

2015 VCE Music Style and Composition: Externally assessed Task (EAT) examination report

General comments

In 2015, the Externally assessed Task (EAT) consisted of two parts and comprised a total of 100 marks. Both sections of the task were compulsory and the format followed the guidelines published by the VCAA.

Responses to the EAT components were of a consistent standard. While most submissions showed that the study design had been consulted, there were still examples of a lack of understanding concerning details of the task.

Overall, the responses to the tasks for exercises (Unit 3) and music work (Unit 4) were of an appropriate standard and showed clear understanding of the requirements of the tasks. In the Unit 3 creative exercises, most work demonstrated strong links to the stimulus works for the exercises. Some submissions, however, were longer than the specified bar/time length. A consistently high standard of work was presented and there were few submissions at the lower end of the spectrum.

Some students presented the documentation as score annotation. For the purposes of the two components of the EAT task, score annotations should include succinct but detailed explanations by the composer that show the reasons and processes for the creative decisions that have been made. However, many of the annotations presented had little or no explanation of the processes for creating the task. Rather, they tended towards broad, unexplained, colour-coded blocks on the score that were linked to musical elements and/or compositional devices without further explanation. This meant that the assessors were left to draw conclusions as to the intention of the composer in relation to their creative processes. Well-constructed, clear score annotations can be a good method of documentation, but these were in the minority. Written explanations that outline compositional intentions and outcomes were required; vague score annotations were not appropriate. Some of the written documentation was longer than the specified word count. Notation was generally good, with sophisticated scores being presented.

Teachers and students should ensure that student names and school letterheads are removed from all work submitted, including audio files. It is suggested that the use of student VCE identification numbers, rather than student names, would help to avoid this problem. It would also be useful if all materials submitted for assessment were labelled with the student number, Unit number and the specified task, and that all pages be numbered.

While most students adhered to the specified word limits there were still a number who exceeded them. It is advised that if annotations are used to explain musical works there should be some thought put into what the word equivalent of these would be. The inclusion of word counts on documentation is requested. Although word counts were included by some students these were not consistent.

For Unit 4, a number of live recordings were presented, and many were of a very high standard. Sequenced recordings were mostly balanced and provided clear renditions of the music works. Live recordings were not required.

Specific information

Unit 3

Exercises

Overall, a good range of material was presented. There were few submissions in the low-scoring range and the work presented was mostly appropriate to the task. The required elements of variation, development and/or contrast were generally evident in the creative exercises. While some students presented simplistic responses that had tenuous links to the stimulus works, others showed very strong musical understanding and creativity in linking their exercises to the stimulus material. Overall, the creative responses to stimulus works were handled consistently. The work presented showed that through the Unit 3 exercises students appear to be developing a good general understanding of the musical knowledge and skills required for composing the Unit 4 music work.

Higher-order responses tended to take a musical characteristic of the studied work and explore it in an individual way. The highest-scoring examples featured the clear display of compositional technique within the allotted time, and showed originality and creative thought. A variety of approaches to the task were evident; however, using the structure of a studied work is not always successful because this is sometimes difficult to achieve in an exercise that is only 16 bars/30 seconds long. In general the approach to the exercises showed comprehensive musical understanding, but there were still instances where the tasks need to be more carefully structured to allow students to achieve successful outcomes.

The length guidelines for Unit 3 exercises must be adhered to; however, students should also take into account the effect of final bars in these short exercises. A number of exercises would have benefitted from attention to a settled or expected conclusion rather than simply being artificially cut off after 16 bars/30 seconds was reached. In some of the exercises, students exceeded the bar length/time requirement significantly; however, only the first 16 bars/30 seconds of music can be assessed.

Documentation

Students need to name the source work and composer for each of the two creative exercises. The high-scoring responses to the task were evident when specific musical characteristics stemming from the stimulus works were stated, with students then pointing out explicit links to these in their own exercises. It is not a requirement to connect every music element to the source work, so using two or three musical elements or characteristics was legitimate. Specifying aspects of variation, development and/or contrast in the documentation could have been more explicitly identified in many cases.

While score annotations can be helpful many of these were not explained in any detail. Colour coding of the annotations can also be helpful, but again these need to be explained through written descriptions.

Unit 4

Music work

In general, the standard of music works presented was consistent, and a variety of genres and styles were presented. Most of the works presented had developed a musical structure and

included the elements of repetition, contrast and variation. Much documentation also explained the rationale and processes of the composition clearly. However, there were submissions that did not reflect the levels of planning required to produce credible and cohesive musical works, and did not explain the processes transparently.

High-scoring works

In the highest-scoring works students presented original ideas that showed high levels of musical development. They worked within structures that enabled successful manipulation of the required elements and showed obvious idiomatic understanding of the instruments/voices/ensembles chosen for inclusion. These works had an underlying rationale and included interesting use of the musical elements and compositional devices. Overall these works:

- demonstrated consistent stylistic integrity through the treatment of various music elements and the compositional devices of contrast, repetition and variation
- provided detailed scores that displayed strong understanding of score conventions
- demonstrated familiarity with the chosen instrumentation and genre
- demonstrated strong knowledge of structure, a clear sense of a development and the evolution of compositional ideas
- adhered to specified bar lengths/time limits
- demonstrated good musical understanding through the development of musical material
- manipulated the musical material creatively and with sensitivity.

Low-scoring works

The low-scoring works lacked development in the use of the required compositional devices of repetition, variation and contrast, and tended to lack logical musical reasoning. Some of these works lacked direction or any obvious understanding of the compositional devices. Other issues noted included:

- weakness in developing musical ideas
- a lack of structural cohesion
- a lack of contrast
- limited skills in linking sections together appropriately
- underdeveloped musical scores
- a lack of understanding of the instrumental capabilities of their chosen ensemble.

Differing from Unit 3, the Unit 4 music work does not need to be linked to any specific work or style, and is therefore wholly decided by the composer. The compositional devices of contrast, repetition and variation are to be explored in the Unit 4 work, and these should be used as a means to develop the work. Students are encouraged to think about these devices at the outset of their creative process.

Written component

In general students discussed their creative process in a sophisticated way and reflected on this throughout their documentation. However, students are encouraged to include more detail on how they achieved contrast, variation and repetition. Characteristics of the existing style or a stimulus work being used, and how and where these are manifested in the work, needed to be included. Students who scored highly in this component of the task stated their objectives clearly and explained/illustrated these comprehensively. Word limits were adhered to consistently but there were still cases where the documentation was too long. It should be noted that words included in score annotations, as part of the documentation, form part of the word count, but this was not always considered.

As was the case for the Unit 3 documentation, many students presented their documentation as score annotations that did not necessarily show the compositional stimulus and processes with clarity. The purpose of documentation is to document and show the compositional process, and because of a reliance on annotated scores that were often poorly presented this was generally not done well. However, the higher-level documentation very clearly explained the creative processes from initial stimulus and/or intention for the work, through the compositional decision-making processes and refinement to the final presentation of the music work. It should be remembered that a variety of methods could be used for presenting the information but that the creative process needs to be explicitly outlined and explained, as stated in the assessment criteria. The use of appropriate musical terminology was evident across the board, with few cases of incorrect usage of terminology or misunderstanding of terminological meaning.

Overall notation

The musical notation was of a very consistent standard and showed a developing understanding of score preparation by most students. There were some excellent scores presented. However, in the preparation of some scores there were omissions. Mostly these can be simply remedied, and this would bring the mark for this component up to a higher level. The inclusion of stylistic indications, tempo and tempo changes, metronome markings, fermatas, phrase marks, dynamics and other musical indicators would have enhanced some scores. There were some instances where basic information like clefs or time signatures was not included. Scores generated on music computer software were mostly presented well and a majority of students showed solid idiomatic understanding of acoustic instruments. Again, a number of the low-scoring compositions showed an over-reliance on the computer, and without sufficient editing and writing were outside the playing capabilities of instruments. There were few electronic compositions. While some of the notated representations of electronic submissions were problematic, other students presented credible representations of their electronic musical compositions.