2022 VCE Music Style and Composition Externally-assessed Task report

General comments

In 2022, the Externally-assessed Task (EAT) had two sections covering Unit 3 and Unit 4 respectively. Both sections were compulsory and students were required to follow the guidelines published by the VCAA.

A wide range of marks was represented across the scoring spectrum, with fewer in the lower band. The quality of work for Unit 3 was of a good standard; however, many students chose to use colours in their notation to emphasise their work, which was not required nor beneficial to the task. Many of the Unit 4 Music Works demonstrated a clear understanding of the task, addressing the examination criteria. These utilised the compositional devices and there were high-quality submissions overall. Many students chose to compose for smaller ensembles and groups, with many not exhibiting harmonic complexities or complex musical exploration.

Students whose work achieved the highest marks demonstrated a clear creative refinement in their composition, with detailed documentation clearly outlining and validating the creative process. Many of the works relied too heavily on the inspired work, being more of a demonstration of variation to an already-composed creative idea rather than expanding on the key elements and compositional devices to generate a new creative work. Many of the students used visual colours to demonstrate similarities and creative choices, which often interfered with how the documentation and creative work related, making assessment difficult at times. There was less exploration of instrumentation and blend, with many of the compositions not demonstrating exploration of a diversity of tonal colours and explorative techniques.

Utilising the published VCAA performance descriptors, marking guides and reports gives students the best opportunity to access higher marks, making a creative, informed decision for their submitted work. Most student work was submitted in the correct format into the correct files and properly labelled. However, some students left their name on the composition as the composer. Students are reminded that student numbers should replace the student’s name as the composer for the works being submitted in both Units 3 and 4. Recordings of student work were mostly saved in one of the VCAA-recommended formats as outlined in the study design, and, while not required, live recordings assisted with the playability, instrument idiosyncrasies and overall success of the works. Where Sibelius was used as the composing platform, it is recommended that students use the free Sibelius sounds download instead of the computer-generated sounds to assist in fulfilling their creative work. Live recordings of both the exercises and music works are strongly encouraged, as these recordings demonstrate a higher level of playability and practicality to the compositions.

Computer-generated compositions make up a large proportion of works. In this genre, the compositions were for the most part considered and well put together, demonstrating an understanding of the compositional devices and their uses. Some of these compositions were slow to develop, with limited evidence of the music elements and compositional devices, while others demonstrated a higher level of understanding of the criterion and task. The music notation in this genre was considerably more detailed and clearer than in previous years, often supported by well-written documentation outlining the creative process. Students writing in this genre also used a variety of sound production tools, which is not assessed as part of the criteria for this study.

Music notation in this genre was successful, with most notation representing the creative work. In very few cases there was no notation, or notation that did not match the creative work. Documentation that clearly identified the creative process without colours and/or ongoing comparisons generally accessed the higher marks. Graphic notation should allow for recreation of the music work, providing a clear identification of how the work was created.

In 2022 a number of students produced a creative response to a studied work in Unit 4. While responding creatively to a studied work is a requirement for Unit 3, students are reminded that the task in Unit 4 is to create an original piece of work, not a creative response, arrangement or variation to an already-created work.

A number of students included small sections of notated bars in the documentation of both units, using multiple colours to highlight comparisons, trends, creative choices and similarities. This is not required as part of the task and in most cases did not enhance the documentation. The documentation that received higher marks was clear, concise and specifically outlined the creative process and creative choices.

Specific information

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

Unit 3: Creative exercises

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | Average |
| % | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 9 | 10 | 15 | 16 | 13 | 9 | 9 | 3 | 14.8 |

Overall, the exercises were of high quality, showing a clear understanding of the task and demonstration of the referred studied work and correlation to the creative exercise.

A large percentage of students represented the upper band of marks through clear, concise documentation referencing the stimulus work. Where the stimulus work was evident in the creative exercise, with clear documentation describing the creative process and music elements and compositional devices applied, these works were the most successful and represented many genres. Where students wrote for too many instruments, provided coloured chord similarities or variations through annotations, or showed no correlation from the studied work in the creative exercise, these students for the most part could not access higher marks. Most students followed the guidelines of length and/or time outlined in the study design and there was a wide variety of genres represented. Concise documentation correlating to the studied work, which is evident in the structure and tonality contour of the works, accessed the highest marks.

All students displayed a compositional device of either repetition, variation and/or contrast.

The upper band of students’ exercises demonstrated inventive and intricate use of the elements and development of musical ideas. This included a clear link to the work studied. A small number of students did not connect their work to the stimulus material at all. Students are encouraged to clearly and succinctly identify which compositional device they are demonstrating in their exercises (even though all three may be represented) and how it was treated to achieve creative outcomes.

Unit 3: Documentation

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
| % | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 10 | 29 | 27 | 20 | 6 | 3 | 6.7 |

Documentation for Unit 3 overall was submitted in adherence to the study design. The highest-scoring documentation was succinct and clearly showed the relevance of the creative work to the stimulus piece. These students described the relationship between the studied music compositional device and the creative outcomes in a concise, well-articulated document. The students who provided colour-coded music notation in the documentation often were unsuccessful in demonstrating clear stimulus, relevance or creative aims, making the connection to the studied work unclear. Annotations on the creative exercise for the most part caused the exercise to exceed the word count, which needs to be considered in the final submission.

Unit 4: Original music work

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 32 | 33 | 34 | 35 | 36 | 37 | 38 | 39 | 40 | Average |
| 4 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 8 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 28.6 |

While there was a range of styles represented, there were few jazz and full orchestral submissions. The range of marks was well spread with very few students scoring at the highest or lowest end of the range. Most works were consistent with the required task, representing a firm understanding of the task for assessment. Many of the works were well considered and demonstrated some complexity in the musical progression. The creative works that scored highly were inventive, with complexity in the development and treatment of the compositional devices and music elements. There was a trend this year to follow a stimulus work, and while this is a recognised form of composing, students are reminded that the Unit 4 task is an original creative work and not an arrangement or theme and variation to a studied work.

The musical works that obtained the highest marks demonstrated inventive treatment of the musical elements and a complex use of compositional devices, repetition and variation, with clear documentation describing the creative process supporting the development of the work. Unit 4 works that did not come to realisation or were not supported and validated through the documentation could not access the higher marks. The few creative works that demonstrated an erudite understanding of the compositional devices and their development, and of musical concepts such as instrument range, playability, idiomatic aptness, and demonstrated sophisticated creativity, received the highest marks. When writing for orchestration, choirs and bands, students need to demonstrate an understanding of instrument range, idiomatic playability and a suitability of instrument blend, including appropriate instrument voicings. Computer-generated music representing a variety of idioms, demonstrating sophistication and artistic creativity through well-considered structures, layering and creative sounds also received marks in the highest band.

Sample loops, ambient and atmosphere music with little to no development and limited documentation discussing the creative process were unable to access the higher marks, as outlined in the VCAA assessment criteria.

Solo, group and vocal works that did not develop or demonstrate direction also could not access the higher marks, as outlined in the VCAA assessment criteria.

Many live recordings of the creative works were submitted, and although not a requirement, this is strongly encouraged where appropriate as it contributes to the genuine playability and overall quality of the work. Electronic scores were mostly submitted in an appropriate format, providing an accurate representation of the creative work.

Unit 4: Documentation

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | Average |
| % | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 8 | 15 | 9 | 11 | 12 | 17 | 11 | 2 | 15.3 |

Most students provided clear documentation that represented their musical work in Unit 4. Students who clearly demonstrated the creative process from initial concept to the final completion, and in-depth musical understanding, discussing the creative process, treatment of elements and exploration of compositional devices, achieved the highest marks. Students who provided detailed explanation of decisions and creative choices made throughout the different stages of the process, also using complex language and terminology to support their musical work, were able to access higher marks. Many students discussed the inspiration of a stimulus work and the similarities of these works to their own creative variation. Although well written at times, this is not required for Unit 4; rather, the requirement is for a documentation discussing the creative process and not an analysis of a studied work. Many students also provided coloured annotations either pasted into the documentation or annotated into the musical score. Most of these submissions were not successful at achieving the highest marks. This approach clouded the creative process and was often a representation of music analysis and not a documentation outlining and validating the creative process. On most occasions sections of notation provided as visual stimulus did not enhance or relate to the creative journey in the documentation and could not achieve the higher marks.

Documentation overall

Documentation varied from limited explanations to well over the word count. Documentation with considered wordings explaining creative choices was most successful. Examples of annotations with bars and chords often did not enhance the documentation and clouded the purpose of the task. It is recommended that only brief, if any, coloured notations are submitted, as they often have no bearing or relation to the task. Annotated scores for both units need to be considered for the word count and overall relevance to the task.

Overall notation

Notation ranged from non-existent to excellent. Generally, music notation submitted was a clear representation of the musical work.

Students achieving higher marks in this criterion had detailed scores including dynamics, tempo markings, bowing and peddling techniques, muting or percussion techniques, ties, slurs, lyrics and phrase markings.

Many scores were missing basic components such as time signatures, key signatures and bar lines (where appropriate) or omitted music played in the recording. Some scores were not cleaned and had multiple bars at the end, little direction on how to perform the work and random notation throughout. Time for score cleaning with attention to detail needs to be allocated before submitting the final work to access the highest marks. Electronic scores were mostly well detailed and directions on the creative aim, how to perform the work or techniques were clear. A high percentage of electronic scores received high marks, with clear, well-explained graphic notations or soundscapes clearly authenticating the work. It is important to note that notation is style-specific. Traditional music needs to be presented in the traditional genre notation format it is representing, while contemporary or computer-generated music needs to be in its reproducible, appropriate style-specific format.