

# Edexcel GCSE music: ideas for teaching the new Appraising component

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by Simon Rushby

## INTRODUCTION

Edexcel's new GCSE music specification, to be first examined in summer 2018, has a familiar structure to it if you have taught Edexcel GCSE music before. There remain three components – **Performing, Composing** and **Appraising** – and the Performing and Composing components are internally marked and externally moderated. These comprise 60% of the GCSE in total, and the remaining 40% is examined in a single Appraising paper taken in June at the end of the course.

The structure of the Appraising component itself has been changed quite a lot, however. Gone are the 12 set works, divided equally among four areas of study, familiar to those who have taught (and are still teaching to their Year 11s!) the 'legacy' course.

The new Appraising component has **four new areas of study (AoS)**, and each AoS includes two **set works**, making eight in total. Although this might seem like less content, there is a lot more focus now on **unfamiliar music**, and both sections A and B of the exam paper will ask students to answer questions on extracts they will not have heard before. They will be expected to make judgements on the use of **musical elements, contexts and language** in these unfamiliar extracts, as well as, in section B, comparing a piece of unfamiliar music to one of the set works they have studied.

Online resources in the coming months will include detailed looks at the individual areas of study, but in this resource I offer an oversight of the Appraising component as a whole, and hopefully some useful ideas and strategies as teachers begin the course with Year 10 students.

First of all, we will look at **what students will be expected to know**, including an idea of the **depth of study** required of the set works themselves, and the **breadth of knowledge** of other, related music that students will need in order to be successful in the paper.

Then we consider some ideas for how to approach the teaching of this component. The danger of studying set works is that the experience can be quite dry and passive for learners, and every teacher's holy grail is to be able to 'deliver the content' in a way that is active and **student-led** rather than didactic. My intention here is to set the ball rolling on the road to this grail by looking at **connections**, not only between the three components of the course but also to students' existing knowledge, and to share some ideas of approaches that have a common thread, whatever the music being studied. If students learn **how to study music**, rather than simply digesting the content of the music itself, this will help them hugely when faced with unfamiliar extracts.

## WHAT'S IN THE PAPER

The Appraising paper lasts for 1 hour 45 minutes, and is divided into two sections. **Section A**, worth 68 marks, comprises **eight questions**, six of which are specifically about six of the eight set works (see below for these). The seventh question is a short **dictation** exercise, using a short extract from one of the set works and asking students to complete it. The eighth question in section A is about an **unfamiliar piece of music** and asks questions that expect students to be able to talk about its use of musical elements and language, and know something about its context. A **skeleton score** of the unfamiliar extract will be provided for this question, and the piece will be closely related in some way to one of the set works.

**Section B** of the paper is worth 12 marks and comprises a **single question**, asking students to compare in detail an extract from one of the set works with another unfamiliar piece of music that is related to it. This

**comparison** will be in the form of an **extended response**, and marks are awarded for the quality of musical knowledge and understanding shown, as well as for the student's ability to evaluate and draw a conclusion. The students will need to approach the comparison in terms of use of elements and musical language in both pieces, and their context. There could also be credit for expressing judgements and opinions about the music, mentioning other related music that students have studied, and using musical vocabulary. **Scores** of the two extracts are provided.

As with the legacy listening and appraising paper, a CD will be played containing all the musical extracts, repeated a set number of times.

The **Areas of Study and Set Works** are listed below, along with Edexcel's suggestions for **wider listening** in preparation for the unfamiliar music questions. The pieces on these wider listening lists are not compulsory and teachers are free to choose other works, but they do give a clear indication on the kind of wider music students should be aware of as they cover the areas of study.

#### AoS1: Instrumental music 1700-1820

- Bach: Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 in D, third movement
- Beethoven: Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 13 (*Pathétique*), first movement
- Suggested **wider listening** includes a concerto grosso by Handel, 'Winter' from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* (a solo concerto), and piano sonata movements by Haydn and Mozart.

#### AoS2: Vocal music

- Purcell: 'Music for a While' (from his incidental music for the play *Oedipus*)
- Queen: 'Killer Queen' (from the album *Sheer Heart Attack*)
- Edexcel's **wider listening** list for this AoS includes solo arias from Bach and Handel, and songs by Alicia Keys and the Beach Boys. It would be a good idea to look at songs by composers such as Schubert or Weill, and perhaps an aria from a Mozart opera as well.

#### AoS3: Music for stage and screen

- Schwartz: 'Defying Gravity' (from the musical *Wicked*)
- Williams: 'Main Title/Rebel Blockade Runner' (from the film *Star Wars, Episode IV: A New Hope*)
- Unfamiliar listening is likely to be songs from stage musicals and extracts from major film scores – the **wider listening** list includes examples from the stage shows *Matilda* and *Hairspray* and *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy.

#### AoS4: Fusions

- Afro Celt Sound System: 'Release' (from the album *Volume 2: Release*)
- Esperanza Spalding: 'Samba em preludio' (from the album *Esperanza*)
- The unfamiliar music in this AoS could be from a number of examples of fusion and world music, but it's best to start with similar examples to the set works, such as African fusion, Celtic fusion and Latin-American music. The **wider listening** list makes excellent suggestions from Capercaille (familiar if you taught the legacy Edexcel course), Demet Akalin, Buena Vista Social Club and Dizzy Gillespie.

# WHAT STUDENTS NEED TO LEARN

The specification repeatedly mentions three key areas, and so it is safe to assume that these are the areas that students will need to be clear on. The delineation of these areas is really helpful when giving students a **recipe** for how to approach the study of the set works and all the unfamiliar music they encounter. Start the course by clarifying with your students what these three key areas mean. The key areas are:

- Musical elements
- Musical contexts
- Musical language

## Musical elements

I have found that the acronym **MHRTIF** is a useful tool in remembering the key musical elements – you may have a similar one. MHRTIF stands for **Melody, Harmony/Tonality, Rhythm, Texture, Instrumentation and Form**, and in my school we teach it in Year 7 and continue to use it right through to A level, adding to its detail and value as students get older and more experienced.

Using this reminder at GCSE, students can ensure that for each piece they study, they can show that they understand the following:

- Melody:
  - use of high and low pitch
  - conjunct and disjunct lines
  - rising and falling phrases
  - phrase lengths, balance and structure, call and response
  - major, minor, modal, pentatonic and chromatic melodies
  - devices such as ostinatos, riffs, sequence, repetition
  - ornamentation
- Harmony and tonality:
  - simple chord progressions including perfect and imperfect cadences
  - simple key relationships and modulations – such as tonic, dominant, relative minor, etc
  - major, minor and modal tonality
  - devices such as pedals, circles of 5ths, drones, ground bass
  - consonance and dissonance
  - diatonic and chromatic
- Rhythm:
  - tempo
  - metre – pulse, simple and compound metres, changes of metre
  - rhythmic devices such as dotted rhythms, hemiolas, syncopations, swung rhythms, triplets
  - key rhythmic features
- Texture:
  - how parts fit together and how many layers there are
  - unison and octaves
  - monophonic, homophonic, polyphonic and heterophonic
  - imitation and fugal textures
- Instrumentation:
  - varying instrumental and vocal timbres
  - combinations of instruments to create sonorities
  - articulation such as legato and staccato
  - instrumental and vocal techniques
  - effects such as guitar effects and studio vocal effects
  - the use of dynamics
- Form:
  - structures such as binary, ternary, sonata form, fugue, verse and chorus form, theme and variations
  - the development of ideas through repetition and contrast

## Musical contexts

For each piece studied, students should know something about:

- what the composer's or artist's **intentions** were when developing the piece
- what the historical, social and cultural **contexts** were at the time that the piece was created
- how audience, venue, occasion and time affected the **creation and development** of the piece

## Musical language

This means that students need to acquire and be able to use some **key skills** as they study the music in the course. These skills are, of course, completely transferrable to and from the performing and composing components, and many students will have these skills already. Crucially, there are some aspects of musical language that are specific to certain genres, such as chord notation and certain vocabulary. Broadly speaking, students need to be able to:

- read and write in the treble and bass clefs.
- read and write rhythmic notation in simple time.
- understand keys and key signatures up to four sharps and flats.
- understand major and minor chords and their symbols in both traditional (I, IV etc) and contemporary (C, G7 etc) notation.
- know a range of musical vocabulary and terminology, all of which is listed in Appendix 3 of the specification.

For more on approaches to teaching musical context, see *Music Teacher* online resources, July and August 2016.

# HOW TO APPROACH THE UNFAMILIAR LISTENING

The key thing about wider listening and unfamiliar pieces is that students will need to develop the **confidence and skills** to be able to appraise unfamiliar music that falls under the broad terms of each Area of Study. To this end, it really does not matter what pieces are studied in preparation for the unfamiliar listening questions, as long as they have similar stylistic characteristics to the set works. The thinking behind this is to equip students with not only the skills to appraise music that they have not heard before, but also to gain a breadth of listening experience and knowledge beyond just the eight prescribed set works – which is really good news.

While Edexcel provides a list of suggested wider listening in Appendix 4 of the specification (to which I have already referred), there is no expectation that these works should be studied. The important thing is to help students learn **how to apply their appraising skills** to any piece of unfamiliar music, again thinking from the point of view of **musical elements, musical context and musical language**. So a good starting point would be to encourage students to ask **three questions** of any piece of unfamiliar music presented to them:

- What **characteristics** can I detect in the melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, instrumentation or form that I have seen in other pieces?
- What **examples** of use of musical language can I detect in this piece, that I have seen in other pieces?
- Based on my findings, what conclusions can I draw about the **context** of this piece?

The best way to prepare students for the unprepared questions is to introduce a wide array of similar music into the course **alongside** study of the set works. Although it is important to study the set works in detail, not least because the students will be asked more technical dictation-style questions about them as well as contextual and stylistic questions, it is equally important for them to gain a more detailed insight into each AoS as a whole and build up a 'library' of musical and stylistic traits common to the different genres of music that exist within it. The aim should be for it not to matter that students don't know the music being presented to them in the exam's 'unfamiliar music' question, since they will be able to 'analyse' it musically and find similarities with the music they do know.

# TEN TIPS FOR TEACHING THE APPRAISING PAPER

With apologies if I am stating the obvious, I think it can be useful to have these ten tips in mind when planning the teaching of this component.

## 1. Regularly work through exam-style questions with the students

This does not mean 'teaching to the exam', nor does it mean stressing the students by constantly referring to the exam. However, it is important that students quickly learn **how to apply** the knowledge they are gaining by getting used to the sorts of questions they are likely to face. Every week or so, spend a little time working through a couple of exam-style questions on the aspect you have been studying.

Get the students to set these questions for each other, once you have shown them some examples. They can also write mark schemes – see tip 10 below. Encourage them to think from the point of view of the question-setter – 'What would *you* ask about melody in this piece if you were setting the paper? What answers would you be looking for?'

## 2. Get the students to do the work!

All teachers know that outstanding learning is active, not passive. So finding ways to get students to discover the key musical features of the music they are studying, working individually or in groups, and presenting their findings to the class, is key. Lecture-style teaching of musical analysis is extremely hard to make interesting.

There are a multitude of ways to do this, and here are five examples:

1. Going back to MHRTIF, **assign an element** to each student or pair of students and get them to find out as much as they can that's characteristic of that element in the piece you are studying. These can be added to a **collaborative mind-map**, or **two-minute presentations** can be given to the rest of the class.
2. Blow up a section of the score to A3 or A2 size and get students to **highlight key features** of different elements in different colours – for example yellow for melody, pink for harmony, green for rhythm, and so on – with pithy annotations alongside each one. The finished 'giant score' can be photographed and shared with the students, and maybe displayed on the wall of the classroom.
3. Provide students with cards with some of the **key features** already on them, and set them the task of finding these features in the music, perhaps working in pairs. You could make 'fill in the gaps' worksheets for them to complete, or get them to make these themselves!
4. Think about **flipping the learning**. Ensure that students prepare for lessons by setting forward-looking homework activities as well as review-based ones. For example, set them a little guided listening before starting a set work – maybe a list of Queen songs with some simple questions about instrumentation and structure. Point them in the direction of videos and articles to view or read before the lesson so that they are not meeting the music for the first time when you play it to them.
5. Think about getting students to make **videos or podcasts** about their set works, or about one aspect of each work, which they can then share with each other. Videos can often be a really useful revision resource. This can be done really simply with interview-style class activities, though in my experience every class has at least one student who has the computer skills to make quite sophisticated resources.

## 3. Listen to music all of the time

Following scores is important and should certainly be part of the process, including making annotations on them, but the **aural approach** is powerful and also a great leveller when you have a wide array of learning styles and musical experience in your class. It reduces student anxiety around how well they can read music if you show them how to make judgements and comparisons using only their ears.

Also, it never fails to amaze me how little students listen to music related to their GCSE course in their own time. Of course, everyone wants to listen to music that they like, so the trick here is to whet their appetites with examples of music that they might actually want to go and listen to. Here are four ideas:

1. Consider having **listening homeworks** where students are given a choice of composers or artists and have to report back in the next lesson with information about a piece by their allotted person. Have music playing when they come into your classroom but don't tell them what it is. Find ways to **arouse curiosity** and a desire to hear more.
2. A number of departments set up **playlists** on Spotify, YouTube, Naxos or other similar streaming services for students to explore – but it is even easier to ask students to make their own playlists to share with you and with each other. Interesting homework assignments like 'make a playlist of four pieces that use ground bass' or 'bring to the next lesson an example of fusion to share with us' will get them used to doing their own listening research.
3. Consider **listening guides** as well. I find that some lessons spent on how to listen critically are valuable early in the course, particularly as music tends to play quite a background role in our day-to-day lives.
4. Finally, consider starting or setting an online **listening journey**. You can use a number of streaming sites for this, but to use Spotify as an example, you start with one of the set works or a related unfamiliar piece, and then in turn click on one of the top ten 'recommended' pieces that the site throws up. Rules can be set such as 'listen to a minimum of five different artists or composers' and 'note down two characteristics of each piece you hear'. This is a very quick and interesting way to widen your students' listening experiences.

#### 4. Make connections with music they know

It's always good to study concepts and characteristics across a wide array of music, not just the set works, and particularly to reference music that the students are already familiar with. For example, if you are studying the use of harmony in Purcell's 'Music for a While', connect it to the repetitive bass lines of Bruno Mars's 'Treasure' or Taylor Swift's 'Shake It Off'. In both of these examples the same concept of multiple melodies over the same bassline that was used by Purcell is clear to hear. You can then introduce Purcell's 'Dido's Lament' or the final movement of Brahms's Fourth Symphony, for example.

Look at how it's not only Purcell and Queen who use word painting in the set works – so do any number of songwriters including Schubert, Kurt Weill, George Gershwin, David Bowie and Adele. Not only do you find the use of leitmotif in John Williams's *Star Wars* music but also in the film music of Max Steiner, John Barry, Danny Elfman and Howard Shore. Once you have shown them how Afro-Celt Sound System fuses African and Celtic styles, play them a song from Paul Simon's *Graceland* or The Corrs' *Talk on Corners* for an example of the fusion of African or Celtic music with pop.

#### 5. Make connections with their performing work

Get students to bring into class pieces that they are working on as instrumentalists or singers. Hopefully they will be confident enough to perform them, and then you can start a session on looking at some of the key musical features of the music they are performing. There is a pretty strong chance that most pieces will fit into one of the areas of study and can be linked with one of the set works.

Singers will be able to tell the class about other songs from shows that share characteristics with 'Defying Gravity', and pianists will be able to identify features in Beethoven's *Pathétique* Sonata that have cropped up in their own study, no matter what their level. Guitarists will come into their own when given the chance to wax lyrical about Brian May's work on 'Killer Queen', and to compare it with other songs by Queen, Led Zeppelin or similar rock bands. Your budding producers, electronic and dance music enthusiasts and arrangers will have a lot to say about the technology, loops and samples in 'Release', and will want to tell the class about their own favourite electronic or fusion artists.

#### 6. Make connections with their composing work

Composing tends to be the aspect of GCSE music that causes the most anxiety among students early on in the course. Many worry about the fact that they have never properly composed before, and find it hard to see the process that goes into making a piece of music from nothing. Young composers do not even necessarily have the tools to get started, and feel disadvantaged compared to painters or writers who at least already have a pen or brush and know how to use it. The closest composers come to the blank page is an empty Sibelius

or Logic screen. Those who are not confident with using music technology are faced simply with a silent void and perhaps some ideas of melodies or rhythms floating around in their head.

The key, I think, to overcoming this anxiety is to think about how painters or writers start to fill this blank canvas or page. Most of the time, they will study examples and **learn to copy**, and I think this aspect of composition is crucial and can be easily overlooked. The reason for overlooking it can be a failure to see beyond differing genres and tastes, and acknowledge the fact that all music shares similar characteristics and techniques, particularly when it comes to how to develop musical ideas.

As different aspects of compositional technique crop up in the study of set works or other music, break off and explore (perhaps with little exercises and assignments) how these techniques can be used in students' own compositions.

Small technique-focused exercises are invaluable as students gain confidence in composing their own music. Personally, I avoid asking students to write full-length pieces until we have worked through a whole host of short composition exercises, examples of which could be:

- Write a sequence.
- Write two different melodies over the same 2-, 3- or 4-chord progression.
- Write a minute-long piece using only three notes.
- Write a minute-long piece for drums only.
- Re-harmonise a well-known melody (such as 'Happy Birthday') with one or two new chords.

When it comes to studying the set works, link little composition exercises to each one so that eventually a few of them might develop into larger pieces. Here are some possibilities:

- **Beethoven:** write a short piece for piano with a simple ABA structure. (**Extension:** modulate to the dominant at the end of the A section.)
- **Purcell:** write a short piece that uses a repetitive bassline. (**Extension:** experiment with different chords over the same bassline.)
- **Star Wars:** write a fanfare. (**Extension:** write a piece that uses a leitmotif, or a short piece inspired by a scene from a *Star Wars* film.)
- **Release:** write an electronic piece that uses recurring riffs or beats. (**Extension:** use ideas from two differing genres such as African drums and sitars, or choral singers and electronic beats.)

## 7. Learn the vocabulary and command words listed in the appendices of the specification

The specification includes a daunting list of the musical vocabulary that students need to know, and of course this builds up over the course. Find ways to associate the words on this list with the various AoS and set works, as well as with the elements of music (the list in the specification is set out this way already). Students will need to note the vocabulary as they encounter it, associate it with specific genres and pieces, and transfer it to their performing and composing in order to become familiar with it. Insist that they use it all the time in their verbal and written answers.

## 8. Take opportunities to expand students' listening, and approach all listening in the same way so that they get used to analysing music

The key here, again, is to revert to MHRTIF or your own preferred approach and be consistent. Break away from the study of a set work to spend a portion of a lesson encountering a similar work, such as another Beethoven piano piece or a different Queen song. Crucially, get students to find similarities with open questions such as:

- What aspects of instrumentation that we have discussed in 'Killer Queen' can you see in 'Play the Game'?
- Can you find similar modulations in Beethoven's *Für Elise* to those in the *Pathétique* Sonata?
- Using your experience of studying 'Music for a While', what examples of word painting can you find in Purcell's 'Dido's Lament'?
- Listen (maybe also watch) the opening sequence of *Batman* (the Michael Keaton/Jack Nicholson version). Thinking about what you have learnt from studying *Star Wars*, what techniques does composer Danny Elfman use to set the scene at the start of the *Batman* film?
- What features of samba music can you detect in Antônio Carlos Jobim's *One Note Samba*?

## 9. Review concepts from previous lessons by looking for them in new music

Starters to lessons will often involve quick-fire reviews of prior learning, and this can be a good opportunity to introduce new music to the students. The questions above would make excellent starters for pair work or class discussion, or you could try the following ideas:

- After studying Baroque style in the Brandenburg Concerto, get students to identify key Baroque features in another Brandenburg movement (perhaps Brandenburg Concerto No. 4, which can be found in the legacy A level anthology).
- Having looked at 'Defying Gravity', find another duet such as 'A Whole New World' from *Aladdin* or 'The Last Night of the World' from *Miss Saigon*, and get students to discuss how those composers write for pairs of voices.

There are a whole host of related ideas for 'targeted' unfamiliar listening, based on concepts such as writing for harpsichord or piano, sonata form, fugue, studio techniques and effects, guitar solos, use of brass in film music, recitative in stage musicals, Celtic melody or inventive use of the double bass.

## 10. Look at model answers and practice marking each other's work

Finally, ensure that students are fully aware of how to get the best marks out of their answers. GCSE appraising papers are notorious for being all about hitting the right **key words** and ensuring that students understand what the question is asking for. The best way to prepare for this is to do regular, short listening questions in class, related to the music you study, which are modelled on the questions in the specimen paper and in the various books of listening questions that are becoming available.

Study the mark scheme closely for each question students attempt. Get them to mark in a different colour and then write a model answer that would have got them full marks, so that they can see where they 'went right' and how they can improve their answer. Ensure that students keep a section of their file to store their completed, annotated listening exercises as these will be the most valuable of their revision resources. You could even have a section of the file for each of these:

- Section A listening questions
- Dictation questions (in the style of question 7 of the specimen paper)
- Unfamiliar listening questions (in the style of question 8)
- Section B longer questions

Over the coming months, online resources will be made available geared to the teaching of each Area of Study. In the meantime, I wish colleagues the very best as we all embark on a new GCSE course.