

# Component 1: Understanding music – assessment guide

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This resource gives you technical guidance for Component 1: Understanding music to help you prepare for GCSE Music (8271). There are no recordings to accompany this document.

## The task

Students will concentrate on four Areas of study. These were chosen to provide an appropriate focus for students to appraise, develop and demonstrate in-depth knowledge and understanding of musical elements, musical context and musical language.

The four Areas of study are:

- 1 Western classical tradition 1650 - 1910
- 2 Popular music
- 3 Traditional music
- 4 Western classical tradition since 1910

Each Area of study (AoS) contains four topic areas and a study piece. The topic areas within each AoS are:

### 1 Western classical tradition 1650 – 1910

- The Coronation Anthems and Oratorios of Handel
- The orchestra music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven
- The piano music of Chopin and Schumann
- The Requiem of the late Romantic period

#### Study piece

Haydn: Symphony No. 101 in D major, The Clock, movt. 2

### 2 Popular music

- Music of Broadway 1950s to 1990s
- Rock music of the 1960s and 1970s
- Film and gaming music 1990s to the present

- Pop music 1990s to the present

### Study piece

The Beatles: three tracks from *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*:

*With a Little Help from my Friends*  
*Within You, Without You*  
*Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*

## 3 Traditional music

- Blues music from 1920 - 1950
- Fusion music incorporating African and/or Caribbean music
- Contemporary Latin music
- Contemporary folk music of the British Isles

### Study piece

Santana: three tracks from *Supernatural*:  
*Smooth*  
*Migra*  
*Love of my Life*

## 4 Western classical tradition since 1910

- The orchestra music of Copland
- British music of Arnold, Britten, Maxwell-Davies and Tavener
- The orchestral music of Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók
- Minimalist music of John Adams, Steve Reich and Terry Riley

### Study piece

Copland: two movements from *Rodeo*:

*Saturday Night Waltz*  
*Hoedown*

Students will sit an end-of-course written examination. The examination is in two sections and lasts one and a half hours. It is worth 96 marks, 40% of the final examination.

### Section A (worth 68 marks)

There are eight questions based around short excerpts of music taken from all four AoS. There will be two questions on each AoS and, together, each pair of questions will

be worth 17 marks. You will find that 48 of the 64 marks will focus on questions related to the Elements of Music while the remaining 20 will focus on the context and/or genre within which some of the different excerpts were written. It will last about one hour.

## Section B (worth 28 marks)

Students will answer two questions on two different Study Pieces: Question 9 (Haydn) is compulsory and then candidates choose one of the remaining three questions.

Each question will have four parts, the first three requiring short answers and the final one requiring a longer answer.

This is an examined unit, marked by AQA examiners. There are two SAMs (Specimen Assessment Materials) on the AQA website providing exemplar questions and mark schemes.

## Approach and assessment

For this examination, Ofqual requires that students:

- demonstrate and apply musical knowledge
- use appraising skills to make evaluative and critical judgements about music.

Each of these requirements/assessment objectives carries equal weighting within the examination.

## Section A

Each of the eight questions will be based around a musical excerpt, as in the legacy specification. Questions will focus on the use of the elements of music within these excerpts but, in some cases, will also require students to comment upon the use of certain elements of music within an excerpt which links it closely to a period or genre.

As well as familiar questions such as:

‘Name the cadence at the end of this excerpt’

or

‘Describe the texture of this excerpt’,

there will also be questions such as :

‘Explain three features of the instrumental introduction typical of Rock’n’ Roll music.’

## Section B

There will be four questions, each based on one of the study pieces. Students **must** answer Question 9 about Haydn's 'Clock' Symphony, 2nd movement. They will then choose **one** other question from the remaining three, depending upon which they have studied.

These questions are contextual in approach and focus on features of the music which are typical of the genre and/or period during which they were written. There are 14 marks for each question: three of them are worth 2 marks each; the fourth is worth 8 marks and requires an extended answer.

## Common guidance questions and answers

[Will I still be able to teach the Elements of Music as I did for the legacy specification?](#)

Yes: the Elements of Music form the basis of the study, understanding and appreciation of all music.

[Will the examination still have a CD?](#)

Yes: the CD will contain the excerpts of music for Section A. As with the legacy specification, each question in this section will be announced and the music played a certain number of times. There will be no excerpts of music for Section B.

[Will the layout of the examination paper be like the exams for the legacy specification?](#)

Yes as far as Section A is concerned, although there will also be questions on the context during which some of the excerpts were written as well as questions concerning the elements of music.

[Why are students having to answer questions about the context of the music?](#)

This is an Ofqual requirement but it is also important that students understand how historical and stylistic influences affected the music composed during different periods of music history, in different genres and for different occasions.

[Will students be able to take scores and/or recordings of the study pieces into the examination?](#)

No: scores and/or recordings will not be necessary as it is to be expected that students will know the selected study pieces really well after two years of study. Also, scores are not available for all study pieces.

Will students have to refer to bar numbers during their answers to questions in Section B?

No: that sort of detail will not be required. Reference should be made to the SAMs papers on the AQA website for examples of the final questions for each of the Study Pieces.

Can students answer all questions using bullet points?

No: that was a feature of the legacy specification and the instruction will not be found on the front cover of the Understanding music examination paper. Although short answers will be perfectly acceptable where a simple answer is required, answers to, for example, the final part of the question on each of the study pieces will need to be written in continuous prose. The assessment guidelines in the mark scheme make this clear.

The reason for this is because, for all subjects, Ofqual requires that: 'the assessments for a GCSE specification must include questions or tasks, which allow learners to provide extended responses. An extended response is evidence generated by a learner, which is of sufficient length to allow the learner to construct and develop a sustained line of reasoning which is coherent, relevant, substantiated and logically structured.'

Where will I find information about the study pieces?

There are study guides on the AQA website for each of the study pieces. There is also a 'Suggested Resources' list on the website which gives references to other sources of information. It is also worth pointing out that there are classroom performance editions of excerpts from the study pieces to be used with your GCSE classes: playing the music is a vital way of really getting to know it and, where possible, applying some of the musical and/or instrumental techniques to classroom or individual compositional tasks during the course.

Why is this 'Understanding music' component worth 40% of the final marks when the equivalent paper in the legacy specification was worth just 20%?

The weighting for the three components was set out by Ofqual and all examination boards have followed this. This component now covers two Assessment Objectives (AOs):

A03: Demonstrate and apply musical knowledge (20%) and

A04: Use appraising skills to make evaluative and critical judgements about music (20%).

I have seen the Study guides on the AQA website: do these contain all the answers to all the questions the students will have to answer?

This certainly cannot be guaranteed: although each of the study guides is very detailed, it is still important that the chosen study pieces are examined in detail and it is very likely that there will be additional points to be discovered and that a future question setter could well ask about some aspect of a study piece not referred to in a study guide but, nevertheless, present in the music.

My students are not very keen on classical music. Why do they have to answer question 9? Can't they answer two questions from 10, 11 and 12 instead?

The Western classical tradition is a compulsory Area of study set by Ofqual at GCSE for all of the examination boards. Students cannot answer question 10, 11 or 12 instead.

Can I teach all of the study pieces to my students so that they can choose between questions 10, 11 and 12 when they get into the examination?

Yes, this is possible, but such a programme of study would require a lot of content to be covered. It might be more beneficial to find out which of the three study pieces from questions 10, 11 and 12 your students prefer and concentrate on looking at that in greater depth.