

Musicianship

2012 Chief Assessor's Report



Government
of South Australia

SACE
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MUSICIANSHIP

2012 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

OVERVIEW

Chief Assessors' reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Skills Development

The two tests in this assessment type, as well as being an important assessment item in themselves, are a valuable preparation for the external assessment (examination) and should be designed by teachers with this in mind.

The most appropriate and successful tests covered the full scope of the theory concepts for the subject, including harmony, but did so progressively across the two tests. Test 1, for example, might be best designed to cover part of the scope of Musicianship at a less demanding level, allowing Test 2 to cover the full scope at a level reflecting the higher learning required for the examination. Skills development tests should be designed to give students the best opportunity to reach the highest level as described by the performance standards.

Teachers are encouraged to use the support materials on the SACE website and to use past examination papers as a guide for developing their skills tests. This is particularly important in the harmony part of the subject outline, where students should be given the opportunity in at least one of the two skills tests to demonstrate their proficiency to its fullest extent by being challenged with an examination-standard question.

The final moderation process was assisted when both tests were clearly marked, and the answers were supplied. It is also very helpful if teachers provide notes explaining how they reached decisions about the specific features being assessed.

Task sheets for the tests should also be supplied, to indicate the assessment design criteria being applied.

Assessment Type 2: Arrangement

A number of schools used the arrangement assessment sheet available on the SACE website and this proved to be an effective way for schools to explain and support their assessment decisions. Some teachers annotated their decisions and comments directly onto the scores.

Overall the standard of performance in arrangement pleasingly demonstrated both an improvement in the standard of work produced and a better understanding of requirements by the teachers.

Sound recordings to accompany scores were most successful when synthesiser voicings had been chosen carefully to best represent the intention in the scoring. Drum and guitar parts need special attention, and teachers should avoid choir or voice 'ah' sounds with a slow attack. Students can make live recordings, if appropriate, as the process may help their understanding of the capabilities of their chosen instruments.

The most successful arrangements had a number of features in common:

- Well-designed form and structure — deciding how to start, develop, and finish the arrangement successfully is an important part of the arranging process.
- Sound knowledge of the capabilities of the chosen instruments and/or voices — students should ideally be encouraged to write for instruments and instrument groupings that are available to them and with which they have some familiarity.
- Knowledge of style was particularly clear in the writing of students who showed evidence of having listened to significant examples of music within their chosen style or styles.
- Concise and clear written statements that detailed the technical features of the arrangement, using appropriate terminology — the well-considered use of musical quotations in illustration helps in associating commentary with the musical passages described.
- Presentation of the score in either portrait or landscape format allowed the easiest reading of the music without the need to turn pages every 3 or 4 bars.

Students should avoid:

- submitting transcriptions (rather than arrangements) where no new music has been created; in these cases no originality is shown, students are unable to demonstrate their individual creativity beyond choice of tone colour, and the notes of the original are allocated to various instruments or voices
- writing for instruments such as voice, piano, or drums, without clear stylistic structure or strong harmonic foundation
- creating a commentary that focuses less on the musical intentions of the arranger and more on either an attempt to engender emotions in the listener or on small events and decisions made early in the writing process
- creating arrangements where instrumental ranges and capabilities are not understood but computer programs appear to show the music as 'playable' — therefore students do not appropriately transpose instrumental parts as required
- selecting favourite original melodies that cannot easily be modified and manipulated to create new music.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Nearly all students were assessed as achieving within the A, B, and C grade bands, suggesting that they were able to demonstrate success against the performance standards for all assessment types in Musicianship. The school assessment results showed a higher proportion of candidates achieving in the B and A ranges when compared with the external assessment results, where a larger proportion of the cohort received results in the C range.

This may suggest that students will need to be carefully prepared for the practical application of the required knowledge and skills for tasks covered in the examination.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 3: Examination

Part 1: Theory, Aural Recognition, and Musical Techniques

Question 1

More than 60% of students answered this question correctly. Of those students who erred, many answered part (a) correctly, whereas part (b) was answered less successfully.

Question 2

Just over a third of students answered this question correctly. Again part (a) was more often successfully answered than part (b).

Question 3

Most students had difficulty with this question. The most successful used dots instead of ties to form notes of the correct length, and remembered to put in the bar lines.

Question 4

This question caused considerable difficulty. Only a few students correctly identified the full rhythmic dictation.

Question 5

Students found this question difficult. Only a handful of students identified both key signatures. A common error was recognising the second as 4/4 rather than the compound 12/8.

Question 6

Responses to this question were mixed. About 60% of students answered both parts correctly.

Question 7

Students struggled with this question. About 20% of students correctly answered both parts of the question. Many different incorrect options were given in place of the minor third and major second answers.

Question 8

Just over a third of students named and wrote the correct intervals. A significant number of those who erred did so by mistakenly identifying the second interval as a minor seventh rather than a minor sixth.

Question 9

Students generally answered this question well, with nearly 60% correctly identifying both scales.

Question 10

About two-thirds of students correctly identified both scales.

Question 11

Nearly half of the students correctly identified both melodies.

Question 12

This question was answered particularly well. More than 80% of students correctly placed the four missing sections in the musical example.

Question 13

Students struggled with this question. Only about 30% of students correctly identified the four minims. A common error was to correctly identify the first G, but then miss the drop down to the B, and then the following A. However, many students, probably recognising the perfect cadence ending, still identified the second-to-last note as a D.

Question 14

This melodic dictation question proved difficult, with just over 10% of students displaying full competency. Many students missed the E sharp in bar 4, even though the clue of the C# chord was given above.

Question 15

About two-thirds of students correctly identified both broken chords.

Question 16

There were a variety of answers to this question. Almost 40% of students correctly answered the two parts. Common errors included identifying the first chord as a major chord in root position (B) or in first inversion (G/B) rather than the correct second inversion (E/B). A number of students also identified the chord in part (b) as major seventh instead of dominant seventh.

Question 17

About a quarter of students correctly identified both chord progressions.

Question 18

This question produced a variety of answers.

Question 19

This question also produced a variety of answers. One common error was the inability of students to recognise the first option as the correct answer in part (f).

Question 20

Again, a variety of answers were produced for this question. In part (c) a few other answers were given instead of the correct duplet. Only the most successful students correctly identified the E dominant seventh chord in part (d).

Question 21

Just over half of the students rewrote this melody with correct grouping. Many who erred did so by rewriting the three quavers in the anacrusis in a group of two and one single afterwards, rather than the reverse, as needed for correct grouping.

Question 22

The scale writing part of this question was generally completed well. Only the more successful students also gave the correct scale degree names.

Question 23

Many students successfully identified the cadences, as well as the names and positions of the non-chord melodic notes.

Part 2: Harmony

Question 24

The students who displayed the most competency substituted an A minor seventh chord in place of the C dominant seventh in bar 4, and changed the B flat major seventh chord in bar 5 to a D minor seventh chord, completing the 1-4-7-3-6-2-5-1 progression for the whole piece. The best extensions used were to F major seventh in bar 1, B flat major seventh in bar 2, and C dominant seventh in bar 7.

In this question keyboard voicing continues to be a skill in which students are generally competent. Students should be careful with chord spelling to ensure that the chord symbol matches the chord voiced. Students needed to be aware not to write the minor triad chord above the music and then voice it as a seventh chord.

Those who displayed the greatest competency in countermelody writing generally tried not to be too complicated in their approach, concentrating instead on creating a solid, melodic, and rhythmically complementary tune. Many used the two rhythmic motifs in the melody (quaver, quaver, quaver, quaver, crotchet; dotted crotchet, quaver, crotchet) in building the rhythm of their countermelody.

Care should also be taken throughout the body of the countermelody to avoid dissonant clashes with the melody. Those students who fared best in building their countermelody used chord notes that were not already in the melody. The best note on which to finish the countermelody was an A, producing a consonant interval with the melody.

Many students correctly transposed the designated extract for alto saxophone in E flat. Some transposed down a third, rather than up a sixth as was required. It is also important to note that all elements of the music should be included in the transposition. Some students omitted the time signature, which should have been included for the answer to be fully correct.

Question 25

There were many varied chord choices overall. The most successful opening was 1-4 / 1-4; however, 6-2-5 / 1-4 also worked. Many students showed some degree of competency in chord selection.

In the last 2 bars students generally used 2-5 / 1 but some opted for 6-2-5 / 1. Most students had some difficulties with the two modulations in bars 6 and 7. The first modulation to D minor was not usually completed within bar 3 but rather many students put the E half diminished on the minim of bar 2. This would have worked best if the 5 chord (A7) included a flat 9 to accommodate the B flat in the melody but this was not usually the case. In the first modulation the A9 chord was used regularly but students failed to note the B flat in the key signature. Many students forgot to make the C natural when moving from A7 to Dm7 in the same bar.

The second modulation to C major was again often not completed exactly as the solution suggests in bar 6. Many put the Dm7 on beats 3 and 4 of bar 5 which was not ideal with the melodic B flat. Students needed to be aware when putting the new chord as C major 7 not to label it as a C dominant seventh which meant the modulation was not complete using a 2-5-1 progression.

The most successful students remembered to add the correct accidentals as required by the modulations into the keyboard voicings.

It was good to see most students altering notes in dominant seventh chords; some, however, still altered inappropriate chords such as minor or major sevenths. In this harmony an Em7flat 5 does not constitute an altered note chord as it is just a regular diminished seventh chord in the key of F major.

There was some very good piano-voicing and also good voice-leading at times. Students need to be aware not to voice too high and also not to contain large gaps between the bass and treble notes. Six-ninth chords were generally voiced quite poorly. Students are to be reminded that best piano-voicing is middle to moderately low register. A number of students moved above the third space C in RH which is not ideal. Some students lost marks unnecessarily for not including stems on any notes.

Question 26

Overall the responses to this question were done well. Many students showed good knowledge of fundamental requirements such as sensible chord choices, good chord-voicing and voice-leading, cadences, and second inversion chords. The use of the dominant seventh and the cadential 6/4 chord were the least successful. In the case of the dominant seventh many students struggled to resolve the chord correctly, and to prepare voicing and resolve the cadential 6/4 chord appropriately. The dominant seventh was sometimes used incorrectly as the second chord of the imperfect cadence.

A cadential 6/4 was used successfully in some answers as the first chord of the imperfect cadence. Some students added a decorated plagal cadence at the end, usually successfully, but occasionally with poor harmonic rhythm by ending on a weak beat.

Attempts to add accented passing notes produced several incorrect answers, including the addition of accents or tenuto marks to existing passing notes and a clutter of passing notes in the inner voices. Students must be careful when writing a convincing accented passing note in a bass part that they notice the obvious place to make use of the descending melody in bar 5. The addition of too many passing notes can create new and incorrect chords on weak beats.

The less successful answers included unnecessary chromatic passing notes, and the addition of accidentals to create a major seventh on the dominant chord instead of the minor seventh. Some awkward harmonic rhythms in bars 3 and 5 were caused by attempts to accommodate the dotted crotchet-quaver rhythm.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

Teachers should ensure that they read the relevant subject operational information on the Musicianship minisite on the SACE website. This information sets out key dates and gives assessment requirements and details for school and external assessment.

Schools that combine for assessment should, whenever possible, collaborate on the design of the skills development tests, task sheets, and assessment decisions in both the skills tests and the arrangements. This is to ensure consistency and validity of results across the assessment group.

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