



GCE MUSIC TECHNOLOGY

6717: Composition

SUMMARY DEFINITION OF TASKS

All candidates should produce TWO compositions;

- Composition 1; Free Brief, where the student composes a piece in any style and for any combination of instruments. Content is freely devised by the student.
- Composition 2; Set Brief, where the student responds to ONE of the four briefs published by the board.

Both compositions must have a minimum of four instruments and/or voices.

Composition 1 should be between 2 & 3 minutes long. Composition 2 must be 3 minutes long – the first two compositions in the brief booklet will have timings associated which will add up to 3 minutes.

BOTH compositions are marked to the same criteria, the only difference being the Response to Brief.

For the *Set Brief*, as this is given by the board, there is an assessment as to how accurately the student has responded to it. For the *Free Brief*, the student has to supply the brief (or plan of the composition), and is then assessed on how accurately the student has responded to it.

The details of the mark scheme are laid out below but in summary, examiners should look for - and credit - the following;

- Detailed Response to Brief (Free Brief)
- Consistency of style coupled with a cohesive composition (not moving randomly between ideas)
- Good use of melody, harmony and rhythm (NOT necessarily complex)
- Expansive/adventurous use of timbres and the way they combine (texture)
- Good use of technology in both the compositional process and in manipulating and (possibly) devising sounds
- Good quality recorded submission showing clarity and impact
- Good quality score, incorporating a degree of understanding as to how a score should look and be laid out (be it 'graphic' or notated)

Mark scheme in more detail

Compositional Process

Responding to brief: Although the submissions booklet does not carry any marks, if the composition does not compare to the response to brief marks will be lost.

For the Free Brief, the student must supply a 'well-planned brief'. The statement '*I composed a three minute song*' is not good enough. Give details of influences, what the music is about, the style of the music, any actions that may accompany the music and how these are represented etc.

For the Set Brief, timings (briefs 1 and 2) and how you have used the given material (briefs 3 & 4) will form part of this assessment. In addition, have the student done what was asked in the brief - and is the composition of the right overall length (3 & 4).

Style: Whatever style is used, either influenced or original, is it consistent. A composition with a number of different styles is in danger of sounding disjointed.

Coherence: Does the composition sound well-planned or are there some sections that appear to stick out unnecessarily.

Options - all 6 are marked but only the best 4 marks are carried through.

Melody: if the piece relies on melody, is the melody itself well constructed, have variety, have a sense of melodic flow? Does it have direction (and therefore a sense of structure) to it?

Harmony: Is the harmony used secure with an element of adventure? However is it too adventurous and sounds out of control? Is it too functional?

Rhythm: Is the rhythm used successfully? Rhythm is not just percussion - it is also phrasing, general time signatures and a blend of rhythmic ideas. 'Dance-type' music will not necessarily score highly here (purely because it is rhythmically based). Too much repetition should be avoided. Some variety should be aimed for.

Texture: The 'thickness' or otherwise of the sound. Different textures can add to a composition, but they must be blended and used sensibly.

Timbre: sound choice is important. A variety of timbres in itself will not produce a high mark here, but if well chosen and varied this will stand a better chance. Non GM and original synthesised sounds can be used. VST instruments are allowed.

Form/Structure: Appropriate to the song or composition. Sections must be balanced. Many compositions suffer from poor endings, which often sound abrupt. Again,

overall this should sound balanced. A two minute intro followed by a 30 second verse and 30 second ending is NOT a successful structure.

Use of Technology

This is integral to the composition process. It is NOT expected that the student composes on manuscript then uses the technology to realise the performance. Technology offers the opportunity to try ideas and place them in different positions.

The first part involves the *Manipulation of Sounds*: This can be applied to audio (recorded) sounds or synthetic sounds. Any sounds used can be enhanced by the use of effects or programming (or both). Sampled sounds can be treated similarly. Any 'out of the box' sounds should not score highly here - only if they have been further manipulated. In this respect a GM sound in itself will score the same as a VST instrument sound chosen from the supplied library.

Creative use of technology in the composition process: Look for the use of technology to sequence or record in this section. Cut and paste, trying different sounds and timbres, transposing sections to experiment are all areas where technology will play a part. Include other techniques such as sampling, synthesis, audio effects, time stretching or any other technique that is essential to the final outcome (compositionally).

Quality of the recorded submission: This should be of a high quality. As all candidates will have done the recording component of the course, it is expected that this submission will be of the same quality.

Score

The score is an accurate representation of the music in 'score' form. Score origination is an integral part of the use of music technology. Some software will produce better quality than others. Notation software (such as Finale and Sibelius) will produce better quality printed scores than would Cubase or Logic etc. However, DO NOT PENALISE purely because the score has been submitted in one of the sequencing programs. The marks for the score must be awarded in accordance with the following.

The mark scheme contains a range of criteria to cater for both graphic and notated scores. However, a simple screen print of a sequence 'arrange' page is not sufficient to gain high marks in the graphic category.

Suitability: does the score convey the intentions of the music? This may be in notation, or if graphic an accurate representation of the time element and lines of sound. A notated score for a sampled piece is generally not suitable. Likewise a graphic score for a string quartet would also not be suitable (unless the music was 'avante garde' etc). A notated score will allow other musicians to interpret the music. A graphic score should allow a sound engineer to understand what is happening during the performance/recording.

Accuracy: if notated, pitch and rhythm are the main factors. Note groupings, unnecessary rests, good spacing are required here. If graphic, how accurate are the timings and the way the instruments and sounds appear.

Level of detail: if notated, dynamics, phrasing and articulation are the elements here. If graphic, again dynamics should be indicated, but explanation of any sounds used (samples, FX etc) is also needed.

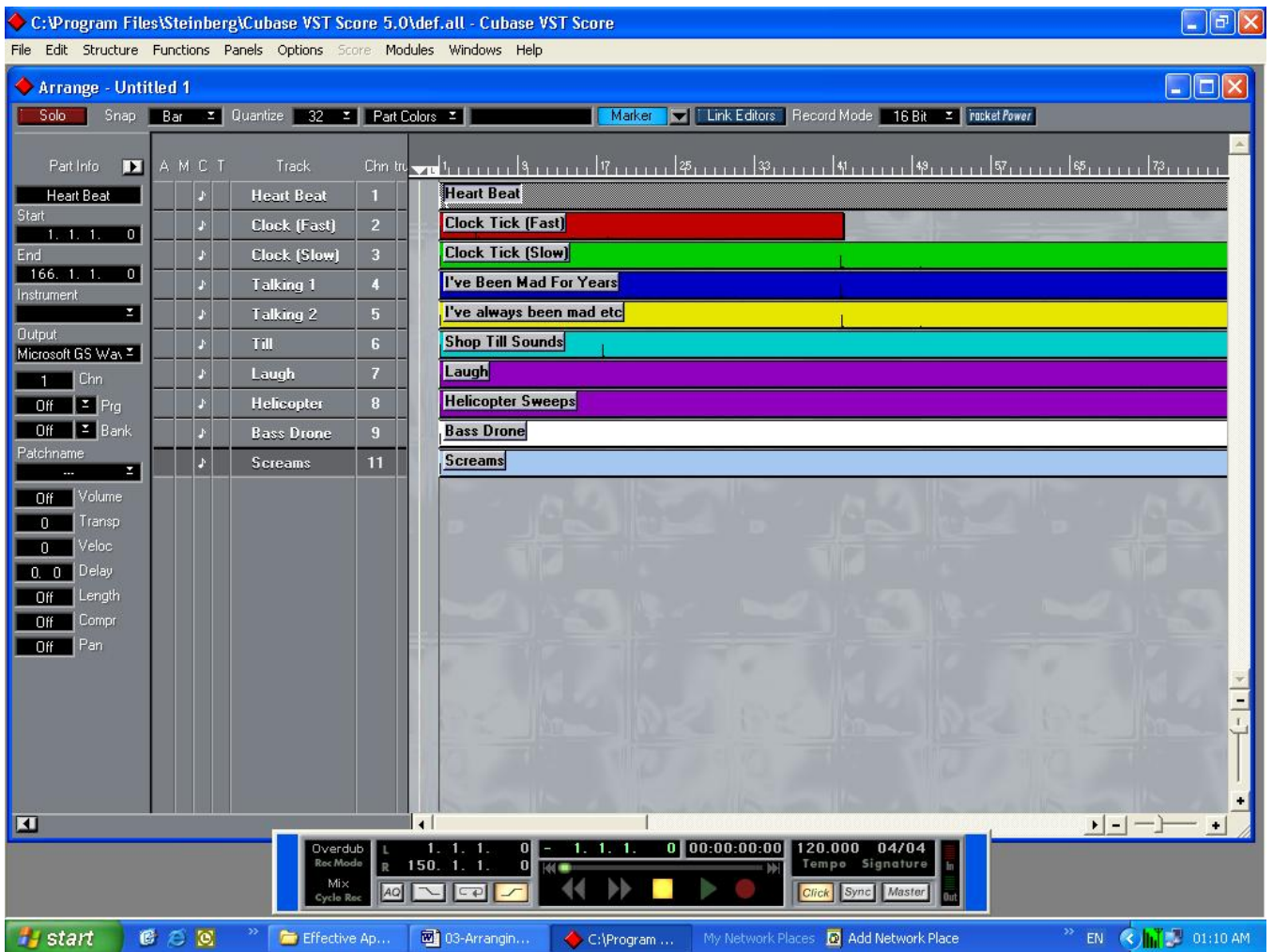
Quality of presentation: the overall artistic layout. Do staves clash or overlap? Can the details on the page be easily followed in the way the music is laid out (1 bar per page, a score of 50 pages long OR preferably full pages with the score being 5/6 pages long).

ALL SCORES MUST BE PRODUCED USING A COMPUTER. Handwriting will reflect on the quality of the presentation and may result in a reduction of marks.

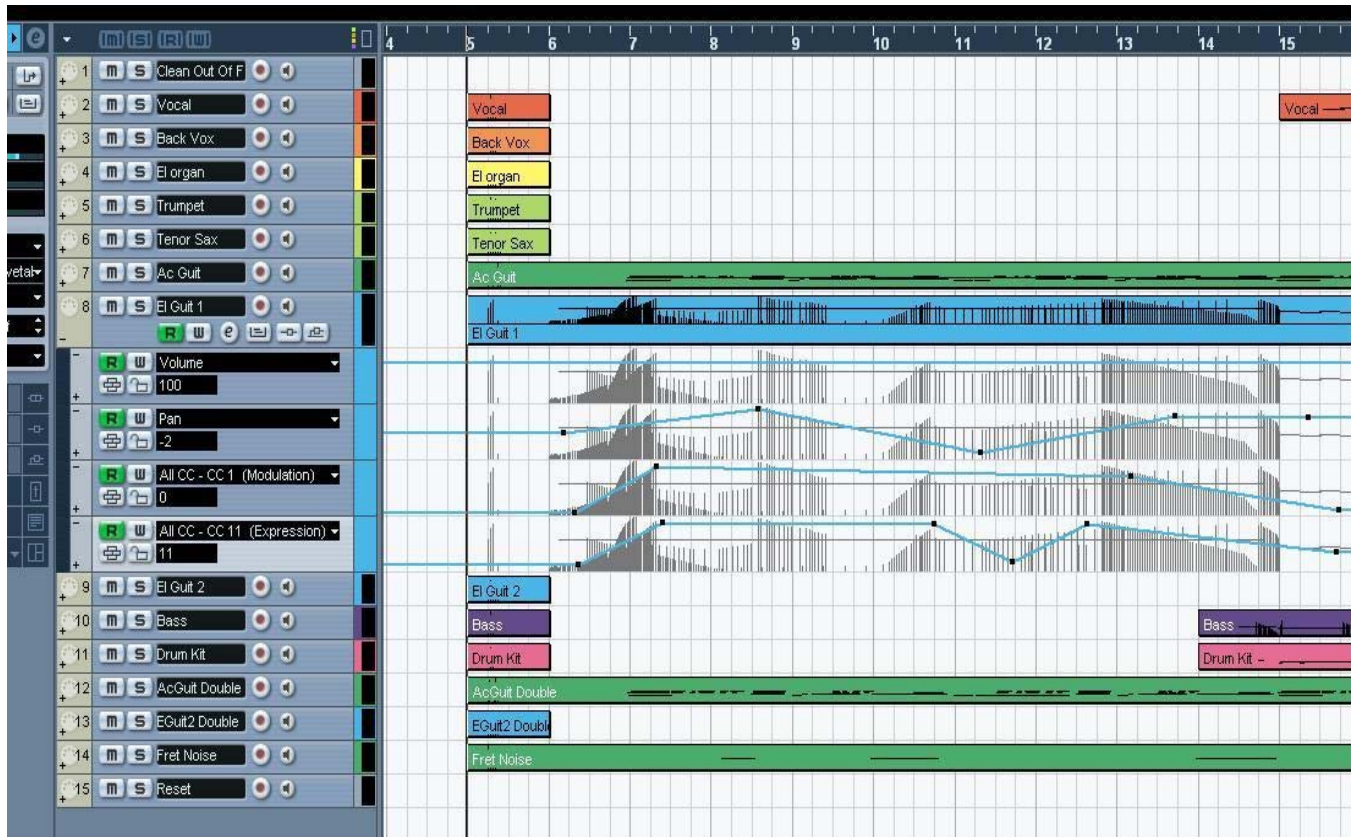
Are the scores good or the result of pressing the Print button to produce any score.

Here are examples of what to look for in a Graphic score (often a screenshot of the sequencer page).

Score A: POOR. Some indication of instrumentation, a time line of sorts and the tempo, but no other information is included. A typical 'Print Screen' shot.



Score B: GOOD. This graphic score includes detail such as timeline, instrumentation, tempo (should the transport bar be included) but can also display so much more. A sense of part construction and now the controller information (El Guit 1 part) which includes volume settings (score dynamics), pan positioning (moving across the stereo width), modulation (in the MIDI sense - vibrato, varying levels) and expression (a secondary cresc./dim. effect).



For a sound engineer, score B includes much more valuable information. Score A gives little technical information.

The more astute student will often submit a series of pages indicating this information plus the VST information can be submitted as a small portfolio to supplement the information.

Although it is difficult to generalise, the standard of work often follows this pattern;

Top band work will show good work throughout (as detailed in the mark scheme). Often the subtotal for Composition Techniques will be around 40 and the Use of Technology 35 (or above). Generally the Use of Technology will be good in these submissions.

Middle band work will often be stronger in the Composition Techniques than the Use of Technology. The Manipulation of Sounds and the Score are key areas here. Around 30 for Composition and 25 for Use of Technology.

Lower band work is poor all round and will sound disjointed etc. Scores tend to be very poor at this level, as is the overall Use of Technology. Around 20-25 for Composition Techniques and 15-20 for Use of Technology.

