GCE Examiners' Report

Music

AS and A Level

Summer 2026

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Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each unit.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.[1]

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)

[1] ***Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.***

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Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.wjec.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner | WJEC

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Executive Summary

This report presents a positive overview of performance across the A Level Music units, with candidates generally demonstrating strong commitment, musical engagement and creativity. Across all units, the strongest work was characterised by secure musical knowledge, stylistic awareness, effective technical skills and a clear understanding of assessment requirements. Common themes for improvement included administrative accuracy, greater attention to documentation, stronger understanding of harmony and tonality, more effective development of musical ideas and improved use of specialist musical vocabulary.

In Unit 1 Performing, candidates generally performed to a high personal standard, and many showed confidence, musicality and enjoyment of live performances. Administration and timetabling were usually well organised, and centres provided suitable venues, accompanists and examination arrangements. Strong performances featured appropriate repertoire choices, accurate execution and effective communication. However, recurring issues included candidates failing to meet minimum timing requirements, incomplete or incorrectly labelled scores, poorly prepared backing tracks and inaccurate paperwork. Examiners noted that some candidates selected over-ambitious repertoire or included extracts rather than complete pieces. Musical weaknesses commonly involved limited dynamic contrast, particularly among drummers and guitarists, over-reliance on scores in vocal performances and ensemble parts lacking sufficient independence.

Unit 2 Composing showed considerable creativity and a broad range of musical styles. Administrative standards were particularly strong, with very few problems regarding uploads or documentation. Candidate logs were generally clear and informative, and many candidates effectively described their compositional process and influences. The strongest brief compositions demonstrated a secure understanding of Western Classical conventions, well-shaped melodies, coherent structures, imaginative thematic development and effective technical control. Free compositions often reflected candidates' personal musical interests and displayed originality, stylistic confidence and musical individuality. Nonetheless, some compositions were too short, lacked harmonic substance or demonstrated limited development. Examiners highlighted over-detailed logs that focused on analysis rather than process, insufficient information about influences and occasional failures to provide guide tracks where other performers were involved. Common compositional weaknesses included repetitive harmonic patterns, weak melodic construction, limited contrast and a tendency to prioritise ideas over effective development and refinement.

Unit 3 Appraising revealed strengths in listening, contextual understanding and extended writing, particularly within Rock and Pop, Musical Theatre and Jazz. Many candidates displayed a strong knowledge of timbre, instrumentation and stylistic features, and essay responses often reflected genuine enthusiasm and broad musical knowledge. However, recurring difficulties centred on theoretical understanding. Examiners reported continuing weaknesses in the accurate use of terminology, particularly relating to harmony, tonality, intervals and chord recognition. Many candidates described performance techniques rather than musical features when analysing extracts. Set-work questions exposed gaps in score study and analytical skills, with weaker candidates often unable to identify harmonic devices, tonal changes or specific musical features from scores. Comparison questions were generally answered well, although some candidates relied too heavily on memorised responses rather than direct engagement with the extracts.

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Across the composition and appraising work at A Level, in Units 5 and 6, secure harmonic understanding emerged as a key differentiator between stronger and weaker candidates. Those achieving the highest marks demonstrated sophisticated handling of melody, harmony, texture and structure, alongside a confident application of analytical terminology. Candidates who struggled often showed insecure harmonic knowledge, limited developmental techniques and inconsistent stylistic awareness. Research, listening and contextual understanding were repeatedly identified as essential factors underpinning successful performance.

Overall, the report highlights a qualification in which candidates demonstrated enthusiasm, creativity and musical accomplishment. The main areas for future improvement are greater accuracy in administration and documentation, stronger engagement with Western Classical stylistic conventions, a deeper understanding of harmony and tonality, more effective development of compositional ideas and enhanced analytical precision when discussing musical features and in set works. Centres are encouraged to continue making use of WJEC support materials, score study, wider listening and professional learning resources to strengthen these areas and maximise candidate achievement.

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UNIT 1 AND 4 PERFORMING

Overview of the Unit

PLEASE READ THIS IMPORTANT INFORMATION AS THE ISSUES MENTIONED IN THIS REPORT RECUR YEAR AFTER YEAR

Once again, a warm welcome was given to all examiners. The majority of candidates performed to their highest personal standards and seemed to enjoy the experience of performing live.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Timing:

There were still some issues with candidates not performing for the minimum time once again this year. Please note that the visiting examiners time **from the start of the candidate's first note to the end of the candidate's final note of each individual piece performed.** Rests, which are written into the work by the composer in order to give the performer a rest, would be included in the time. However, if there were long periods when the candidate was not performing (eg) a DC return to a long introduction, a 2nd verse in a duet which is sung by another singer, or a 32 bar break for solo piano in a jazz piece, or other long interludes when the candidate is not performing, **these would not be included in the time.** Centres should carefully check the timings of each piece (allowing for a slightly quicker performance on the day due to nerves) but should not enter these timings on the mark sheet. The visiting examiner will be responsible for timing the individual pieces as they are performed, live. **Please note that, when using a Backing track, the length of the candidate's performance is not the total length given of the track. Candidates who do not meet the minimum time requirement for this component will face a penalty deduction from their total mark.**

Live accompanist v Backing track:

In most cases, and if at all possible, the flexibility and support afforded by a live accompanist, is preferable to using a backing track. Standards of accompaniment were very good on the whole. Some centres now bring in professional accompanists.

Missing Backing tracks:

On a few occasions this year, candidates have chosen to perform pieces which require a backing track WITHOUT the necessary backing track, resulting in the candidate accompanying a vocal which is not heard or resulting in some silences which would be filled by the track. This is musically unsatisfactory.

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Performing Extracts:

Performing extracts of pieces is also musically unsatisfactory and devalues the concept of the recital. However, musically sensible cuts may be made, and should be clearly marked on the score.

Page turner and audiences:

Do arrange for a page turner if this is necessary or helpful to the candidate or the accompanist. There is no restriction on others, whether members of staff, students or parents and friends, being in the examination room as long as all mobile phones are turned off and they do not overlook the examiner's desk. Please note, **nobody** other than the examiner is permitted to record the exam, and there must be no live-streaming.

Unaccompanied pieces:

Once again, the physical support given by an accompanist is preferable to a candidate being "out on their own". Whilst we realise that unaccompanied pieces, in particular, studies, often form part of the repertoire of many public exam boards, these are not always suitable for this examination. There are exceptions, of course, such as the JS Bach unaccompanied violin or cello works, but these should only be programmed by the most accomplished candidates.

Performances given from memory:

Although this is to be commended, it is not a requirement of this exam. **The examiner will allow a restart but not a second attempt.** If a breakdown occurs well into the performance, "picking it up" is sometimes an issue when there is no score to refer to.

Second instrument or voice:

As this is not a requirement of the exam, there is no advantage to be gained by performing on more than one instrument or voice. **Candidates should only perform on more than one <u>if both are of an equivalent standard.</u>**

Administration, Paperwork and Preparation:

In most cases, the administration and timetabling of the examinations was excellent with many centres providing running orders. In the case of longer sessions at colleges and where there are consortium arrangements between centres, please continue to build into your timetables comfort breaks for the examiners. Allowing 15 minutes, possibly 20 minutes for the longer recitals, for each candidate seems ideal in most cases. Please be aware of school bells and tannoy announcements which may impact on your candidate's performance. If at all possible, please timetable AS and A level examinations separately. **Please note that examiners may arrive up to 30 minutes before the examinations are due to commence in order to set up and ensure a prompt start.** Thank you for reserving a parking space for the visiting examiner, especially if you aware that parking is an issue at your centre.

Most centres had downloaded the correct forms as required but, in some instances, these had been completed by the candidates themselves. Please double-check these for accuracy. Candidates' full names, rather than shortened forms or nicknames, should be entered on the forms. In addition, forms need to be completed **<u>neatly and legibly.</u>** In some instances, examination numbers were missing from the forms when they were given to examiners. Please include the names of composers, in addition to the titles of the pieces to be performed.

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Links to Areas of Study:

PLEASE NOTE, THERE IS NO LONGER A REQUIREMENT TO LINK PIECES PERFORMED IN THIS EXAMINATION TO AREAS OF STUDY.

Venues:

Examination rooms were, on the whole, fit for purpose. Please ensure that the instruments used, particularly the pianos, are in good working order (including the pedals) and have been recently tuned, and take care with the positioning of upright pianos. Some centres choose to use electronic keyboards.

Levels of Difficulty:

In cases where the standard of the repertoire is known, it would be helpful if this information was given on the form.

Scores:

Most candidates provided copies of their music for the examiners. Photocopies of the originals on A4 paper need to be made as the examiners will take these away at the end of the session. Please ensure these are **complete** and the pages are in order, and that they are correctly labelled with the candidate's name and number. Please ensure that the music provided accurately reflects the performance being given, especially when downloading tab from the internet. In order to achieve the top marks for accuracy, singers must ensure that the notated vocal melody line has been added to a lead sheet rather than just lyrics and chords. Please clearly mark any repeats, cuts or any other modifications on the copies. In addition, ensure that the edge of the music has not been cut off on the photocopy.

Repertoire:

There were many excellent performers but some candidates need to give more careful consideration to their choice of programme as some are over-ambitious. Conversely, the occasional candidate performed a lower standard piece (amongst more difficult repertoire) which resulted in a lower overall mark. When using a backing track, please ensure that the track is a true backing track, with the candidate's part omitted, not a complete recording which includes the part the candidate is performing. Backing tracks should not be streamed live from the internet but should be downloaded and checked. In some instances, extracts from works were performed. It should be noted that cutting the more challenging parts of a piece will lead to a lowering of the level of difficulty for the work performed.

Ensembles:

There is no requirement to perform an ensemble at AS or A level but some candidates choose to include an ensemble piece in their programme. On occasions, more care is needed in choosing ensemble repertoire in order to ensure that the individual parts are significant and of the required standard. The candidate's part must not be doubled by any other performer. Candidates also need to be aware of the technical challenge afforded by their own compositions, if they choose to perform these. Teachers and candidates should familiarise themselves with the assessment criteria.

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Performance requirements:

Performers need to ensure that they pay attention to the performance directions on the music. Some **drummers and guitarists** are not aware of the need for contrast, especially of dynamics. **There should be no audible click tracks**. However, if a backing track is used by the candidate, through headphones, **it must also be audible to the examiner, without the click.**

Vocal performances:

Some singers lack projection and communication due to over-reliance on their music. If the music or lyrics are needed, it would be preferable for them to be placed on a stand, slightly to the side of the performer.

Rehearsals:

Best practice includes rehearsing the performances “in situ”, giving careful consideration to the position of the candidate in relation to the accompanist and the examiner. Try to create the sense of occasion by involving other students as an audience and use this as an opportunity to check all the equipment which will be used.

The audience:

Give careful consideration to the position of an audience if present on the day, behind, and not encroaching on, the examiner, especially considering the recording equipment the examiner is using. As per examination guidelines, there should be no mobile phones present in the examination room (other than that being used by the examiner as a timer, which is preset to Airplane Mode.) Nobody other than the examiner is allowed to record (or live stream) any performance.

Sound checks and balance:

Please carry-out sound checks **in advance** of the examination. In most instances, electronic equipment had been set up and sound-checked in advance allowing the examination to proceed without hold-ups. Take care with the positioning of microphones and consider carefully whether microphones need to be used for an acoustic performance, especially in a small room or classroom. As well as carrying out a sound-check for balance with any backing tracks used, also check the balance between the candidate and an accompanist. Please remember that a microphone does not replace the need for vocal technique and projection.

On the whole, the feedback from the examining team was very positive and I am very grateful to all those involved, including the team based in the office in Cardiff.

Eric W. Phillips

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UNIT 2 COMPOSING

Overview of the Unit

Unit 2 Composing assesses **AO2** - **Create and develop musical ideas with technical and expressive control and coherence.**

This comprises developing composing skills to demonstrate the manipulation of musical ideas and the use of musical devices and conventions. It includes broadening musical experience and interests, and developing imagination and creativity, as well as extending the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to communicate effectively as musicians. This unit will also develop knowledge and understanding of a variety of instruments and styles, and of relevant approaches to composing. There will be an opportunity to develop awareness of music technology and its use in the creation and presentation of music. Learners will develop as effective, independent individuals, reflecting on their own music and personal judgements.

Learners will study the musical language, techniques and conventions associated with Western Classical Tradition in order to develop knowledge and understanding of music. Learners will use the musical techniques and conventions of this tradition to compose one piece of music to a chosen brief. The second composition will be based on the learners' own interests, as they set their own free brief.

The assessment is based on the following strands:

- **Creating Musical Ideas** – the construction and presentation of ideas which respond to the chosen brief;
- **Developing Musical Ideas** - thematic material and use of compositional techniques and a combination of musical elements to provide a coherent result; and
- **Technical and Expressive Control of the Musical Elements** – including instruments, music technology and communication.

General Comments

Administration

This organisational element has grown stronger every year, and this year was no exception, with most documents clearly labelled, and all relevant information positively communicated. The very few exceptions were missing signatures or candidate numbers on some logs, and one or two late submissions. All examiners were delighted with the efforts made by centres this year.

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Uploading work/Labelling

There were very few missing or incorrect uploads; examples of these were logs that would not open. As always, it is highly recommended that the candidates and teachers check the files carefully before they are uploaded, so that they are the correct ones, and that they open and work correctly. There were one or two instances where the same files were uploaded twice, and centres had to be contacted. Again, a full check of the uploads needs to happen. It would also be very useful if composition titles were not used as upload labels; a far more efficient practice would be to name each of the compositions as 'Brief' or 'Free'; this would ease matters considerably.

Candidate Logs

Logs were clear this year with most efforts word processed; it is good to note that the handwritten logs were also legible and clear. In most cases, the candidates gave a sufficient amount of detail, and there were some excellent accounts of the composition process, as requested. Software details were included. Many logs were informative and they reflected the actual compositions. However, there were a number of extremely detailed logs, and unfortunately candidates were still over-analysing the music within long explanatory accounts. It was sometimes rather disheartening to read descriptions of the composition, rather than honest accounts of the composition process.

Examiners will always be looking for:

- the chosen brief, written clearly in the log
- the chosen software for each composition
- a list of musical influences
- the process of composition [this perhaps being the most vital and important element]
- any advice or input given by the teacher, and how it was utilised by the candidate
- the planning and refining process, including use of musical elements such as structure, tonality, harmony, melody and so forth.

The musical influences mentioned in the logs mainly showed excellent in-depth research and interests. These were always interesting to read and gave further insight into how the composition was initiated and realised. However, there were instances of candidates failing to mention any musical influences in their logs; in some cases, there were nods to more modern and popular artists within the WCT brief logs.

The influences should be noted with as much detail as possible, especially so in the free composition. As regards film music in the free composition, the examiners needed to know about the context of the story line, characters or mood; this was extremely useful when marking the response to the brief.

Please provide guide tracks, either sung or played by the candidate, when others perform parts of a composition. The guidance clearly states that candidates cannot simply tell someone what to perform. Examiners need to know the exact role of each candidate within the composing process, and can only give credit for what the candidate has created. It is not best practice to ignore this element.

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Scores and Recordings

There were good standard scores this year, many of which included strong expressive detail such as added dynamics, articulation and phrasing. It was encouraging to see that when sequencer-style programmes had been used to produce the music, time and effort had often been taken to produce a more traditional score also; this was most helpful, however it must be remembered that there are no marks available for the score itself. As always, ICT was effectively used to create professional scores.

Generally, there were far less screenshots produced this year, and these provided mixed results. Some were thorough and well-supported with detailed commentary, while others lacked sufficient detail. However, it is important to reiterate here that the specification states that a score or a detailed written description of the composition accompanied by an outline of the melody and chords is required. This includes guide tracks. It is also worth reminding centres that if a pop or rock song, or similar, is composed, the chord symbols and lyrics should be provided, as well as other relevant details. Examiners will always look at all the compositional evidence, and any additional material is always welcome.

Notation and sequencing programmes included MuseScore, Sibelius, Capella, Cubase, Flat and Logic Pro. The addition of Note Performer was utilised by some centres, providing an impressive outcome with high quality instrumental sounds.

There were many live recordings this year, and it is as ever a joy to listen to these performances of compositions. There were some recordings with a distinct imbalance in the recordings; this can easily be resolved if final checks are made before uploading.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Composition 1 - The Western Classical Tradition - Brief Composition

There were some very successful responses to the set briefs this year, where the melodic material was supported by appropriate harmony, and where there was a clear attempt to structure the work efficiently and clearly. By far, the instrumental briefs were more popular than the vocal options.

The standard of Western Classical Tradition compositions was generally secure, with very few following the more modern route in their brief composition. Once again this year, there was evidence of commitment and good focus on the teaching of composing, which is to be commended.

Some responses were rather simplistic and lacked substance. There were some extremely short efforts, which did not demonstrate full use of musical features. There were some concerns this year regarding some candidates citing musical styles and influences which fell outside the WCT styles, and this was reflected in their composing.

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Brief 1: Compose a short two-part vocal piece with instrumental accompaniment, to be performed at a celebratory event at Cardigan Castle. You may choose (or write your own) appropriate words.

This brief was chosen by a few candidates, and there was some excellent vocal writing here, with sensible word setting and a clear sense of structure and style. Some candidates had researched the chosen venue and had written appropriately. These compositions often showed strong structural ideas but lacked harmonic and technical control. There were instances where some efforts failed to respond to the 'celebratory event' and the outcomes were more sombre works. It is always best practice to respond to the whole brief. The piano was by far the most popular instrument for accompaniment, and sometimes it is worth remembering that the accompaniment also needs variety and contrast as well as the vocal parts. Only sometimes was there a feeling of partnership between the voices and accompaniment.

Brief 2: Compose a short instrumental quartet, intended for performance at a Fireworks or Festival of Light event.

This was by far the most popular choice this year, and there were compositions for a whole range of quartets, from string to woodwind and brass. It was pleasing to note that candidates wrote competently in the main, with a high level of musicality and a very good understanding of the musical elements. There was an excellent sense of occasion here, with lively writing for the four instruments within the quartet. There was excellent use of musical devices to portray the theme which resulted in effective and secure compositions. There were many Baroque and Classical style pieces with typical forms such as ternary, rondo or minuet and trio. Some candidates struggled to fully respond to the demands of the brief, merely composing a work without reference to the theme or occasion. There were some submissions with a slow tempo which did not fully reflect the brief.

Brief 3: Compose the opening of a prelude for any instrumental ensemble, based on Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', to be performed at a regional festival of Shakespeare plays.

This was another very popular choice by candidates. The better efforts had obviously researched story lines and characters as well as moods and emotions within the play, and this was well received by examiners. The works were mainly romantic in nature, with a strongly imaginative and programmatic element throughout. Many were through composed which infrequently rather lacked a sense of structure. Good examples of this brief had contrasting sections for the different characters or themes, for example a livelier section for Puck and a lyrical theme for the Lovers, and some candidates wrote effective leitmotifs. There were examples of larger ensembles and even full orchestral works which worked well. Harmony was generally well handled, as well as a sense of interplay between instruments and secure musical writing. There was evidence of well used modulations, effective use of instruments and textures, and sensible melodies, with the most successful submissions creating balance and fluency throughout. There were a few instances where the compositions veered towards film music, which of course is not a WCT task, and these lacked structure, phrasing and general musical understanding.

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Brief 4: Compose a section of a longer vocal trio piece in compound time to celebrate a wedding anniversary. You may select (or write) your own text, and the piece may be accompanied or unaccompanied.

This was not a very popular option, apart from some vocalists who chose this trio. In some compositions, there was a lack of a trio and a definite lack of compound time! Candidates need to carefully read the brief and respond fully to all instructions. Vocal ranges were a concern this year, with extremely high soprano lines and extremely low notes for bass. Word setting was better this year, with some strong musical phrases to match. The majority of these choices used an accompaniment, either piano or organ. There were some appropriate and excellent creations which scored highly in the top band.

Composition 2 – Free Composition

There were many imaginative creations this year, covering a plethora of interesting styles and genres. There was a slight increase overall in pop/rock and musical theatre compositions compared to previous years, alongside a decline in film score compositions. Jazz continues to be a favoured option overall. As always, examiners were heartened to read and listen to creative works which reflected the candidates' own interests; this is always encouraging and advantageous for the candidate to write creatively and competently.

Here are some examples of the varied genres that examiners encountered this year:

- Film music
- Jazz, Blues, Funk, Latin American
- Pop, Ballad, Rock, Indie, Heavy Metal, Hip-Hop, Prog Rock, Emo
- Musical Theatre
- Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Impressionism, Minimalism
- Conventional forms – Binary, Ternary, Sonata Form, Theme and Variations
- Video game music, Animé
- Music for tuned percussion
- Programme music
- Welsh music.

Some candidates submitted works they had composed for a Young Composer competition, which had been professionally recorded. In these cases, the logs mainly lacked a clear description of the level of support given.

Generally, there was musical intent noted in the brief and log, showing effective planning and organisation. As mentioned in previous reports, candidates would be well advised to give this requirement careful consideration as their work is assessed directly on the outcome of the selected brief.

The better efforts utilised interesting and inventive textures within the chosen style. There was a definite sense of balance and colourful use of musical elements and expressive control. There was almost always a secure foundation for the composition, displaying well-developed and well-controlled coherent compositions. Harmony was logical and fluent, melodies were fitting and stylistic, and structure was idiomatic within the style. Candidates had obviously written for instruments or voices that they knew well. Examiners noted a good grasp of the selected musical concepts, as well as a concerted effort to develop the original musical material.

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In other works, simplicity reigned supreme, and a few compositions were below the expected standard required for AS. There was evidence of a lack of structure, an over-reliance on primary triads, clashes between melodic lines and chords, and a general sense of inconsistency. These efforts were unfortunately limited and therefore could not gain marks within the higher bands.

Creating Musical Ideas

Centres are reminded that the Creating Musical Ideas column directly refers to the candidate's response to the brief. The brief-led compositions mainly showed good understanding of the Western Classical Tradition style, with creative emphasis on melodic lines. Modulations were used well, and some were able to use extended chords as well as a sensible treatment of phrasing and style. The various genres of the Baroque, Classical or Romantic periods were used well and candidates showed musical knowledge, which was exceptional in some works.

There were impressive submissions which were inventive, creative and well-balanced. Many candidates achieved marks within the top bands, indicating an ability to generate engaging and stylistically appropriate works. Many candidates wrote musically on their initial concept, particularly in the free compositions. There was a sense that candidates responded very well to their own briefs. This reflects much successful teaching of composition within centres.

There were some compositions where the outcome was inconsistent with insecure melodies and basic, or even strange, harmonic progressions. There were some creations which had no real melody and seemed to be random notes strung together. These were therefore unconvincing and static. Organisation of the original musical ideas let some candidates down, and there was some unclear writing.

Developing Musical Ideas

It is worth reiterating here that in the WCT Brief composition, there is no discrete column for Developing Musical Ideas, but it would be expected to see changes in melodic, structural or harmonic lines, so that the music is moved forward. In the Free compositions, development of musical ideas is assessed, and examiners expect competent growth using a range of compositional devices to further the initial ideas.

Development can include changes and growth in melody, rhythm, texture, dynamics, articulation and performance techniques. Many compositions used a wide range of these musical elements, and this year, there was good use of the cycle of fifths as a composing tool. There was also evidence of sequences, layering and textural variety. Good development techniques included changing key, adding layers and countermelodies, modifying harmonic progressions and varying accompaniment patterns, to name but a few. There was good organisation of thematic ideas, but sometimes these were not fully developed by using a wider range of compositional techniques. Although candidates were efficient in producing ideas, they were sometimes perhaps less confident in transforming, extending and organising the music across the whole composition.

Some free compositions were rather too short to ensure progressive development. The route of repetition was well used, based on a narrow range of chords and ideas. This was particularly true in the rock and pop submissions.

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Technical and Expressive Control of Musical Elements

In the assessment for this column, examiners always look for effective and secure technical control of the musical elements, communicated effectively with expressive control. Examiners were pleased to note that this aspect has very much developed over the years. This year, technical and expressive control was a strong feature in many compositions, and many candidates scored highly within this column. Effective examples included sensible use of a whole range of dynamics, articulation and phrasing, and a generally coherent shaping of material. Competent musical understanding was shown throughout, and even when development was lacking, candidates were able to achieve a higher mark in this column.

There were very few compositions which demonstrated little or no control of resources and instruments and which lacked technical and expressive control. The musical understanding was sometimes missing here, at times making the overall outcome inconsistent and incoherent.

Summary of Key Points

- Continue with correct administration according to WJEC guidelines [this shows improvement year on year], using the correct forms, labelling, adding signatures, checking and uploading compositions and logs.
- Aim to write as much detail as possible on the candidate log, including details of influences (and compositions), any software used, and any help or feedback given; the process of composition is most important here.
- Guide tracks are required if other performers play the work of the candidate.
- Remember that no marks are awarded for existing musical ideas or indeed an interpretation of an idea by a performer that is not the candidate. Credit can only be given for ideas (including expression and interpretation) that are the work of the candidate.
- Avoid overlong accounts on the log, in particular bar-by-bar analyses.
- Read the WCT briefs carefully and cover all aspects/instructions of the brief in the composition.
- Always check the Assessment Criteria, taking note of the two-column format in the Brief Compositions, and the three-column format for the Free Compositions.
- The first composition, following one of the briefs set by the WJEC, must be in a Western Classical Style which illustrates an understanding of the musical language, techniques and conventions of the Baroque, Classical or Romantic periods.
- Research instrumentation, techniques, styles and general theoretical understanding in order to employ a variety of elements.
- Always aim for a composition with a beginning, a middle and an end, displaying musical growth and coherence.
- Aim for refining, improving and modifying musical ideas and elements to create a unified composition.
- Candidates, guided by their teachers, should be heartily congratulated on their commitment and steadfastness to create such interesting and musical compositions in both the brief and the free categories.

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UNIT 3 APPRAISING

Overview of the Unit

Unit 3 Appraising assesses the following Assessment Objectives:

AO3: Demonstrate and apply musical knowledge

Candidates need to show theoretical knowledge of musical elements (e.g. harmony, rhythm, structure), contexts, and language across different areas of study.

AO3 involves identifying features in scores and aural extracts. Typical command words for this Assessment Objective include words such as *state, name, identify, underline*. Here, typical question types might include *multiple choice, short answers, and recall of knowledge.*

AO4: Use analytical and appraising skills

Candidates need to make evaluative and critical judgements about music.

AO4 involves describing and explaining musical features demonstrating understanding of musical elements, contexts and language as well as analysing, comparing and evaluating music. It targets appraising skills and uses command words such as *describe, explain, compare, complete (pitch or rhythm), evaluate and analyse.*

Comments on individual questions/sections

Comments on Individual Questions / Sections

AREA OF STUDY B – ROCK AND POP 1965-1990

Question 1: Scenes from an Italian restaurant – Billy Joel

(a) This was well answered, with most candidates identifying the *tenor voice*.

(b) This was also correct in many scripts.

(c) There were suitable answers in the main, with very few candidates leaving this question blank.

(d) There was much inaccuracy here, with some blanks, and also many mentioning *C major*.

(e) This was well answered by many candidates, and it is pleasing to note that many knew the chord symbols; other efforts were partly correct in that notes of the chord were named, but not the meaning of *Bb/D*. Unfortunately, there were instances where the description was correct but the names of the chord notes were missed.

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(f) There were many *saxophone* answers, but so many candidates missed out on the mark here for not fully noting the *Tenor Saxophone*.

(g) There were many strong answers here, with the majority making a good attempt to name many different instruments and their use.
Many candidates gained the full three marks here.

(h) Not many candidates noted the musical features of the vocal melody, relying more on describing the performance technique.

(i) This was well managed and answered fully on many scripts.

(j) There were many correct answers here, and it is encouraging to see that cadences are generally well known by candidates.

(k) There were very few who did not gain a mark here, mentioning *David Bowie*; however *Billy Joel* was known to the majority.

Question 2: Different timbres used in Rock and Pop

Examiners were very pleased to read several interesting responses on different timbres. There were full and detailed accounts which reflected the candidates' interest in the music of Rock and Pop. Many references were made to instrumental and vocal timbres, as well as a number of musical features within a variety of songs. The most successful examples used were from Queen and The Beatles, but there were so many diverse choices such as The Beach Boys, The Bee Gees, New Order, Marvin Gaye, Kate Bush, The Doors and ELO to name but a few. Many different styles were also mentioned such as Country, Punk, Funk and Soul. There were many convincing accounts here with much attention to musical detail. There was an obvious depth of knowledge and interest in the topic within this Area of Study. The weaker efforts wrote a few facts about only one song and missed the opportunity to link to specific timbres.

AREA OF STUDY C – MUSICAL THEATRE

Question 3: High Flying Adored – Evita

(a) As in Rock and Pop, this was answered well with the majority gaining the full mark.

(b) This tick box answer was more troublesome, with surprisingly many missing ticks.

(c) The chord symbols were mainly known, as well as naming the notes of the chord. Some candidates may have misread the question, as both answers were required for the full two marks.

(d) Identifying a specific chord was a challenge for some candidates, and the full name, in this case *G minor*, was required for the mark.

(e) This was very well answered, with most candidates able to recognise the *sequence*.

(f) This was very well answered, with the majority of candidates able to recognise the correct melody.

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(g) There were many options noted in the mark scheme, and it was pleasing to see that many candidates gained three or four marks here. The most popular answers included *syncopation, repetition* and *conjunct movement*. Many wrote logically on each lyric line.

(h) Very few identified the interval of a *seventh*.

(i) The question asked for a description of the use of the orchestra, but many candidates followed the vocal route here. The stronger candidates were able to name instruments and what they played within each line, whereas others named instruments only, without expanding detail on their use.

(j) The cadence was generally well known, with some mentioning *perfect* rather than *plagal*.

(k) This was well known, with very few mentioning *Porter* or *Rodgers*.

Question 4: Different timbres in ALW and CMS musicals

There were some knowledgeable answers here displaying an in-depth knowledge of different timbres within works by both composers. A very small minority only wrote on one composer, and there were some invalid references to Porter and Rodgers. There were excellent examples used from the 'usual' musicals, and it was encouraging to note that candidates had obviously researched other works such as Martin Guerre and Sunset Boulevard. Within these musicals, there was a myriad of suitable songs and an encouraging tendency this year not just to name the songs but also to describe the timbres within the chosen songs. The better efforts were able to write copiously on a variety of instrumental timbres, including references to vocal timbres. The weaker candidates were happy to relate the story and emotional aspects of each musical, mentioning structure and tonality, but unfortunately missing the opportunity to answer the demands of the question.

AREA OF STUDY D – JAZZ

Question 5 – Have you met Miss Jones?

(a) The key was mainly well answered.

(b) *Trombone* was not well recognised, and many candidates only wrote *saxophone* rather than *tenor saxophone*.

(c) The form was very well known, with only a handful of blanks here.

(d) There were some strong answers here with many clear examples given of the music played by the instruments.

(e) Many candidates noted the chord of *F* but not necessarily the *F7*; but this was generally well answered.

(f) As expected with those candidates who study Jazz, the naming of notes within a chord was very well answered.

(g) This was mostly correct.

(h) This tick box was also well answered.

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(i) This was another strongly answered question. There were good responses and many could clearly hear and note the main features of the improvisation.

(j) There were quite a few blanks here, but the term *trading fours* was generally well known.

(k) The date (within the accepted range) was also well known.

Question 6 – Different timbres in Jazz

There were some very strong responses here, and examiners noted exceptionally intuitive answers, therefore gaining full or close to full marks. There were clear comparisons between the different sizes of ensembles and the use of individual instruments. Many mentioned the playing techniques and some also noted the vocal timbres. The weaker candidates tended to list general features without expanding on the timbres involved. Musical examples were diverse; as well as the usual expected works, there were some interesting references to Mel Tormé and Peggy Lee. Some essays scored lower marks by not naming musical examples.

AREA OF STUDY A – WESTERN CLASSICAL TRADITION

Question 7 – String Quartet – Mendelssohn

(a) The meaning of *Lento* was well known this year.

(b) The key was also answered well, with very few naming *F# minor* instead of *A major*.

(c) Nearly all candidates gained at least one or two marks here, with the rhythm completion far better answered than the pitch, as is usually the case in this style of question. It was reassuring to see so many full marks also.

(d) In this grid of features, many answered well on the *sequence* and the *homorhythmic texture*, but the *interrupted cadence* and the *suspension* had mixed responses, with some blanks here.

(e) This was very well answered, with a minority mentioning *compound triple* rather than *simple triple*.

THE SYMPHONY

Question 8 – Comparison

Many candidates wrote in detail here, and the majority used the two-column format and bullet points – as always, all acceptable forms of writing in these types of responses. Once again this year, there were very favourable accounts with many candidates noting interesting musical facts and correct comparisons of both extracts. However, many missed out on marks by not mentioning obvious features such as tempo, major or minor tonality, texture or metre; maybe these should be among the first elements to be recognised as the music begins. The better responses included a profound knowledge of orchestral works within the period, with succinct and informative writing throughout. Unfortunately, there are still some candidates who rely heavily on learning pre-prepared features, some of which were not particularly relevant to this year's extracts. More detail could have been added in some cases to ensure marks within the higher bands.

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Question 9 – Haydn Symphony No. 103 in Eflat – 'Drum Roll'

(a) There was a whole variety of answers here (or no answers at all). Not many candidates knew the correct answer.

(b) On the other hand, this was very well answered, with many candidates knowing the meaning of *a2*.

(c) This was another disappointing effort, with many incorrect responses. This is indeed a little disheartening, as the candidates have the scores in front of them for this question.

(d) Despite mentioning this in previous reports, the term *harmony* is still not well known, and it is inevitably a challenge to many. Candidates were unable to describe the use of harmony here, with many veering towards melody or instrumentation. Also, there were many candidates who skipped this question completely. Please be aware that questions on harmony and tonality are regularly included in these set works sections.

(e) *Imitation* and *the tonic minor harmony* were known, but candidates struggled with the *Lombardic rhythm* and the *German Augmented 6th chord*.

(f) This was answered well, especially the *interrupted cadence*.

(g) The type of question on contrast between two sections is always well answered, with many candidates gaining the full two marks here. The most popular answers were the *reduced instrumentation, the dynamic difference* and *the use of pizzicato*. The better responses noted the actual contrast between both sections, whereas the weaker candidates only noted the feature without contrasting both segments.

(h) This was very much hit or miss; the notes of transposing instruments appear regularly in set works questions.

(i) The use of structure enlisted some good answers, with many noting the correct sections and bar numbers throughout. Marks were not awarded for simply mentioning *Minuet and Trio*, as these terms were clearly marked on the score. It was expected that candidates would mention the actual sections and bar numbers, as well as the rounded binary term. This was a five-mark question, and many scored very well here.

RELIGIOUS CHORAL MUSIC

Question 10 – Comparison

As in the Symphony comparison question, many wrote all manner of features which were not particularly relevant within these extracts. One of the main elements here is aiming to listen to the actual music in the examples, and then comparing both extracts, naming any relevant stylistic features. Therefore, this was a mixed bag of answers with some candidates struggling to name any notable features. However, there were some centres who had clearly done much extra listening and analysing of religious choral music, and this provided encouraging and valid references within the answers. There were some detailed and considered responses in many scripts. Musical terminology was well utilised overall.

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Question 11 – Mozart Requiem

(a) As in the Symphony, this was not well known at all.

(b) This question was answered fully and well, with suitable explanations given.

(c) Many candidates noted the two features, but unfortunately, some only ticked once, even though the question clearly asked for two ticks.

(d) As in the Symphony, many missed out on a mark here.

(e) Most candidates knew the term *sotto voce*, which was indeed encouraging.

(f) Harmony as a concept was once again misunderstood, but many recognised the *perfect cadence*, along with some keys in some bars.

(g) The most marks went to the *4-3 suspension* and the *homorhythmic writing*. *Diminished 7th harmony* was not well known, and the *perfect cadence* required two chords – the dominant and tonic - over the two correct bars, which many missed.

(h) Very few candidates noted the *Augmented 4th*.

(i) There were some successful answers here with logical and full accounts of the writing for voices. Some unfortunately concentrated on the instruments used instead.

Summary of Key Points

- Read the questions carefully; know what is needed to gain the maximum marks.
- Always look at how many marks are allocated to each question; know how much to write.
- Aim for a fuller understanding of musical terminology; learn the correct meaning of terms such as harmony and tonality.
- Aim for analytical thinking regarding the set works scores; read the scores wisely – all the required answers are within the music.
- Learn chords and chord symbols.
- Aim for logical writing in the longer answers.
- Use bar / line numbers (if asked for in the question).
- Comparison questions – listen intently to the music of the two extracts.
- Use bullet points and keywords – these are always acceptable by examiners.
- Extra research and listening on the Areas of Study is always encouraged.

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MUSIC

GCE

Summer 2026

UNIT 5 COMPOSING

Overview of the Unit

Unit 5 Composing assesses AO2 i.e. **Create and develop musical ideas with technical and expressive control and coherence.**

This comprises developing composing skills to demonstrate the manipulation of musical ideas and the use of musical devices and conventions. It includes broadening musical experience and interests, and developing imagination and creativity, as well as extending the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to communicate effectively as musicians. This unit will also develop knowledge and understanding of a variety of instruments and styles, and of relevant approaches to composing. There will be an opportunity to develop awareness of music technology and its use in the creation and presentation of music. Learners will develop as effective, independent individuals, reflecting on their own music and personal judgements.

Learners will study the musical language, techniques and conventions associated with Western Classical Tradition in order to develop knowledge and understanding of music. Learners will use the musical techniques and conventions of this tradition to compose one piece of music to a chosen brief. The second composition (and third for Option B) will be based on the learners' own interests, as they set their own free brief.

The assessment is based on the following strands:

- **Creating Musical Ideas** – the construction and presentation which respond to the chosen brief;
- **Developing Musical Ideas** - thematic material and use of compositional techniques and a combination of musical elements to provide a coherent result; and
- **Technical and Expressive Control of the Musical Elements** – including instruments, music technology and communication.

General Comments

Administration

The only issue noted this year was incorrectly submitted mp3 files, either for a different candidate, or unable to be played. There were also a few missing signatures and candidates entered for the wrong option (A or B). Whenever a centre was contacted, there was almost always a quick response with new uploads; this was very much appreciated by examiners. Otherwise, the whole admin process was very well executed throughout.

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Uploading work/Labelling

The message is getting through that it is highly recommended that candidates and/or teachers carefully check the files before they are uploaded, so that they are the correct and complete ones, and that they can be opened and played correctly. There was an instance this year where some instrumental tracks were muted and therefore had to be uploaded a second time. There were also issues with mislabelling of tracks; extra care should be taken here. Good practice is using labels such as 'Composition 1 / 2' or 'Brief / Free', so that the examiner can clearly see which composition is which.

Candidate Logs

This year, examiners commented on many short length logs which lacked sufficient detail. It is worth reiterating here what is stated on the log template: '…*details of pieces which influenced you, any software you used, and any help or feedback you were given. Explain how the choices you have made are linked to the brief. Give details of any musical ideas in your piece which are not your original work. e.g. quotes from other pieces, loops / samples / chord realisations from your software or elsewhere, or ideas composed or suggested by other people. If you choose to ask another person to perform for you, you may also submit a recording of a guide track which you used to show the performer what to do'.*

Positively, there were examples of excellent logs which were detailed, logical and appropriate throughout. Good understanding was shown of the brief and intention, the genre and style, and musical content. It is good to remember that one of the most important elements here is the composition process, and best practice regarding logs always includes a clear process to research and listen, compose, refine and improve compositions. Reading about this process gives examiners an insight into how a piece was initially created, extended, developed, refined and finalised. They will look for the decision-making process and the thoughts of the candidates as the music progresses and expands; descriptions of what is on the score are not required. Examiners are fully aware that the logs are not awarded marks, but they always enjoy reading how each composition was originated and extended to become a complete musical work. There was always a logical attempt to write clearly and musically on the actual process of creating and composing the music.

Some accounts were far too long and went into far too much detail; there is no need for long analyses, especially when full scores are available. Conversely, there were a few weaker attempts which were far too vague and missing valid information.

Influences were rarely mentioned this year; named composers or works always give the examiners an insight into the music composed by candidates and are therefore appropriate and valuable.

A note here about guide tracks: some candidates were not clear enough in showing how performers knew what to play or sing. The guidance clearly states that candidates cannot simply tell someone to perform. The guide track evidence was non-existent within many logs. Examiners need to know the exact role of each candidate in the composing process and will always credit what the candidate is responsible for. Therefore, these vital details must be included in the log.

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Scores and Recordings

The majority of tracks were taken from the chosen software and were clear. Some centres provided live recordings (some of which included appreciative audience applause, which gave a sense of occasion). There were some live tracks as well as computer generated recordings, which was useful when the live recording may not have been performed entirely correctly. Some candidates combined digital audio sounds and live instrumental or vocal elements, often to impressive effect.

Accompanying scores were clear and of high standard. There were fewer lead sheets and screenshots this year, and once again these varied in quality and content. Stronger submissions included detailed screenshots and clear explanatory analysis. The weaker ones were superficial, lacking depth and detail and were not a sufficient alternative to a full score. It was disappointing to note that those candidates who composed songs did not always provide lyrics or chord symbols.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Composition 1 - The Western Classical Tradition - Brief Composition

In this first composition, examiners are judging and assessing the response to the brief, and especially the musical context of WCT. There were far less candidates this year who chose to compose outside the WCT style; this is commendable. On very few occasions, there was no clear attempt to create a WCT style, with compositions veering towards film music, or modal or folk idioms. Some very short efforts did not have enough content to display the full range of Western Classical Style characteristics. Several works in this category stated twentieth century composers as WCT influences. Candidates and centres need to be reminded that the higher range of marking cannot be awarded if a composition is not within the WCT style.

Generally, the main concerns here were melodies losing focus, unintentional dissonance regarding harmony, and a lack of contrast and variation. A few brief compositions were exactly a minute in length, and these proved to be more challenging to assess effectively. However, there were mainly many excellent interpretations of the various briefs within the WCT style, which is indeed very encouraging.

Brief 1: Write a short instrumental piece entitled ‘Capriccioso’, featuring canonic or fugal techniques, to be performed at a May Day celebration.

There was a moderate uptake here, with some excellent efforts with clear canonic (mainly used) or fugal techniques as requested. Sometimes, the term ‘Capriccioso’ (meaning ‘whimsical’ or ‘capricious’) was not fully realised, with some rather slow moving or dirge-like attempts. There were compositions for string quartets, piano solos and a brass trio. In the main, there was a good understanding of harmony, melody and the chosen instruments.

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Brief 2: Compose a short programmatic work portraying the French Landing at Fishguard and/or the character of Jemima Nicholas. You may write for voices or instruments, or a combination of both.

This was a popular choice amongst candidates this year, and there were many different choices of instrumentation, as well as a few vocal renditions. Research of the historical aspects had been successfully done. The programmatic and descriptive writing was strong here, and many adhered to the storyline in an effective and stylistic manner. Many utilised quotes from the 'Marseillaise' (as expected), as well as allusions to Welsh melodies, which were all effectively treated throughout the work. There was a distinct feeling of picturing the intentions of the candidate which demonstrated a successful reflection of the brief. The only comment made by examiners regarding this choice of brief was that candidates need to be aware that a true reflection of WCT is required throughout the entirety of the composition, without venturing towards cinematic styles. There was however a strong sense of inventive writing and features, mainly aiming for late Romantic style.

Brief 3: Compose two sections of an instrumental piece on the theme of 'Autumn Colours and Spring Awakening'.

This was the most popular chosen brief this year, and it garnered a wide range of responses, from solo piano to full orchestral efforts, via various chamber ensembles. There were some Baroque style compositions, but the main influence seemed to be Romantic. In most cases, the two distinct sections were clear, with effective contrasts in key, tempo, mood and textures. However, sometimes the distinction between both parts was so jarringly different that the whole did not fit together as a complete work. Very few compositions did not note a change of style or music, and therefore the music did not feel like two sections. There were however some excellent and well-balanced reflections of WCT overall, with inventive melodies, sensible harmonic progressions and fluent movement within fitting structures. Musical elements were well controlled. There was one candidate who submitted separate scores and audio for both seasons which was not required.

Brief 4: Compose two sections of a longer choral SATB piece, with accompaniment. It should feature antiphonal writing and be suitable for performance at St Asaph Cathedral. You may choose (or write) your own words.

A few candidates chose this brief, mainly with organ or piano accompaniments. Harmony was often controlled but there was a lack of finesse and sophistication at times. Word setting was sometimes an issue in some efforts, and the term 'antiphonal' was sometimes unknown or unused within the compositions. There was however a conscious effort to use compositional features such as a cycle of fifths, and some efforts displayed interesting attempts to write stylistically, with much use of expressive control. Textural contrast was sometimes evident, although more attempts at antiphonal writing would have enhanced some works. Unclear vocal lines were sometimes used, and the vocal ranges were extended very high and very low.

Composition 2 – Free Composition

As in Unit 2, there was a very broad range of free compositions styles this year. There was a distinct increase in compositions within the WCT, as well as musical theatre songs and jazz. Pop and rock compositions were in decline at this level. It is always worth remembering that the free composition is worth more marks than the brief composition, with the addition of the 'Developing Musical Ideas' column. Sometimes, the free compositions felt a little rushed, almost as an afterthought. It is always encouraging to see that candidates follow their own interests here.

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Here are some examples of the genres encountered this year:

- Jazz, Blues, Big Band, Latin American, Fusion
- Musical Theatre
- Pop, Rock, Electronic, Ballads, Soul, Blues
- Video Game music, Animé
- Music for Brass Band
- Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Neoclassical, Impressionism
- Film music: mystery, horror, romance
- Incidental music for various occasions
- Folk and modal music.

Many of the free compositions were exceptionally sophisticated, displaying an excellent command of harmony, melodic development and orchestration within coherent and characterful creations. Effective musical understanding of the chosen genre and sophisticated technical and expressive control were in abundance, and there was musical maturity throughout. There were instances of strong melodic lines, good use of motivic development and excellent use of instrumentation showing true knowledge of various instruments and orchestration. Dynamics and articulation were also carefully considered, all contributing to well-rounded, sensible and successful reflections of the chosen briefs.

Once again this year, there were examples of pop songs without lyrics or chord symbols, film music without a theme, or additional information, and some compositions that seemed incomplete. The least successful compositions only displayed some understanding of the musical elements, and inconsistent control, and were often harmonically unstable without clear melodic lines to propel the music forward. These were less convincing and even incoherent at times. At this level, simplistic compositions will not score highly. Short content, erratic structures, a lack of direction and repetition of material are all examples of common weaknesses. Inconsistency and a lack of development in some compositions prevented them venturing into the higher bands of marks.

Creating Musical Ideas

There was almost always a sense of strong melodic lines in the initial stages of composing, within the chosen style or genre, and most candidates were able to handle and extend these ideas successfully. There was strong evidence of melodic phrasing and balance within secure and effective ideas. Harmony, chordal progressions and structures were also well utilised. Instrumental writing was idiomatic and well handled. There was always a strong sense of musical intent, which was creative and skilful.

Weaker compositions displayed a lack of understanding and were at best elementary and simple. There was no overall direction moving forward, with very simple and repetitive chord progressions and basic melodic lines. There were examples of a mismatch regarding the chosen brief, and successful use of instruments was sometimes lacking.

Developing Musical Ideas

Teachers should be aware that in the WCT Brief composition, there is no discrete column for Developing Musical Ideas, but it would be expected to see changes in melodic or harmonic lines, so that the music is moved forward. In the Free compositions, development of musical ideas is assessed, and examiners expect competent growth using a range of compositional devices to further the initial ideas.

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Compositional devices and techniques were used well to develop the original ideas, and on the whole, candidates were strong at organising their thematic ideas in this respect. This year, many examiners noted the overall strength of development within the free compositions, showing knowledge and competence in organising, extending and expanding musical ideas. Examples included suitable contrasts, carefully prepared modulations, a variety of dynamics and articulation, imitation and sequence, and well-balanced phrasing.

However, there were also examples of some compositions which altogether lacked development. An example of this was a less effective piece which used the same two-bar chord progression throughout, becoming repetitive and rather static. There were also examples of very brief compositions which lacked sufficient development or extension of the original ideas. The general feeling amongst examiners was that there were some works which did not display inventive manipulation or appropriate growth, resulting in unclear and limited efforts.

Technical and Expressive Control of Musical Elements

In the assessment for this column, examiners were looking for effective and secure technical control of the musical elements, communicated effectively with expressive control.

Compositions overall demonstrated effective technical control, where there was careful consideration given to all technical and expressive elements. Competent treatment was almost always noted, showing effective musical understanding throughout the creative efforts. There were impressive efforts regarding fitting and colourful phrasing, artistic manipulation of the musical material and confidence in handling and refining the music.

There were works this year, albeit in the minority, where technical and expressive control was less used, or in some cases mainly ignored. There were still some candidates who did not add any dynamic or tempo markings, and some who did not show a full understanding of their chosen instruments or voices. A lack of musical understanding was shown on more than one occasion, and there was minimal evidence of variety, colour and clarity.

Unit 5 – Option B

This year, there were some outstanding compositions displaying impressively mature musicality. There was a good variety of genres, with examples such as musical theatre songs, film music, TV documentaries, Neoclassical and Impressionist pieces, jazz, bebop and pop songs. The stronger compositions displayed an excellent command of harmony, melodic development and competent orchestration, well within the context of the chosen styles. It was pleasing to note sophistication at its best here. Imaginative, creative and successful approaches to composition were outstanding in many cases.

The inconsistent efforts were in the minority, and there was a feeling that the third composition in particular was somewhat rushed, not always matching the efforts of the previous two creations.

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Summary of Key Points

- Continue with correct administration according to WJEC guidelines, using the correct forms, labelling, adding signatures, checking and uploading compositions and logs.
- Aim to write as much detail as possible on the candidate log, including details of influences (and compositions), any software used, and any help or feedback given; the process of composition is most important here.
- Guide tracks are a requirement where other performers play the work of the candidate.
- Remember that no marks are awarded for existing musical ideas or an interpretation of an idea by a performer that is not the candidate. Credit can only be given for ideas (including expression and interpretation) that are the work of the candidate.
- Avoid overlong accounts on the log, in particular bar-by-bar analyses.
- Read the WCT briefs carefully and cover all aspects/instructions of the brief in the composition.
- Always check the Assessment Criteria, taking note of the two-column format for the Brief Compositions, and the three-column format for the Free Compositions.
- The first composition, following one of the briefs set by the WJEC, must be in Western Classical Style which illustrates an understanding of the musical language, techniques and conventions of the Baroque, Classical or Romantic periods.
- Research instrumentation, techniques, styles and general theoretical understanding in order to employ a variety of elements.
- Always aim for a composition with a beginning, a middle and an end, displaying musical growth and coherence.
- Refine, improve and modify musical ideas and elements to create a unified composition.
- Candidates, guided by their teachers, should be heartily congratulated on their commitment and steadfastness to create such interesting and musical compositions in both the brief and the free efforts.

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MUSIC

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Summer 2026

UNIT 6 APPRAISING

Overview of the Unit

Unit 6 Appraising assesses the following Assessment Objectives:

AO3: Demonstrate and apply musical knowledge

Candidates need to show theoretical knowledge of musical elements (e.g. harmony, rhythm, structure), contexts, and language across different areas of study.

AO3 involves identifying features in scores and aural extracts. Typical command words for this Assessment Objective include words such as *state, name, identify, underline*. Here, typical question types might include *multiple choice, short answers, and recall of knowledge.*

AO4: Use analytical and appraising skills

Candidates need to make evaluative and critical judgements about music.

AO4 involves describing and explaining musical features demonstrating understanding of musical elements, contexts and language as well as analysing, comparing and evaluating music. It targets appraising skills and uses command words such as *describe, explain, compare, complete (pitch or rhythm), evaluate and analyse.*

Comments on individual questions/sections

AREA OF STUDY F

STRAND 1: IMPRESSIONISM

Question 1: Debussy – Reflets Dans L'eau

(a) (i) This was mostly well answered, with many candidates noting *A* or *A3*, but with some mentioning the *Coda*. Some however misread the question which specifically asked for *the section which begins at bar 71*.

(ii) Most candidates noted the *Rondo form*, with very few noting *Ternary*, or leaving it blank.

(b) Naming the chords was not well known, with some correct answers on *B flat minor*, but far fewer correct on the second chord. Many simply noted the letter name of the chord, not mentioning the *major/minor* or the added 6^{th} or 7^{th}.

(c) Very few noted the correct meaning; it is important that within a set work, all markings on the score are viewed and understood.

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(d) Questions which ask for descriptions of the music are generally well answered, and this was no exception. The most popular answers were the *monophonic section*, the *use of chords and arpeggios* where relevant, *the wider range of notes* and *the triplet rhythms*. Please be aware that many of these 'longer' answers (where two, three, four or five marks are available) will always ask for references to bar or line numbers, and these should always be included.

(e) This comparison question between two sections was generally well answered. Most were able to identify *the triplets, the higher octave*, and a few candidates noted *the use of pedal*.

(f) Longer Answer – use of tonality – the main drawback here was relating to and understanding the meaning of the word 'tonality'. Many candidates were unsure and wrote on anything except tonality. On the other hand, some candidates had been taught much information on these set works, absorbed the relevant facts and imparted this knowledge very well indeed, which is commendable. Some were able to make links and comparisons in both works, and there was largely a good attempt to compare both pieces. The weaker efforts provided mostly irrelevant responses, and there were instances of candidates writing on *Colloque Sentimental*, which was not required. Many candidates wrote in the form of bullet points, which is acceptable in this question.

STRAND 2 – CHAMBER MUSIC IN WALES

Question 2: Plowman – Night Dance No. 1

(a) Candidates were au fait with the two sections required here; only very few got this question wrong.

(b) (i) The naming of chords was poorly answered overall.

(ii) This fared slightly better, with more candidates able to recognise the *diminished 5th* chord.

(c) The term *tenuto* was well known, as well as its meaning.

(d) There was a little confusion here on the writing for piano, but also some strong responses with many candidates gaining two or three marks.

(e) This comparison question was also very well answered with many gaining the full two marks. The popular answers were *the same flute melody* and *the differences in time signatures.*

(f) Longer Answer – use of harmony and tonality – there was some confusion here, as well as some candidates writing on either harmony or tonality; of course both were required. The terms were generally not well known, and marks were lost as candidates wrote on thematic treatment and the writing for piano and flute. Others lost marks by only writing on one of the two compositions.

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STRAND 3 – POPULAR MUSIC IN WALES

Question 3: Show Me The Wonder – Manic Street Preachers

(a) This was well answered with many candidates noting two valid features to gain full marks.

(b) The structure was also well known, and many gained the full marks here also. Some failed to note the bar numbers as requested.

(c) Not many noted the *tenor* or *baritone saxophone*, but there were many mentions of the *synthesiser / piano*.

(d) The *F# minor chord* was not well known, and there were many blanks here.

(e) Very few gained a mark here; intervals were not well known or identified.

(f) This was not well answered, and once again there were many blanks here.

(g) The date was hit or miss, with very few gaining a mark here.

Question 4: Candylion – Gruff Rhys – timbre and melody

Many candidates wrote sufficient detail here and had obviously studied the music of Gruff Rhys very well indeed. There were good descriptions of the Candylion song, and much discussion on the uniqueness of the musical style. Many other relevant songs were noted, and overall, this was an encouraging effort by many candidates. Only very few wrote very little, showing a lack of listening and research.

STRAND 4 – AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATRE

Question 5: Alas For You – Godspell – Schwartz

(a) The time signature was not well known, with only a few noting the *seven beats*.

(b) There were quite a few *disjunct* answers, and less of *triadic* or *arpeggaic*.

(c) Many noted the *F#* but failed to note the *major* or *minor*. It is expected that candidates learn chords and chord symbols for both AS and A Level.

(d) *Sequence* was well known here.

(e) Only very few candidates noted *the pedal* here.

(f) This was very well answered with the majority gaining the mark, and many noting the *Hammond organ*.

(g) The interval of a 6^{th} was well known by many.

(h) The two marks were easily achieved here, with the popular answers being the *syncopation*, the *use of chords* and *piano following the vocal line*.

(i) The decade was also well answered; very few mentioned other decades such as the 1980s or the 2000s.

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Question 6: The Soldier's Dream – Here We Are – Sondheim – melody and timbre

The answers to this question mainly demonstrated good writing and knowledge on the music in the extract, as well as features of Sondheim's musical style. There was evidence of detailed research as well as a variety of songs which were named in the responses. There were instances of much music from Sweeney Todd, Into the Woods and Company, but also relevant songs from Assassins, Follies and A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum. There was good detail on melody, but perhaps less on timbre. Those candidates who wrote well mentioned both instrumental and vocal timbres which were very well described and analysed. The weaker candidates struggled here, with some mentioning songs and works by Stephen Schwartz rather than Sondheim, and others not giving enough musical detail or fully answering the question.

STRAND 5 – JAZZ LEGENDS

Question 7 – Freddie Freeloader – Miles Davis

(a) There were many answers naming the *saxophone* but not going further to mention the *Alto* and *Tenor.*

(b) The *12-bar blues* was well known, with only very few stating *ABA*.

(c) *Walking bass* was correctly identified in the main.

(d) The texture was also well answered, with most candidates able to name *homophonic*.

(e) This interval was sometimes correct.

(f) Surprisingly, this was mostly incorrect.

(g) As there were many correct options noted in the mark scheme, the majority of candidates were able to gain the full two marks here.

(h) The date was generally correct, or at least a date within the acceptable range noted in the mark scheme.

Question 8 – Take the A Train – Ellington – instruments and texture

There were some interesting and full answers here, reflecting some candidates' research and listening. Most showed a good knowledge of jazz and Duke Ellington's style. The descriptions of instruments were stronger than the texture, but overall, there were some very expressive and informative accounts which gained marks in the top bands. The weaker answers missed the opportunity to extend further and delve deeper into the chosen music and general style.

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AREA OF STUDY E – WESTERN CLASSICAL TRADITION

Question 7 – Violin Sonata – Schumann

(a) Most candidates found the dotted crotchet and quaver error, but far less noted the C natural.

(b) Again, most candidates gained marks for the correct rhythmic patterns, but many struggled with the pitch. Some candidates only concentrated on the rhythm, writing the notes on one stave line or space. There were very few blanks this year, as the majority of candidates attempted this question.

(c) There were many *imperfect* responses, rather than *interrupted*.

THE SYMPHONY

Question 10 – Symphony No. 1 – Brahms [Movement 4]

(a) The 'Comment on….' type of questions are usually well answered, and this was no exception. There were many candidates who gained full marks in this question. The stronger candidates were able to write correctly on many features as well as adding the correct bar numbers for each aspect; all in all, a comprehensive knowledge of the opening of the movement was shown. The weaker efforts wrote much less detail and missed out on exact locations, and some left the question blank.

(b) Tonality is once again an unknown term in many cases. Some of the many keys were mentioned, but there was some confusion regarding the correct bar numbers. There were some irrelevant answers here. Please be aware that questions on harmony and/or tonality are regular features in the Appraising papers.

(c) There were some valid and strong answers here, full of musical detail and correct bar numbers. Instruments, musical features and themes were utilised well. However, there were instances where a whole section of bar numbers was noted, and very general comments were added which were mostly irrelevant.

(d) The tick box was generally well answered, with a few mentioning the *perfect* rather than the *plagal cadence*.

Question 11 – Different ways to approach the nature and role of the 3rd movement

The most successful answers here were those that mentioned much detail on third movements, those who wrote logically and mainly chronologically, and those who described relevant composers and works. This opened the way to write on similarities and exceptions. Many suitable symphonies were added, and works by composers such as Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Dvořák were used. More adventurous candidates wrote well on Mahler, Sibelius, Strauss, Rachmaninoff and Farrenc. Often there was a clear understanding of the original structure of a symphony and how it was altered. Examiners were always pleased to read such perceptively thorough, informative and mature essays, displaying extra research and depth. Sometimes however there was confusion, for example, regarding Berlioz' Symphonie Fantastique, where there was a muddle of information about the third movement, describing Un Bal instead of Scene aux Champs.

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There were some pre-prepared essays this year, many of which did not mention the third movements at all. Also, the Area of Study F composers of Ravel and Debussy were discussed as well as one-movement symphonic poems. References to works from outside the time period of this AoS cannot be credited.

RELIGIOUS CHORAL MUSIC

Question 12 – Verdi Requiem – Rex Tremendae

(a) There were strong answers here regarding the treatment of melodic material, and many thematic ideas were effectively discussed. Relevant bar numbers were correctly used on the whole. Some answers lacked clarity, and some answers ventured onto the route of Latin word meanings which was not required in this answer.

(b) As in the Symphony, some keys were mentioned but not extended fully enough to gain the four marks. There were fewer successful answers here.

(c) Analysis questions are favoured by candidates, especially when they have access to the score. There were acceptable answers here on the main musical features, sometimes let down by a lack of bar numbers and naming voices.

(d) The tick box was mainly correct.

Question 13 – Elements of Romantic musical language and style

There were some exceptionally comprehensive essays this year. Candidates wrote copiously on many facets of Romantic language and style within religious choral music of the period, and there were relevant examples throughout. The music of Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Fauré and Verdi were described, as well as the more unusual Janáček and Glinka. A few candidates wrote on music outside the chosen period, and these references were not creditable. The main features included the extended size of choirs and orchestras, elements of virtuosity, changes in the texts, the Cecilian movement and the influence of opera. It was obvious that much research had occurred by candidates and centres. The weaker candidates wrote superficial descriptions of various requiem masses without fully answering the demands of the question. There were a few who wrote one or two paragraphs only, therefore providing a limited discussion.

Summary of Key Points

- Read the questions carefully; know what is needed to gain the maximum marks.
- Always look at how many marks are allocated to each question; know how much to write.
- Aim for a fuller understanding of musical terminology; learn the correct meaning of terms such as harmony and tonality.
- Aim for analytical thinking regarding the set works scores; read the scores wisely – all the required answers are within the music.
- Learn chords and chord symbols.
- Aim for logical writing in the longer answers.
- Add bar / line numbers in order to gain full marks.
- Bullet points and keywords are acceptable by examiners in all longer answers apart from the final answer [The Symphony or Religious Choral Music essays].
- Extra research on the Areas of Study is always encouraged.

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WJEC
245 Western Avenue
Cardiff CF5 2YX
Tel No 029 2026 5000
Fax 029 2057 5994
E-mail: exams@wjec.co.uk
website: www.wjec.co.uk

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