

2019 VCE Music Investigation performance examination report

General comments

VCE Music Investigation is a performance-focused study in which students select a unique Investigation Topic that frames their year's work of performance research. By design, the study provides for students to 'drill down' into an aspect of performance that is of particular, or passionate, interest to them as musicians.

In 2019 students typically sought to undertake performance research framed around a specific performer/artist, genre or style, period/decade/era or performance technique(s).

In nominating an Investigation Topic for the broader study, students undertook performance-based research in preparation for the Unit 4 examination. Alongside refinement of the Investigation Topic throughout the year of study, students developed nuanced performance skills directly relevant to the chosen topic and the assessment criteria.

While Music Investigation provides for students to prepare/present a program of works that is profoundly linked in terms of the nominated Investigation Topic the examination performance is assessed against the published VCAA criteria. A performance cannot be assessed in terms of what, perhaps in another setting, might constitute a highly successful, or even outstanding, concert experience. Several contemporary bands, chamber groups and solo contemporary vocalists presented programs that on one level appeared to be highly competent, but did not address the assessment criteria in any meaningful way.

Poorly conceived Investigation Topics at times made it difficult for assessors to connect the presented performance to higher scores across the criteria. Several Investigation Topics were framed on, or heavily referenced, content not directly relevant to performance, performance techniques or the criteria. Broadly, these topics seemed more suited to essay topics or lecture presentations. Common poorly constructed topics were those that referred to, for example, the role of X in a band, the influence of one performer on another performer, or the use of very generic/broad techniques across a disconnected program of works. The highest-scoring topics sought to clearly identify a range of identifiable performance techniques set within a nominated stylistic context.

Students who scored the highest marks across the 11 criteria had clearly worked in collaboration with individuals who were well-informed with regard to the technical and stylistic demands/opportunities within the chosen Investigation Topic and had made the significant leap of being able to convey this acquired knowledge through the act of performance.

Several students selected an appropriate program of works and performed the program with few errors, but were less successful in terms of conveying a practical knowledge/demonstration of the inherent sophistication and nuance that was fundamental to the nominated Investigation Topic. Sophistication and nuance can and should be evident throughout the performance. In short, this practical demonstration of knowledge was achieved by students through the effective and

appropriate manipulation of tone, fluent delivery of idiomatic performance techniques, subtle control of articulation and phrasing and, perhaps at the highest level, the nuanced delineation and delivery of musical lines contained within repertoire.

Performer's Statement

On the day of the external assessment students are required to provide a completed Performer's Statement to the VCAA examination coordinator.

Compliance with the VCAA conditions and advice surrounding the Performer's Statement could have been improved in 2019.

While the Performer's Statement is not directly assessed within the broader criteria it does play a vital role in guiding assessors to the performance research undertaken by the student throughout the year. The Performer's Statement points assessors to the performance techniques, stylistic nuance and subtle control that, according to the student, are the highlights of the skills developed across the year. In 2019, many students did not fully use the Performer's Statement to highlight aspects of their performance.

The VCAA Performer's Statement template document makes clear that paperwork submitted on the day of the assessment should be typed. However, on several occasions, paperwork submitted was handwritten. This template also makes clear that two copies should be provided (one for each assessor), but this was ignored by several students.

Some students arrived at the examination venue unaware that a Performer's Statement needed to be provided to assessors on the day of the examination. In these instances, students had to hurriedly develop a Performer's Statement.

Performer's Statements that were most effective referred solely to commentary directly relevant to performance, in particular the stylistic and technical demands contained in the program to be presented. These statements were concise and showed that the assessment criteria had been taken into account at the time of writing. Performer's Statements should not include significant reference to historical information such as the life of the composer or performer.

Specific information

The Music Investigation performance examination is a criterion-based assessment. While a performance in a setting outside of this study might be considered outstanding in terms of a concert performance, gig set or performance against criteria set by an alternative examining body, this can in no way guarantee a high score.

While many students presented repertoire that showed a clear knowledge of the assessment criteria, others appeared to have selected performance programs with little or no consideration for the published criteria. This was typically shown through the overuse of repetition within a small number of performance techniques and the absence of specific performance skills directly referred to in the criteria (a deliberate variation of tone shown across the program, for example).

Some criteria require the demonstration of **skill** in, not just the presence of, a particular aspect of performance.

Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria used for Music Investigation performance were not identical to that applied in other music performance assessments. Music Investigation used identical criteria for both solo and group settings (in contrast to Music Performance, for example).

1. Compliance with the requirements of the task

To attain compliance, students were required to perform no fewer than four works within the prescribed time provided for assessment. These works should have been representative and characteristic of the style, tradition and/or genre outlined in the Performer's Statement.

A second element of compliance was that at least one work within the program be selected from either the Prescribed List of Group Works or the Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works, as published on the VCAA website.

2. Skill in performing accurately and with clarity

Students who achieved the highest scores on this criterion were able to demonstrate a high level of stylistic nuance and instrumental accuracy across the repertoire presented for assessment. In maximising their scoring opportunities within the potential of the nominated Investigation Topic, these students evidenced a high level of precision in terms of pitch, rhythm, dynamics, articulation, clarity of passage work, timing and tone production.

Students who achieved lower scores appeared unprepared or overly challenged by the technical demands of repertoire selected for presentation.

3. Skill in performing a range of techniques with control and fluency within the context of the Investigation Topic

Central to students achieving higher scores for this criterion was the ability to demonstrate a range of performance techniques with exceptional control and fluency. In many programs students presented only a limited number of developed techniques, often demonstrating an excessive level of repetition.

Inappropriate or poor repertoire selection often played a key role in students not scoring beyond the middle range. Well thought-out repertoire selection, in terms of scoring potential, was fundamental to the presentation of programs that scored beyond the middle range.

4. Skill in producing a range of expressive tonal qualities relevant to the Investigation Topic

Many students attempted to manipulate and vary tone production across their broader recital presentations. Students had evidently responded to advice indicating that evidencing a single tonal character, even if that tonal character was outstanding, would not provide access to scores beyond the middle range.

5. Skill in the interpretive control of articulation and phrasing within the context of the Investigation Topic

While sophistication in performance could be seen as a fundamental attribute for several of the assessment criteria, it is particularly relevant to Criterion 5. Students who were unable to convey a developed sense of musical purpose, refinement or sophistication were often limited with regard to articulation and phrase shaping. Students who scored well were able to feature the inherent sophistication contained within the Investigation Topic through their subtle delivery of interpretation, and by manipulating articulation and phrasing.

6. Skill in differentiating the musical lines in the selected works as appropriate to the Investigation Topic and as appropriate to the instrument and/or instrumental context

Students who scored well on this criterion were able to go beyond 'getting the notes right' in terms of conveying the melodic intentions of the composer. These students appeared to have researched the significance of individual lines/figures within each work and had endeavoured to convey that knowledge through a heightened level of interpretive control.

Students who received lower scores on this criterion were not able to demonstrate artistic purpose in terms of differentiating the significance of particular musical lines beyond attempts to accurately perform the notes.

7. Skill in differentiating the structures and textures within each work as appropriate to the Investigation Topic

A number of students presented performance programs that provided only limited scope to evidence a variety of textures within the broader Investigation Topic. In some instances, the overuse of interpretive repetition throughout repeated sections (form) within a work(s) indicated that the student needed further understanding or knowledge of the importance of variation in performance.

8. Skill in presenting an interpretation of the works that is informed by historical and/or contemporary practices and conventions relevant to the Investigation Topic

Students who scored highly were able to evidence aspects of their research report undertaken in Outcome 1 within the performance examination. These students appeared able to demonstrate, from a practical perspective, nuanced knowledge that had emerged from analytical work undertaken as part of the broader study completed within the Investigation Topic.

9. Skill in performing with musicality through creativity and individuality

Students should endeavour to demonstrate individuality and creativity within the chosen performance program, as appropriate to the nominated Investigation Topic. In order to access higher scores, the performance should convey elements of personal interpretation set within the stylistic framework of the selected repertoire. The ability to interpret repertoire beyond technical demands should be viewed as a platform, or springboard, from which students are able to include their own level of individuality and subsequent creativity.

10. Skill in demonstrating how the works in the program are representative of the Investigation Topic

Students who scored highly on this criterion were able to make an obvious connection between the presented performance and the Performer's Statement provided to assessors on the day of the assessment.

Where the program presented appeared to have an unconvincing or even irrelevant link to the provided Performer's Statement, scores were limited.

11. Skill in the presentation of a cohesive program relevant to the Investigation Topic

Students should acknowledge the assessment weighting of 10 marks for this criterion, by demonstrating a sense of cohesion and occasion relevant to the Investigation Topic. Throughout the entire year of study students should review, analyse and rehearse presentation conventions relevant to the selected Topic.

A number of students chose to introduce each item to assessors. This rarely contributed to the awarding of higher scores as dialogue was commonly not related to an aspect of performance, appeared unprepared, or was very time-consuming in the context of the limited performance time available to students.