equipment is to be provided by the student.

Voice – contemporary popular

- Students and teachers should carefully check the *Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works* on the VCAA website and read it carefully to establish that all requirements have been met. Note that some works in the two vocalise categories actually include two vocalises.
- Student must make sure that a 'variety of styles' is addressed in the choice of program as well as in the delivery of each song.
- Appropriate keys need to be chosen to best suit the vocal range or 'fach' of the student.
- The accompanist must provide a stylistic backing – especially making sure that the melody line is not present in the accompaniment. The accompanist must play to the vocal capabilities of the student. Accompanists should avoid playing too loudly.
- If a CD accompaniment is used, students should ensure that burnt CDs are tested in the CD player they intend to use. Also, with the vocals, they must ensure that the correct track is used for the backing. Where a CD has both an accompaniment only, and a melody and accompaniment, as provided with the sheet music, the correct track must be used for the performance examination.
- The number of CD backings allowed (a maximum of three) must not be exceeded.
- Students should consider vocal health. To avoid forcing their voice, students should choose their program wisely. The keys and technical demands on the young voice should be considered as well as changing keys to suit a particular student's abilities.
- When choosing an outfit for the performance, students should consider their posture. High stiletto shoes are not good for a singer's posture.
- If using hand or body gestures, students should make them appropriate to the text.
- Students must be aware that the examination is a 'recital', not a sing-along.

Voice – classical

- Teachers should ensure that different styles are clearly understood (for example, avoid scooping in the baroque or classical work).
- Students who select a large number of works from the 'Ballads', 'Music Theatre' and 'Jazz/Pop' categories, should consider choosing Voice – contemporary popular rather than Voice – classical as their instrument.
- Teachers should ensure that the demands of the program can be met by the student, particularly in regards to the program length (some students are fatigued before their last song).
- If using hand or body gestures, they should be appropriate to the text.



- Students should choose their accompanist wisely. Students need to be able to create an 'ensemble' in which the accompanist plays a supportive rather than a dominating role.
- The highest achieving students ensured that their unaccompanied folksong and vocalise had as much attention to detail as the other works on their program.
- The highest achieving students chose a wide variety of interesting repertoire suited to their voice rather than performing 'standard' pieces. Students and teachers should try to explore the wide range available in every category on the list rather than staying with the most popular pieces. Teachers are encouraged to become acquainted with pieces with which they are unfamiliar to help create interesting programs and highlight their students' abilities.
- The highest achieving students included different languages in their programs. The words were pronounced with clarity and fluency and the performer knew the meaning of each word and how to highlight important syllables, words, phrases or ideas. Including a work sung in a language other than English is not a requirement but can be a way of broadening the range of styles and characters evident in the program.
- Some pieces tend to be more demanding in terms of intonation than others. These should be selected carefully.

Piano - contemporary popular

- Students and teachers should check the *Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works* on the VCAA website and read it carefully to establish that the requirements have been met. The arrangement/edition used is critical as arrangements other than the ones listed may constitute a different piece to the one prescribed.
- The works on this list are technically comparable with works on the pianoforte list. The complexity of syncopated rhythms can be extremely challenging, so a disciplined approach to learning is needed.
- Accompaniments are not accepted for any works in this list (that is, no CD backing is allowed).
- Five works are required, with four categories to be represented.
- A steady beat is essential, with a clear understanding and differentiating between a swung and straight feel.
- Many students need to further develop a refined pedalling technique.
- A wider range of tonal effects needs to be explored; many students seem to want to 'bash' the piano.

Pianoforte

- Page turning – students should ensure continuity of performance. Assessors can assist with page turning if required.
- Although the prescribed list of works is comprehensive, the range of works selected by many students is often limited. Students who wish to showcase their capabilities might do well to explore the lesser-known works on the list.
- Students should perform within their capabilities and avoid taking on programs that are too demanding for them. They should explore a range of styles, techniques and genres that are within their capabilities.
- Students are advised to practise performing on different pianos and in different environments. Students who may be considering performing their program on a grand piano are advised to play on a grand piano as much as possible throughout their examination preparation.
- Maintenance of a disciplined practice regime throughout the whole year will enable students to maximise their potential.

Wind Instruments (particularly flute)

- Students and teachers should ensure that the program can be performed within 25 minutes.
- Where the total playing time is calculated to exceed 20 minutes, it could be useful to consider placing all of the 'required' works early in the program.
- A students' physical stamina needs to be balanced with the need to fulfil the criteria to the highest level.
- A strong understanding of the whole work, not just the solo part, is needed.
- While a good clarinet mouthpiece is a valuable asset, it cannot be wholly relied upon to create an excellent tone and dynamic range. Much work is needed to develop these.

Bassoon

- Students must check that the correct Vivaldi concerto is chosen.

Brass instruments

- Many of the issues are similar to issues for wind instruments, especially regarding the stamina needed to complete the performance effectively.
- Students must demonstrate thorough preparation with the accompanist.

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- If performing a work which uses a backing track, students must ensure that the correct track is used in the correct way; for example, if the backing has the solo doubled on one channel, this channel must be turned off in the performance.
- Students should always check that the correct editions are used for performance.

String instruments

- Students who choose repertoire that is too difficult for them, or that doesn't explore a range of performing techniques, often fail to maximise their score. Students should perform a range of techniques well, and ensure that all works chosen are within their technical facility.
- Students who perform very long programs are advised to include all required works early in the program.
- Students should be prepared for contingencies; for example, by carrying spare strings, rosin etc.
- Students should practise performing in a range of acoustical environments from flat to very bright. They should become accustomed to performing in different temperatures. This will make it easier for students to adjust to performance conditions.