



**2006 Music Group performance GA 3: Aural and Written examination**

## GENERAL COMMENTS

The format of the paper was consistent with the guidelines in the sample examination material on the VCAA website <www.vcaa.vic.edu.au> and comprised of a total of 118 marks apportioned across three sections. Students had to answer nine of the ten questions; with the option of responding to either Question 9 (Part-writing) or Question 10 (Improvisation) in Part C.

As in previous years, many students were unable to achieve equal results across the areas of focus in Section A (Music Language and Aural perception). Basic notational skills remained the most serious weakness for a significant number of students, however, it was pleasing to note that the formal introduction of 'music language' to the study design appears to have resulted in improvements in most of the music literacy and aural perception domains of Section A. Students' use of relevant terminology seemed to have improved, although there were still noticeable problems in this area. Again, a number of students used pen for their Section A answers; this is not advisable, especially for transcription tasks such as Questions 3 and 5.

### Examination Technique

Many students appeared not to have read the questions thoroughly, which impacted on their ability to focus their answers appropriately. Many students' responses were either 'generic' or directly relevant to questions found on papers from previous years. Such responses invariably did not answer the questions on this examination. It is strongly recommended that students do not attempt to 'second-guess' what will be on the paper and/or prepare responses beforehand then attempt to 'reshape' them for the questions asked.

Many students planned their responses, for example, through a series of key words linked by arrows, which helped jog their memory and keep them 'on task'. Many of the high-achieving students highlighted (and/or underlined) exactly what was required in each part of each question so that, once they had read and analysed the question, they only needed to re-read the highlighted/underlined components in order to present a succinct, salient, focused and well-organised response. Most of the stronger students used dot points for most responses, which assisted in presenting clear, deliberate and cogent comments and arguments.

Teachers and students need to be aware that the instrument (or voice) played by the student can have significant bearing upon their overall ability to respond to particular questions. Care should be taken to ensure that all students develop the required skills, particularly in relation to aspects of key knowledge that are less familiar to them. For example, while singers might use their performance experience to write perceptively about characteristics of melody, they may need to spend time developing skills in learning and using music language associated with harmony. While drummers might be able to identify and describe features of rhythms easily, they may need to develop skills in analysing and describing characteristics of melodies. In the same way, guitarists who habitually use tab may need to focus on developing skills in reading and writing pitch notation and single-line players may need to focus on identifying and analysing relationships between parts. Students who generally perform fully-notated music may need to develop their ability to identify and describe the role and relationship between composed and improvised elements of specific arrangements, such as embellishment or fills at the end of phrases or motifs that are derived from a melody and used as the basis for an improvised solo.

The most common areas of weakness included:

- a lack of basic theoretical knowledge, especially regarding the correct names of intervals and the qualities of chords
- fundamental problems with the implications of key signatures (see Question 1 in particular)
- limited aural skills, including difficulty identifying tonalities (scale forms) and intervals within a melodic context, notating rhythms on their own and melodies (pitch and rhythm), both from within score-based settings (Questions 3 and 5)
- limited ability to use the other (not-to-be-transcribed) parts of the printed score in transcription questions (Questions 3 and 5) in order to optimise the likelihood of responding correctly
- confusion about the notes in chords with 7ths and the notes in primary triads and suspended 4 chords
- confusion about or misunderstanding of basic terminology that is taken directly from the study design
- not using the reading time wisely, so that questions were not thoroughly understood and responses were not focused appropriately.



Other concerns included the following.

- Some students did not attempt to answer some of the questions, especially in Section A of the examination.
- Many students wrote prose answers that were very hard to decipher, often due to illegible writing, extremely blunt pencils, and/or poor spelling and grammar. Students are reminded of the importance of writing clearly and correctly.
- Confusion or lack of awareness about the meanings of musical terms arose frequently. ‘Dynamics’, ‘articulation’, ‘phrasing’ and ‘phrase relationships’, ‘expressive devices’, ‘texture’ and ‘tonality’ were often dealt with inappropriately or incorrectly. Many students approached issues of ‘dynamics’ from the perspective of ‘dynamism’, ‘liveliness’ or ‘energy’ rather than relative volume and/or volume-based relationships. Most students who wrote about ‘expressive devices’ placed them within the context of the use (or not) of electronic effects/audio processing devices. Limited understanding of ‘texture’ as a musical characteristic was evident in the majority of instances where students chose to write about textural differences. It was clear that these terms and concepts, which are taken directly from the study design (see Appendix – Music performance, pages 99–102), need to be defined and/or discussed and used more regularly in teaching and learning programmes.
- A number of students expressed value judgements in their responses, particularly about standards or the quality of musicianship. Students are advised not to make comments about their love of or disdain for a particular band, singer or style of music, but to use their time to answer the questions fully.
- Many students did not appear to know the characteristics/requirements/components of different prose-based response formats; for example, the requirements of ‘identify’, ‘describe’, ‘evaluate’ and ‘discuss’. Only ‘identify’ allows students to simply name or make a list. ‘Evaluate’ requires a degree of analysis and ‘describe’ requires the demonstration of **knowledge**, especially with respect to salient characteristics, components or elements. ‘Discuss’ requires the application of knowledge to demonstrate **understanding**, invariably demanding a higher level of insight. The relative marks available for each response type should provide an indication of the level of depth and/or breadth necessary.

Advice

- Students need to be aware of the requirements of various question types (see above) and should practise answering similar questions as part of their teaching and learning programme.
- Students should use the 15 minutes of reading time productively and ensure that they have read each question carefully.
- Students should write as clearly as possible, especially when notating on a staff. When notating music, students should use a pencil and an eraser rather than a pen.
- When undertaking transcription questions, students are advised to do their rough work on the blank manuscript paper provided and then transfer a neat, legible copy of their final response to the space provided for the answer.
- If students do their rough rhythmic transcription work using ‘stick’ notation (stems and flags without note heads) or slashes across lines representing rhythmic subdivisions/segments of each beat, they need to be very careful when they transfer their work across from the ‘rough work’ page to the answer space. Often, students’ work was more accurate on the ‘rough work’ manuscript page than on the staves provided for the answer. It is not advisable for students to write their final answer using ‘stick’ notation unless it is perfectly clear at all times. Dotted rhythms tend to become ‘muddled’ with this style of notation.
- If students have difficulty with precise, pitch-based, (modern) mensural notation (that is, the **exact** notes and rhythms) in melodic transcriptions, an attempt should still be made to express the contour/shape of the melody, even if a line graph is used. Although this approach cannot result in full marks, marks may be awarded for a written expression of the melody’s relative contour. It is possible to gain marks for the melodic transcription question by notating the rhythm with complete accuracy and using a line graph to present a **precisely plotted** contour of the melody. Nevertheless, if students can plot contour precisely and transcribe rhythms accurately, they are advised to use ‘proper’ notation, if possible.
- Where possible, students should have access to appropriate aural training software and a computer music ‘sequencer’, especially to program rhythms, chords and chord progressions for aural training (perhaps improvisation training, too) and to realise their harmonisations (for those who select the part-writing option in Unit 4).



## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

The answers below are a guide only to possible responses, and the various aspects/issues presented are not exhaustive. The lists of possible responses or characteristics are example of salient points and/or aspects of the question's components.

### Section A: Music Language and Aural perception

#### Part 1: Intervals, scales and melody

##### Question 1 – Music language – Recognition of intervals

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	16	12	22	21	19	10	2.5

- First interval: 'F#' to 'A' – minor 3rd
- Second interval: 'D' to 'G#' – diminished 5th
- Third interval: 'C#' to 'E#' – Major 3rd
- Fourth interval: 'F#' to 'G#' – Major 2nd
- Fifth interval: 'C#' to 'F#' – Perfect 4th

A number of students experienced difficulty with this task, which was surprising given its fundamental significance and relative simplicity. Several issues seemed noteworthy.

- A large number of students treated the excerpt as if it had no sharps or flats; that is, as if it was in F Lydian. As a result, they correctly identified only the last two intervals, and the third interval was identified as an 'augmented 3rd', which is not prescribed for study, or a 'minor 4th', which is not an interval of the 'Western' system.
- Despite the requirement that 'quality and number' be included, a large number of answers only gave the interval's number.
- The second interval was sometimes identified as a 'tritone'. This is an aural-based term that does not include quality and number. The second interval should have been identified as a diminished 5th.
- The fourth interval was sometimes identified as a 'tone'. This term likewise does not include quality and number. The interval should have been identified as a Major 2nd.

##### Question 2 – Aural perception - Recognition of intervals and scales

###### 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	37	4	29	3	27	1.8

- first interval: minor 6th
- last interval: Perfect 5th

It was disappointing to note that the mean score for this question was below 50 per cent. This year, many students wrote only arrows or 'ascending'/'descending' or 'up'/'down'. Students should note that marks are not awarded for recognising the directions, upward or downward, of the intervals. Some students were able to identify number but not quality. Some students called the Perfect 5th a Major 5th. A significant number of students continued to write 'M's that appeared to be deliberately ambiguous. Students are strongly urged to write 'Major'/'Maj'/'Ma' or 'minor'/'min'/'mi' for intervals of 2nds, 3rds, 6ths and 7ths.

###### 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	26	18	56	1.3

Harmonic Minor

It was pleasing to note that many students identified the harmonic minor tonality correctly, while 18 per cent indicated the melodic minor. Unfortunately, many students did not answer this question. Perhaps students were not aware that the question has two parts. Students are strongly advised to attempt every question, especially questions such as this one which require only circling an answer. There are no penalties for incorrect responses.



Question 3 – Aural perception – Melodic transcription

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	5	19	20	15	12	9	7	8	5	3.3

It is clear that students need more practise with melodic transcriptions in 4-part contexts, as many students had significant difficulty with this question. Many students clearly did not understand the relationships between melody and harmony. A significant number of students did not use the notes or chords of the other parts to their advantage – in particular, the ability to read the notes in bass clef would almost certainly have been useful for many.

A large number of students had problems with the two intervals greater than a second (the second quaver of beat three to beat four of bar two ('F#' to 'D#'), and beat three to the first semiquaver of beat four of bar three ('A' to 'C#')) – especially the descending minor 3rd of bar two. Some students did not ensure that the durations of the notes in each bar added up to what was required by the 'four-four' time signature, and some students wrote all crotchets, all minims, or notes indicating 'four-two' as the time signature. Many students notated only the rhythm of the melody. Some drew its general contour as a simple line graph across the staff, often without note heads. To achieve high marks, it is not advisable to use this method.

The most common areas of weakness included:

- limited understanding of the notes in chords and the direct relationships between melody, diatonic harmony and scales/tonalities



- limited awareness of the characteristics of logical melodic structures and/or intervallic function in melodic contexts
- weak intervallic skills, especially when the melody was not moving by step
- limited awareness of rhythmic issues and/or an inability to transcribe rhythms in common time
- not answering the question in a systematic way; for example, notating the rhythm first rather than attempting pitch and rhythm simultaneously.

One successful approach to answering this melodic transcription question could have been:

- noting that the excerpt was in 'E minor'. The 'D#' from the saxophone in the last bar as well as the two 'D#'s in the guitar part – bars one and two – should have alerted students that the melody was highly likely to be from either the harmonic or melodic minor scales
- establishing where the raised 7th (a 'D#') was likely to be located within the bars to be transcribed. In this case, the note was consonant only to the B7 chord sounded on beat three of bar two, so it could only go there
- listening for the raised 7th played by the guitar (and then the saxophone) so as to confirm that the note on beat four of bar two of the saxophone part was indeed a 'D#'
- noting that the chord progression presented by the piano (and written on the staff) was clearly from the harmonic minor
- establishing which notes of the melody to be transcribed were perhaps missing across the parts in order to confirm that the transcribed note completes the harmony as notated. (See, for example, the 'E' on beat one and the 'G' on beat two of bar three, both of which 'completed' the notated chords – the 'C major' and 'G/B' sonorities of the piano part.)

## Part 2: Harmony

### Question 4 – Music language – Structure of chords

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	21	17	11	9	7	7	9	9	11	3.3

- First chord: C minor – 'C', 'Eb', 'G'
- Second chord: A-flat Major 7 – 'Ab', 'C', 'Eb', 'G'
- Third chord: C-sharp Dominant 7 – 'C#', 'E#', 'G#', 'B'
- Fourth chord: E-flat Augmented – 'Eb', 'G', 'B'
- Fifth chord: E half diminished (m7/b5) – 'E', 'G', 'Bb', 'D'
- Sixth chord: B-flat suspended 4 – 'Bb', 'Eb', 'F'
- Seventh chord: G minor 7 – 'G', 'Bb', 'D', 'F'
- Eighth chord: F-sharp diminished 7 – 'F#', 'A', 'C', 'Eb'

Many students did not know (or could not write) the notes in these chords. The majority of students seemed to be confused regarding which chords have which types of 7ths. Following are some common errors displayed in responses.

- A large percentage of students appeared not to know the fundamentals of how chords are constructed, what comprises them and how they differ.
- 'Major 7' and 'Dominant 7' chords were often reversed and sometimes even repeated (that is, written twice as the same chord – as two Major chords with minor 7ths or two Major chords with Major 7ths).
- Generally, the notes that comprise the (E) 'half diminished (m7/b5)' chord were not well known.
- The difference between 'half diminished (m7/b5)' and (full) 'diminished 7' chords was not well understood by many students.
- Many students did not appear to be familiar with the notes that comprise the keys from which the chords are taken. For example, a large number of answers for the (Bb) 'suspended 4' chord did not include the flat for the 'E'.
- The 'Augmented' (primary) triad was often incorrect.
- Some students wrote inverted chords. This was only accepted if all of the notes of the particular chord were correct; however, they were usually incorrect.
- A number of students wrote chords above the notes of the first two staves (that is, they seemed to ignore the word 'or'), and usually as if they were all notes of the treble clef. Hence, there were two attempts at the chord types written under the first system of two staves ('minor', 'Major 7', 'Dominant 7' and 'Augmented') and, commonly in such instances, no attempt at the chords under the second system of two staves ('half diminished', 'suspended 4', 'minor 7' and 'diminished 7').
- Several students wrote chords in every block of both clefs; these were often contradictory.



- A few students presented answers that were written as if all four systems were treble staves. (The 'Ab'–'Fb' of chord two, the 'C#'–'A#' of chord three, and the 'Eb'–'Cb' of chord four were particularly interesting in these instances.)

To succeed with questions of this type, students need to know the intervallic and structural characteristics of all chords prescribed for study in order to be able to write them accurately above given tonics.

Following is an outline of one efficient way of teaching how to write the various chord types prescribed for study.

- Primary Triads: two have major thirds and two have minor thirds. The two with major thirds have a perfect 5th ('Major') or an Augmented 5th ('Augmented'). The two with minor thirds have a perfect 5th ('minor') or a diminished 5th ('diminished').
- Suspended 4 chords have no third. They have the note a Perfect 4th above the tonic (root) note and the note a Perfect 5th above the tonic (root) note.
- Thorough understanding of the key signatures for all tonic (root) notes is often useful, especially to check for the correct 3rd, (4th) and 5th of the particular chord.
- Regarding chords with 7ths: for chords that have just a '7', it is the note a minor 7th above the tonic (root) note. If not, the '7' will be preceded by either 'Major' (or a symbol denoting this) or 'diminished' (or a symbol denoting this). So:
  - a 'Major 7' chord is a Major chord (triad) with a 'Major 7th'
  - a 'minor 7' chord is a minor chord (triad) with a 'minor 7th'
  - a 'Dominant 7' chord is a Major chord (triad) with a 'minor 7th'
  - a 'half diminished (m7/b5)' chord is a diminished chord (triad) with a 'minor 7th'
  - a (full) 'diminished 7' chord is a diminished chord (triad) with a 'diminished 7th' (aurally a Major 6th, but must be written as a 7th because these sonorities are based upon rules of 'tertian', not 'quartal' or 'secundal', harmony – that is, 'standard' sonorities constructed in 3rds)
  - a minor chord with a Major 7th is called a 'minor/Major 7' (not prescribed for study)
  - an Augmented chord with a minor 7th is an 'Augmented 7' (not prescribed)
  - a chord with a Major 3rd, a diminished 5th and a minor 7th is called a '(Dominant) 7/flat 5' (not prescribed).



### Part 3: Rhythm

#### Question 5 – Aural perception - Transcription of rhythms

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	5	9	10	10	10	12	11	12	22	4.8

The mean score for this question was very pleasing, perhaps indicating that the rhythmic transcription capability of Music Group performance students is improving over time. Nevertheless, a series of problems were consistently evident.

- Some students did not have a total of four crotchet beats in one or both of the relevant two bars.
- Some students did not attempt to divide their response into two bars of four beats each.
- Some students lost track of the pulse, which resulted in all manner of oddities.
- Some students had trouble with the length of the dotted crotchet (the first note of bar two – the first bar to be transcribed) despite it appearing in the first bar of the excerpt in both the piccolo and trumpet parts and again in the second bar (first bar to be transcribed) from the trumpet.
- Some students were unable to notate the ‘tim-ka’ syncopation (dotted quaver/semi-quaver) accurately (beat three of bar two). Many appeared to have heard the syncopated figure but had difficulty writing it, despite it appearing in the trumpet part on beat three of bar three (the second bar to be transcribed).
- The triplet quavers were generally handled well (beat two of bar three), although the ‘3’ to denote formally that the figure is a triplet/hemiola was frequently omitted. When this figure was incorrect, however, it was often very incorrect. This was surprising, given the triplet figure from the snare drum that played on beat two of every bar of the excerpt.
- The ‘syn-co-pa’ (semi-quaver/quaver/semi-quaver) figure on beat four of bar three was often incorrect. This was not surprising as this rhythmic figure did not appear anywhere else in the excerpt.



- Even when recognised, the more ‘active’ figures (beats three to four of bar two and beats two and four of bar three) were often positioned incorrectly.
- Many students failed to recognise that, with the exception of the ‘syn-co-pa’ on beat four of the third bar, every rhythmic figure appeared elsewhere in some other part.
- Some students augmented the rhythm (often not consistently) such that their transcription was (primarily) in four-two time (mostly minims, sometimes dotted minims), and/or entirely as crotchets.
- Although marks were not affected directly, ‘common practice’ groupings of beats with two or more sounds (almost every figure to be transcribed) often were not used. It was clear that a significant percentage of students continued to be very weak with basic skills of rhythmic notation.

Generally, students who aligned their answers vertically (to the rhythms of the other parts) achieved higher marks. Although not imperative, this approach helps students overcome several of the problems identified above, especially pulse-related matters. It was clear that some students needed much more practise with rhythms presented in four-part contexts.

## Part 4: Characteristics of a pre-recorded work

### Question 6 – Aural perception and evaluation of the characteristics of a pre-recorded work

6a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	0	2	11	21	26	24	16	4.1

Roles of instruments

- keyboard – accompaniment at start; provides initial riff that delivers the ‘groove’
- turntable-scratch (DJ Wheel/Decks/Scratch Board) – an effect; rhythmic layer; locates the work stylistically and with respect to the period (late 20th century); almost replaces the rhythm guitar in ‘recitative-type’ segments; sometimes used as hand percussion (almost like maracas)
- electric bass guitar – basically in unison with the left hand of the keyboard
- drum kit – rhythmic drive; essentially the basis of the ‘groove’; works in conjunction with bass/piano riff
- trumpet(s) – part of horn section that delivers secondary melody riffs
- trombone – part of horn section that delivers secondary melody riffs
- (tenor) saxophone – part of horn section that delivers secondary melody riffs

A large number of students did not truly ‘describe’ the role or function of their selected instruments; that is, they did not demonstrate adequate knowledge and/or awareness of the selected instruments’ purpose within the excerpt. Many students simply labelled the instruments and/or described them, for example, ‘the drummer used two tom-toms...’, and did not deal with the **role** of the instrument. Students should be encouraged to learn about the roles of instruments and instrumental parts within musical ensembles as this is critical to developing an understanding of virtually all music in ensemble settings.

Many students gave generic answers; for example, they described the role of a drum kit in **any** band rather than the role of the drum kit in this particular work. Students who dealt with how the chosen instrument(s) related to other instruments, at least at some point in the response, were better able to avoid generic answers such as ‘the drummer keeps the beat’.

A number of students identified the vocals as one of the instruments, despite the question stating ‘not including the vocals’. A few students wrote about only one instrument.

6b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	2	7	18	30	22	14	6	3.3

A. melody

- introduction: melody is sung and straightforward; rhythm is simple and range is narrow; a bit like an ‘air’
- verse: basically in a rap style, although it is pitched and the range is larger; pretty much in the style of ‘speech-rhythm’, although most of it is placed on the root, 3rd or 5th; some of the melody is delivered in a higher register than the introduction; the verse section is faster (about 10 bpm) and features noticeably more rhythmic density



**B. harmony**

- introduction: four-chord progression, played four times; (I – V (sometimes V<sub>b</sub>) – ii – V)
- verse: essentially a three-chord progression (I – ii – V), but delivered primarily via the riffs rather than chords

**C. tonality**

- essentially (F#/Gb) major throughout; melody is primarily (F#/Gb) major pentatonic; there is use of minor 3rds in the melody, but these are diatonic to the (F#/Gb) major pentatonic scale (that is, the minor 3rd intervals between A# and C# and D# and F#) and are common features of the melody, especially of the introduction (the use of minor 3rds in a melody does not make the tonality minor – the 3rd to the 5th and the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> of a dominant 7 chord are both minor 3rds, for example)

**D. expressive devices**

- introduction: almost vaudevillian vocals - a bit ‘deadpan’; legato and circumspect with a fairly narrow range and no melodic interval greater than a minor 3rd (the entire compass is a minor 6th – A# to F#)
- verse: vocals fairly accented; more energetic; syncopated; louder; scratching adds to rhythmic complexity

**E. texture**

- introduction: essentially homophonic and fairly sparse, like a recitative
- verse: various elements of polyphony; ‘busy’, both rhythmically and with respect to the nature of the arrangement itself

A large number of students attempted to address differences between the introduction and the verse, as per the requirements of the question. Although there were some outstanding answers to this question, it was often poorly handled and responses were frequently superficial and overly simplistic. Many students attempted to use terminology with which they were unfamiliar and/or used terminology in non-musical ways.

Following are some issues which were observed in students’ responses.

- Melody was commonly interpreted as describing what the vocals are doing, usually in terms of the timbral/production characteristics of the singer’s voice. It was commented frequently that the piano (not the singer) has the melody. (This viewpoint is supportable if the piano’s riff – between the introduction and the verse – was considered a melody, but this distinction was rarely made. These students almost invariably stated that the ‘piano has the melody’ and dealt with melody as such.) A large number of students approached issues of melody as if its most important, and sometimes only, components were dynamics and/or tempo.
- Harmony was often interpreted as describing what the piano and guitar are doing, and was often dealt with rhythmically. Other students discussed the input of the backup vocalists, that is, the parts/lines of the ‘harmony singer’. Although these were sometimes in consecutive harmony for one short phrase of the excerpt, the rest of the time they presented ‘comment-based interjections’ that were not harmonisations.
- Tonality was usually interpreted as describing the tone, that is, either the timbre or the nature/quality/mood of the excerpt and/or the singer.
- Expressive device often featured a discussion about (electronic) devices/pedals/effects for expressive purposes (including comments that there weren’t any, ‘so why was this element included in the question?’). Other students commented on the timbre of the vocals (both lead and backup singers) but usually did not link this to the notion of using timbre as a stylistic characteristic and/or ‘device’.
- Texture was usually interpreted in terms of ‘rough’, ‘smooth’, ‘thick’, ‘thin’, etc.

Students must have a sound knowledge and a good understanding of the terminology set for study in order to answer questions such as this. In particular, all elemental terms (‘melody’, ‘rhythm’, ‘harmony’, ‘tonality’, ‘texture’, ‘structural characteristics’, ‘role of instruments’ and ‘expressive devices’) must be well understood prior to this examination. For descriptions of the terms related to this question, students and teachers are referred to pages 47 and 56 of the study design as well as the ‘Appendix – Music performance’ found on pages 99–102.

**6c.**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	8	7	12	15	15	13	14	9	7	4.1

Rhythmic patterns included:

- straight semiquavers from the turntable and the tambourine (accenting each crotchet)
- straight quavers from the drums, but played snare/hat followed by kick (‘chup boom, chup boom, chup boom’)



- straight quavers from the bass guitar
- keyboard playing offbeats
- horns – six semiquavers from the ‘and’ of three, followed by sustained pitches
- tag rhythm – five quavers from beat three of the last full bar, played by all instruments.

There were some excellent responses to this question, most of which detailed the horn line and the stabbing notes at the end. Even when students seemed to have misunderstood parts a. and b. of Question 6, they were often able to answer part c. very well. The best answers commonly included notation (to varying standards of accuracy), although many students were quite successful at describing a specific rhythm without notating it. Many of the high-scoring responses were presented in dot points with fairly short, succinct answers that featured notation and used appropriate terminology.

Following are a range of difficulties and issues that were encountered by students.

- Although they usually did still focus upon rhythms, quite a few students did not read the question properly and wrote about the roles of two of the **instruments** in this section. It appeared that these students believed they were answering Question 6a. (not 6d.), but with reference to a different section of the music.
- There were many discussions about the ‘arpeggiated’ piano part (which was not truly ‘arpeggiated’, but rather presented off-beat chords of the pattern ii – iii – IV – V).
- Some students referred to ‘general’ rhythms in the whole excerpt, and not specific rhythms in the last four bars; for example, ‘the drummer played a rock beat in this song’.
- Quite a few students correctly identified certain rhythms, but forgot to state the instrument(s) playing them.
- Many students commented how this was the end of the song, rather than the end of the excerpt, despite its not finishing on the tonic chord.
- Many students who wrote about the last (‘tag’) rhythm failed to identify that it was in unison for all instruments.
- Some students attempted to notate some other part of the excerpt.
- Some responses featured descriptions of the roles of instruments rather than addressing rhythmic patterns or issues at all.

## Section B – Aspects of performance

As part of their responses, students were asked to provide information about two works they had prepared for performance and/or performed; the instrumentation, including voice(s), of their group or ensemble; its general style; and one type of venue at which their group had presented a performance. Some students did not provide much, if any, of this information. The information is requested to familiarise assessors with the nature of the ensemble, especially its repertoire, general style/genre and instrumentation, and the type(s) of performance difficulties or scenarios that the given ensemble might be likely to experience. In some instances, this information is essential for assessors to make valid judgements about responses to subsequent questions and, therefore, it is important that the information be given. Students need to be reminded **not** to identify by name the members of their group, the school hall and/or the location of the performance venue.

Some interesting songs were presented, including original compositions, in response to Section B questions. However, many students did not read the questions carefully, often missing the point and/or failing to comply with all of the requirements. Students should use the reading time to ensure that they fully understand the requirements of all questions.

Section B focuses upon the whole of Outcome 2 of Unit 3 of the study design. Generally speaking, responses to Questions 7 and 8 lacked detail, perhaps indicating that more work is needed in teaching and learning this Area of Study.

### Question 7 – Aspects of performance – Presentation of and preparation for performance

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	4	4	5	9	11	11	14	12	10	8	8	3	1	<b>5.8</b>

Connectedness to the styles was the most important issue in responses to this question. Students needed to establish a link between each of the relevant styles and the performance techniques used to realise the stylistic characteristics. All four of the dot points needed to be addressed in the (three) performance techniques in order to be awarded full marks.



In addition, descriptions may have incorporated some of the following considerations:

- ornaments and embellishments
- pitch and (altered) tuning issues; for example, scordatura or 'drop tuning'
- bends, multi-phonics
- doubling (or not) of lines
- use of improvisation (if appropriate)
- use of effects such as sound enhancement/alteration devices such as digital delay, reverb, echo, distortion, overdrive, etc.
- relevant analytical considerations essentially unique to the style
- comparative role/prominence of instruments/voice(s) at given times
- experimentation with different interpretative emphases
- use of mutes and other sound reduction devices if appropriate balance cannot be attained.

There were some excellent responses to this question, indicating that students had spent time working through issues and considerations relevant to the realisation of various characteristics of their selected style of work. Students who answered this question well focused upon performance techniques that were stylistically authentic and validated this stylistic authenticity by referring to practices/techniques that were present in professional performance(s) of the work. This resulted in some very fine discussions of stylistic nuances. Most of the outstanding responses were from 'chamber ensemble' (List B) students who had obviously studied stylistic issues (such as articulation, phrasing, rhythmic nuance, dynamic considerations, etc.) with respect to the given period/era and were able to link these successfully to issues of individual performance so as to realise characteristics of the style.

In general, however, a significant percentage of students did not perform well on this question. Some student seemed confused about how to answer the question. A high percentage of students did not seem to have read the question thoroughly as they selected three performance techniques from the four dot points provided, rather than noting the statements 'in your answer refer to the following' and 'you may refer to these points in reference to one or more performance techniques'. Students were required to write about three performance techniques that they used and discuss these by incorporating various components, including the four dot points given.

Although it was possible to use three of the four dot points as the general focus of the 'performance techniques', these would rarely stand alone easily as they are components of performance techniques, not the overarching techniques themselves. For example, although 'articulation', 'phrasing' and 'dynamics' are components of techniques of performance, the terms on their own do not contribute very well to the notion of enabling one's group 'to realise the style in (the) performance of one of the works'. Although a reasonable number of students successfully selected three from the four dot points, this was generally because they went on to clarify that they were talking about, for example, 'imbalanced phrasing', 'detached articulation' or 'limited dynamics'. In addition, these students went on to include the fourth dot point within their discussion of one (or more) of the three performance techniques, as instructed by the question. Many students simply provided a definition of these technique-based components which was often incorrect and had little or no relationship to the notion of realising the characteristics of the style of the work.

Students often had problems with the meanings of musical terms from the study design. For example, musical 'dynamics' and 'dynamism' (energy) are different things. Many students who understood the term 'dynamics' gave very vague descriptions as to how their group tried to make sure 'some bits were loud and some bits were soft'. Others who thought the term to mean 'dynamism' wrote about jumping up and down on stage to be more 'dynamic'. 'Articulation' is not the exclusive domain of singers, and comments such as 'I can't talk about this because we don't have a singer in our group' were disturbingly common. A few students made similar comments about 'phrasing', one or two of whom implied that they were disadvantaged by this question because 'phrases go in songs with words' whereas theirs was an instrumental group. Students are advised to use a music dictionary and/or construct a glossary of all musical terms within the study design.

Other issues in students' responses included the following.

- Many of the weaker responses included comments such as 'I interpreted the rhythms' without an explanation of **how** this was done, or any relationship to (or mention of) issues of stylistic characteristics.
- Many students who left Questions 7 and 8 blank had nevertheless completed the information requested on page 14. No marks were awarded for doing so.
- Some students wrote that they did not know what performance techniques are.
- The keywords **individual** and **you** were apparently not recognised by a significant percentage of students who made broad, generic comments about their **group's** performance techniques, including stagecraft.



- Many students discussed rehearsal techniques (both group and individual), as for the equivalent question from previous exams, which were from the previous study design. Hence, there was an abundance of responses such as ‘eye contact’ and ‘lots of rehearsals’.
- A significant number of students wrote about both of their nominated works within Question 7, despite the instruction stating clearly that students were to write about **one** of the works.
- Few students referred to style at any level.
- A fair percentage of students discussed how important it was to ‘have dynamics in my song’, presumably indicating that their chosen work was a composition of their own. Although this is an acceptable basis for answering this question, most students who took this approach had trouble dealing with the question because they seemed unclear about the style of the work. Because of the high potential for problems of this nature, it is often better for students not to write about their own compositions for questions in Section B.
- Some students tried to address all four dot points into one or two of the performance techniques and failed to complete the question.

**Question 8 – Aspects of performance – Performance environment**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	6	4	6	7	11	14	16	14	10	7	6	5.5

Some of the ‘other’ considerations (that were not on the list of three dot points) that might have been discussed included:

- issues of acoustics
- placement of the instruments/players relative to each other (issues of being able to hear one another)
- structural materials
- seating capacity
- ‘fly-space’ above a proscenium stage
- placement of monitors (‘foldback’)
- use of graphic (or parametric) equalisation
- intonation and tuning
- placement of the mixing desk
- use of acoustic baffles to eliminate resonant frequencies, false accentuation of frequencies and timbres, etc.
- use of sound enhancement/alteration devices (for example, digital delay, reverb, echo, distortion and overdrive)
- placement of amplifiers
- bowing
- articulation (for example, shortening note lengths)
- changing instruments (especially electric rather than acoustic guitar or bass)
- mutes
- tempo alterations
- seating arrangements
- balance
- use and/or selection of microphones, especially microphones with particular patterns (unidirectional, omnidirectional) and/or wireless microphones (with a clear and articulated awareness of why their use would optimise the performance environment and hence the performance)
- extra-musical considerations. (These needed to be treated appropriately. The response needed to make a very cogent and salient argument as to how the given extra-musical consideration(s) would have resulted in the group using the performance environment to their best advantage.)

Responses to this question ranged from extremely good answers that demonstrated excellent understanding of a range of technical considerations, to vague and unconvincing comments. The best responses generally included an evaluation of salient acoustic properties within the performance venue and then went on to deal specifically with a range of relevant issues and/or considerations, at least one of which was selected from the three dot points presented. Many students demonstrated appropriate knowledge of the acoustic properties of the instruments within their ensemble and how this knowledge might be used to get the best from the performance environment. Some students skilfully described their experimentation with technology and/or the positioning of instruments and/or equipment within their ensembles, again with the clear purpose of optimising the performance space. Students who focused on at least three ensemble performance strategies described a range of approaches including: ‘feeling’ the sub-pulse of the metre so that difficult rhythmic passages would ‘lock in’; having a designated leader to control, for example, tempo and/or meter changes; and matters related to ensemble cohesion such as eye contact, slight ‘in time’ swaying, ‘breathing’ together,



‘guideposts/milestones’ (within the music) to check/ensure that the balance was as desired, etc. Most importantly, virtually all of the excellent responses gave a diagnosis of things that were essential to deal with from the outset, potential problems (such as might happen along the way) and strategies to overcome, or at least address, these considerations, issues and/or potential problems.

A large number of students had difficulties with this question. Following is a list of several of the common problems observed.

- Many students did not provide enough detail about any of the issues discussed.
- Often it was unclear exactly what was being written about. There was a lot of ‘stream of consciousness’ style writing, which was frequently without much substance and lacking in focus.
- Many students attempted to write about all three of the dot points. This was not a requirement, and frequently one or more of the dot points did not fit the nature of their ensemble very well and/or the student did not know very much about the particular dot point. The statement ‘In your response consider at least one of the following’ meant exactly that. Also, if students chose to write about more than the minimum number of issues or considerations (which is often a good idea), they did not have to be selected from the dot points provided – other issues and/or considerations could be introduced and written about. Students simply had to address **at least one** of the dot points.
- Many students identified and described the acoustic aspects of the space within which they had performed but failed to go on and deal with how the group used the performance environment to its best advantage.
- Some students identified difficulties or issues to be addressed but did not describe them with sufficient breadth, depth and/or relevance. A lot of responses were very short and contained virtually no explanation; for example, ‘we used a PA and foldback wedges so that we could hear ourselves’. This answer is not really a description, nor does it furnish any indication of how the use of a PA and monitors would get ‘the best’ from the venue, or present any kind of ‘diagnosis’ of potential problems which might lead on to solution(s) for getting the best from the venue.
- Many students who wrote about ‘technology and/or equipment’ spent too much time describing the equipment without actually answering the question. That is, some students commented about the quality of their (or others’) ‘gear’, as if presenting information from a sales catalogue.
- A high percentage of responses clearly had been prepared beforehand. Almost invariably these responses would have been good for some of the questions from previous exams but almost always failed to ‘hit the targets’ of this particular question.

Students and teachers are directed to Area of Study 2 of Unit 3 of the study design and the Key Knowledge and Key Skills of Outcome 2 (see pages 45–6 of the study design). The Area of Study states, ‘the performance conditions students are likely to encounter are also considered...’ and ‘students *evaluate* the venues, instruments and equipment they will use, along with their own performance strategies, thus determining ways to utilise the performance environment to its best advantage’. In order to address questions about these matters successfully and appropriately, students must indeed evaluate/analyse and, often, offer solutions that demonstrate awareness of the issues and the need to develop strategies to solve the perceived problems and/or optimise the performance.

## Section C – Part-writing or Improvisation

Question chosen	0	9	10
%	14	47	39

### Part a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	23	11	21	45	1.9

### Part b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	27	5	8	10	12	11	12	8	7	3.4

### Part c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	27	7	7	8	9	9	10	8	7	4	4	3.8

This year, Part-writing (Question 9) students generally expressed themselves noticeably better and with a higher level of insight. However, there were also many intelligent responses to Question 10 (Improvisation) that indicated thorough



preparation of this option. For the most part, students of both options demonstrated reasonable insight into a sufficient number of the aspects that they were asked to describe or discuss.

This section requires students to provide an in-depth description or discussion of exactly what they have done and/or how they have done it. Many students did not complete the information requested at the beginning of the question. A number of students indicated that they had not undertaken a study of 'arrangement techniques used by established arrangers' or 'improvisation techniques used by professional musicians', despite these being specific requirements of Area of Study 2, Outcome 2 of Unit 4 (see pages 52–4 of the study design).

As always, a number of students wrote responses that clearly had been prepared beforehand and often did not answer the given question. Students must analyse the components of the question, establish precisely what is required and address the components directly with respect to the demands of the task(s) – it is almost always obvious when answers have been prepared beforehand.

A high percentage of students seemed not to know the meanings of the musical terms they were trying to discuss, even though they were all taken from the study design. For example, many students who wrote about 'phrase relationships' were not clear about the meaning(s) of the term nor its implications and components/elements. Students who wrote about 'imitation' often commented about having 'imitated' (copied) the work of a professional arranger or improviser, rather than dealing with issues of imitation as a process of either harmonising/arranging or improvising. Perhaps the most problematic term for this year's part-writing students was 'motivic development'; it was clear that the notion of a motive and its relationship to rhythm was not understood to an appropriate level. Many improvisation students seemed not to know the meaning(s), implications and components of 'rhythmic motifs', hence a discussion about them was likely to be difficult. Students should not attempt to write about terms, elements, approaches or concepts unless they are certain of their meaning(s).

### Question 9 - Part-writing

#### 9a.

Students needed to identify valid, genuine arrangement techniques.

Although a large percentage of students scored well on this question, shallow answers were fairly common. Many responses, although not incorrect, were superficial and/or very obvious, and frequently failed to demonstrate much knowledge or understanding of either the discipline of arranging or what constitutes arrangement techniques. The following response is an example of the standard of a number of answers to this question.

*Arrangement technique 1: Melody on top with harmonies below*

*Arrangement technique 2: Melody on bottom with harmonies on top*

*Arrangement technique 3: Melody on top with chords below*

A significant number of the answers were even shallower. Phrases such as 'identify the key signature', single words such as 'harmony' or 'dynamics', or basic concepts like 'use instruments' can hardly be viewed as arrangement **techniques**, at least not in their own right.

#### 9b.

Basic arrangement techniques include:

- instrumental combinations to create different tone colours, densities and/or sonic effects
- issues related to instrumental 'doubling'
- contrary versus parallel motion between parts, both in the same register and in different registers
- harmonic density (for example, how many instruments should deliver the chords; is there a point that might be reached where there are too many chording instruments involved?)
- the use of different octaves and/or inversions for the chording instruments in order to 'spread' the sonority across registers
- the 'groove'; the role of rhythm and the 'rhythm section' (if used)
- the general (and specific) interrelationships between melody, harmony and rhythm.

Relationship between parts could have included:

- parallel harmonisation
- contrary motion
- conjunct versus disjunct motion
- polyphony



- direct imitation
- call-and-response (antecedent–consequent)
- homophony
- ‘free-part’ style
- heterophony (for example, simultaneous variation).

Harmonic rhythm could have included:

- consistent/regular changes of harmonies
- chordal ostinati
- harmonic cycles created via the use of additive rhythms
- extended segments (phrases) with regular or irregular subdivisions
- multiple rhythmic strata aligned to harmonic ‘macro events’.

Responses with instrumental or vocal arrangements where voice leading was an issue should have given some consideration to the use of ‘non-traditional’ consecutive intervals (particularly 5ths and octaves). This did not mean, however, that the use of such consecutives was deemed to be incorrect. The notion of voice leading within the accompaniment could also be presented; for example, similar considerations regarding the parts of chording instruments, especially piano/keyboards and guitars.

Students who had identified appropriate/genuine arrangement techniques for part a. generally responded well to this question; however, a high percentage of students who struggled with part a. also had major difficulties with part b. It appeared that arrangement techniques used by established arrangers either had not been studied specifically (hence students could not describe relevant issues with any level of detail or knowledge) or had not been studied at all. Disturbingly, many students confirmed this latter observation by writing comments such as ‘we never did this’ on their examination scripts. It is essential that the study design be read, analysed and understood in order to maximise student results for this examination. These matters are particularly salient when study designs are revised.

A reasonable percentage of students wrote about their own works. Some students managed to link their own harmonisation/arrangement back into the question, sometimes quite successfully; however, many students who adopted this approach could not. The Key Skills for this outcome (Outcome 2 of Unit 4) have five dot points, two of which relate directly to Questions 9a. and 9b. of this paper – dot point 4, ‘analyse harmonic, melodic and rhythmic characteristics of completed arrangements’, and dot point 5, ‘describe arrangement techniques used by professional arrangers’.

#### 9c.

Students needed to refer to at least two of the dot points given and exhibit an understanding of their impact upon and/or relationship to rhythmic development in **their own** arrangement.

There were a pleasing number of outstanding responses to this question. Excellent responses almost invariably presented discussions that featured refined use of musical terminology. Some of these responses were not very long, but the effective use of terminology resulted in a clear and comprehensive response.

A significant percentage of students did not perform particularly well. The difficulties most commonly experienced by students stemmed from uncertainty about the meanings of the dot points, resulting in an inability to discuss how these related to the treatment of rhythm in the development of part(s). It was clear that many students could not articulate the notion of the use or treatment of rhythm in any systematic or procedural fashion. Given the fundamental nature of the principles regarding the treatment of rhythm in arranging (and composition) it is almost certain that most students will have used at least two of the three processes found in the dot points. Many of them could not mount a discussion because they simply did not know the meanings of the dot points.

There were quite a few discussions about the use of pitch/melody and/or harmony/chords that did not refer at all to issues of rhythm. Students need to remember that the use of rhythm is not the exclusive domain of the drum part. Some students commented that their harmonisation/arrangement did not include a drum or percussion part, so the question was ‘not fair’ for them.

There were a large number of responses that were obviously prepared beforehand, many of which did not deal with issues of rhythm very much at all. Some students presented ‘generic’ responses, in which they seemed to deal with the use of rhythm ‘by the book’, rather than discuss what they had done themselves. It must be remembered that this



section of the examination verifies the SAC for Outcome 2 of Unit 4, so it must be clear to assessors that students have indeed completed the coursework.

### Question 10 – Improvisation

#### 10a.

Students needed to identify valid, genuine improvisation techniques.

Although a large percentage of students scored well on this question, shallow answers were common. Many responses, although not incorrect, failed to demonstrate knowledge or understanding of either the skills and aspects of improvisation or what comprises or constitutes improvisatory techniques. The following response is an example of the standard of a number of the answers to this question

*Improvisation technique 1: Play in the right key*

*Improvisation technique 2: Learn the chord progression*

*Improvisation technique 3: Keep the song going, even if you play a wrong note*

Some answers were even less forthcoming. Phrases such as ‘know the key’ or ‘know the scale’, single words such as ‘articulations’ or ‘dynamics’, or basic concepts like ‘play in tune’ can hardly be viewed as improvisation **techniques** used by professional musicians. These are simply fundamental processes, components, aspects or elements of virtually all (Western) music.

#### 10b.

Responses for this question were highly context specific. A short list of relevant techniques includes:

- call-response
- blue notes
- elaboration (runs, decorations, melismas, etc.)
- scale-based approaches (pentatonics, blues scale(s), be-bop scales, modes, directly diatonic, non-western, hybrid, etc.)
- exploring the instrument’s range (for example, adding upper and lower octaves)
- imitation/variation
- long tones
- chromaticism
- rhythmic variation/development
- use of silence
- contour imitation
- thematic transformation
- dynamics
- instrument specific techniques (‘growls’, ‘pull-offs’, ‘tapping’, vocalised ‘interjection’, ‘scoops’, slides and bends, etc.)
- textural issues (cymbal rolls, playing drums with hands, using instrument outside ‘standard’ context; for example, buzzing mouthpiece without trumpet, multiphonics, etc.)
- augmentation
- diminution.

There were some outstanding responses to this question which were characterised by considerable musical literacy and awareness of the improvisatory genre, especially the jazz idioms. These students’ descriptions of the two techniques were almost always very comprehensive and contained insightful, accurate and articulate details of ‘ways the improviser(s) used’ the techniques. The students gave a very clear idea of what the given improvisers(s) had done, and almost what the improvisation might have sounded like. Also, it was absolutely clear that these students had indeed ‘evaluate[d] improvisation techniques used by professional musicians’ and ‘analyse[d] recorded improvisations’.

Many students did not deal with this question very well. This was almost invariably the case for students who gave weak responses to part a. and for those who indicated that they had not studied improvisation techniques used by professional musicians. A common trend was for students to describe characteristics of what they had done for their **own** improvisation, rather than ways that the professional improviser(s) had used the selected improvisation techniques. In these instances, it was common for students to present long-winded discussions about their own improvisatory prowess that often failed to address the question.



Some students wrote about how ‘cool’ they were on stage and/or the number of (often unmusical) activities they engaged in during a performance with a view to having the audience note how ‘good’ or ‘hot’ their improvising was; for example, playing with the guitar on their shoulder and/or with their teeth – à la Jimi Hendrix. Although Hendrix did this when improvising, it is stagecraft rather than an improvisational technique. Furthermore, almost without exception, students who made these sorts of comments did not speak about the improvisation practices of professional ‘others’; they simply discussed themselves. Such responses rarely address the question adequately and should be avoided.

**10c.**

Students needed to refer to at least two of the dot points and exhibit an understanding of their impact upon and/or relationship to rhythmic motivic development in **their own** improvisation.

As always, there were some excellent responses to this question, perhaps demonstrating some very fine teaching and learning going on with respect to the improvisation option. Usually these high-scoring responses included the name of the song, the instrument that the student played, **notated** rhythmic motives that were obviously from the particular song (that is, it was possible to ‘scat’ the rhythm and confirm that it was indeed from the song in question) and very lucid discussions about issues of motivic development with reference to two of the dot points. In fact, although unnecessary, many of these excellent students discussed all three of the dot points.

Nevertheless, a large percentage of students did not deal with this question very well. There were a number of very short responses that lacked much detail or insight. Most of these students seemed unaware of what is required for a formal discussion. Generally speaking, this was probably because of: confusion about the notion of developing rhythmic motifs (perhaps even the meaning(s) of the term ‘motif’); little understanding of structural implications or processes and/or phrase relationships with respect to the development of rhythmic motifs; and a belief that ‘imitation’ involves imitating or copying rather than it being an improvisatory process, in this instance, with respect to issues of rhythm. Again, students needed to be much more familiar with the terminology of the study design.

Yet again this year, a small number of students simply stated something like, ‘an improvisation is not meant to be done this way – you just make it up on the spot’. Comments such as this are not appropriate and do not demonstrate learning or understanding of improvisatory issues in music. The study design requires fairly ‘formalised’ teaching of improvisation, including analysis, evaluation of techniques and approaches, structural and developmental discernment, and so forth. In any case, even a ‘make it up on the spot’ approach almost always demands that developmental decisions are made prior to delivering each segment (or even each note), otherwise the improvisation is very likely to lack musical logic and/or be fairly incoherent. Whether they agree with it or not, teachers are obliged to deliver the study design, particularly because it forms the basis for the examination questions. It is particularly important for students to be highly familiar with all of the terminology, concepts and components of the study, especially those that are essentially applied and/or process-based.

**Average marks**

<b>Section A</b>		51.6%
<b>Section B</b>		46.8%
<b>Section C</b>	<b>Part-writing</b>	52.9%
	<b>Improvisation</b>	46.2%
<b>Whole exam</b>		49.4%