

# Composing and Arranging

2013 Chief Assessor's Report



Government  
of South Australia

**SACE**  
Board of SA

# COMPOSING AND ARRANGING

## 2013 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

### OVERVIEW

Chief Assessors' reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

### SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

#### Assessment Type 1: Folio of Minor Works (50%)

For this assessment type students present a folio of works comprising two or more original compositions and/or arrangements. The total length of the music presented should be between 6 and 7 minutes, and should cover a variety of musical styles.

The most successful compositions and arrangements:

- showed careful attention to detail in the editing of scores
- demonstrated an understanding of the musical capabilities and notational standards of the instruments being used
- were well planned, structurally sound, and demonstrated clear and thoughtful development of different musical material
- used a variety of different compositional/arranging techniques throughout the folio
- demonstrated a high level of creativity
- displayed harmonic and rhythmic awareness through the effective use of countermelodies and convincing and appropriate harmonic choices
- explored the capabilities of the instruments used in interesting and varied ways
- could be played by live musicians.

The best task designs allowed students the freedom to investigate areas and elements of music that were of greatest interest to them, but also encouraged variation and expansion upon a student's niche area of interest.

In order to show learning at the highest level, students must adhere to the total length of 6 to 7 minutes for music in the folio of minor works. Folios should also have at least two contrasting works to show the student's understanding of different styles. In most cases a familiarity with different styles was shown through differences in both instrumentation and genre. Students composed original works for many different ensemble types, including, but not limited to, choir (traditional and contemporary), orchestra, string quartet, voice and piano, solo instrument with piano accompaniment, guitar ensemble, jazz quartet, big band, wind quintet, percussion ensemble, pop/rock band, and solo instrument. As in previous years, contemporary

genres of film score/soundscape, pop song, and computer game music were popular, but some exceptional folios included works in classical and modern classical genres. The best compositions investigated creativity, structure/form, development, score presentation, and musical awareness equally. Students who did not substantially consider all these areas (for example, those who had highly creative ideas within a poorly notated and unstructured work) were unable to achieve highly across all performance standards.

Many students chose to produce arrangements as part or all of their folios. The best arrangements reinterpreted the existing musical material and experimented with variations in style, melody, rhythm, harmony, structure, and instrumentation. By creating new musical material to enhance their arrangement and vary it from the original source, students were able to achieve highly in originality, creativity, understanding of style, and composing/arranging techniques. Some of the less successful folios contained arrangements that were little more than transcriptions. These arrangements introduced no new musical material beyond the choice of instruments, showed minimal or no change in style from the original, followed a formulaic and predictable approach, and gathered most of the musical material (key, rhythm, melody, countermelody, harmony, dynamics, tempo, performance indications etc.) from the original source.

Scores were generally legible, properly aligned, and displayed skills in the use of technology. In preparing folios, students and teachers are advised to:

- spend some time in preparation before beginning a composition/arrangement (This could include listening to and reading scores of other pieces of the same genre/instrumentation; speaking to players of the instruments being written for, to discuss notation, range, and general conventions and capabilities; constructing a model or plan for the composition/arrangement to assist with structure and development.)
- write for instrument combinations that the student is familiar with and perhaps has access to
- ensure that instrument names (full and/or abbreviated) are included on the score
- ensure that scores are transposed if required
- carefully consider placement of dynamics and their influence on performance (Does each instrument know what dynamic to play at? Are there 'leftover' dynamics attached to empty bars? Will a low flute at *piano* be heard over a high trumpet *forte*?)
- thoughtfully consider slurs/phrasing, bowing for strings, and articulation markings
- present drum kit notation with appropriate style and detail
- allow time for careful editing of scores, particularly rest and note grouping, placement of symbols and performance indications, unnecessary accidentals, and general layout to facilitate easy score reading.

Teachers should ensure that scores and recordings are submitted in a manner that facilitates the moderation process. This includes stapling complete scores together, preferably submitting one CD per student folio, and ensuring that the CD is labelled and protected in a case, and that the audio files are in the required formats (no .sib or data files). It is also recommended that each submission includes a marks sheet, a cover sheet, and, if arrangements are included, a copy of the original source of the work.

## Assessment Type 2: Commentary

This assessment type is a companion to Assessment Type 1: Folio of Minor Works. It should focus on and include discussion of the musical elements evident in the works of the minor folio.

The best commentaries:

- dealt with a wide range of musical elements (melody, rhythm, harmony, instrumentation and orchestration, texture, form, key, variation and development, techniques used etc.)
- focused on analysis of musical material
- included score excerpts with clefs, bar numbers, and instrument names
- went beyond a generalised bar-by-bar description of the work and included discussion of compositional and arranging techniques
- contained sophisticated but appropriate musical terminology with correct spelling, and showed an understanding of the terminology being used
- were carefully considered, planned, and edited to ensure an insightful discussion was contained within the word limit
- contained musical examples that were relevant and enhanced the discussion of the works.

Although the commentary is a focused examination of the student's folio, in some cases references to, discussion of, and score examples from, works/composers that influenced the composition/arrangement can be used to further illuminate the understanding of the work and the creative process. This is not to be confused with a discussion of the challenges of the composition process or the background story behind the piece — both of which are to be avoided.

A commentary for an arrangement should contain as much discussion of techniques and general musical awareness as a commentary for an original composition. Commentaries that contained little discussion of form, techniques, and stylistic changes often accompanied arrangements that suffered from a lack of originality and creativity.

The commentary is a substantial part of the school assessment component for this subject, and so time should be taken to ensure that it is developed and planned with care and consideration of detail, presentation, and content.

## EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

### Assessment Type 3: Major Work (30%)

#### **Part 1: Major Work — A Composition or an Arrangement**

For Part 1 of this assessment type, students are required to submit an original composition or arrangement for small or large ensemble. The minimum length for the work is 3 minutes. Major works are expected to reflect significant detail, scope, and depth.

The characteristics of a successful submission for this assessment are the same as for Assessment Type 1: Folio of Minor Works.

### **Part 2: Analysis of the Major Work**

For Part 2 of this assessment type, students present an oral or written analysis of their major work. The analysis requires a greater level of depth and musical description, to a maximum of 1000 words or 6 minutes. Students are reminded that the focus of this task must be on the musical aspects.

The characteristics of successful analyses are the same as for Assessment Type 2: Commentary.

### **OPERATIONAL ADVICE**

For details of the learning requirements, and information about dates and assessment processes, teachers should refer to the 2014 subject outline and subject operational information on the Composing and Arranging minisite.

Teachers are encouraged to share and discuss the exemplars of student work from the SACE website.

### **GENERAL COMMENTS**

It was pleasing to note that an increasing number of students were able to submit a recording of a live performance of their works. Students and teachers are reminded that the audio quality and standard of performance have no effect on the assessment, and that the opportunity to hear work performed live can be an invaluable experience and learning tool in the study of composition.

The use of computer-based notational software that does not allow formatting to standard conventions is not recommended. Students should be able to input notation and edit or make additions as required. Students and teachers are reminded that neat and legible handwritten scores are allowable, and in some cases may enable a student's work to be presented with better adherence to standard score conventions than software that does not allow editing and consistency of notation.

Teachers are encouraged to attend clarifying forums as these sessions are particularly useful for networking with other teachers of the subject and receiving useful information and feedback.

Composing and Arranging  
Chief Assessor