

2017 VCE Music Style and Composition: Externally assessed task (EAT) examination report

General comments

In 2017, the Externally assessed task (EAT) consisted of two parts, with a total of 100 marks. Both sections of the task were compulsory and students were required to follow the guidelines published by the VCAA.

A range of student performance was presented, with a spread across the marking spectrum. The majority of students scored in the middle to upper range. Overall, the submissions showed that there was a good understanding of the task requirements.

This year there were some changes to the task, and the submissions reflected that schools were aware of these. Generally, students responded appropriately to the separate components' requirements; however, there were some submissions that demonstrated a lack of understanding of the task details. It is suggested that teachers and students be familiar with all requirements for both Units 3 and 4 of the EAT and access the *VCE Music Style and Composition Study Design*, assessment criteria and supporting documents. Materials submitted for assessment should be labelled with the student number, unit number and component, and page numbers, and must be de-identified.

Specific information

Unit 3

Creative exercises

Overall, the creative exercises were presented appropriately and included the use of repetition, variation and/or contrast. Specific requirements regarding the number of instruments and time/bar numbers were mostly adhered to. The majority of submissions were in the middle to upper mark range, showing clear and relevant links to the studied works. The highest-scoring examples were polished and creative, addressing the task within the time/bar limit, while the lowest-scoring examples showed tenuous links to studied works and lacked musical indications, and idiomatic understanding of instruments was often questionable. Despite this, a majority of the creative exercises showed credible links to studied works and fulfilled the requirements of the task competently. Generally, the music scores would benefit from the inclusion of metronome markings or other tempo indications, stylistic indications and dynamic markings for at least the first entry of each instrument.

It was noted that many students based their exercises on works composed by Australians.

Documentation

Overall, the documentation was presented appropriately within the word limits and showed good understanding of the task. Although some submissions did not include any written documentation, the studied works and composers were mostly specified. The highest-scoring examples displayed succinct discussion of relationships to source works and explained the purpose and intention of the exercises. It should be noted that students have the scope to respond broadly within the task but need to show links to the studied work. There were some imaginative and evocative responses. Tables were commonly used and the best of these explained the connections between the exercise and the studied work; however, some documentation relied on unexplained colour coding and/or unexplained selections of scores. It is recommended that all score inclusions contain clefs and time signatures, and identify instrumentation/sound sources. Score selections should be labelled appropriately as figures.

Unit 4

Original music work

There was a range of musical styles and genres represented in the compositions, with most in the middle to upper mark range. The highest-scoring examples were creative and interesting, showing musical character and depth of musical understanding. The musical works were generally consistent. Across the range of submissions the musical elements of repetition, contrast and variation were explored in many ways, from novel and quirky to more conservative approaches. While there were some very innovative compositions, the low-scoring compositions were limited in their development of musical material, showed limitations in structural understanding and did not reflect exploration of the musical elements.

Idiomatic understanding of instruments was variable, sometimes excellent, but in other instances there was no clear understanding of instrument/voice capabilities. This is one aspect of using music composition software that does not show students the limitations of instruments. It is recommended that students explore the capabilities of instruments/voices that they include in their works to ensure playability. There was a range of electronic music works presented, with some highly successful compositions that manipulated the elements of music very well. Others lacked enough interest to fulfil the requirements of the task to the highest level.

Many compositions were recorded live, although this is not a requirement. Live recordings are encouraged whenever possible as they demonstrate the playability of the works and give a more realistic representation of the composer's intentions. However, this is not always possible or appropriate. Sequenced recordings were mainly well balanced and provided clear renditions of the music works.

Documentation

The majority of the documentation was presented clearly. At the highest level, it comprehensively described compositional processes using relevant music language to describe the manipulation of repetition, contrast and variation. Generally, documentation outlined a rationale for the work and decisions made at various stages of the compositional process using appropriate musical terminology. At the lower levels the documentation lacked the composition processes.

It is recommended that students directly outline how and why they composed the piece. Composition diaries are recommended to allow for chronological documentation of the compositional process. For many electronic works, a more thorough, in-depth analysis of electronic manipulation techniques, data on how the layers/instrumentation were imported, with artistic justifications would have improved documentation. While the expression and grammatical quality of students' documentation is not assessed, clear and succinct writing in dot points or prose gives a stronger indication of the creative intention and compositional process.

Overall notation

Musical notation was generally presented in style-appropriate formats, showing that a majority of students had a competent understanding of notating or representing their music work. A professional standard of editing characterised the highest-scoring examples, with stylistic and tempo indications, dynamics and articulation/bowing included. Low-scoring examples were missing clefs, time signatures and key signatures. Transposed scores are not a requirement of the EAT, but in presenting a concert score correct key signatures and instrument ranges are essential. There were several general issues with notation: score order needed to be logical, with main melodic lines and higher instruments on top of the score, rather than leaving music notation software to make the decisions; correct presentation of rests is recommended; simultaneous inclusion of multiple dynamics was problematic; and not indicating which dynamic level a crescendo rises to.

While some less traditional scores, including scores for electronic works, were very well presented, with explanation of the process as part of the notation, others did not present a clear or cohesive representation of the work. Simply presenting unexplained screenshots of MIDI settings does not fulfil the requirements of notation for the EAT. Students are advised to study models of scores in different formats to inform decisions about the best format for their score.