

Subject specific vocabulary

The following subject specific vocabulary provides definitions of key terms used in AQA's GCSE Music specification. Students should be familiar with and gain some understanding of these terms.

Accompaniment

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

Annotation

Diagrams, screenshots and written notes showing how the piece was composed, the use of harmonies, detailing chords etc.

Areas of study

Specified genres, styles and traditions of music that must be studied.

Articulation

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

Audio recording

Sound recording of the student's final performances.

Balance

Equality when panning sections and instruments to achieve clarity of recording (music production).

Chord

The simultaneous sounding of two or more notes.

Chord symbols

Specific symbols used to represent chords on musical notation eg C7.

Compatible tracks

(DJ) Tracks of music that work well together harmonically eg harmonically, key, tempo.

Composing

Writing pieces of music including notation, instrumentation, orchestration, musical montage and sound production.

Composing log

Student record of how they developed their composition.

Composition to a brief

Composition produced in response to our externally set brief.

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.

DJ

Using turntables to manipulate tracks and demonstrate an understanding and a range of techniques.

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 two or more musicians or performers (including DJ).

Excerpt

Short extract from a piece of music.

Expression

Representing in music a feeling, idea or situation using, for example, dynamics, tonality, articulation.

Free composition

Composition 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 hip hop, folk, latin and baroque.

Guide recording

A recognised recording submitted in place of a score.

Harmony

A combination of simultaneous sounds including 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 phrasing, dynamics.

Key

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

Intonation

The accuracy of pitch in playing or singing.

Lead sheet

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

Level of demand

A mark given for the difficulty of the repertoire marked against recognised instrumental grades. Provided for all performance types.

Listening/appraising

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

Melody

A melody is 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.

Modulation

The move from one key to another eg tonic to dominant.

Musical chronology

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

Musical context

Writing about 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

Staff (stave) notation, chords symbols and musical terminology and vocabulary.

Musical terminology and vocabulary

Set of words specific to music particularly on scores eg Andante, conarco, repeat.

Music production

The use of technology eg computers, effects units or software used 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 down music eg score and lead sheet.

Panning

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

Performing

Performing is one or a combination of the following: playing music, singing music, realising music using music technology.

Phrasing

Grouping consecutive melodic and/or rhythmic notes, both in composition and performance. This is often thought of as equivalent to a sentence of spoken words.

Pitch

The lowness or highness of a tone eg bass (low) and treble (high).

Popular music

For this specification, popular music is defined as mainstream music including a number of musical styles and genres including pop, jazz, musical theatre and computer gaming music from 1960 to present.

Rhythm

The arrangement and accent of notes with different values.

Scale

A number of notes (usually 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-stave accompaniment, usually piano.

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 an instrumentalist or vocalist.

Sonority

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

Staff/stave notation

The set of five lines on which music is written.

Stereo separation

Distribution of sounds between two channels.

Structure

The overall layout or plan of a piece of music.

Study piece

Specific musical pieces that enable students to critically appraise music in the Areas of study using musical elements etc.

Style

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

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 quarter notes in a bar.

Transpose/transposition

When notation is played by certain instruments the sound they produce will be different to what is written 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.

Tradition/traditional

For this specification traditional music is defined as music that takes influences from traditional sources including folk music and reinterprets them in a contemporary style, and traditional music from traditional sources and cultures that is performed as intended by the composer.

Western classical tradition 1650–1910

For this specification the western classical tradition is defined as art music of (or growing out of) the European tradition, normally notated, and normally intended for public performance.

Western classical tradition since 1910

For this specification, western classical tradition since 1910 is defined as music that comprises modern, contemporary classical music and electronic art music, experimental and minimalist music as well as other forms.