



GCE Music Composition (SMU21 / AMU21)

General Guidance:

- Setting a clear, achievable, brief at the outset of the composition process is essential as candidates are assessed against this.
- Be mindful of the size of ensemble, for example, writing for full orchestra at this level is very difficult to do successfully.
- Whilst the quality of the recording is not assessed, it is vital that all tracks are clearly audible, particularly in the absence of a score.
- When submitting a Sibelius recording of a choral piece, a score must be included so that elements such as the word setting may be assessed accurately.
- In the absence of a score, it is not helpful to reference bar numbers in the commentary. Instead, timings should be included.
- For commentaries, please be reminded that the provided template should be used. Please also ensure that all information is included in the correct section. The commentary is the guide for the moderator and so a strong emphasis should be placed on ensuring it is accurate.

Creation, development and organisation of ideas (20 marks)

- The most successful compositions demonstrate a strong melodic line, which uses balanced phrasing, within a clearly defined structure.
- The composition should reflect the chosen style and developmental techniques should not be used in a contrived manner.
- Depending on the style, developmental techniques may include some of the following:
 - Imitation;
 - Sequence;
 - Pedal;
 - Change of key / time signature;
 - Motivic / rhythmic development;
 - Countermelodies;
 - Fragmentation;
 - Inversion; and
 - Diminution / augmentation.
- Compositions should be composed within a clear structure. Examples of successful structures or forms include, *for example*:
 - Ternary form;
 - Rondo form;
 - Theme and variations; and
 - Strophic (avoid through composed for vocal music).
- There should be balance across sections – often pieces included a very long A section, followed by a much shorter B section.

- Linked to the previous point, A sections, or initial ideas were often much stronger than the material which followed. In many cases, the music tended to meander back to the A section, often lacking a clear melodic idea.

Use of resources (texture/timbre) (10 marks)

- It is recommended that candidates should compose for the instruments with which they are familiar.
- This criterion is in relation to both instruments and texture; often candidates write successfully for their chosen instruments but do not consider texture.
- A common pit fall across all vocal compositions is unnatural word setting. Candidates should avoid this, rather they should follow the natural stresses of the chosen text.
- Texturally, too many compositions tend to be dense and busy throughout, with limited space or variety.
- When considering part writing, instrumental/vocal register should be considered – often these are very close together and it is difficult to hear the individual parts within the context of the overall ensemble.
- Caution should be taken when including piano parts. Often these were not idiomatic, sometimes unplayable and did not add to the success of the composition.

Harmonic handling (15 marks)

- Regardless of the style of the piece, candidates should consider carefully the following:
 - an appropriate harmonic pulse;
 - fluent progressions which establish a clear sense of the tonality;
 - chord voicing;
 - doubling within chords;
 - clear cadence points; and
 - control of dissonance – ensure that candidates compose vertically as well as horizontally.
- Depending on the chosen style, the inclusion and handling of the following may be appropriate:
 - AS / A2**
 - Inversions;
 - dominant seventh;
 - tonal shifts and/or simple modulations;
 - A2**
 - use of secondary sevenths;
 - chordal extensions;
 - chromatic chords;
 - modulations to more remote keys.