

# Getting ready for the GCSE music listening paper

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## Introduction

For the first time since 2019, students taking GCSE music will be sitting a listening paper this year. The students currently in Year 11 were in Year 8 when there was last a summer listening paper. They've had major disruption to their time in school over the last two years, so of course there will be a lot of uncertainty and perhaps anxiety about the forthcoming exams. The major examination boards in England and Wales have recognised this, however, and have published helpful extra information about what to expect in this summer's papers – we'll take a close look at this information.

The intention of this resource is to provide an overview of each board's intentions, to bring you and your students up to date with their latest information about the forthcoming listening paper, and to provide some revision tips to help the students prepare thoroughly. There are links to other *Music Teacher* resources dotted throughout this one, where they are relevant.

## Revising for GCSE music exams – previous resources

In 2019, *Music Teacher* published three resources (in the March, April and May issues: see right) to help teachers and students with the daunting prospect of revision, aiming to make it more active, intuitive and engaging, with suggestions of effective ways to prepare for the listening exam. These resources aimed to help students understand that revision is not simply about learning their notes or re-reading information about prescribed works. They encouraged students to re-engage actively with the music they have encountered throughout the course, re-familiarise themselves with it, and most of all, focus on how to answer the questions that will come up in the exam, under time pressure and without the help of their notes and resources.

Two of these 2019 resources are specific to GCSE students and they are still available to download (see right). The first, published in March, was a general resource aimed at making revision effective and manageable – normalising it and dispelling the concept of it being a chore.

It looked in detail at *how* to revise, identifying five **golden rules**:

- ▶ Start your revision early.
- ▶ Tailor your revision to your learning style.
- ▶ Create a good revision environment.
- ▶ Be strict with your timetable, environment and activities.
- ▶ Practise doing the exam. Past papers from previous years are available on the exam boards' websites, including from the autumn exam sessions of November 2020 and – in some cases – 2021.

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*Music Teacher* revision resources:  
 March 2019 - [Making revision effective and manageable](#); April 2019 - [Revising for GCSE Music exams](#); and May 2019 - [Revising for AS and A Level Music Exams](#).

This first resource also looked at how students can manage distractions, develop a deeper understanding of how they think, and ‘work smart’ through planning and progression, making revision a process that lasts over a number of weeks or months. It also gave tips for making an effective revision timetable and provided a number of class activities to aid revision at home.

The second resource, published in April 2019, was specifically geared to GCSE exams and comes highly recommended as students think about their continued (hopefully!) revision planning for the weeks ahead. Its key advice included:

- ▶ Ensuring that students feel they’re making progress with their revision.
- ▶ Bringing purpose to revision by making it active with specific focus.
- ▶ Allowing positive ‘flow’, so that time spent revising is time well spent.
- ▶ Varying the revision (to keep it interesting) and being mindful.

A significant part of that resource, entitled *Eyes on the Prize*, focused on the skills students need to develop in order to approach the paper effectively. This included:

- ▶ Understanding the assessment objectives – especially AO4.
- ▶ Knowing what types of question to expect, and how to deal with them.
- ▶ Recalling musical characteristics when familiar music is played in the exam.
- ▶ Reducing the need for ‘learning’ huge amounts of information about prescribed works and areas of study.
- ▶ Developing ‘pure’ listening skills.
- ▶ Preparing for extended-answer questions.

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### Special arrangements for 2022: advance information

In recognition of the unusual circumstances and disruption experienced by this year’s GCSE students, on 7 February this year the examination boards published more specific information about what will be covered in this summer’s papers. The intention of this *advance information* is to communicate the focus of the content of the exam papers, not so that students will be able to pre-prepare answers but so that they can revise with confidence on the relevant parts of the specification. Anyone is allowed to discuss the advance information but students cannot take the document into the exam with them.

The exam boards emphasise that a broad understanding of the whole specification is always the best preparation for success, since prior learning and contextual understanding can help students to answer questions more fully. Therefore, while the advance information will be incredibly helpful, teachers should be wary of narrowing the students’ learning by completely overlooking other parts of the specification.

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### GCSE music exam papers: formats for summer 2022

Here’s a reminder of the format of the GCSE listening paper for each of the major boards. These papers will look familiar to teachers, following the same format as the 2018 and 2019 papers. After each mini-overview I’ll outline the details of the advance information, setting out the topics that each board has identified for particular focus this year.

#### AQA

The Understanding Music paper for AQA’s Component 1 lasts 1 hour and 30 minutes. There are two sections:

Section A (68 marks)

- ▶ Eight listening questions on unfamiliar music taken from the four Areas of Study (AoS).

Section B (28 marks)

- ▶ One listening question on the prescribed work from AoS1.
- ▶ One listening question on the prescribed work from one of the other three areas of study (students can choose which one they do).

### Advance information for AQA's Appraising paper, summer 2022

AQA's advance information, published in February, details the parts of the syllabus that this summer's paper will focus on.

In Section A, questions will be set on music from the following genres/styles in each AoS:

AoS 1: Western classical tradition 1650-1910

- ▶ The Coronation Anthems and oratorios of Handel
- ▶ The [orchestral music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven](#)
- ▶ The [piano music of Chopin and Schumann](#)
- ▶ The [Requiem of the late Romantic period](#)

AoS 2: Popular music

- ▶ Music of Broadway: 1950s-1990s
- ▶ [Rock music of 1960s and 1970s](#)
- ▶ Film and computer gaming music: 1990s to present
- ▶ [Pop music: 1990s to present](#)

AoS 3: Traditional music

- ▶ Blues from 1920-1950
- ▶ Fusion incorporating African and/or Caribbean music
- ▶ [Contemporary folk music of the British Isles](#)

AoS 4: Western classical tradition since 1910

- ▶ British music of Arnold, Britten, Maxwell Davies and Tavener
- ▶ Orchestral music of Kodály and Bartók
- ▶ Minimalist music of [Adams](#), [Reich](#) and Riley

In Section B, the extended questions will focus on:

- ▶ [Mozart: Clarinet Concerto in A – third movement](#) (compulsory question)

and a choice from:

- ▶ [‘Prologue/Little Shop of Horrors’ \(from Little Shop of Horrors\)](#)
- ▶ [‘Graceland’ \(from Paul Simon’s album Graceland\)](#)
- ▶ [Intermezzo \(from Kodály’s Háry János\)](#)

For Section A, only a small amount has been taken out for this summer's exam – just one genre from each of AoS3 and AoS4 – but a little more specific focus has been indicated for the parts of the prescribed works that will come up in the Section B questions.

## OCR

The Listening and Appraising paper for OCR's Component 5 lasts 1 hour and 30 minutes and carries 80 marks. Though no set number of questions is mentioned in OCR's specification, since 2018 every paper has contained eight questions, two on each of AoS 2, 3, 4 and 5. The question requirements range from one-word answers to extended writing.

Though it lists suggested repertoire in its specification, OCR has no prescribed works, so the extracts of music are all likely to be unfamiliar. They do come, however, from specific areas of focus within each AoS, so students will be able to apply their contextual and stylistic knowledge to them.

### Advance information for OCR's Appraising paper, summer 2022

OCR's advance information, published in February, details the parts of the syllabus that this summer's paper will focus on, as follows:

#### AoS2: The concerto through time

- ▶ the Classical concerto
- ▶ the Romantic concerto

#### AoS3: Rhythms of the world

- ▶ India and Punjab
- ▶ Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East.

#### AoS4: Film music

- ▶ Music that has been composed specifically for a film

#### AoS5: Conventions of pop

- ▶ Rock 'n' roll of the 1950s and 1960s
- ▶ Pop ballads of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s

OCR has also announced that

- ▶ the **extended response** question will be on AoS 4 – music that has been composed specifically for a film.
- ▶ the **part-extended response** question will be on AoS 5 – pop ballads of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

Like all the other boards, OCR recommends that all of the genres listed in the specification content should be covered, to support students in their general understanding of each AoS.

## Edexcel

The Appraising paper for Edexcel's Component 3 lasts 1 hour and 45 minutes. There are two sections:

Section A (68 marks)

- ▶ Six listening questions on the set works.
- ▶ One musical dictation question, of a melody from one of the set works.
- ▶ One unfamiliar listening question.

Section B (12 marks)

- ▶ An extended answer question asking for comparison between two extracts – one from a set work, and the other from an unfamiliar work.

### Advance information for Edexcel's Appraising paper, summer 2022

Edexcel's advance information, published in February, details the parts of the syllabus that this summer's paper will focus on.

In Section A, questions will be set on extracts from the following set works:

- ▶ [Bach: Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 in D, third movement](#)
- ▶ [Beethoven: Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor \(\*Pathétique\*\), first movement](#)
- ▶ [Purcell: 'Music for a While'](#)
- ▶ [Queen: 'Killer Queen'](#)
- ▶ [Williams: 'Main Title/Rebel Blockade Runner'](#) (from *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*)
- ▶ Afro Celt Sound System: 'Release'

Also in Section A:

- ▶ The **dictation** question will be in the treble clef.
- ▶ The AoS for the **unfamiliar listening** question will be Fusions.

In Section B, for the **extended** answer, the AoS will be [Music for Stage and Screen, and the set work will be Schwartz: 'Defying Gravity' from \*Wicked\*](#)

From the advance information, you can see that, in fact, all eight set works still need to be revised for the exam, along with preparation for dictation and unfamiliar listening. But teachers and students do now have more information about which set works will appear in which parts of the paper.

### WJEC (see below for Eduqas)

The Appraising paper for WJEC's Unit 3 lasts 1 hour and is worth 72 marks. There are eight questions, two on each of the four Areas of Study, with one question requiring an extended answer. One of the questions for AoS1 (Musical Forms and Devices) and one of those for AoS 4 (Popular Music) will be on the prescribed works, and the other six questions will be about unfamiliar music related to the area of study.

#### Advance information for WJEC's Appraising paper, summer 2022

WJEC's advance information, published in February, details the parts of the syllabus that this summer's paper will focus on.

The prescribed works questions on the WJEC paper will focus specifically on:

- ▶ Section A of 'Anitra's Dance' (from Grieg's *Peer Gynt* Suite No. 1)
- ▶ The intro, first verse, pre-chorus and chorus of 'Everything Music Go' (by Manic Street Preachers).

The remaining six questions will focus on the following genres from within the four AoS:

- ▶ The unfamiliar extract for AoS 1 (Musical Forms and Devices) will be from the Baroque era.
- ▶ The two questions on AoS2 (Music for Ensemble) will be on music taken from Welsh folk songs/melodies and musical theatre.
- ▶ AoS 3 (Film Music) remains unchanged
- ▶ AoS 4 (Popular Music) remains unchanged.

Additionally, in the WJEC paper:

- ▶ The **dictation** question will require students to notate rhythm only.
- ▶ The **extended answer** will be on AoS1: Musical Forms and Devices.

### Eduqas

The Appraising paper for the Eduqas Component 3 lasts 1 hour and 15 minutes and carries 96 marks. Like WJEC, there are eight questions, two on each of the four areas of study, with one question requiring an extended answer. One of the questions for AoS1 (Musical Forms and Devices) and one of those for AoS4 (Popular Music) will be on the prescribed works, and the other six questions will be about unfamiliar music related to the area of study.

#### Advance information for Eduqas's Appraising paper, summer 2022

Eduqas's advance information, published in February, details the parts of the syllabus that this summer's paper will focus on.

The prescribed works questions on the Eduqas paper will focus specifically on:

- ▶ [Section B of 'Badinerie' \(the final movement from Bach's Orchestral Suite No. 2 in B minor\)](#)
- ▶ The second verse and chorus of 'Africa' by Toto

The remaining six questions will focus on the following genres from within the four AoS:

- ▶ The unfamiliar extract for AoS1 (Musical Forms and Devices) will be from the Romantic era.
- ▶ The two questions on AoS2 (Music for Ensemble) will be on music for vocal ensemble.
- ▶ AoS3 (Film Music) remains unchanged.
- ▶ The unfamiliar extract for AoS4 (Popular Music) will be from the pop genre.

Additionally, in the Eduqas paper:

- ▶ The **dictation** question will require students to notate pitch only.
- ▶ The **extended answer** will be on AoS3 (Music for Film).

The advance information gives teachers and students more information about the specific parts of each AoS, and of the prescribed works, to aid their revision, though like the other boards both WJEC and Eduqas recommend continuing to teach the other genres and sections of the set works for the sake of context and understanding. **Please note that the advance information for WJEC specifies different areas of focus to that for Eduqas.**

## What students need to know: elements, context and language

The exam boards' specifications list extensively the **skills and knowledge** that students need to develop, and it is these aspects that can be best focused on in revision sessions. Broadly speaking, three key aspects of musical knowledge are needed to be able to appraise music effectively, whether it's prepared music (prescribed works) or unfamiliar music met in the exam for the first time. We're going to spend the bulk of the rest of this resource looking at the skills and knowledge that students need to develop in these three areas.

### Musical elements

Most specifically, students need to know the **elements of music**, what each of them encompasses, and how to use them to understand and identify appropriate features of each AoS and prescribed work.

I've made a checklist below, which is not completely comprehensive but covers a big range of features, characteristics and devices, with appropriate terminology, that students can look for in the music they study. Check your board's specification for their specific expectations/definitions within each element.

#### Pitch (both melodic and harmonic)

- ▶ conjunct/disjunct/triadic/broken chords/arpeggio/scalic
- ▶ diatonic/chromatic
- ▶ intervals
- ▶ passing notes
- ▶ phrasing (regular or irregular)
- ▶ motifs – melodic and rhythmic
- ▶ consonant/dissonant

Melodic and harmonic devices such as:

- ▶ sequence
- ▶ ornamentation/decoration
- ▶ ostinato/riff/hook (depending on the style)
- ▶ repetition and contrast
- ▶ imitation
- ▶ canon
- ▶ Alberti bass
- ▶ pitch bend, slide/portamento and glissando
- ▶ melisma
- ▶ blue notes
- ▶ drones and pedal notes

Chord choices and progressions including:

- ▶ cadences
- ▶ standard chord progressions (eg I-VI-IV-V)
- ▶ 7th chords
- ▶ tierce de Picardie
- ▶ power chords

Students need to be able to:

- ▶ read and write staff notation in treble and bass clef (though check advance information for your board).
- ▶ read and write rhythmic notation in simple time.
- ▶ for some boards, read rhythmic notation in compound time.
- ▶ read and write key signatures (up to four sharps or flats).
- ▶ understand both Roman numeral and contemporary chord symbols for chords within a major key, including minor and dominant 7th chords.



## **Tonality**

- ▶ major and minor keys (to four sharps/flats)
- ▶ modal, pentatonic and chromatic tonality
- ▶ simple modulations such as those to the dominant, subdominant or relative/tonic major/minor
- ▶ blues scale

Students need to recognise major and minor chords and their associated, stylistically appropriate symbols.

## **Rhythm, metre and tempo**

- ▶ pulse and metre (regular/irregular depending on the AoS)
- ▶ tempo indications (eg beats per minute/metronome marks, Italian terms)
- ▶ simple and compound time
- ▶ anacrusis
- ▶ hemiola
- ▶ rubato
- ▶ syncopation/off-beat
- ▶ swing and shuffle rhythms
- ▶ dotted rhythms and triplets
- ▶ rhythmic styles appropriate to the area of study (eg Latin rhythms, polyrhythm)

## **Sonority (depending on the AoS)**

- ▶ instruments and types of voice appropriate to the AoS
- ▶ instrumental and vocal groupings appropriate to the AoS
- ▶ electronic/synthesised sounds, sampling
- ▶ different combinations and the effects of their use, including basso continuo
- ▶ playing techniques associated with particular instruments/voices, like pizzicato or strumming, slap bass or falsetto
- ▶ articulation like staccato and legato
- ▶ effects provided by pedals or studio technology (see Music technology below)

## **Texture**

- ▶ monophonic
- ▶ homophonic/chordal
- ▶ melody and accompaniment
- ▶ countermelody
- ▶ polyphonic/contrapuntal
- ▶ heterophonic
- ▶ antiphonal
- ▶ layered
- ▶ unison/octaves
- ▶ canon/round
- ▶ a cappella
- ▶ solo

## **Dynamics**

- ▶ Italian terms
- ▶ crescendo/diminuendo/hairpins
- ▶ accents/sforzando

## **Structure (depending on the AoS)**

- ▶ binary, ternary, rondo, theme and variations, sonata form
- ▶ verse/chorus (strophic) structure (including intro/outro, pre-chorus, middle eight, break/instrumental/solo)
- ▶ call and response
- ▶ ground bass
- ▶ leitmotifs and thematic transformation
- ▶ 12-bar blues
- ▶ popular song forms (eg 16-bar AABA)

## **Music technology (depending on the AoS)**

- ▶ looping
- ▶ sampling
- ▶ DAWs and appropriate software
- ▶ synthesised/computer-generated sound
- ▶ panning
- ▶ effects (instrumental and vocal)
- ▶ use of backing tracks/click tracks.

Students need to practise applying their knowledge of the elements of music when they meet new extracts, so that it becomes a natural, undaunting task in the exam. Any short piece of music, with or without score, can be used as part of revision to practise this.

Try it with this extract from a simple Mozart piano piece (written when he was ten!). Ask your students to list as many features for each element of music that they can and compare them with their peers' lists, with the intention of nailing those AoS3 skills.

**Allegretto**

The musical score is for a short piano piece in 2/4 time, marked 'Allegretto' and 'mf'. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has six measures, and the second system starts at measure 7 and also has six measures. The music is written for piano and features a simple melody in the treble clef and a supporting bass line in the bass clef.

### Musical context

Awareness of the context of prescribed works is crucial to gaining marks. It is also hugely helpful when students are presented with unfamiliar music, since they can match it with music they know.

Much of this is concerned with the **effect** or **influence** that the context has on the creation and development of music. Students need to be aware of the ways in which music is composed and performed in different historical, social or cultural contexts, affected by:

- ▶ the intention of the composers and/or the artists performing the music, and the people who commissioned it and/or the reasons why it was created.
- ▶ the type of audience or venue, and how this might have changed over time.
- ▶ performing conventions of the time.
- ▶ how the genres within each AoS developed and changed over time.
- ▶ the historical context – for example, the Classical period or 1970s Britain.
- ▶ how relevant music industries grew – for example, the film or popular music industry, and why they grew (including the impact of technology).
- ▶ the origins and cultural context of traditional music.

Students also need to be able to:

- ▶ draw conclusions about a piece of music.
- ▶ draw comparisons between extracts of music.
- ▶ make evaluative and critical judgements about music.
- ▶ understand relevant chronology and stylistic features.

## Musical language

Musical language is the toolbox of knowledge and ideas, built up over time, that students can use to help them understand the music they are dealing with, and to communicate their ideas to the examiner with clarity and demonstration of their knowledge.

For each area of study students need to know:

- ▶ typical forms and structures of the prescribed works, and of a range of representative music from each AoS.
- ▶ key musical vocabulary appropriate to the music in each AoS – it's important that they use this in their answers.
- ▶ stylistic features typical of each AoS, and examples of them in the music they have studied.
- ▶ examples of composers, artists and performers appropriate to each AoS.

They also need to be aware of the performance conventions surrounding the music they study and their time periods, how the music relates to its context, and how to express and justify their opinions about it. This applies just as much to unfamiliar music as to prescribed works.

The importance of the four bullet points above cannot be overstated if students are aiming for the top marks, especially in extended answer questions. To get into that top category, students need to:

- ▶ use musical vocabulary extensively and with sophistication.
- ▶ make valid points, which are fully supported by evidence and explanation showing stylistic awareness.
- ▶ demonstrate a high level of understanding, with in-depth knowledge.
- ▶ compare, contrast and draw conclusions.
- ▶ describe how the use of different elements affects the music.
- ▶ express their responses in clear, accurate language and with logical, easy-to-follow structure.

Nailing those AO4 criteria are particularly important. To get the very top marks, in many cases, students need to relate what they find in a piece of music to its effect on the music itself, considering the purpose and intentions of the composer.

## Developing extended answers

Let's finish by looking at how students can use their musical language toolboxes to be surer of high marks in extended answer questions. As in other subjects, like English, taking the *Point, Evidence, Effect, Link* approach (*PEEL*) is a particularly effective way of checking for the 'fullness' of their answers, especially in respect of gaining those AO4 marks.

Here's a relatively simple example to show this in action:

- 1 State your **point** – describe a feature of the music:
  - ▶ 'The melody is chromatic.'
- 2 **Evidence** your point – explain where it is in the music:
  - ▶ 'The opening melody is chromatic.'
  - ▶ 'The flute melody at the end is chromatic.'
- 3 If relevant to the question, state how this feature links to the **context**:
  - ▶ 'The opening violin melody is chromatic, which is typical of melodies in the Romantic period.'
- 4 Describe the **effect** of this feature:
  - ▶ 'The opening violin melody is chromatic, which emphasises the unsettled mood and increases the tension for the listener.'
- 5 If you can, and it's relevant to the question, **link** to other music in the AoS:
  - ▶ 'The opening violin melody is chromatic, which emphasises tension, similar to the music of Bernard Hermann in *Psycho*.'
- 6 Finally, check that your extended answer is **organised** and clear. This means planning it, with bullet points and rough notes, before writing it out in full.