



2011 Music Investigation GA 2: Performance examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

Music Investigation was introduced as a new Unit 3–4 sequence in 2011. The *VCE Music Study Design* offers music students opportunities to extend their existing musical knowledge and performing ability through a focus on a particular area of musical interest.

Many students presented musical performance programs that demonstrated great depth and focus in their musical outcomes. On the other hand, a number of students were not as successful in their performances.

Students were expected to present a live performance of at least four contrasting works that related to the Focus Area underpinning their study in Units 3 and 4. The students also were required to submit, along with a performance program sheet, a Focus Statement outlining their Focus Area and the relationship of the selected performance program to this area. At least one work in the program was to be selected from either the *Prescribed List of Group Works* or the *Prescribed List of Notated Solo Works* as published on the VCAA website.

Students nominate to present either as a soloist or as a member of a group. Schools are advised to check that all of their students completing VCE Music Investigation at Unit 3–4 level in 2012 have been enrolled in VASS with the correct instrument focus area code.

- Students intending to present for the performance examination as a **soloist** must have the correct instrument selected in the Focus Area field in the VCE Enrolment maintenance screen on VASS. (Note, an instrument focus area code of **AA – ALT/INST (Alternative Instrument)** should only be selected where prior written approval has been granted by the VCAA).
- Students intending to present for the performance examination as a **member of a group** must have the instrument focus **GR – GROUP** selected in the Focus Area field in the VCE Enrolment maintenance screen on VASS.

Students who presented for the Music Investigation examination performed with a diverse range of instruments, including voice. Students' ability to address the criteria varied and was influenced by their performance skills; the relevance of the musical items performed to their submitted Focus Statement; their understanding of the music style(s); and use of relevant performance techniques and experience in performing in a group or solo context.

In this first year of the study, the success of students' performance examinations in demonstrating relevance and articulating the content of their focus statements varied considerably.

Students who achieved the highest scores presented a high level of musicianship in a performance program that consistently and clearly provided musical items relevant to their Focus Area. For example, a high-level result was achieved by a student who consistently demonstrated in their performance (Group context) a focus area concerned with the use of blues devices used by a number of jazz musicians in improvisations across a clearly delineated timeline. Another example of a high-level performance was by a student who consistently demonstrated, in their solo performance, a focus area concerned with the use of natural and artificial harmonics in contemporary solo acoustic guitar music.

Some students took the opportunity to introduce each piece with a description of how the piece related to their chosen Focus Area. Although not mandated, this practice was often of benefit in ensuring the connection between performance and Focus Area was clear to the assessors.

Students who achieved a medium or low result may have achieved this score either because of a lower level of musicianship in their performance program, or because they presented a reasonable level of musicianship but failed to demonstrate clear relevance to their Focus Statement (see the notes on focus statements below).

A number of students who achieved very low scores presented very low levels of musicianship in performance programs that bore little connection to the stated Focus Area.

At times, students performed some pieces that appeared to be irrelevant to their Focus Area, such as performing a prelude in a performance that was supposed to focus on the influence of dance forms on classical music.



While the Focus Statement is not assessed, it does provide a crucial reference point for assessors to understand the intention of the program.

Students and teachers should carefully read the document containing the 11 criteria used by assessors. This can be downloaded from the VCAA website. Note that each criterion references the Focus Area in either the text or the accompanying annotations.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Solo

Students who performed as soloists in this examination performed on a wide variety of classical, contemporary and world instruments, including an Indian Tabla. Contemporary popular voice had the largest cohort of students, followed by contemporary popular guitar, drum-kit and saxophone.

As mentioned above, one of the main factors in awarding marks was the extent to which the performance related to the Focus Area. The highest-ranking students were able to clearly and concisely articulate and demonstrate their area of focus. In reading the Focus Statement, it was very clear what the area of investigation was. The performance then clearly demonstrated what was written. At the same time, the performance contained a variety of elements as specified in the examination criteria. These students were also able to use a variety of performance techniques and musical elements to create interesting and varied performances.

Some students seemed to have had difficulty in understanding what they were investigating via the performance and Focus Statement. Some students were let down by focus statements that were too general and performances that seemed to have little or no relationship to the focus statements. Some focus statements were light on facts. Others were so broad and general that they could have been written to justify almost any program. Some needed more detail, and others provided a great deal of irrelevant information. While some students had a strong command of musical terminology in their focus statements, others lacked precision in their language, immediately demonstrating a lack of depth of understanding of their Focus Area. Some students failed to make any obvious link between the chosen 'set work' and the other works in their program.

Group

Each student was required to submit a Focus Statement, even where members of a group had selected similar focus areas. The performance program presented often allowed for similar focus statements to work in the one examination time. Some students should have considered whether their Focus Area would best be demonstrated by performing in a separate examination to other students from the same school.

Teachers and students also needed to be careful to ensure that they put together the strongest possible program for the assessed students. When determining the musical performance program for the examination, they needed to consider their selections in relation to the criteria, especially regarding the relevance to their focus. Some students successfully performed original compositions that were relevant and well-crafted, but other students presented a majority of original compositions in their program with limited connection to the Focus Area.

The Performance Program and Focus Statement

Students needed to recognise the importance of presenting a performance that clearly demonstrated their Focus Area. The Focus Statement communicates information about the Focus Area to assessors and the quality of the statements has been noted to vary considerably from excellent to very poor.

High-level focus statements clearly outlined what the student intended to demonstrate in their performance. The Focus Area had depth and often referred to a timeline. The accompanying notes avoided distracting background information such as historical information and included only notes explaining the performance techniques to be demonstrated item by item.

Poor focus statements made it difficult to make a connection between the Focus Area and students' performance. At times it appeared that the student(s) had devised a performance program first and then rationalised a Focus Area that lacked any genuine focus or depth.



There was a significant number of focus statements that were problematic in a number of ways, such as:

- the Focus Area was too broad and lacked depth and/or focus; for example, a Focus Area entitled ‘the role of bass guitar in alt rock in 70s and 80s’ use of the term ‘alt(ernative) rock’, which is exceptionally broad and can generally refer to any musical style or genre that is not played on mainstream media
- the Focus Area chosen was selected as suitable for school-based aspects of the study but was not well chosen for a performance examination as it did not support presentation of the performance program where each work demonstrated a different aspect of the Focus Area
- the Focus Statement did not present information clearly; as a result, it was difficult to work out how the chosen program related to the Focus Area
- the Focus Statement listed musical items not included in the program
- the Focus Statement provided excessive historical background
- the Focus Statement was unnecessarily long and contained information not directly relevant to the actual performance program.

Students should:

- be familiar with the examination criteria, which emerge directly from the study design
- start with, ‘I intend to demonstrate ...’ when writing the focus statement. This can then be tested with each work chosen, to ensure that each work demonstrates a different aspect of the Focus Area
- make a list of styles, techniques, tonal qualities, textures, structures, and typical articulation and phrasing evident in typical works of the chosen Focus Area, and then choose works with corresponding variety.

Specific Issues (Group and Solo)

Unsatisfactory Focus Areas

Focus Areas were audited early in the year to provide advice to students and teachers and to ensure that the focus areas chosen were appropriate, clearly articulated and would work well as the basis of a program for the performance examination. In some cases, recommended changes were not made and focus areas that were deemed unsuitable were used as the basis of the program in the performance examination. The result was that the students were severely disadvantaged in their examination.

Contemporary popular voice (solo) – use of microphone

One very exciting development for students is that the use of a microphone is allowed. While this carries obvious benefits, it also poses challenges for singers. Students who decide to use a microphone should do a lot of work in microphone technique, and be thoroughly comfortable and confident in this area. They should also consider demonstrating the ability to sing without a microphone in one or two songs for contrast and variety. This would also allow the performer to demonstrate different aspects of vocal technique. The issue of setting up equipment must be considered due to time constraints, as well as balance between the vocalist and the backing.

Voice (classical and contemporary – group and solo) – range and keys

When choosing works for a program, it is recommended that voice students consider performing in different ranges to highlight the different colours in their voice. At the same time, the choice of key is very important to the successful delivery of a song. Sometimes a key needs to be altered (sometimes requiring the re-transcription of an accompaniment) to better suit a students’ developing vocal range. Some students do themselves a disservice by keeping all songs in the original key in their edition of the music.

Accompaniments and style

As students have the opportunity to play in a specific style or genre in this subject, it is absolutely essential that live accompanists chosen to support students are expert at playing in the chosen style. When performing with backing tracks, students need to consider the quality of the backing, and the balance of their part with the backing track. Mistakes made in 2011 included using backings that were too soft and thus failed to provide adequate support, as well as backings that were too loud and drowned out the solo part.

Some students had their own part playing in the accompaniment (group or solo). In most instances, this affected the stylistic integrity of the performance. In some cases it was difficult for the assessor to clearly determine what was actually played by the soloist, thus adversely affecting the student’s mark in one or more criteria.

Short programs

There are no prescriptions about program length apart from requiring a minimum of four works and a maximum of 25 minutes in length. It was possible to perform four two-minute pieces, without incurring any penalty. However, it was

2011 Assessment Report



difficult for students to fulfil the examination criteria to a very high level if they chose such a minimalist approach. Students were expected to demonstrate a breadth of work studied over the course of a year, with a depth of understanding. Some programs presented were very short and displayed only very limited and simple techniques. Students were encouraged to make the best of the opportunity to perform for up to 25 minutes, and to display a depth of understanding of their Focus Area through a wide variety of technical and musical resources.

Unaccompanied works (solo)

In music performance, it is often the unaccompanied work which separates the good students from the best students. Although it was not a requirement in music investigation, some students could have benefited by at least considering performing an unaccompanied work in their program. In some programs, the unaccompanied work could have been that one missing style needed to complement the rest of the program.