

Subject specific vocabulary

The following subject specific vocabulary provides definitions of key words and terms used in AQA's AS and A-level Music specification. Students should be familiar with and gain understanding of these terms.

Accompaniment

Pieces written with an instrumental or vocal part designed to support or complement the melody.

Ambition of project

A mark awarded against instrumental music grades for the difficulty of the repertoire and recognised for all performance types.

Analysis

Evaluating set works and demonstrating knowledge and understanding of musical elements, context and language to make critical judgments.

Annotation

Diagrams, screenshots and written notes showing how the piece was composed, including instruments' use of effects and editing.

Appraising music

(Component 1 of this specification) Listening attentively to familiar and unfamiliar music, identifying and accurately describing in written form, musical elements, context and language.

Areas of study

Specified genres, styles and traditions of music.

Articulation

The effect on how the note is played eg slur, phrase mark, staccato, accent and legato.

Art music since 1910

Area of study defined as music that comprises modern, contemporary classical music, electronic art music, experimental and minimalist music as well as other forms.

Audio recording

Sound recording of the students' performances and compositions.

Balance

Equality when panning sections and instruments to achieve clarity of recording.

Baroque solo concerto

One of the strands for Area of study 1: Western classical tradition 1650–1910 requiring the study of set works in this genre. Written for a solo instrument with orchestra, often with demanding passages for the soloist.

Blend

When a recording of an ensemble has a well-balanced sound, without individual instruments or voices standing out.

Chorale

Brief No.1 of externally set briefs requiring the working of cadence points and vocal lines, including alto, tenor and bass.

Chord

The simultaneous sounding of two or more notes.

Chord symbols

Specific symbols used to represent chords on musical notation eg C7 C⁺C^ø.

Clarity of capture

Part of the technical control for production reflecting the choice and placement of microphones to produce a clear, clean capture for all tracks with no noise or distortion.

Close-mic

The technique of placing the microphone relatively close to an instrument or sound source to produce a non-reverberant sound and so reducing extraneous noise.

Composing log

Student record of how they developed their composition to a brief.

Composition to a brief

Composition 1 produced in response to an externally set brief by AQA .

Compound time

A metre in which each beat of the bar divides naturally into three equal parts (triplet feel) 6/8 9/8 12/8.

Compression

Part of the expressive control element of production to make the sound more consistent in the dynamic range so that they 'sit' in the mix of other instruments better.

Contemporary traditional music

Area of study defined as music influenced by traditional musical features fused with contemporary elements and styles.

Contextual understanding

Making critical judgments by analysing and evaluating music.

Conventions

Musical terms and concepts eg melody, accompaniment, tonality.

Devices

Used to 'colour' musical elements eg ostinato, melisma.

Direct injection

Part of the production process demonstrating the use of a recording technique to minimise noise and distortion.

Dynamics

The levels of sound eg loud (*f*) or soft (*p*), in a piece of music.

Effects

Ways of changing the sound/length of notes eg amplification, distortion.

Ensemble

A group performance of three or more musicians.

EQ

Used to eliminate unwanted sounds; make certain instruments or voices more prominent or enhance particular aspects of an instrument's tone.

Excerpt

Short extract from a piece of music.

Expressive control

Part of the assessment for performance demonstrating appropriate use of several music elements including tempo, dynamics, phrasing, choice of timbres.

Free composition

Composition 2 composed freely from a student's own idea or by referencing an area of study or given brief.

Genre

A form or style of music eg baroque, classical.

Guide recording

A recognised recording submitted in place of a score.

Harmony

A combination of simultaneous sounds eg chords, accompaniment and counterpoint that can support a melody.

Improvisation

The spontaneous and creative performance of musical ideas.

Instrumental

Music composed for or performed by instrumentalists.

Interpretation

The mood and style of music using musical elements and techniques eg tone, phrasing and dynamics.

Intonation

Accuracy of pitch when playing or singing.

Jazz

Area of study defined as a style of music characterised by a strong but flexible rhythmic understructure with solo and ensemble improvisations on basic tunes and chord patterns and a highly sophisticated harmonic idiom from 1920 to the present.

Key

The scale on which the piece is based eg G major, F minor.

Lead sheet

A detailed framework giving structure and musical substance from which a performance can be produced that meets the composer's intentions.

Linked questions

A set of questions referencing a musical excerpt and following the timeline of the music.

Listening/appraising

Ability to evaluate music heard demonstrating knowledge and understanding of musical elements, context and language.

Melody

A linear succession of musical tones that the listener hears as a single entity.

Metre

The emphasis of strong and weak beats in a piece of music.

MIDI sequenced

For production this is referencing the number of tracks for assessment with MIDI sequencing referring to application software for recording and editing.

Modulation

The move from one key to another eg tonic – dominant, major – relative minor.

Musical chronology

The timelines of the development of music eg baroque to classical to romantic.

Musical context

The placing of musical styles, composers and their works in relation to the audience, time and place.

Musical elements

Terms used in the composition of music eg melody, texture and tonality.

Musical language

Defined as staff notation, chords symbols, musical terminology and vocabulary.

Musical terminology and vocabulary

Specific musical words used particularly on scores eg Andante, con arco, repeat.

Music for media

Area of study defined as music specifically composed for film, television and gaming 1958 to the present.

Music for theatre

Area of study defined as music composed to govern, enhance or support a theatrical conception from 1930 to the present.

Music production

The use of any technology eg computers, effects, units or software to perform and compose music.

Music software

Computer programs for composition and production of music.

Notated score

Detailed performance information through musical notation eg dynamics, tempo, and techniques where appropriate.

Notation

The method of writing music down eg score and lead sheet.

Opera

A musical form in which singers and musicians perform a dramatic work combining text (called a libretto) and musical score usually in a theatrical setting.

Panning

The process of balancing a single sound (mono signal) over two or more channels to result in effective separation of the parts.

Performance

Component 2 – performing music using one or both of the following ways; instrumental/vocal, production via technology either as a soloist and/or as part of an ensemble.

Pitch

Pitch is the lowness or highness of a tone for example, bass (low) and treble (high).

Pop music

Area of study defined as popular mainstream music derived from and including a number of musical genres including rock, funk and R&B from 1960 to the present.

Rhythm

The arrangement and accent of notes with different values.

Scale

A number of notes (generally eight) arranged in a specific order in a range of tones and semitones eg major (t, t, s/t, t, t, t, s/t).

Score

Written music that shows instrumental/vocal parts.

- A full score includes all instrumental and vocal parts generally on separate staves.
- A vocal score can show voice parts with a simplified two-staff accompaniment, usually piano.

Set works

Students study a piece or selection of pieces to demonstrate in depth analysis and critical understanding.

Simple time

A metre in which each beat of the bar divides naturally into two eg 2/4 4/4.

Solo

A composition written for, or performed by one vocalist or instrumentalist.

Sonority

Different sounds created by instruments and voices including variations created through instrumental/vocal techniques.

Staff notation

A set of five lines on which music is written including: clefs, traditional notation eg quaver (eighth note) and rests.

Stereo field

The quality of production referring to the appropriate use of sound from left to right and front to back and also using other techniques such as panning.

Stereo separation

Distribution of sounds between two channels.

Strand

Refers to music representing particular genres of classical music 1650–1910. In this specification these are baroque, classical and romantic.

Structure

The overall layout or plan of a piece of music.

Style

A particular identity to a piece of music. This can be to a particular period eg Romantic or composer/artists individual style eg Bach chorales.

Synchronisation

Refers to technical control within performance and the expectation of an ensemble being together.

Technical control

References the assessment of pitch (including intonation), rhythm and quality of tone, bowing, pedaling etc in performance; pitch, rhythm, articulation, phrasing and clarity of capture in production and a level of competence in composition.

Techniques

To compose/perform in order to achieve a particular musical effect/idea eg pizzicato, rim shot, reverb.

Tempo

Tempo means the speed at which a piece of music is composed and played.

Texture

How the melodic, rhythmic and harmonic materials are used to create the overall quality of the sound in a piece.

Timbre

The quality of a musical tone that distinguishes instruments and voices.

Time signature

Generally placed at the beginning of music to show how many beats there are in a bar eg 2/4 is two crotchets (quarter notes) in a bar.

Transpose/transposition

When notation is played by certain instruments the sound they produce will be different to what is notated eg horn in f reads c and sounds f.

Tonality

The use of a particular key for writing a piece of music eg G major.

Tone

Refers to the audible characteristics of music and for this specification references a quality in technical control eg breathing and diction, bowing, pedaling etc.

Tracks (production)

The number of tracks produced for performance and composition. A track is one of a series of recordings.

Tradition/traditional

Traditional music from traditional sources and cultures that is performed as intended by the composer.

Western classical tradition 1650–1910

Area of study defined as art music of (or growing out of) the European tradition, normally notated, and normally intended for public performance.