

WJEC GCE Music – Unit 2 and Unit 5 Composing.

Please note, these Units are externally assessed, so centres are not required to submit any marks or comments with the candidate work. This guidance is to aid teachers in understanding how the criteria will be applied by the examiner, and to help teachers advise their students.

Amplification and further support in applying the criteria.

This information does not replace the criteria in Appendix B of the published, regulated specification. It is intended to help teachers to understand the criteria which will be applied. You can also look at:

- guidance in the Appendix B of the specification which follows the criteria.
- the principal examiners' report, which can be found on the WJEC website.
- exemplar work, which is published as part of the CPD materials, available on the secure website.

Additional advice and guidance.

Timing – the specification mentions compositions which are “at least” one minute. There are no penalties for timing in these Units, but it is important to say that in general, if a candidate aims for the minimum, they frequently don't score well. However, the composition is always assessed according to the content – impressive standards will deserve appropriate credit.

The Western Classical Tradition – Compositions to a brief set by WJEC must show an understanding of the WCT, which in this situation is defined as Baroque, Classical or Romantic Music. It is best for candidates not to be pushing the boundaries of what is typical for these periods of music, as there is a risk that it will not meet the requirement, and the marks will therefore be affected.

Assessment of the WCT pieces – there is no specific mention of *development* in the criteria bands and columns but the overall title of AO2 is “Create and develop musical ideas with technical and expressive control and coherence.” In the shorter pieces, or sections of pieces expected for the response to the brief set by WJEC, there should be a natural progression of ideas beyond simple repetition. The examiner needs to be able to identify the compositional techniques being used to award credit for them.

Assessment

Overall, when advising candidates on the content, standard and suitability of their composition, it may be helpful to listen to it first and consider some general approaches before looking at the criteria. Remember to refer to the candidate log so that you know exactly what the composer wanted to achieve.

- If it is a piece written for instruments or voices (rather than being for synthesized sounds) is it playable or singable?
- Does the composition make sense aurally, or are you left wondering why certain choices have been made?
- Has the candidate demonstrated considerations of tempo, pulse, melodic shape, use of suitable harmony, rhythm etc? Is there convincing technical control of the elements?
- Are the new ideas presented at the start appropriate? Are there too many things brought in all at once rather than during the piece, or is there a sense of planning?
- Is there a clearly stated brief? Does the piece meet the brief? Remember that the candidate can re-write the brief for the free composition.

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- Is the piece actually substantial enough to meet the challenges of AS or A level? Refer to exemplar material available on the secure website and also the terminology in the list in Appendix C to see the level of musical understanding which is expected.
- Are you happy to sign the declaration that the work is the candidate's own? You must monitor it on at least 3 occasions during the composing process, but you may need to do more than this. Anything non-original (e.g., loops, borrowed themes) must be declared in the candidate log, and cannot be credited under the marking criteria. Are you certain that the music submitted by the candidate has not been generated by AI?
- In the case of a composition which has been performed live by people other than the candidate, are you certain that what was performed is what the candidate has composed, not an interpretation by experienced performers? It would be advisable for the teacher to be present during the recording process to be able to confirm authenticity.

Using the bands – Compositions to a brief set by WJEC at AS and A Level, showing an understanding of the Western Classical Tradition.

In each column of the assessment criteria for the 'brief' compositions there are 3 bands of marks.

Overall, the consideration when deciding which AS band to place a mark in can be explained as below:

Band 3 (7-9 marks)	Ideas are consistently impressive and effectively controlled throughout .
Band 2 (4-6 marks)	At the top of the band there is evidence of convincing musical ideas, but this is balanced by weaker ideas which do not work well, with some weaknesses in technical control. The content lacks some conviction and there are questionable moments in most aspects.
Band 1 (1-3 marks)	Ideas are weak and lack musical intention. There is limited conviction and control shown and little is worthy of credit at this level.
0	Nothing is submitted.

At A level the responses should be more advanced:

Band 3 (7-9 marks)	Ideas show a high level of academic musical understanding. They are consistently sophisticated and mature, and the technical control of elements is skilful.
Band 2 (4-6 marks)	Ideas are mostly effective but there are moments when they are less convincing and lacking some control.
Band 1 (1-3 marks)	Ideas are inconsistent, basic and limited . There are obvious weaknesses in all aspects.
0	Nothing is submitted.

Creating musical ideas

Refer to the assessment criteria and the advice in the tables above regarding which band to place a mark into.

Assess how effective the initial ideas are, for example:

- Are the initial ideas appropriate to the WCT style and to the stated brief?

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- Are the ideas typical and reflective of the aspect of the Western Classical Tradition the candidate has chosen (Baroque, Classical or Romantic Music)?
- Are the ideas substantial enough to show an academic musical understanding of the chosen Western Classical style?

Assess the structuring of the ideas:

- Is there a clear shape or structure, and a logical progression of ideas?
- Does the thematic material link together and feel as if it ‘belongs’ together?
- Does the piece have a clear start and end?
- Is the ending section of the piece an appropriate length or does the piece stop abruptly and without musical conviction or apparent reason?

Assess the response to the brief:

- Does the piece meet the selected brief?
- Have the elements been used appropriately to meet the brief?

Technical and Expressive Control of Musical Elements

- Referring to guidance supplied for each element of music, and the list of terminology for the qualification, does the content display musical understanding and technical control?
- Has there been attention paid to performance directions in order to demonstrate expressive control? E.g., tempo markings, dynamics and articulation thoughtfully added.
- Is there appropriate writing for the voices/instruments used? Is the range appropriate/possible in performance?

Using the bands – Compositions to a brief set by the candidate.

In each column of the assessment criteria for the free compositions there are 4 bands of marks.

Overall, the consideration when deciding which AS band to place a mark in can be explained as below:

Band 4 (10-12 marks)	Ideas are consistently impressive and effectively controlled throughout .
Band 3 (7-9 marks)	Most ideas are effective. Although the composition is mostly successful there are obvious moments where musical understanding and control are less secure.
Band 2 (4-6 marks)	There are some acceptable moments, but control is often insecure and inconsistent.
Band 1 (1-3 marks)	Everything is limited , e.g., the melody is unconvincing, no phrasing, poor structure, lack of focus. It doesn't work and the result is unmusical.
0	Nothing is submitted.

At A level the responses should be at a higher level again:

Band 4 (10-12 marks)	Ideas are consistently sophisticated, imaginative, and impressive throughout . There are no apparent weaknesses .
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Band 3 (7-9 marks)	Most ideas are appropriate and show a musical understanding of the chosen style but there are moments which lack conviction and security.
Band 2 (4-6 marks)	The content is generally weaker and less convincing. It lacks security and conviction most of the time.
Band 1 (1-3 marks)	Everything is limited and simplistic . There are many inaccuracies e.g., As at AS the melody is unconvincing, no phrasing, poor structure, lack of focus. It doesn't work and the result is unmusical. The piece clearly lacks musical understanding.
0	Nothing is submitted.

Compositions to a brief set by the candidate.

The first and third columns of the criteria have the same focus as those for the compositions to a set brief, so the questions for consideration remain largely the same, just without the requirement for a Western Classical style, but for this composition there is an additional column added which refers specifically to the development of musical ideas.

Creating musical ideas

Refer to the assessment criteria and the advice in the tables above regarding which band best reflects the musical content of a composition.

Assess how effective the initial ideas are, for example:

- Are the initial ideas appropriate to the chosen style and to the stated brief?
- Are the ideas typical and reflective of the style the candidate has chosen?
- Are the ideas substantial enough to show an academic musical understanding of the chosen style?

Assess the structuring of the ideas:

- Is there a clear shape or structure, and a logical progression of ideas?
- Does the thematic material link together and feel as if it 'belongs' together?
- Does the piece have a clear start and end?
- Is the ending section of the piece an appropriate length or does the piece stop abruptly and without musical conviction or apparent reason?

Assess the response to the brief:

- Does the piece meet the selected brief?
- Have the elements been used appropriately to meet the brief?
- Has the intended musical style been effectively captured?

Developing Musical Ideas

Assess how effectively ideas are developed and organised.

- Are the ideas organised and planned effectively?
- Is there a logical presentation of the development? Too many compositional techniques used all at the same time can make a piece sound confused.

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- Is it clear which motifs are being developed and how?

Assess how effectively a range of compositional techniques has been used.

- Is there a range of compositional devices being used? Refer to the list of examples.
- Does the use of compositional techniques demonstrate an academic musical understanding appropriate to this level? Refer to the terminology listed in Appendix C.

Assess how effectively the musical elements have been combined to produce a coherent piece.

- Are the sections of the piece linked together coherently?
- Do all sections of the piece feel as if they belong together?

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Technical and Expressive Control of Musical Elements

- Referring to guidance supplied for each element of music, and the list of terminology for the qualification, does the content display musical understanding and technical control?
- Has there been attention paid to performance directions in order to demonstrate expressive control? E.g., tempo markings, dynamics and articulation thoughtfully added.
- Is there appropriate writing for the voices/instruments used? Is the range appropriate/possible in performance?
- Note that the use of technology refers to the use and control of compositional techniques and outcomes, not just proficiency in using music software.

Compositional Techniques

**This information was originally included in CPD materials published in 2018 and 2019 so the format is more intended for teaching than assessing. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list. Candidates are not expected to include every listed technique in their pieces and could include alternatives as well or instead.

Some techniques for developing ideas.

- Decoration; ornamentation; adding unessential notes
- Imitation
- Sequence
- Textural variety
- Counter melody
- Modulation (passage work through different keys)
- Contrasts
- Augmentation
- Diminution
- More extended episodic work
- Thematic transformation
- Inversion
- Fragmentation
- Alternative harmony

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The Elements of Music in composition.

Element of Music	Best practice – <i>Sophisticated / effective</i>	What to avoid – <i>Inconsistent/ Limited</i>
Melody	Good shape; balanced phrases; mix of conjunct and disjunct movement; sense of focus and direction; a 'lyrical outcome'; inclusion of patterns, sequences, arpeggios; balancing thematic and non-thematic material.	Awkward shapes; too much disjunct movement (that doesn't work!); lack of balance and flow; meandering and lacking focus and structure; too many different ideas [Can you sing it? Does it make musical sense?]
Tonality and Harmony	Clear sense of the home key; planned modulations to related keys at appropriate points; variation in chord positions; strong cadential progressions; interesting harmonic content and variety (e.g. 7ths, cycle of 5ths etc.)	Over-reliance on modal techniques; weak overall sense of key; ending in a different key than the opening; over-reliance on root position triads and basic positioning; no clear cadential points; continued reliance on repetitive progressions (e.g. 4-chord tricks, overly repetitive harmonies in ostinato structures, theme and variations) Refining parts that 'don't fit in' – muting the line is not the solution....
Texture	Variety of textural ideas (monophonic, homophonic, polyphonic, heterophonic) – sensibly balanced; imitation; layering; timbral contrasts; antiphonal dialogue; fugal ideas.	One texture /over-use of one idea throughout; insufficient contrasts; poorly planned and executed textural ideas; only very basic attempt at imitation.
Rhythm	Start with a set of patterns and build up contrasts; use of rhythmic motifs; use of syncopation and other devices (triplets, dotted rhythms etc) in a manner appropriate to the WCT	Too complex; too many different types of rhythm; constantly changing time signatures; overuse of syncopation in a manner not appropriate to the WCT; too simplistic, lacking variety and thoughtful development [Listen to it! Tap it out! – does it make musical sense?]
Performance directions	Clear thought given to practicalities and possibilities of the music and its individual lines; phrasing; 'performability'; range of instruments / voices; suitability of writing for selected instruments / voices; appropriate tempo choices; planning for dynamics.	Overly complex – or impossible – writing for instruments / voices; inappropriate instruction/performance marks; unsuitability of part-writing; inappropriate content; constant tempo changes; unsuitable tempo and dynamic directions; dynamics added as an afterthought.
Structure	As according to the brief; as outlined in the spec; balance of phrases; style of intros + codas.	Problems with balance; limited sense of structure; incorrect structure of 'brief' requirements; lack of clarity about structure.