

2016 VCE Music Style and Composition examination report

General comments

The 2016 Music Style and Composition examination consisted of two compulsory sections and was worth a total of 100 marks. The format of the examination followed the guidelines published in the examination specifications.

In Section A of the examination many students displayed a skilful capacity to aurally analyse works. Others were less capable or confident in using appropriate music terminology or focusing their responses on the specific issues raised by each question. A 'listening diary' approach to answering questions – where students note down or 'narrate' the different musical features they hear – is less likely to garner high marks than an approach that targets the specific elements or devices relevant to the question. Students who achieved high marks consistently demonstrated an effective use of music terminology. Students who did not consistently employ appropriate music terminology were able to achieve some marks, but tended to spend a great deal of time describing concepts that could have been captured in a few well-chosen words. The use of music terminology and language is a key skill in the study design for Music Style and Composition, and its accurate use is vital throughout the examination.

Section B of the examination required students to engage with specific types of music composition. Most students nominated appropriate works as the basis for their responses. Some nominated inappropriate works and could not garner any marks for those questions. The highest-scoring responses in Section B were characterised by a thorough knowledge of the works studied that was tailored to the questions asked and expressed using accurate music terminology.

Specific information

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A

Section A consisted of four questions and was worth 52 marks. An audio CD with aural prompts that lasted 60 minutes and 16 seconds accompanied this section of the examination.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	0	0	0	1	7	9	17	21	27	12	7	7.1

Most students answered this question effectively. Students who scored high marks wrote convincing discussions that took a nuanced approach to the construction of a critical response. These were characterised by a high-order use of terminology, with a refined and deep understanding of musical concepts. These discussions tended to engage with multiple elements/devices to demonstrate the critical response. Students who did not score highly tended to merely describe musical aspects of the excerpt and often struggled to appropriately employ relevant terminology. The following points are a guide to the issues students might have referred to in their discussions

The music can be described as 'jovial'. This effect is brought about through the use of short melodic motives and quickly changing, but frequently repeating, musical ideas. The dynamics vary in line with these quick changes, but the overall impact of the excerpt is that of a loud dynamic level. The texture changes frequently so that different melodic lines and ideas are projected. Tempo and rhythm are manipulated to evoke a lively and bustling effect that contributes to a sense of energy and busyness.

- The piece was written for an orchestra with an extended percussion section (including a car horn, which is used to evoke the sound of traffic).
- The excerpt began in simple time and the tempo was moderately fast. It changed, becoming faster and then slower, and the metre also changed. This functioned to give the impression of constant change or busyness.
- The first theme was an angular (featuring a descending minor 7th leap), jaunty three-note motive that incorporated a decorative feature (a 'grace' note). This idea formed the melodic basis of the excerpt. It was repeated twice, and on the third repetition was extended and altered to evoke a 'marching' character. The melody was interrupted by interjections from the woodwind, and a countermelody in the flute and bassoon. Subsequent repetitions saw this countermelody varied and played by the violins. The third repetition also saw a change in tessitura, with the idea presented an octave higher. These musical ideas combined to evoke busyness and constant change.
- A new vigorous rhythmic motive derived from the semiquavers in the final phrase of the first theme was then heard. It was played in rhythmic unison and metric ambiguity was achieved by accenting different beats.
- Energy and busyness was further evoked by a descending sequence, a pattern of modulations on a motive that incorporated a tritone and an increase in tempo as the excerpt unfolded.

Appropriate terminology for use in discussing this excerpt included, but was not limited to, repetition, off-beat accompanying figures, syncopation, textural interjection, chromaticism, fragmentation and imitation.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	0	0	1	3	7	14	19	21	19	11	3	6.6

This question elicited a range of responses from students. Students who received high marks created an explanation supported by aural analysis and music terminology of how the voices were used in the excerpt. Students who scored lower marks tended to make general observations about the excerpt and describe generic musical features. While students were able to score highly with any response that provided an explanation of how the voices were used, the most effective answers centred on the textural function of the voices and the way they were used to imitate instruments. All vocal parts needed to be considered to score highly. Students who focused only on the melody line did not score as highly.

Answers included but were not limited to the following issues:

In the first section of the excerpt ('0–'24):

- the voices worked together to present an opening chord, introduced with a crescendo, which imitated a string or synthesiser 'pad'
- one voice took on the standard role as vocalist singing syllables (similar to 'scatting', but not improvisational – it was more of a fixed melody)
- this voice was accompanied by male (tenors') voices singing sustained notes that functioned as a bass line and female voices singing stylised broken chords as an accompanying figure. The vocal ensemble texture operated more as a keyboard or string quartet in terms of the functional division of each part.

In the second section ('25–'44) the same division of roles occurred, but with the main vocalist singing words as opposed to vocalisations.

In the third section ('45–1'15) the texture changed.

- The male voices became more florid but continued to have a bassline function.
- The accompanying female voices split into two sections – two conjunct melodies that operated in two-part counterpoint and worked to accompany the main melody.

In the fourth section (1'15 to end) the excerpt changed texture drastically to present a more conventional choral texture. Many of the voices now worked in rhythmic unison, with some independence in the low male voices. In this last section, all voices sang the lyric, as opposed to vocalisations.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	1	1	7	16	28	26	12	6	2	4.4

Students who scored highly wrote nuanced descriptions of rhythm/time that accurately used terminology and demonstrated a good understanding of the metre and tempo of the excerpt as well as the action of at least one rhythmic phrase. Students who did not score highly tended to present unfocused responses that either did not describe the treatment of rhythm/time or did not provide specific, detailed information. It should be noted that students could only garner marks for this question in the space set aside for responses to Question 2b. on the examination. A small number of students raised issues that were pertinent to rhythm/time in Question 2a., but did not revisit these issues in Question 2b.

The excerpt used rhythmic figures grouped in three. For much of the excerpt, these groups of three were assembled into 'bars' of 4. However, at significant points of structural division, and in the second section, these groupings of four were interrupted by an additional 'beat'. As a result, the excerpt could correctly be identified as being in simple triple (3/4) time, or compound time (either duple or quadruple) with occasional interruptions to this pattern. Both responses had the capacity to be correct.

In addition to the metrical issues discussed above the rhythm/time was treated as follows.

- The tempo of the piece could have been described as 'flowing'. Terms such as *andante* and *moderato* were appropriate. Differing readings of the tempo were possible – responses that contextualised the metre as 3/4 (simple triple) would correctly describe the tempo as moving faster than if contextualised in compound time.
- The rhythms used in the excerpt explored a range of different note values. Some more prominent included (notated as for simple triple using crotchets as the underlying beat): dotted crotchet-quaver-crotchet/crotchet-crotchet-crotchet. Many students identified particular

rhythmic patterns presented through the piece as the basis for their description. Any correct rhythm was accepted with or without notation.

- A defining feature of the rhythm was the regular use of a hemiola (a non-standard division of the grouping of 3). The hemiola was used extensively at climactic passages within phrases, and as a bridging device between sections. The hemiola was also presented in a florid manner. Some responses referred to the hemiola as mixed metre (where 6/8 moves to 2/4 but the tempo features 'dotted crotchet = crotchet'). This approach was also correct.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	0	0	2	3	11	14	23	18	13	12	4	6.4

Students who scored highly showed a good capacity to engage with complex musical ideas and with the concept of 'contrast'. These students referred to multiple elements of music to demonstrate their understanding of the operation of the compositional device (contrast) and communicated this information using appropriate music terminology. Students who did not score highly tended to struggle with the concept of 'contrast' as a compositional device and were not able to support their discussion with specific examples of the operation of contrast. Answers included but were not limited to the following issues related to the operation of contrast in the excerpt.

- Tone colour: the tone colour of the didgeridoo was offset against the action of the Western wind instruments both as a group and individually.
- Role of instruments: the drone of the didgeridoo was offset against the pointillist, perfunctory melodic fragments of the Western wind instruments.
- Melody/Pitch: the static/regular pitch presentation of the didgeridoo was offset against the chromatic/atonal/kaleidoscopic presentation of pitch in the wind instruments.
- Tonality: the 'grounded' quality of the didgeridoo contrasted with the centre-less quality of the other parts.
- Rhythm: the continuous pulse of the didgeridoo contrasted with the generally smooth but more 'pulse-less' figures of the Western instruments.
- The action of the Western instruments over the course of the excerpt demonstrated contrast. The short, aggressive phrases at the beginning of the excerpt contrasted with the longer, more fluid phrases towards the end. There was a sense in which the excerpt represented a transition from one state to another, and that contrast was generated from this gradual change.
- Contrast was also generated in the rhythmic unison of the Western instruments breaking down and becoming a disjointed micro-polyphony at the end of the excerpt.

Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	0	5	15	27	33	16	4	3.6

This question elicited a range of responses. Some students did not focus their response on the element of melody but instead made general observations about the instruments and other features of the excerpt. Students who scored highly focused their descriptions on specific issues related to melody and were able to identify multiple relevant issues. Answers included but were not limited to the following.

- The tonality of the work was B minor, and the melody used a natural minor scale (Aeolian).
- Phrases started with large ascending leaps (minor 6th in the first statement, later a major 7th) and descended in steps and thirds to create a series of bell-shaped contours.
- The melody could be described as 'plaintive', with longer notes lingering on the larger intervals.

- The singer entered with a step-wise melody built from the initial idea.
- At the end of the excerpt, the accompaniment entered, featuring a bass line melody that descended along a natural minor scale (the descending form of the melodic minor scale).

Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	0	1	4	9	20	21	21	19	5	5.2

This question gave students scope to employ skills in aural analysis to describe the development of music ideas. While the element of texture needed to be incorporated into the answer, responses did not need to be based exclusively on texture to garner full marks. However, simply using the word 'texture' did not fulfil the requirement to reference texture – an understanding of texture as the action of different parts operating together, with terminology such as 'homophonic' was ideally employed. Some students incorrectly contextualised texture as the 'feel' or 'character'. The highest-scoring responses demonstrated a good understanding of the development of musical ideas over the course of the excerpt and with regard to multiple elements, aspects or ideas. Students who did not score highly tended to employ metaphor in place of music terminology and demonstrated a lack of understanding of musical ideas. Answers included but were not limited to the following.

- The excerpt featured a gradually unfolding texture (began with monody, continued to two-part polyphony, before revealing a fully developed homophony with bass-line, harmonic accompaniment, melody, countermelody and bassline).
- The tempo of the work increased as the texture became more complex.
- The tessitura began in a low range for all instruments, but became more expansive as the excerpt unfolded.
- A new melodic idea in the vocal line was accompanied by the introduction of the piano with a contrasting textural idea.
- The music coalesced into a conventional waltz, with the standard rhythmic figure associated with a waltz acting as a unifying idea.
- The harmony developed via modulation – initially in a minor key, the music moved to the parallel major and developed the underlying progression through sequence and contrary chromatic motion.

Section B

Section B consisted of four questions and was worth 48 marks.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	2	0	1	3	7	5	9	13	16	12	13	15	3	7.8

Students needed to use an Australian composition as the basis for their response to garner any marks for this question. Some students missed out on marks as a result of not nominating an Australian work. This question focused on the compositional device of contrast. Students were required to engage with the element of form/structure but did not need to base their entire response on form/structure to garner full marks. Students who scored highly constructed insightful discussions that demonstrated a good knowledge of the work studied. A number of students used bar numbers or 'cues' without presenting additional information about the work. It should be noted that simply quoting a bar number does not constitute supporting evidence.

Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	3	7	3	5	10	6	13	17	19	12	6	6.1

This question required students to describe how the work studied was representative of a music style. Reference needed to be made to the elements of melody and harmony but responses did not need to be centred on these elements to achieve full marks. The highest-scoring responses provided thorough insights into the style of the work while also revealing a good knowledge of the work itself. Overly generic descriptions of a style did not score as highly. Students and teachers are reminded to access good, scholarly sources of information to support analysis. Many students who did not score highly in this question incorporated a range of factually inaccurate information regarding music style.

Question 7a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	1	10	19	22	21	18	9	3.4

This question required students to describe two contextual issues related to a work composed since 1910. Only responses based on works composed since 1910 could garner marks for this question and Question 7b. The highest-scoring responses provided factually accurate information around an issue that had a clear impact on the work studied. Low-scoring responses were characterised by inaccurate or misunderstood information related to history and culture or very broad social trends that did not meaningfully impact on the work studied.

Question 7b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	3	6	10	4	7	9	15	15	16	9	6	5.8

This question required students to use one of the contextual issues described in Question 7a. as the basis for a discussion of the impact of that issue on the work studied. High-scoring responses featured insightful links between the contextual issue and the work. These discussions featured detailed evidence from the work and accurately employed relevant terminology. Low-scoring responses tended to further detail the contextual issue rather than providing evidence of its impact.

Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	2	5	6	8	9	14	21	18	10	6	6.3

This question sought an explanation of the way in which the compositional devices of repetition and variation operated to create interest in the work studied. Students were free to define 'interest' in whatever way they chose, and were free to disagree with the basic contention of the question and still garner full marks. The highest-scoring responses provided detailed explanation with a thorough insight into the operation of repetition and variation. Descriptive statements around these devices were backed up with accurate evidence that effectively employed music terminology. Lower-scoring responses tended to consist of pre-prepared responses that did not create a link between the device and the notion of interest.