

Music

Overview

An extended essay in music provides students with an opportunity to undertake in-depth research into a topic of genuine interest to them. The student is encouraged to develop and explore, in a disciplined and imaginative way, a research question appropriate to the subject.

The outcome of the research should be a coherent and structured piece of writing that effectively addresses a particular issue or research question and arrives at a particular, and preferably personal, conclusion.

Real music should be at the heart of an extended essay in music. This means that particular pieces of music, experienced via recordings, live performances or concerts, should be chosen as the core focus of the extended essay. Students should strive for a coherent verbal analysis and interpretation of one or more pieces of music in relation to the chosen research question.

Absolute reliance on textbooks and the Internet is discouraged and no extended essay in music should be based exclusively on such sources. Textbooks should be consulted only insofar as they may stimulate original ideas, provide models of disciplined, structured and informed approaches, and encourage direct and personal involvement with the essay topic.

Choice of topic

The chosen topic may be inspired by one or several of the areas of interest listed here. (Please note, this is not an exhaustive list, but is intended for guidance only).

- Aspects of the Diploma Programme music course (for Diploma Programme music students)
- Local performances or concerts
- Musical cultures that students have encountered that are not their own
- Personal contact with composers and/or performers
- Direct involvement in actually making music
- Recordings
- Music on the Internet, or downloaded from it
- Other music that has a particular interest, emotional appeal or other importance for the student

It is strongly recommended that students are encouraged to be as much involved as possible in activities such as those listed previously during the writing process, if they are relevant to the chosen topic. However, it is recognized that students who choose an extended essay in music may not be studying the Diploma Programme music course.

It is essential that the topic chosen is distinctively musical. It is quite acceptable, for example, for a student to explore a topical question relating to popular music, jazz or blues, but the primary focus of the essay must be more concerned with the music itself than with the lives of the performers, the nature of the instruments used or the lyrics. Supervisors should, therefore, strongly discourage students who are primarily interested in analysing text or lyrics, particularly of pop songs, from submitting extended essays in music.

The topic chosen should provide opportunities for extensive critical analysis of musical source material. Topics that are entirely dependent on summarizing general secondary sources (such as

textbooks and encyclopedias), and topics likely to lead to an essay that is essentially narrative or descriptive in nature, should be avoided. Restricting the scope of the essay will help to ensure a clear focus, and will also provide opportunities for demonstrating detailed musical understanding and critical analysis.

To achieve this goal, it is essential that the research question chosen can be effectively answered. Titles along the lines of “Clara Schumann”, for example, do not give much scope for effective analysis or argument—they are more likely to produce an account of her life and music. Topics such as “Computers and music” should be treated from both musical and critical perspectives, and should concentrate on musical, rather than technological, aspects. Redundant research questions such as the comparison of a play to an opera of the same title (which inevitably means that only half the essay is focused on music itself) should be avoided.

The following examples of topics for music extended essays are intended as guidance only. The pairings illustrate that focused topics (indicated by the first title) should be encouraged rather than broad topics (indicated by the second title).

- “The use of contrapuntal techniques in Bach's *Art of Fugue*” is better than “Bach's Fugues”.
- “Harmonic innovation in the bebop style of Dizzy Gillespie” is better than “The music of Dizzy Gillespie”.
- “The role of minimalist techniques in Balinese gamelan” is better than “Balinese gamelan”.
- “The influence of jazz in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*” is better than “Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*”.

Moreover, it may help if the student further defines the topic chosen for study in the form of a research question, followed by a statement of intent that indicates which broad process is going to be used in answering the question. In this way, the approach to the topic chosen may be even further clarified. Some examples of this could be as follows.

Title	Edgard Varèse and Frank Zappa
Research question	What is the influence of Edgard Varèse on the musical output of Frank Zappa?
Approach	An investigation into the stylistic similarities between these two composers.

Title	<i>Jesus Christ Superstar</i> and opera
Research question	Is <i>Jesus Christ Superstar</i> a modern classical opera?
Approach	An investigation into Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical language and structures in this work, with reference to other relevant music from operas of the Western classical tradition.

Title	The naming of Mozart's music
Research question	What evidence is there to support the title of Mozart's divertimento <i>Ein Musikalischer Spass (A Musical Joke)</i> K. 522 (1787)?
Approach	An investigation into Mozart's compositional techniques in this work.

However, it is important to bear in mind that, in the subject of music, a research “question” is sometimes not an accurate description of the task. Therefore, students should not force aesthetic or sociocultural issues into a question format when the articulation of a clear and probing inquiry into an idea is more appropriate. Examples of this could be as follows.

Title	Emotional tension in traditional music
Research question	Emotional tension and its significance in Japanese music.
Approach	An investigation into the mechanisms used in traditional Japanese music to create emotional tension, with reference to comparable examples in Western music.

Note that this approach is looking for a commonality of expressive device between two cultures, allowing for a probing inquiry through comparison. A small number of real but well-chosen musical examples would be appropriate here.

Title	Musical continuity in Frederick Chopin's 24 piano Preludes Op. 28
Research question	An investigation into the presence and musical significance of a recurrent motif found throughout Frederick Chopin's 24 piano Preludes, Op. 28.
Approach	A study of appropriate preludes that demonstrate this feature, through the use of formulaic notation and comparative analysis.

Note that this approach, while still using comparative analysis, is more focused on the musical mechanics of a series of works by the same composer, allowing for an in-depth study within the word limit. In this case, the student would only be able to study five or six preludes, given the parameters of an extended essay.

Title	The music of Hildegard of Bingen—an explanation of its appeal and justification of its popularity
Research question	An investigation into the reasons for the popularity of the music of Hildegard of Bingen today.
Approach	A study of Hildegard of Bingen's musical style in comparison with other sacred music from her time, through analysis and comparison of musical examples, with particular reference to the aesthetic theory of musical expectation and inhibition.

This approach has its dangers, in the sense that it can be easy to make a supposition in a research question, without any evidence, and then try to prove the statement by subjective and superficial comment and analysis. However, at its best, this approach can allow investigation into other important areas of musical study and theory, while remaining focused on music itself.

Treatment of the topic

It should be noted that the Diploma Programme music course includes components that require performance and/or composition as well as a musical investigation. An extended essay in music has a different purpose, in that the focus should be clearly on a verbal response to a research question.

In order to promote personal involvement in the extended essay, the use of primary sources that are locally available should be encouraged wherever possible. However, it is appreciated that, in certain situations, students may not necessarily have access to primary musical sources. In such situations, in order not to restrict the topics that can be investigated, recordings of a high quality

are considered acceptable sources. It is important that the topic and research question reflect a firm emphasis on music, and that they do not become directed towards another subject area.

Appropriate resources for music include books, textbooks, the Internet, scores, interviews, recordings, and live performances or concerts of the music being studied. The inclusion of appropriate reference material, such as music notation, audio tapes or other musical examples, with music extended essays is encouraged as long as the material is directly supportive of, and relevant to, the argument/evaluation.

Students are expected to evaluate critically the resources consulted during the process of writing the essay by asking themselves the following questions.

- Which sources are vital to the support of my ideas, opinions and assertions?
- Which sources do not contribute to the analysis?

Students must choose a research question that is suitable for effective treatment within the word limit and is not of a trivial nature. Research questions that do not allow a systematic investigation that demonstrates critical musical analysis and detailed understanding are unlikely to be suitable. In some instances, it may become clear at an early stage in the research that too few sources are available to permit such an investigation. In such cases, a change of focus should be made.

Many different approaches to the research question can be appropriate, for instance:

- use of primary sources (music and musicians) and secondary sources (material about music) in order to establish and appraise varying interpretations
- analysing sources (primary and secondary) in order to explore and explain particular aspects of musical techniques
- using primary source material for an analysis, with emphasis on a particular aspect of the music
- collecting and analysing orally transmitted and/or written music from live musicians and/or composers through recordings, possibly leading to a comparison of similar or different music.
- Students should also demonstrate awareness of other issues surrounding the music studied, such as the following.
- Do I show an awareness of the value and limitations of the music I am studying through analysing its origin and purpose?
- Do I show a consistently good musical understanding in setting the research question into context and addressing it fully and effectively?

Relevant outcomes of this analysis should be integrated into the student's argument.

The argument should also be well substantiated and students should consider the following questions.

- With what evidence do I support my comments and conclusions?
- Is this evidence relevant and well founded, and not based simply on my preconceptions?

Frequent reference to the assessment criteria by both the supervisor and the student will help keep a sharper focus on the project.

Interpreting the assessment criteria

Please note: extended essays that do not focus on real music are likely to score 0 in criterion A, and are unlikely to score highly in criteria C, D, F and G.

Criterion A: research question

The research question can often be best defined in the form of a question. It may, however, also be presented as a statement or proposition for discussion. It must be:

- specific and sharply focused
- appropriate to the particular area of music being explored
- centred on music and not on peripheral issues such as biography or social discourses
- stated clearly early on in the essay.

Note that larger-scale musical works or groups of pieces may limit the possibility of effective treatment within the word limit.

Achievement level	Descriptor
0	The research question is not stated in the introduction or does not lend itself to a systematic investigation in an extended essay in the subject in which it is registered.
1	The research question is stated in the introduction but is not clearly expressed or is too broad in scope to be treated effectively within the word limit.
2	The research question is clearly stated in the introduction and sharply focused, making effective treatment possible within the word limit.

Criterion B: introduction

The introduction should relate the research question to existing subject knowledge: the student's personal experience or particular opinion is rarely relevant here.

The introduction should not be seen as an opportunity for padding out an essay with a lengthy account of the context of the music.

Achievement level	Descriptor
0	Little or no attempt is made to set the research question into context. There is little or no attempt to explain the significance of the topic.
1	Some attempt is made to set the research question into context. There is some attempt to explain the significance of the topic and why it is worthy of investigation.
2	The context of the research question is clearly demonstrated. The introduction clearly explains the significance of the topic and why it is worthy of investigation.

Criterion C: investigation

The range of resources available will be influenced by various factors, but above all by the topic.

- Students should use primary sources (scores, recordings, performances, interviews) in the first instance, with secondary sources (textbooks and the comments of other musicians) as evidential support.
- The proper planning of an essay should involve interrogating source material in light of the research question, so that the views of other musicians are used to support the student's own argument, and not as a substitute for that argument. It may thus be helpful for a student to challenge a statement by a musician, in reference to the music being studied, instead of simply agreeing with it, where there is evidence to support such a challenge.

- If students make use of Internet-based sources, they should do so critically and circumspectly in full awareness of their potential unreliability.

Achievement level	Descriptor
0	There is little or no evidence that sources have been consulted or data gathered, and little or no evidence of planning in the investigation.
1	A range of inappropriate sources has been consulted, or inappropriate data has been gathered, and there is little evidence that the investigation has been planned.
2	A limited range of appropriate sources has been consulted, or data has been gathered, and some relevant material has been selected. There is evidence of some planning in the investigation.
3	A sufficient range of appropriate sources has been consulted, or data has been gathered, and relevant material has been selected. The investigation has been satisfactorily planned.
4	An imaginative range of appropriate sources has been consulted, or data has been gathered, and relevant material has been carefully selected. The investigation has been well planned.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Students are expected to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the music chosen, together with its historical, social and cultural, as well as academic, contexts. Wherever possible, this knowledge should be based at least partially on primary sources.

Achievement level	Descriptor
0	The essay demonstrates no real knowledge or understanding of the topic studied.
1	The essay demonstrates some knowledge but little understanding of the topic studied. The essay shows little awareness of an academic context for the investigation.
2	The essay demonstrates an adequate knowledge and some understanding of the topic studied. The essay shows some awareness of an academic context for the investigation.
3	The essay demonstrates a good knowledge and understanding of the topic studied. Where appropriate, the essay successfully outlines an academic context for the investigation.
4	The essay demonstrates a very good knowledge and understanding of the topic studied. Where appropriate, the essay clearly and precisely locates the investigation in an academic context.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Students should be aware of the need to give their essays the backbone of a developing argument. Personal views should not simply be stated but need to be supported by reasoned argument to persuade the reader of their validity. Straightforward descriptive or narrative accounts that lack analysis do not usually advance an argument and should be avoided.

Achievement level	Descriptor
0	There is no attempt to develop a reasoned argument in relation to the research question.
1	There is a limited or superficial attempt to present ideas in a logical and coherent manner, and to develop a reasoned argument in relation to the research question.
2	There is some attempt to present ideas in a logical and coherent manner, and to develop a reasoned argument in relation to the research question, but this is only partially successful.
3	Ideas are presented in a logical and coherent manner, and a reasoned argument is developed in relation to the research question, but with some weaknesses.
4	Ideas are presented clearly and in a logical and coherent manner. The essay succeeds in developing a reasoned and convincing argument in relation to the research question.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject
Students should accurately and consistently analyse technical aspects of the music (melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, tone colour, and lyrics or text), demonstrating an understanding and a persuasive personal interpretation of the music.

Achievement level	Descriptor
0	The essay shows no application of appropriate analytical and evaluative skills.
1	The essay shows little application of appropriate analytical and evaluative skills.
2	The essay shows some application of appropriate analytical and evaluative skills, which may be only partially effective.
3	The essay shows sound application of appropriate analytical and evaluative skills.
4	The essay shows effective and sophisticated application of appropriate analytical and evaluative skills.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject
Students are expected to make effective use of musical terminology and, where appropriate, notation. Notation may take a variety of forms, depending on the type of music studied.

Achievement level	Descriptor
0	The language used is inaccurate and unclear. There is no effective use of terminology appropriate to the subject.
1	The language used sometimes communicates clearly but does not do so consistently. The use of terminology appropriate to the subject is only partly accurate.
2	The language used for the most part communicates clearly. The use of terminology appropriate to the subject is usually accurate.
3	The language used communicates clearly. The use of terminology appropriate to the subject is accurate, although there may be occasional lapses.

4	The language used communicates clearly and precisely. Terminology appropriate to the subject is used accurately, with skill and understanding.
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Criterion H: conclusion

“Consistent” is the key word here: the conclusion should develop out of the argument and not introduce new or extraneous matter. It should not repeat the material of the introduction; rather, it should present a new synthesis in light of the discussion.

Achievement level	Descriptor
0	Little or no attempt is made to provide a conclusion that is relevant to the research question.
1	A conclusion is attempted that is relevant to the research question but may not be entirely consistent with the evidence presented in the essay.
2	An effective conclusion is clearly stated; it is relevant to the research question and consistent with the evidence presented in the essay. It should include unresolved questions where appropriate to the subject concerned.

Criterion I: formal presentation

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to academic standards about the way in which research papers should be presented. The presentation of essays that omit a bibliography or that do not give references for quotations is deemed unacceptable (level 0). Essays that omit one of the required elements—title page, table of contents, page numbers—are deemed no better than satisfactory (maximum level 2), while essays that omit two of them are deemed poor at best (maximum level 1).

In music, discographies should be included where appropriate; musical examples, and tables and charts, if relevant, should appear in the body of the essay, as close as possible to their first reference.

Achievement level	Descriptor
0	The formal presentation is unacceptable, or the essay exceeds 4,000 words.
1	The formal presentation is poor.
2	The formal presentation is satisfactory.
3	The formal presentation is good.
4	The formal presentation is excellent.

Criterion J: abstract

The abstract is judged on the clarity with which it presents an overview of the research and the essay, not on the quality of the research question itself, nor on the quality of the argument or the conclusions.

Achievement level	Descriptor
0	The abstract exceeds 300 words or one or more of the required elements of an abstract (listed above) is missing.
1	The abstract contains the elements listed above but they are not all clearly stated.
2	The abstract clearly states all the elements listed above.

Criterion K: holistic judgment

Qualities that are rewarded under this criterion include the following.

- Intellectual initiative: Ways of demonstrating this in music essays include the choice of topic and research question, locating and using a wide range of sources, including some that may have been little used previously or generated for the study (for instance, transcripts of oral interviews).
- Insight and depth of understanding: These are most likely to be demonstrated as a consequence of detailed research, reflection that is thorough and well informed, and reasoned argument that consistently and effectively addresses the research question.
- Creativity: In music essays, this includes qualities such as comparison of musical features, inventive approaches to musical analysis and new approaches to popular topics.

Achievement level	Descriptor
0	The essay shows no evidence of such qualities.
1	The essay shows little evidence of such qualities.
2	The essay shows some evidence of such qualities.
3	The essay shows clear evidence of such qualities.
4	The essay shows considerable evidence of such qualities.