

Writing an Exam

(Music in Context)

This aural recognition exam, for the *school-developed topic*, should enable the students to show how much they know about the chosen work(s). This assessment component is designed to assess Learning Outcomes 1, 2, and 5 (see below). It is weighted at 20%.

This assessment component will be set and marked by the teacher, and moderated by SSABSA.

Students will undertake *1 hour* of aural recognition tasks on the works of the school-developed topic in Section 1 of the 'Scope'.

Content

Choose several aspects of the music – style, era, composer, genre, cultural function, and performance practice – and construct questions that will elicit the answers you want.

Because this is an *aural recognition* exam, students need to *hear* an excerpt from the school-chosen musical work, and then be able to say where in the work it comes as well as point out and even discuss many interesting features from it.

Assessment

The following *Learning Outcomes* and *Criteria for Judging Performance* should be used to guide you in preparing your exam.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the program in Stage 2 Music in Context, students should be able to:

1. place examples of music in their historical and cultural context;
2. recognise stylistic features of the music;
5. explore and discuss aspects of music including style, era, composer, genre, cultural function, and performance practice.

Criteria for Judging Performance

The student's performance in aural recognition will be judged by the extent to which he or she demonstrates:

accuracy

How accurate is the student's aural recognition?

knowledge

To what extent does the student use appropriate musical terminology?

To what extent does the student demonstrate understanding of musical style in its historical and cultural context?

You need to ensure that all of the above learning outcomes and criteria can be met through your questions. For example, questions on one excerpt might direct the answers purely to what the students hear. Can they hear the instrumental combination and identify it? Can they hear what the flutes are doing over the oboes and clarinets and say what is happening? Can they hear and count the number of times a melodic motif is played – can they identify if it changes and say what occurred?

Selecting musical excerpts

It is best to select an excerpt which is an important part of the work e.g.

- Part of the exposition of a sonata or symphony (say, the first or second theme)
- The middle section of a song
- The development section (or part of it) of a larger work
- The cadenza (or part thereof) in a concerto
- The recapitulation of a larger work (or the first or second theme of the recapitulation)
- The introduction of a work
- The instrumental interlude between themes in a work
- The recitative preceding an aria
- The bass or guitar section in a song
- One of the variations in a set of variations
- The trio section in a minuet and trio
- Transition sections between themes.

Select the excerpt because of its special features – you need to be able to ask a number of questions relating to features such as instrumental, melodic, rhythmic and harmonic.

Try to make the excerpt start logically, or have it pick up just before the feature that you want to highlight, so that students aren't left wondering about an unimportant part that is largely featureless. Finish the excerpt just as logically – be it the end of a section, or fade-out after the feature you were interested in.

Keep the excerpts reasonably short – no longer than a couple of minutes, and perhaps even shorter. Play the excerpts at least *twice*. This is discussed later in more detail.

Style of Exam

It is important to remember that the exam needs to have an aural focus. While your questions should enable students to meet the learning outcomes and the assessment criteria, they do need to stem from the aural aspect.

Your exam should contain a variety of questions to give students the best chance possible. Some can be very direct and which should enable all students to answer quickly, e.g. what is the title and composer of the work?

The questions requiring longer answers should be designed to differentiate between students. Here the students are given the chance to show to what detail they are familiar with the work, and should by nature be more challenging for them.

Multiple choice

The use of similar musical terms for a student to choose from to answer a question can sort those who know their terminology (and the work) from those who don't e.g.

1. Which compositional technique is used in the bassoon part in the repeat of the theme?
 - a) imitation

- b) canon
 - c) inversion
 - d) diminution
2. The texture of the first statement of the second theme (8 bars) is best described as
 - a) multilayered
 - b) polyphonic
 - c) homophonic
 - d) contrapuntal
 3. Which theme is featured in this section?
 - a) the principal theme of the movement in a new key
 - b) a transformation of the principal theme of the movement
 - c) a variation of the principal theme in a minor key
 - d) the second subject
 4. Which of the following best describes the orchestra heard in this example?
 - a) Strings and woodwind
 - b) Strings, woodwind and brass
 - c) Strings, woodwind, brass, and percussion
 - d) Strings, woodwind, brass, and continuo

Short answers

These usually require only a few words or a sentence in answer. Most students should be able to answer these questions. The types of questions you might consider can be found in the list prepared by Aldis Sils, included for you in Appendix 1 of this paper. Here are some more sample questions:

1. What is the tonic key of the example?
2. To which key does the music modulate at bar 16?
3. Violino II and Oboe II play in unison for most of the example. In bar 8, why can't Oboe II continue to double Violino II exactly?
4. There are no dynamic markings in the score yet there is dynamic contrast. How is this achieved?
5. Where does the opening theme of the extract first occur in this movement?
6. Which instrument has the melodic interest in this section?

Longer answers

These usually require a couple of sentences in answer, where the students have to give a more detailed response than is found in the short answers. Some suggestions for these can also be found in the Appendix, as well as below.

1. Which instruments have the following roles in the repeat of the second theme?
 - a) theme
 - b) countermelody
 - c) canon
2. How does the first theme of this extract relate to the overall form of the movement?
3. Name *three* major changes to the presentation of the theme that reappears from bar 13 to bar 16.
4. What musical effect does Bartók create with the woodwinds in this section?

Paragraph answers

These usually require several shorter sentences, giving a detailed response on a particular aspect of style etc. They can be constructed in the same way as the longer answers, but should be more focused. Some sample questions are:

1. How does the extract demonstrate Classical style?
2. Name and explain four characteristic devices of Baroque music which occur in this extract.
3. Explain the overall structure of the section from which the extract comes.
4. Discuss the orchestration of the extract.

Length of Exam

The exam is required to be **an hour** long. In this time it would be feasible to have at least four aural excerpts, with each question taking 15 minutes to play and complete, or six excerpts, with each question taking 10 minutes to complete. This could enable you to have different types of questions per excerpt, e.g.

- excerpt 1 might have a number of short answer-type questions
- excerpt 2 might be for several answer-type questions that require a few sentences, and some multiple choice questions
- excerpt 3 might be a mixture of the above
- excerpt 4 might be for a couple of short answer questions and a few questions which require a paragraph in answer.

Or, you could have a mixture of question types per excerpt – it all depends on the information you want to elicit and how you want the students to present it.

Play the excerpts at least twice – once to begin with, and then again after a pause of one minute. Encourage the students to write while the music is being played. The second playing should enable students to refresh their memories of what they heard.

For longer sets of questions, play the excerpt a *third* time after a further pause of a couple of minutes or longer to enable them to check their answers and finish them off.

Unmarked Scores

You might like to allow each student to have an unmarked score, or provide an excerpt of score (one or two pages only) in your exam to accompany one of your musical excerpts.

Consider the following suggestions:

- unmarked score – play the example: students to identify the work, composer, and where in the work the excerpt comes (they'd have to list bar numbers and other specific details), and to explain, using musical terminology, features in the score that occur at particular places in the score (bar numbers would be part of your questions).
- excerpt of score – questions much as above, except this time you are already identifying the section so students won't need to state bar numbers, however they still need to identify where in the work this excerpt comes and be able to discuss special features within it.

These types of questions can only be answered well if students know both the music and the score thoroughly. Both of the above are useful tools, but they address slightly different things – on the one hand students will need to be able to turn straight to the relevant page(s) of the score in order to answer the questions. On the other hand students will need to identify just where in the work this particular section comes, having just the aural and score excerpts to work from. Both can be very useful for sections of the music which are similar to other sections, e.g. play part of the recapitulation of a work, or Chorus 3 in a song.

Some types of questions that you could employ here might be:

1. Identify and explain the compositional device(s) found in bar 7.
2. Explain how the guitar is to play the figure in bars 28-42.
3. In bars 6-8 there are four examples each of compositional and performance devices. Identify and explain each one.
4. Find and explain seven examples of Twentieth Century style in this excerpt.
5. There is a motif in this excerpt which is used several times. Identify where it first occurs and each occurrence thereafter (bar numbers and instrument(s)) and explain what is happening to it each time it plays.
6. The theme in this excerpt appears elsewhere in the work. Identify it, then explain where and how this second appearance occurs.

Marking

- The short-answer and multiple choice questions would be worth 1 mark each.
- The longer answers could be worth 2-3 marks each.
- The paragraph answers could be worth 5 or more marks each.

Try to have a total of 50 or more marks. The more marks you have the more accurate the test results. This mark can then be calculated into a mark out of 20.

Practice tests

It is a good idea to construct a couple of practice, or formative, tests or series of questions, so that the students can have a dry run before they sit the summative test. They need to have practice under exam conditions to give them the best possible chance of doing well. Encourage the students to write while the music is being played so that they don't forget any of the things they are listening to.

Practice tests serve the purpose of letting the students know where they need to direct their attention. This also gives you practice at setting the paper so that you can write the sort of questions that will differentiate between students.

You might also find it useful to give the students practice analysis questions using music examples and scores they haven't seen previously. The Unseen Analysis section of past Analytical Studies exams would be good for this. You can also create some examples of your own so that students gain analytical skills.

Timing

The final summative test will conclude your study of this topic, so the timing of the exam will largely depend on when you finish this study. Perhaps you might conduct the aural recognition exam

- at the end of term 2,

- at the end of term 3,
- *or* you might decide to hold it in the first week of term 4, regardless of when you concluded your study of the topic.

Prepared by Lesley Duncan, 2006

[references – SSABSA Analytical Studies exams – 1999, 2000, 2001 – and Music History and Literature 1990 exam, SSABSA Support Materials and advice by Aldis Sils]

Appendix 1

The following material comes from the SSABSA website in Support Materials <http://www.ssabsa.sa.edu.au/support/arts/musc/musc-menu.htm>: *musc-ti-013*, prepared by Aldis Sils.

Aural Recognition tasks

These tasks could take the form of an aural test. Extracts of works would be played. Students would be required to identify and then to comment on: section, work, historical/cultural aspect.

Suggestions of questions teachers could formulate.

1. Identify the composer of the example.
2. Identify the title of the piece from which the example has been taken.
3. Identify the section.
4. Identify the instrumentation. *i.e. list the main instruments featured in the example.*
5. Identify the form. *i.e. give a general description of the form of the complete movement from which the example has been taken.*
6. Identify the resources used. *i.e. list the main instruments and/or voices featured in the example.*
7. Identify the recording techniques used.
8. Name another important work by the composer.
9. Name another work in the same genre by the composer.
10. To what period of music does this piece belong?
11. Comment on the form of the piece from which this example has been taken.
12. To what genre does this piece belong?
13. What is the most usual form used in the 1st movement of this genre?
14. Mention any particular point of interest in this example.
15. Which instrument is featured at the beginning of the extract?
16. Name the performance technique heard in the strings.
17. What is the usual function of the featured section? *e.g. solo; cadenza*
18. Which two woodwind instruments are featured?
19. Name the album on which this piece was originally featured.
20. Describe three compositional techniques heard in the extract that are typical of the composer.
21. Describe the thematic relationship between this section and the main theme of this work.
22. Name the work and specify the movement from which the extract has been taken.
23. Name the original stage musical from which this standard has come from.
24. Name the medieval chant which features in this movement.
25. Name another song where the composer features elements of an existing melody.
26. Name and describe two characteristic features of the vocal style heard in the extract.
27. What name (Name the work, and composer) and describe the electronic effects used in the following extract.
28. List the instruments that maintain the groove in this song.
29. What is the function of a rhythm section?
30. Describe the style of bass line used in this section.

Questions that require students to *describe, explain or comment* facilitate answers of greater depth.

Short answer questions (paragraph in length), could also be set. These questions would require students to focus on particular aspects of style.

Short Answer Questions

1. Describe the compositional/arranging techniques used in this work.
2. What aspect of this work is recognised as groundbreaking for its time?
3. Give a short description of the form of this work.
4. Discuss the composer's choice of instrumentation in this work.
5. Describe the recording techniques and effects used in this recording.
6. What aspects of Harmony and Melody are seen as groundbreaking in the music of Miles Davis?
7. Comment on how the composer's musical engagements influenced his/her work output.

*Materials Prepared by Aldis Sils
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