2014 Examination Report

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY

State Government Victoria

2014 Music Style and Composition: Externally Assessed Task (EAT)

GENERAL COMMENTS

In 2014, the Externally Assessed Task (EAT) comprised two parts worth a total of 100 marks. Both sections of the task were compulsory and the format followed the guidelines published by the VCAA.

Students' compliance with the requirements of the task continues to improve. Most submissions showed familiarity with the key knowledge required for Outcome 3 in both Units 3 and 4. This was reflected in students' responses to both the Unit 3 creative exercises and the Unit 4 music work.

There were some very complex and sophisticated compositions. There were also generally strong responses to the Unit 3 creative exercises and students provided the required information in their documentation. Links to studied works were made cohesively. It is recommended that creative responses be clearly and directly related to the compositional approach seen in the works studied, and that this is specified in the written documentation. Students need more practice in articulating their decisions succinctly. This could be achieved by showing and explaining specific links to the musical characteristics and/or compositional devices being explored in the creative exercises. Identification of these, with specific locations in the scores, would help to show how they have been used.

Annotated scores are an excellent way of explaining a piece and highlighting relevant aspects of it. Some annotated scores provided a colour-coded 'key' to explain the processes and these were generally explained quite well. Notation was presented for most of the submissions and the complexity of the notation showed improvement on previous years. In general, written comments were presented appropriately.

Teachers and students should ensure that names and school letterheads are removed from all work submitted, including audio files. All materials submitted for assessment should be labelled with the student's VCE number, the Unit number and the specified task. Pages should also be numbered.

While most students stayed within the specified word limits, there were still a number who exceeded these. It is advised that if annotations are used to explain musical works, there should be some thought put into what the word equivalent of these would be. Word counts were not consistently included. It is requested that this information be included in all of the submitted work.

In a number of cases, either a live recording or a live recording and a sequenced recording were provided. Some of these recordings were of a very high standard. Invariably, the live recording provided a much more musical rendition of the composition and students are encouraged to consider this option. While live recordings are often difficult to create, they do not need to be 'perfect', and live recordings generally convey a very good sense of the music and the composer's intent.

As teachers are required to mark each submission, it is suggested that they take this opportunity to check that all files can be opened, are saved in the required format and contain all of the required information.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Unit 3

Overall, a good range of material was presented and there were few 'off-task' submissions. Variation, development and contrast were generally evident in the creative exercises, although some students prepared quite simplistic tasks that did not offer them the opportunity to develop a range of compositional skills. The relationship between studied works and the creative exercises was clearly evident, but students should be aware that the aim of Unit 3 is to develop a range of knowledge and skills in readiness for Unit 4.

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Students need to name the source work and composer for each creative exercise. It is also important to note that a music style is not the same as a specific work and that for creative exercises links should be made to a specific work, not a style in general. The best results came when the specific musical characteristics that were being used from the source works were stated and students then pointed out explicit links to these in their own exercises. It is not a requirement to connect every music element to the source work; for example, a focus on two to three characteristics allows students to address the criteria at the highest level.

Higher-order responses tended to take a characteristic of the music vocabulary of the studied work and explore it in an individual way. The highest-scoring examples featured a clear display of compositional technique in the allotted time/number of bars and were, in themselves, small but creative musical works. If technical/practical factors are described in the documentation, then students should also describe their impact on the creative process or the outcome of their use in the exercise. Using the structure of a studied work is not always successful as it can be difficult to reconstruct in an exercise that is only 12–16 bars long. In some cases, approaches to the tasks needed to be more carefully structured to allow students to achieve successful outcomes.

The guidelines about duration/number of bars, instrumentation, etc. for the Unit 3 exercises must be adhered to. Students should also aim to make these short exercises as musically 'complete' as possible. For example, a number of exercises would have benefitted from attention to a settled or expected conclusion rather than simply being artificially cut off after 16 bars were reached. In some of the exercises, students exceeded the time recommendation significantly.

Students should note that the task is to respond to music, not to visual imagery associated with the music. Using a composer's 'inspiration' technique (e.g. being inspired by the Australian landscape) is not the same as linking a creative exercise to the musical characteristics of a source work. This form of inspiration is outside the composer's actual use of music elements and compositional devices. Students should be aiming to link specific musical characteristics of the source work to their own exercises.

Unit 4

Music work
The general standard of music works presented was much higher than in previous years and, again, a variety of genres and styles were presented. Most of the works presented had developed a musical structure and included the elements of repetition, contrast and variation. Most of the documentation also explained the rationale and processes of the composition clearly. However, there were still submissions that did not reflect the levels of planning required to produce credible and cohesive musical works, and did not explain the processes transparently.

High-scoring and very good works
In these works, students presented original ideas that showed high levels of musical development. They worked within structures that enabled successful manipulation of the required elements and showed understanding of the instruments/voices/ensembles chosen for inclusion. These works had a rationale for being, and included a clear underlying premise and interesting use of musical colours and textures. Overall, these works:
- demonstrated consistent stylistic integrity while providing contrast, repetition and/or variation through the treatment of various music elements
- provided detailed scores with appropriate performance directions
- demonstrated an obvious and strong familiarity with the chosen instrumentation and genre
- demonstrated a considered approach to the overall structure, with a clear sense of development and evolution of ideas
- adhered to specified time/bar lengths
- displayed excellent understanding of score conventions
- incorporated a clearly defined structure, with smooth transitions between sections
- demonstrated good understanding through development of musical material
- were clear and focused, and used tonal colours and textural variety with maturity and sensitivity.

Low-scoring works
These works lacked repetition, variation and contrast, and the required devices tended to be included randomly, rather than with logical musical reasoning. These works often lacked direction or obvious understanding of compositional devices. Other issues noted were:
- weakness in developing musical ideas
- a lack of structural cohesion

- a lack of contrast
- limited skills in linking sections together appropriately
- few performance directions or unrealistic performance directions
- an inability to use the chosen ensemble effectively, with poor choice of range, register and/or understanding of instrumental capabilities.

Although the Unit 3 exercises must be linked to studied musical pieces, the music work created for Unit 4 does not have to be linked to any specific work or style. The compositional devices of contrast, repetition and variation are to be explored in the Unit 4 work and these should be used as a means to develop the work. Students are encouraged to think about these devices at the start of their creative process. Questions that can be asked include: How can contrast across a variety of music elements be used to further the piece? How much direct repetition will be used? How can variation of established ideas be used as a device to achieve creative aims?

Units 3 and 4

A variety of methods can be used to present the information. This is explained in the *VCE Music Study Design*, page 132. The focus of the written documentation, however, should be on the creative process. Often, students provided a very detailed analysis of their work but did not discuss the creative process in such a way as to demonstrate a reflection on the stages from original stimulus to completed response. While some students very clearly explained the creative process in their documentation for Unit 4, other students did not adequately explain the process from the initial stimulus and/or intention through to development and refinement, and to final realisation, as stated in the assessment criteria. Many students provided sophisticated documentation, but some submissions did not fully explain the musical decisions and/or use appropriate terminology.

In instances where annotations are used to explain the compositional process, the processes must be explained rather than just implied by the annotations. Given the word count requirements, it is recommended that students avoid including detailed explanations that are not connected to criteria. Some examples would have benefitted from editing to include only relevant information. In their documentation, students should lead the assessor through the work in a cohesive and ordered manner. It is advisable to give the documentation a logical order so that it is easy to follow the compositional processes and decisions. The best examples stated clear objectives and included relevant illustrations of these.

Characteristics of the existing style or a stimulus work being used, and how/where these are manifested in the work need to be included. It would be helpful if students added details in their plans for ways to address the specific goals of achieving contrast, variation and/or repetition. The musical characteristics that have been used for the creative response need to be clearly stated. At times, an inserted musical example from the source work seemed to have little relationship to an example from the student response. It is not enough simply to point out a change from strings playing arco then pizz as evidence of the exploration of contrast as a device. Similarly, a change in lyrics is not evidence of contrast or even variation.

Overall notation – Units 3 and 4

The presentation of scores reflected a general improvement in the understanding of notation and there were some excellent examples. Students should be aware that the ideas and treatments they are aiming to communicate in their work can be enhanced by greater detail in the scores. Students need to include musical directions such as tempo, stylistic indications, dynamics and articulation. In some cases no clefs or time signatures were included. Dynamics were often included in the melody, but all other accompanying lines had no dynamic indications. Crescendos and decrescendos must be logical and indicate the dynamic level to which they are coming from and leading to. In some cases, phrase marks would have given definition and clarity to the music.

Computer-generated scores were mostly presented well and a majority of students showed solid idiomatic understanding of acoustic instruments. A number of weaker compositions showed over-reliance on the computer without sufficient editing and included parts of the sections that were outside the playing capabilities of selected instruments. There were fewer electronic compositions this year and although the notated representations of some of these submissions continued to be problematic, others addressed the issue of notation quite creatively, presenting credible representations in a variety of ways.

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Below are some points about the use of notation software:

- Students need to edit and refine the presentation. For example, dynamic markings can be moved lower if they are covering note heads.
- Staves can be dragged to create space and clarity in the score.
- It may be better to have fewer systems to a page for clarity of reading.

To maintain anonymity, it is suggested that students login to Sibelius at the beginning of the year using their student number.