

Examiners' report

A LEVEL

MUSIC

OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in Music

H543

For first teaching in 2016

H543/01/02 Summer 2025 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' 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.

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General overview

Examiners once again report hearing many excellent performances which reflect years of dedicated practice on the part of the candidates and much conscientious work, help and support from centres, teachers and accompanists. As ever, OCR and examiners are very grateful for the time and care that goes into making these performances such a positive experience for candidates, allowing them to reach their fullest potential.

Examiners experienced fewer problems with missing items or incomplete submissions this year, most coversheets and scores being uploaded along with the video. Where there were some issues, it was usually to do with missing scores or inappropriate scores.

One issue that was noted this year was that centres were using too many zip files within files. At its extreme, individual pages of scores were zipped. This is unnecessary and is very time-consuming for both centres (zipping them) and examiners (unzipping them). Best practice is to put all the scores together in one zipped file only.

In terms of videos, these varied considerably, and did indeed affect candidates' performances in some cases. Here are some important points to bear in mind in this regard:

- **The performance space:** there seemed to be more instances this year of candidates performing in very small spaces. These included small practice rooms, and in some cases, domestic settings such as living rooms or bedrooms. Unfortunately, sometimes this did impact on the sense of performance and communication. Conversely, there were instances of candidates being marooned in the middle of a vast stage or hall, with the accompanist not visible at all. In both scenarios, the sense of performance and communication was affected.
- **Layout and spacing:** in some cases, often as a result of inappropriate spaces and awkward spacing, the performance was affected due to restricted communication. It is important to aim for clear sight lines between the candidate and accompanist.
- **Recording quality:** following on from the above point, often as a result of inappropriate spacing, the recording quality was also affected. This was often due to the recording being made in a very confined space, but also due to the placing of the microphone. In many cases, the microphone was placed too near the piano so that that the accompaniment dominated in the mix, overpowering the candidate's part. This was made even worse when the candidate was placed behind the piano, and the microphone in front of it. The resulting balance was very distorted.
- **Filming angles:** related to the above, is the filming of the candidate themselves. As mentioned as a 'potential malpractice' it is not appropriate or advisable to film just the hands of a keyboard candidate. Examiners need to see that the hands belong to the candidate entered.
- **Backing tracks:** these were variable in quality as well as volume, in both cases, affecting the quality of the candidates' performances. Centres and candidates are advised to research more before settling on a backing track, checking both its accuracy and quality of sound/recording. In addition, it is vital that the balance between the backing track and candidate's part is checked – not only at the time of filming, but also on the resultant video also, as the balance may sound different on the recording. There were instances where the backing track was either too loud or too soft in the final video. As stated in the marking criteria for Section 3, 'Realisation of Performance' markings and/or performance conventions, candidates are assessed on 'choices made in terms of amplification into the performing space'.

However, it is important to note, that despite the reservations described above, there were also many examples of perfectly fine venues and performing spaces, properly organised, resulting in well balanced recordings.

OCR support



If centres experience difficulty in uploading submissions to the Repository, they should contact OCR who will facilitate an alternative upload method.

Also, any questions regarding the suitability of performance choices or other aspects of this performing unit can be directed to the Lead Subject Advisor at music@ocr.org.uk

Under-time performances

If the performance is knowingly under time, consider where judicious repeats can be included in the music to bring it up to the minimum time length and thus avoid an under-time marking penalty.

Candidates who did well generally:	Candidates who did less well generally:
- performed music that was within their capabilities - knew the music well, performing with accurate pitch (where relevant) and rhythm - showed clear stylistic and critical understanding of the music they played - had strong technical control of their instrument(s) and the technical challenges posed by the music played - brought the music they played to life with vivid use of performance markings/conventions - played with appropriate awareness and control of balance with backing tracks - demonstrated convincing stage presence and communication of the musical message.	- performed music that was beyond their capabilities - showed unreliability in their knowledge of the pitch (where relevant) and rhythm of their chosen repertoire - demonstrated limited stylistic and critical understanding of the chosen music - did not reliably meet the technical challenges posed by their instrument(s) and the music - gave performances that were quite monochrome in tonal and dynamic colouring - did not perform with appropriate balance and level of amplification in terms of backing tracks - showed limited stage presence and outward projection of the musical message.

Most common causes of centres not passing

Happily, very few candidates do not pass, as performing is usually one of a Music candidate's main strengths. However, when candidates do not reach the standard to pass, it is usually because they do not demonstrate a secure enough knowledge of the music they play; performances being hesitant with persistent inaccuracy of notes and rhythms. In such cases, it is not possible to shape the lines as needed to show stylistic understanding either.

Common misconceptions

It is a misconception that a candidate will score more highly by playing more difficult music. The same range of marks is available when performing Grade 6, or higher level music. Indeed, a candidate will score more highly by playing Grade 6 music well, than by playing Grade 7 (or higher) music less well.

Misconception



Another misconception is that there are no extra marks gained by performing on more than one instrument. Again, if a candidate performs on two different instruments and is less proficient on one than the other, they are going to achieve at a lower level than if they just played the instrument on which they are more proficient.

Avoiding potential malpractice

When making video recordings of candidates' performances on piano, make sure that it is possible to see the candidate completely, as well as the full keyboard they are playing. This year, there were a few instances where just the candidate's hands and wrists and part of the keyboard were filmed. While centres do sign an authentication form confirming the work is that of the candidate named, it is still in centres' and candidates' interest for examiners to be able to see the candidate completely. This enables examiners to identify them, and confirm the performance as theirs.

Helpful resources

It is advisable for centres/teachers to sign up for one of the CPD events offered by OCR for this component. These events include specific examples of previous performances, highlighting and explaining the reasons why they were successful and scored highly, or conversely, giving examples of performances that were not as successful and why this was. Training events are listed on [Teach Cambridge](#).

Additional comments

As a reminder, both sections of H543/02 need to be recorded at the same time, not as separate recordings on different occasions.

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