

MUSIC

Paper 9703/01
Listening

Key messages

- Use specific musical examples that are clearly recognisable
- Read the question carefully and make sure the response is entirely relevant and focused
- Choose appropriate repertoire for comparison, focusing on music and not lyrics

General comments

The general standard has shown a continued improvement. The best responses were certainly of a very high standard, and there was some very mature thinking and extensive musical experience in evidence in the best work. Many candidates had clearly diligently and keenly studied the Prescribed and Core works, knew them in fine detail, and were able to construct intelligent and focused responses. Some candidates could have provided greater detail in the discussion questions in particular. These candidates' musical experience also required expanding to better inform their responses.

Most papers delved straight into answering the question, where some others unnecessarily included much irrelevant information in lengthy introductions or conclusions, which did not add anything significant to the response. It is also unnecessary to write the question out at the beginning of the response, and any planning should be crossed out.

Handwriting was generally legible and the standard of English was mostly good.

The tendency for unasked-for 'blow-by-blow' commentaries was somewhat reduced this session, with candidates managing to highlight significant features instead. Section A, with its requirement for a more detailed familiarity with the set works, was sometimes less well-answered than **Section B** and **C** questions, and there was often a lack of consistency across the three sections. In some cases, the brevity of responses prevented candidates from being able to demonstrate sufficient familiarity; there were also some longer responses which avoided relevant points.

Section A

This section requires close familiarity with the prescribed works; the best responses used vivid commentaries and well-chosen examples to answer the question relevantly. Candidates should be reminded that referring to timings on recordings is not helpful, as the examiner will not necessarily have access to the same recording; relating examples to where they sit in the overall structure or sequence of events, as well as in relation to each other, will make references perfectly clear.

- 1 This was a popular question, and most candidates knew the music well, aside from some confusion over the numbering of variations. The best responses were able to maintain a focus on *texture*, with some slightly weaker ones commenting knowledgeably on the music more generally.
- 2 Candidates knew the music well, and there was generally good awareness of tradition and Classical style. Comments on innovation were sometimes a little vague, although commentaries were often detailed and clearly well-prepared.
- 3 Almost as popular a choice as **Question 1**, some candidates struggled with the comparison element of this question. Some weaker responses did not address the central issue of *structure*, instead offering up everything that could be recalled about the pieces. Some stronger responses mentioned tonalities as a structural element, which can be important in music of this period.

Section B

Although close familiarity with Core Works is to be commended, the strongest candidates showed familiarity with a wider range of repertoire where it was required by the question. In order to show a well-developed understanding, candidates need to relate musical features and techniques to their effects.

- 4 This was a reasonably popular question, and many candidates wrote at length about the different movements. There was some imbalance between discussion of the programme and the music, which reinforces the point made above that candidates must make convincing links between musical features and effects. The strongest responses were able to focus on the use of the orchestra, which was central to the question.
- 5 Some responses showed a lack of understanding of the musical features of *Clair de lune*, making vague statements that did not bear up to scrutiny of the music itself. The choice of piece for comparison was least effective where the focus was on lyrics, which are only of secondary importance, and in pop songs often tend to have no relation to the music. Stronger responses picked out the most significant features of the Debussy and presented an appropriate, programmatic piece for comparison.
- 6 This was a popular question, although many candidates found it difficult to remain focused on the river itself, relying instead upon writing down everything they knew about the piece. Nonetheless, there were some very successful responses, which convincingly linked musical features to the depiction of the river.

Section C

The best candidates organised their thoughts logically and presented them in an orderly essay, point by point, each illustrated by reference to relevant musical matters, drawn from study of a wide range of repertoire and personal experience. Weaker responses were extensive, but somewhat confused, with the question not being properly addressed or understood.

- 7 This was not answered by many candidates, and those that chose to respond needed to show a more comprehensive understanding of chronology and the different ways in which music was shared. Surprisingly, modern examples were lacking; it is worthwhile for candidates to be aware of musical issues in their own countries and times.
- 8 Many candidates experienced difficulty in presenting a balanced argument; quite a few came down fairly heavily in favour of programmatic music, but often did not manage to focus successfully on 'which is easier?', which ought to have been the central theme of the response. Material on absolute music was generally less convincing, with candidates struggling to think of why absolute music might also be successful. Weaker responses referred to the lyrics of pop songs, which were not helpful to the argument in much the same way as in **Question 5**.
- 9 An understanding of the purpose of notation was needed here, and few candidates were able to demonstrate this convincingly. Some took notation to mean expressive directions on the score, rather than the notes themselves, and there was little evidence of considering both sides of the argument. The question contained prompts for a range of examples; candidates would have done well to heed this.
- 10 The trumpet was a popular choice to describe, and most candidates showed a good historical understanding of its different roles, with preparation for Section A having some positive impact here. There was generally good knowledge of the instruments that make up the brass family, although many candidates missed at least one part of the question.

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<p>Paper 9703/02 Practical Musicianship</p>

Key messages

- Centres should include photocopies (which will be later destroyed) of the music for Element 1 and for the final assessment in Element 2.
- There should be three assessments of each discipline offered in Element 2, ideally completed over a period of not less than 6 months.
- Exercises for Element 3 should include one given part throughout.
- Centre assessors should provide comments in support of the mark awarded on all Working Mark Sheets. This is of particular importance for Element 2.

General comments

The sheer variety of work submitted demonstrated that most candidates had played to their strengths and there was evidence of skilled music-making across all four components. Almost all work reached a satisfactory level of attainment and there were some accomplished performances in Elements 1 and 2. Most centres included all the requisite paperwork, but there were some missing or incorrect Working Mark Sheets. Centres should refer to the checklist provided with these forms on the website, which also gives details of suggested formats for video and audio recordings. If the essential forms are missing from the submission, then CIE will contact the centre to request them.

In Element 1, candidates were usually well prepared and there were many confident and highly skilled performances. The mandatory spoken introduction is assessed in Criterion E of the mark scheme. Merely naming the pieces to camera will not access the higher mark bands: candidates should explain briefly the principal features of each piece that are characteristic of its place in the repertoire. This does not have to be from memory; neither need it be lengthy. Recitals should be recorded as one continuous track, but it is fine to re-tune between items, and backing tracks are perfectly acceptable. It is worth doing a sound check immediately before recording if the performance is accompanied to ensure that the assessed performer can be clearly heard.

There must be **three** Element 2 recordings submitted for each discipline and these should be spaced out so that candidates have time to develop their skills. In Conducting and Directing, it is particularly important to show work in progress, so an early recording might include footage of candidates interacting with the ensemble in preliminary rehearsal, with the final recording demonstrating the entire finished product. When recording large group ensembles, the candidate must be both visible and musically identifiable, so it is helpful if the camera focuses solely on each candidate being assessed for at least some of the recording.

There is considerable freedom in Element 3 to construct a course that suits the candidate, but it should be noted that free composition in a pastiche style will be unlikely to achieve high marks. Candidates should always work with a given part, which should be from *named* music. The assessment criteria focus largely on harmony and tonality and a command of bass line or melodic construction (none of this need not be Western), so a task which focuses on creating lyrics or adding percussion will be unlikely to access the higher mark bands. Many centres provided a detailed course outline (which is mandatory), and it is always helpful to see evidence of teacher marking on submitted work.

In Element 4, the best compositions were imaginative, but also showed evidence of preliminary listening, often from a wide variety of sources. This should be outlined in the commentary, which, although not formally assessed, provides valuable insight into compositional thinking and stylistic development. Most candidates use a score-writing program: they should be encouraged to utilise features such as phrasing and articulation marks from the outset and to check these rigorously before burning a CD. There was sometimes a tendency to place such scores automatically in the higher mark bands of Criterion E (Notation and Presentation), even if there was little evidence of dynamics, expression or idiomatic writing for the chosen instruments. If a score is not submitted, the commentary needs to be longer: a vivid and highly detailed annotation of the recording.

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<p>Paper 9703/03 Performing</p>

Key messages

- careful preparation for the actual performance occasion should form part of the candidate's study for the component
- in the spoken introduction to their performance, candidates should demonstrate their understanding of their chosen focus
- DVD recordings should be checked to ensure that they are complete and that they function correctly before submission

General comments

There were some outstanding submissions for this component and all candidates reached at least a satisfactory standard. Exemplary performances were heard on piano, voice, violin, cello, electric guitar and clarinet.

The majority of candidates chose appropriate repertoire, of suitable length, for their submission. Most had considered the musical focus of their performance and had also ensured that the technical demands encountered in the music were within their own capabilities. In order to access the higher mark bands, candidates are advised to select focused repertoire which gives them an opportunity to perform to their best. The wide range of focus choices this season included Mozart's Flute Quartet, rondos from nineteenth century violin sonatas, the piano music of Mompou, funk techniques on bass guitar and music-theatre of the 1980s for voice.

Most candidates had prepared well and were able to demonstrate their technical and musical capabilities in their performance. A performance involves much more than just 'getting the notes right', so preparation for the actual performance occasion should form an important part of the candidate's study for this component. Some candidates did little more than play/sing through their pieces without any real sense of performance, thus limiting their ability to access the higher mark bands, particularly in the areas of *Realisation of performance markings and/or performing conventions* and *Stylistic understanding*. Many candidates performed in front of an audience, but even if a candidate chooses not to have an audience, the performance should be presented with a sense of occasion.

All candidates presented a spoken introduction as required, though some were rather brief. In their introduction, candidates should demonstrate understanding of their chosen focus and should know how it is reflected in each of their selected pieces. It is not appropriate to read verbatim from items such as web articles or CD sleeve notes. The introduction should be presented clearly and audibly. It may be read rather than spoken from memory, if the candidate prefers.

Most centres provided competent accompanists and suitable venues for the performance to take place. Most performances were presented on DVD recordings of good quality and centres had ensured that individual candidates could be readily identified. In most instances the camera had been placed suitably, ensuring that the performer and their fingers/instrument were clearly visible. Some cameras were placed rather far away from the candidate, inhibiting both visual and sound quality. Care should be taken when placing microphones to ensure that a good sound balance is achieved between the candidate and any accompaniment.

Centres are advised to check the DVD recordings are complete and that the DVDs function correctly before submission. Copies of the music performed by each candidate should be submitted with the recording.

Centres are reminded that submissions for the different components of the examination should be packaged separately as they are required by different Examiners.

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<p>Paper 9703/04 Composing</p>
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Key messages

- Many centres are fully familiar with the requirements of the syllabus but new or less experienced centres may find it useful to consult previous reports as well as the current syllabus to access comprehensive guidance
- The quality and quantity of composing work submitted should fully represent a year's work at advanced level
- Highly successful composing work is rooted in research and investigation of relevant models that not only contribute to the levels of invention in shaping ideas but can also be the source of much instruction with respect to orchestration techniques and idiomatic writing for the chosen sound source(s).

General comments

Centres are reminded that, in this component, the coursework is examiner-assessed and there is no requirement for centres to conduct an internal assessment. Most centres fully understood the need to submit work in separate components, recognising that different examiners are allocated to the various options.

Occasionally, improvisation is submitted in a way that makes assessment as composition very difficult, if not impossible. Music teachers in centres can play an important role in advising their candidates about the suitability of their intentions in this regard.

Specific comments relating to Compositions

Commentaries

A succinct commentary is required and candidates should avoid a narrative account that simply describes what is obvious in the music itself. Candidates might usefully answer questions such as:

- 'What did I set out to do?'
- 'What music/composers/musicians influenced the choices I made?'
- 'What stages did my composing go through – what was the *process* of composition?'
- 'How did the end product reflect my intentions?'

The scope of submissions

Once again there was a wide range of creative thought that gave rise to a broad array of submissions. There was some impressive, well-researched use of technology, as well as the use of more conventional sound resources. Where candidates had in mind the performance outcomes of their ideas, results were often more successful than those submissions that remained entirely sequencer-bound.

Listening range

Any listening can be relevant to a composer and some candidates mentioned an eclectic range of sources that supported their work. Those candidates who used their research as a genuine learning experience, applying an analytical and critical ear, showed the relevance of their listening experience in commentary explanations, as well as in the music scores / recordings.

Materials, Use of Materials

Some candidates presented very short or conversely, rather lengthy compositions. While examiners take a flexible approach in the interpretation of the syllabus guidelines, it is the quality of the ideas and their outworking that is of particular importance rather than the number of bars / minutes in quantitative terms. Some short compositions, or those consisting of brief sections that were largely unrelated, did not demonstrate sufficient understanding of the concept of development or overall cohesion. Some over-long compositions frequently contain too much repeated material or might visit one new idea after another without exploring an idea fully.

Structure

Candidates writing in a tonal idiom can learn much about how key helps to structure music; study of the prescribed works in Paper 1 will enable understanding to develop concerning the relationship between keys and structure.

Use of Medium and Texture

Candidates writing for ensembles of various sizes were often able to show that they had gathered a range of skills in how to combine instrumental sounds by listening carefully to prescribed works and other relevant music of their choice. Examiners were pleased to see candidates using instruments from non-western traditions used, as well as considerable expertise demonstrated in the use of jazz and rock combinations and traditional resources.

Some candidates ambitiously chose to write for the full orchestral scores that some computer notation software presents in template form. However these large forces were often difficult to handle effectively, producing scores with rather too much doubling and unison writing. It may be profitable to consider options for using reduced forces in portions of the music within a larger-scale orchestration. Listening to examples of this in genres and styles related to the candidate's work is very valuable and teacher guidance here can helpfully signpost the candidate to useful repertoire.

Notation and Presentation

Most candidates notated their compositions using computer programmes, with only a few scores submitted that were hand-written. By attending to accuracy, legibility and appropriate levels of expressive and performance detail, it is also possible for candidates to get maximum credit for their scores whether hand- or computer-written.

Candidates writing for electric guitar may demonstrate with the recording that all manner of technical specialist processes are being incorporated into the finished piece. It is important that these are accurately detailed on the scores so that palm muting, other forms of finger picking, tapping or strumming actions and the precise details of electric pedal applications are fully accounted for.

Where a commentary is submitted because the music cannot be conventionally notated, candidates should provide enough information for clear audio navigation. If a film or video game submission is made, it may be important to provide timings to accompany the narrative description. When samples or 'found sounds' are used in the materials, candidates must attribute their sources accurately and provide full technical details of any process and manipulations that are applied to the samples.

Candidates should not submit unattributed, unscored improvisation as part of their composing work. The performance of others in jazz or world music styles, for example, cannot be credited to the composer unless a very detailed explanation of how the precise ideas were conveyed to performers is given by the composer.

In order to avoid a distorted or inaccurately produced recording, it is recommended that all CDs are listened to before dispatch to the examiner.

If supplementary audio files are included for any reason, they must be fully identified, labelled and explained.

Concluding remarks

Candidates should bear in mind that at A Level, the objectives for success are not the same as those required in a popular or commercial context. Successful work was characterised by sustained application to a self-determined compositional task; there was a sense of purposefulness in the level of relevant research undertaken. Emerging skills and understanding were comprehensively demonstrated in a compositional submission of substance.

Once again, examiners wish to express their appreciation for the considerable support provided by centres in enabling candidates to perform and record their compositions or to realise their work using music technology.

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<p>Paper 9703/05 Investigation and Report</p>

This report addresses a range of considerations that are valid for both 9703/05 and 8663/06. Comments that address the link required for 9703/05 are not relevant for 8663/06.

Key messages

- A comprehensive track list must be included, detailing the contents of the CD of selected/edited extracts supporting the submission.
- The cover sheet must always be included as this states and explains the link between the investigation and either performing or composing (9703).
- Centres may choose to provide instruction that enables their candidates to understand the importance of researching relevant and reliable materials; guidance in consistent reference methods can also be very useful.

General comments

The range of topics investigated by candidates was broad and incorporated all manner of styles, genres and traditions.

A small but significant proportion of the submissions had elements of the work that were missing; using the syllabus outline as a 'checklist' can helpfully enable centres to navigate their way through the components required.

Many candidates were keen to explore programmatic and descriptive aspects of a body of music but overlap with prescribed works in other components of the course should be avoided.

Some chosen topics had a substantial contextual element. It is important to explain and validate the research by reflecting on the impact this has had on personal musical understanding as a whole. Where specific pieces of music are mentioned, for example in songs from musicals, the plot line or place of a song within the context of the dramatic work is relevant, but candidates should make sure that they also talk about the music itself.

Some topic parameters were rather broad – 'How the piano revolutionised music'; in such cases, the most successful work came from candidates who carefully chose a small group of significant pieces to demonstrate their findings.

Teachers can provide guidance to help candidates to focus their thinking from an initial starting point such as 'The Development of Romanticism in the Romantic period' to a more manageable task such as investigating Romantic traits through the study of two or three composers, or the repertoire of romantic music in a single instrument. This would need further refining in the consideration of piano repertoire, for example.

Research

Successful reports achieved a good balance between summarising the outcomes of research and reporting more fully on material finally deemed to be of most importance.

Some good analytical projects were presented. An investigation of the crosscurrents in impressionism and early jazz, for example, provided opportunity for musical analysis and cultural comparisons. Some candidates, however, got rather diverted from their primary purpose, by the inclusion of a 'History of the Piano/Saxophone ...' section which was less relevant to the main focus of the investigation.

Candidates who understood that their unique research topic required a bespoke research plan fared better than those candidates in centres who worked to a common framework.

Many candidates demonstrated the ability to research and select authoritative sources online. The practice of using undergraduate dissertations is questionable – they may not be academically reliable enough and teachers can do a great deal to guide candidates in developing their skills of discernment.

Some candidates were very thorough in documenting their use of websites, having been guided in good practice that refers to the access date.

Syllabus guidance underlines that use of web-based resources alone are unlikely to provide the breadth of materials for research required in this syllabus.

Presentation of Findings

It is not necessary to send bulky lever arch files of documentation as evidence of research – this should be clearly discernible in the distillation of information in the report and supporting biography/discography.

It is very important that all parts of the submission are checked before dispatch. Occasionally, CDs were blank and, without a track list referencing the aural aspects of the investigation, credit could not be given in the absence of evidence.

Candidates should give details of *performers* for pieces of music on the CD – this is crucial information in addition to the name of the piece and the composer.

Referencing takes a good degree of organisation throughout the course. The references should be very clear in the text, with footnotes, or with a detailed bibliography/discography/references at the end. Omissions or confusion occurred where candidates mixed the two approaches.

A track list should be presented separately (not written on the CD itself as the only source of information) and editing of longer pieces should be conveyed through the careful selection of pertinent passages.

Concluding remarks

Exemplary levels of curiosity and motivation in the researching and presentation of findings were observed in much of the work this session. Whilst many areas of investigation were very interesting, it is not the chosen topic that makes for validity, but the extent to which the report is credible in the light it throws on both the candidate's research process and findings relating to the subject matter at hand.

Highly successful candidates were able to channel the results of extensive research, conducted across the course, into a clearly focused, informative and convincing report.