

A LEVEL

Moderators' report

MUSIC

H543

For first teaching in 2016

H543/03/04 Summer 2022 series

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Introduction

Our moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

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.

Advance Information for Summer 2022 assessments

To support student revision, advance information was published about the focus of exams for Summer 2022 assessments. Advance information was available for most GCSE, AS and A Level subjects, Core Maths, FSMQ, and Cambridge Nationals Information Technologies. You can find more information on our [website](#).

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General overview

2022 saw the return of examined assessment following the Covid 19 pandemic.

It came with adjustments to the requirements for composing, H543 03 & 04 and a small change in the structure of the criteria and descriptors.

For both 03 & 04, Section 1, the OCR set brief was omitted. This meant that only sections 2 & 3 of the criteria and descriptors were used, with marking out of 40 for H543/04 (Composing B) and out of 70 for H543/03 (Composing A). Total duration requirements were changed too, with a 2 minute minimum for Composing B and a 4 minute minimum for Composing A.

Most candidates opted for Composing B, but it was good to see a healthy number of Composing A too.

Candidates chose an eclectic range of styles, idioms and genres for their free composition, which is Section 2 of both components. It was excellent to see that candidates were very often composing for idioms with which they had insight and personal interest, and this frequently resulted in idiomatic and creative outcomes.

The springboard for the free choice composition is the learner determined brief, which carries 5 marks.

It was pleasing to note that many centres understood the requirements for the brief: that it should be concise and detailed, and in a format which clearly lays out the intentions of the composition. For a guide as to what is expected, please refer to past and current OCR set briefs. Use the set briefs to demonstrate to candidates the expected length and content for their own brief. However, please do not encourage candidates to replicate word for word, OCR set briefs, as marks are given in this section for the candidate's creativity and clarity of ideas.

Here is an example of a good learner determined brief:

A new independent French film, inspired by the 2001 rom-com 'Amelie', is premiering at the Cannes Film Festival. The film is a romantic comedy following our main character, Karine, as she witnesses some strange occurrences in her neighbourhood in Paris. You have been asked to compose a series of musical passages inspired by the bal-musette genre that accompanies the opening credit scene of the film, The piece will be performed lived at The Palais des Festivals et des Congrès by a small quartet consisting of piano, accordion, strings, and woodwind.

An interesting, concise, and detailed brief will provide candidates with strong ideas and clear references on which to base their composition.

There is no requirement for candidates to submit a commentary for their composition and these are not considered part of the brief, nor are they assessed.

While candidates can benefit from writing a commentary as part of their internal coursework, it must be stressed that examiners do not use this added material for assessment and centres are asked not to include them in the submission.

Furthermore, candidate intentions which are embedded in a long commentary or description, without a defined brief, will be unable to access mid to higher marks for this criteria.

Part of the submission is to include either a score or an explanation of the composition. These are not marked as such but may be used to corroborate the work and intentions of the composer. For example, a digital realisation using basic sound samples might not be sufficiently able to show the composers' intentions and examiners can use the score to see what they intended. Conversely, some of the high-quality live recordings which employ professional musicians, may have added detail and shape which is derived from the performers and not the composer. Again, the score or description will be used to substantiate the composer's intentions.

It must be stressed that the assessment is based on the realisation and not on the score or description. The impact of the recording is therefore paramount, and the better the quality of recording together with the level of detail and balance in the realisation, will impact on the outcome.

Midi-file realisations are not acceptable. Recordings can be digitally produced and enhanced or be live performances.

The responses to the candidate briefs all met the minimum time requirement and showed an overall good level of creativity and knowledge.

For Section 3 of Composing A, candidates were required to compose 3 short (up to 45 seconds) exercises. Candidates are given a choice of focus for their exercises:

Either: 1. Pitch Organisation

or 2. Texture

or 3. Rhythm and Meter.

The 3 exercises must also be from one area of study only. There was occasional misunderstanding of this requirement, with a small number of candidates composing in several styles and with different focus areas.

The more successful exercise sets had variety of tonality, meter, texture and strong melodic ideas and clear structure.

The most common exercise type was Bach Chorales, and these were mostly appropriate in their variety and choice. It is advised that a short incipit and the melody line are given, even though this is entirely at the candidates'/centre discretion; however, material provided must be clearly identified.

Other focus areas included in this series, to name but a few, were Serialism, Romantic String Quartets, Classical String Quartets, Lied, Modernism and Minimalism.

Candidates who did well generally did the following:	Candidates who did less well generally did the following:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a clear, creative and concise brief containing relevant detail • a composition which responded directly to the brief • a defined style or idiom • a clear structure • idiomatic harmonic language • idiomatic use of instruments or electronic sounds • shapely melodies • a good sense of direction and momentum • idiomatic articulation • detailed dynamic shaping to show the structure • considered balance • appropriate tempo choices • effective tempo changes realised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a long commentary rather than a brief • response not relating fully to the brief • response not in a defined style • formulaic structure • basic harmony • simple melodic ideas • simple use of instruments • realisation with general detail.

Most common causes of centres not passing

No brief and therefore few ideas for the composition.

Lack of structure and any stylistic hallmarks.

Limited range in the melodic writing and many errors in harmony.

No specific identity apparent in the realisation.

Incomplete realisation, with parts missing and very few dynamic indications.

Common misconceptions

The most common misconception is the inclusion of a commentary rather than a brief. A commentary is not required or desirable.

Another regarding the brief, is that it is often evident in the wording that the brief was written after the composition. This usually leads to a less focused and not so convincing composition.

There is some misconception regarding the performance of the compositions. It cannot be assumed that a professional, live recording will achieve full marks for communication. This is because, candidates must be able to corroborate their own work in the score or description, and therefore any added ideas by the performers themselves cannot be seen to be the work of the composer without verification in the score or explanation.

Jazz inspired pieces often have improvisatory solos. If these are to be included in a live performance realisation, they must be the composer's own work and must be verified in either the score or explanation. If solos are not written out in full or fully described, they cannot be included in the assessment whether played by the composer or by others.

If candidates choose to submit a description as opposed to a score, it is essential that it is detailed in every way and contains a similar amount of information that would typically be extracted from a score. Many descriptions were rather basic in nature and only described the music in the broadest of terms. Important basic elements to include are instrumental group, keys and modulations, harmony, motifs, structure, structural pillars and transitions, textural variation, meter, tempo, and changes of all of the above as it goes along. Sequencing and mixing ideas, production methods, balance of parts, articulation and dynamics, and performance directions.

Avoiding potential malpractice

The learner determined brief carries 5 marks. It is therefore not appropriate to use past OCR set briefs in their original form for this purpose, and any such inclusion cannot achieve any marks in this component.

Additional comments

It was pleasing to see so many candidates engaging with their musical interests, resulting in many creative and inventive compositions. The standard of work was generally very good, and the range of work was diverse in every way. Submissions were largely complete, with all requirements uploaded. However, there were exceptions, with missing scores and audio tracks causing inevitable delays in marking and occasionally in the publication of results. Please check all submissions carefully, by listening to tracks and checking that the correct candidates' work has been uploaded in the correct component. There were several muddled entries where work was uploaded to Composing A rather than B, or to Performing rather than composing which caused inevitable delays and some consternation for examiners; examiners really strive to make sure that they are marking the correct component for the candidate and with complete submissions to allow candidates reach their full potential.

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