



Common questions about National 3, National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Music

Assignment — composing

Would it be possible for candidates to work on their composition in groups following a workshop?

We do not recommend this as it is difficult to establish the candidate's contribution to the compositional process.

If composing a theme and variations, is it possible for a candidate to use a well-known tune as the theme?

We do not recommend this approach. It would be difficult for the candidate, in their composing review, to demonstrate their input into the compositional process.

For singer/songwriters, are lyrics marked?

The overall song writing skills of singer/songwriters are assessed. For example, how well their chosen/written lyrics fit the melody and chordal patterns created. They must provide their lyrics and the chords chosen on their performance plan. The song does not need to be fully notated for the assignment.

How accurate does the performance plan for the assignment need to be?

The performance plan for the assignment should reflect the accompanying audio file as much as possible. However, it is acceptable for more sophisticated chords to be played which will be heard on the audio recording and taken into consideration when marked. The performance plan provides the context for the marker.

Which media file formats does SQA accept for submission?

All media files should be in MP3, MP4, WAV or WMA.

Assignment — composing review

Do candidates need to explain why they make decisions when they write their composing review? How many strengths and/or areas for improvement are candidates expected to identify?

Explaining the decisions that the candidate has made will help them to achieve the full range of marks available. Candidates are required to identify, as a minimum:

- ◆ Two strengths **or**
- ◆ Two areas of improvement **or**
- ◆ One strength and one area for improvement

Can candidates include additional information such as a planning log or screen shots as part of their composing review?

Yes, candidates can include a planning log or screen shots as part of their composing review. However, candidates should consider that inclusions inserted into the SQA template for the composing review must be a maximum of one page. Including numerous screen shots may restrict space to allow candidates to describe the main decisions made, the exploration and development of musical ideas and the strengths and/or areas of improvement.

Is it acceptable to include audio files of the candidate demonstrating / performing their exploration and development of musical ideas relating to their composition?

Yes, candidates can include additional audio files to demonstrate their exploration and development of musical ideas. However, any additional audio files for this purpose must be clearly referenced in their composing review.

Can candidates' evidence be submitted on a memory stick with a folder for each candidate?

Prior to the uplift dates for the Music assignments, SQA will issue packets for hard copy evidence to be submitted in, along with Ex6 forms which list the candidates for each centre. Each Ex6 form lists up to 10 candidates in alphabetical order, by surname. If you are submitting the evidence electronically, you can use one CD or memory stick for each group of up to 10 candidates. Electronic files with evidence for up to 10 candidates can be submitted on one CD or memory stick. An audio file, score/performance plan, composing review and flyleaf must be submitted to SQA for each candidate.

Performing/instruments

For the external assessment of performing, what are the minimum and maximum time requirements for each level?

These are shown in the table below.

Level	Associated Board equivalent (minimum standard)	Total programme duration	Maximum time on one instrument	Minimum time on other instrument	Other possible combinations of minutes
National 5	Grade 3	8 minutes	6 minutes	2 minutes	4 and 4 5 and 3
Higher	Grade 4	12 minutes	8 minutes	4 minutes	6 and 6 7 and 5
Advanced Higher	Grade 5	18 minutes	12 minutes	6 minutes	9 and 9 10 and 8 11 and 7

Must pieces be accompanied?

In general, it is a requirement that performances (on all instruments) should be accompanied unless stylistically appropriate.

For example, keyboards are not usually accompanied by another instrument and some classical guitar pieces may not have a published accompaniment.

If there are no dynamic markings in a piece of music, how is this performance aspect assessed?

If there are no dynamic markings in the music, this performance aspect is not assessed. The mood and character of the piece can be enhanced when candidates make dynamic contrasts even if they are not present in the score.

Is it possible to make cuts to the music selected to keep within the chosen time limit on each instrument?

Yes, appropriate cuts may be made to keep within the chosen time limit and should be at the discretion of the centre. Care should be taken to ensure the music performed by the candidate still meets the minimum requirements, eg National 5 — Grade 3 or above; Higher — Grade 4 or above; Advanced Higher — Grade 5 or above.

If repeats are included in the timing of a piece, must they be played?

Yes, as Visiting assessors are listening to entire programmes.

The same piece could have differences in timings if some candidates choose not to play repeats, while others do — and also if appropriate cuts have been made to fit the candidate's choice of time allocation for their programme

What are the drum kit requirements?

For drum kit requirements, centres should be working from the [drum kit style bank](#).

Can drum kit players perform from a performance plan rather than music that is fully notated?

Yes. The performance plan would need to contain notated grooves, a minimum of four appropriate fills and a plan stating the overall structure.

The plan of the overall structure could be, for example:

- ◆ 4 bars of groove 1 then fill
- ◆ 2 bars of groove 1 then fill
- ◆ 4 bars of groove 2 then fill
- ◆ 4 bars of groove 3 then fill (etc)

When using a performance plan it is acceptable for the candidate to embellish the grooves and the fills played should resemble those notated.

Four way independence must be demonstrated at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher levels.

What are the requirements for Advanced Higher bagpipes?

A programme at this level must include a piobaireachd, a march, Strathspey and a reel. If it is not possible to include all of a piobaireachd within the programme time, candidates should perform sections of the piobaireachd instead, making sure that the chosen sections are level-specific. Candidates may also opt to miss out repeats in the march, Strathspey and reel to accommodate their chosen time allocation on the instrument.

Is it possible to have bagpipes as one instrument and tin whistle as the other?

Yes.

What are the guitar chords requirements for each level?

There are three different and separate approaches to presenting a guitar programme:

- ◆ a programme of pieces of chordal/rhythm guitar throughout
- ◆ a programme of pieces which is a mixture of lead/melodic guitar and chordal/rhythm guitar — in which case the full chordal requirements for each level must be in the programme
- ◆ a programme of pieces of lead/melodic guitar entirely

In the latter case, there is no requirement to include chords/chordal/rhythm guitar within the programme and the requirement for a set of number of chords does not apply. Centres should indicate on the candidate mark sheet which approach has been selected — chordal, melodic or a mixture.

Level	Minimum number of chords	Chordal guitar requirements
National 5	12	Chords should be played in a continuous accompanying style, which could include finger picking, arpeggiated chords, barre chords or more complex playing techniques appropriate to the styles of the music.
Higher	18	Chords should be played in a continuous accompanying style, which could include finger picking, arpeggiated chords, barre chords or more complex playing techniques appropriate to the styles of the music. Techniques might include alternating bass, runs, slurring, bending and harmonics.
Advanced Higher	18	Candidates must play single melodic lines at the appropriate standard and incorporate melody and accompaniment in at least one piece. Chords should be played in a continuous accompanying style or a more demanding arpeggiated style. Barre chords, varied textures and more complex playing techniques appropriate to the style of the music are expected. Techniques might include alternating bass, runs, slurring, bending and harmonics. Candidates may also incorporate pieces from the classical guitar repertoire in their programme.

Can guitar candidates perform from tablature during their performance exam?

Yes. However, the SQA visiting assessor must be provided with a copy of the sheet music which includes the melodic line which the chordal guitar is accompanying. This will provide a context for the chords.

Does a chordal guitar programme have to contain barre chords for National 5?

No. There is no requirement to include barre chords at National 5, as long as 12 chords are contained within the programme and a variety of strumming patterns are demonstrated.

Are ukulele requirements the same as those for guitar?

Yes. Candidates can choose to perform a melodic or chordal programme on ukulele.

Can the same strumming pattern be used throughout a chordal guitar/ukulele programme?

No. More than one strumming pattern is required to be demonstrated at all levels.

What guidance is available on levelling of pieces for voice?

Here is some general guidance to help you benchmark songs as new repertoire is becoming available all the time.

- ◆ National 5 — Range of over an octave with some leaps; more demanding rhythmically and in terms of breathing/phrasing, interpretation/characterisation demands.
- ◆ Higher — Range of over an octave with some demanding leaps; more demanding rhythmically and in terms of breathing/phrasing, interpretation/characterisation demands.
- ◆ Advanced Higher — Range of over an octave with demanding leaps; much more demanding rhythmically and in terms of breathing/phrasing, interpretation/characterisation demands.

Can candidates use melodic and/or rhythmic licence when performing?

This is acceptable if stylistically appropriate, however it should not be overdone. If there are significant additions to the score relating to ornamentation/embellishments, and if significant rhythmic licence is taken, this should be annotated on the copy of the sheet music provided for the SQA Visiting Assessor. This will inform the assessment of the candidate.

Is rap acceptable as part of a vocal programme?

For external assessment purposes, all songs in a vocal programme (at any level) must contain a melody line as this is one of the key assessment criteria strands. Rap songs do not fulfil that requirement. If a song contains a rap section, this would be acceptable as long as the melodic part of the song is of a suitable level.

Does music require to be approved by SQA?

There is not a requirement to send music to SQA for pre-approval, however you can draw on the following as sources of material for the external assessment:

- ◆ music previously approved by SQA
- ◆ lists of exemplified pieces contained in [National Qualifications Music: Performing](#) document, published October 2005
- ◆ pieces from a range of external Music examination syllabi

If you would like to present pieces which are not from any of the sources listed above, you can do so but you must ensure that the material meets the standard for any particular level. You can also collaborate and share materials with other centres.

Is it a requirement for centres to record the performance on the day of the assessment?

No, this is not mandatory requirement and is entirely optional for centres. However, we would recommend this to any centre that wishes to engage fully with the marking review process.

Centres who choose not to record the performing exam may still request a review of the question paper and the assignment for National 5. For more information, please refer to: [Post Results Services: Recordings for Music, Drama and Dance Performing Exams.](#)

Question paper

Which chords should candidates know?

At Higher level, the literacy content states that candidates should know chords I, IV, V, VI in major and minor keys. For National 5, the mandatory chords are C major, G major, F major and A minor.

Do candidates need to be familiar with cadences in each of the major and minor keys?

Yes, candidates could be required to identify cadences in either major or minor keys.

Can the final answer for Question 6 (Higher) and Question 8 (National 5) specimen question papers be written as bullet points?

Answers can be in the form of bullet points, short answers, sentences or continuous prose.

How should the answers for the final question in the Advanced Higher question paper be written?

Question 6 (a) parts i) and ii) can be answered in bullet points.

For Question 6 (b), the response should be written in continuous prose as this is a description of what you have heard. Please see the Marking Instructions in the Specimen Question Paper for further guidance.

In the specimen question papers, for — Question 8 (National 5), Question 6 (Higher) and Question 6a (Advanced Higher), should candidates list every concept that they hear?

Candidate responses should contain the prominent concepts under each heading relating to the music heard. Penalties will be applied where the candidate lists concepts that are not related to the music and/or provides extensive lists of contradictory concepts.

General questions

There are a number of new concepts on the Advanced Higher concepts list. What guidance can you provide for these?

Electronic dance music

Electronic dance music is normally heard in dance clubs where the DJ combines tracks electronically into one smooth mix. Electronic dance music originally featured drum machines, synthesisers and sequencers but is currently now mostly produced using computers and software that contains sampling, effects, and multi-track recording features. Electronic music includes music of different genres including house music, dubstep, drum and bass.

Piano trio

A piano trio is a small chamber group consisting of a piano and two other instruments, normally a violin and cello.

Contemporary jazz

Contemporary jazz is an umbrella term for all kinds of jazz music being played now — as well as jazz music of the 80s, 90s, 00s and 10s — which can feature some or all of the following:

- ◆ Sophisticated, highly chromatic harmonies (verging on impressionist or atonal).
- ◆ Rhythmic experimentation (cross rhythms, changing time signatures).
- ◆ Development of a groove based on just two or three chords.
- ◆ Instruments used in experimental ways (melodic instruments used in percussive roles, harmonics and other virtuoso performing techniques).
- ◆ World music and avant-garde influences.
- ◆ Inclusion of instruments never used seriously in jazz before (flugelhorn, flute or oboe).

Can candidates be entered on a specific instrument within the freestanding performing units and which code should be used?

The Performing on One Instrument or Voice units (F3F4) are still available and will continue to be offered alongside the new Music courses and units as alternative provision. These units still have the same code, however they have been renamed: Access 3, Intermediate 1 and 2, Higher and Advanced Higher have been removed from the title and replaced with the equivalent SCQF level.

[F3F4 09](#) — SCQF level 3

[F3F4 10](#) — SCQF level 4

[F3F4 11](#) — SCQF level 5

[F3F4 12](#) — SCQF level 6

[F3F4 13](#) — SCQF level 7

The content of the units remain the same. There is nothing in the unit titles or codes to differentiate which instrument or voice is being presented and it is not possible to enter a candidate for the same unit and level twice. However, it is possible to enter for F3F4 at

different levels, putting the better instrument at the upper level, eg F3F4 12 for SCQF level 6 and F3F4 11 for SCQF level 5.

What Understanding Standards materials are available for Music?

SQA are publishing examples of candidate evidence with commentaries as part of the Understanding Standards programme. These materials are for teachers and lecturers to help them develop their understanding of standards required for assessment. As these materials become available, they are being published in the following locations:

- ◆ The SQA secure site — materials relating to the externally-assessed assignment, performance and portfolio components. Teachers and lecturers can arrange access to these materials through their SQA Co-ordinator.
- ◆ Understanding Standards website — materials relating to the Music question papers.

More information on our Understanding Standards programme can be found on our [Understanding Standards](#) page.

How will scaled marks be calculated for the assessment components of National 5 Music?

Marks will be scaled for the question paper, assignment and performance by SQA. To support with centre estimates, please refer to the scaling tables provided in Appendix 1.

Unit assessment

Music: Composing Skills unit

What are the main differences between Higher and Advanced Higher for the Music: Composing Skills unit?

The unit assessment support packs contain useful information on requirements for all levels and can be found on the SQA secure website. The significant differences between the requirements for Higher and Advanced Higher are in bold below.

Higher candidates are required to generate evidence which demonstrates that they have met minimum competency for each of the four Assessment Standards: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4.

Music: Composing Skills (Higher) unit

- ◆ For Assessment Standard 1.1, candidates are expected to analyse two selected examples of music and demonstrate a clear understanding of the influences on composers' work and their specific approach to creating music.
- ◆ For Assessment Standard 1.2, candidates are required to experiment in creative ways and to use at least eight music concepts.
- ◆ For Assessment Standard 1.3, candidates are required to develop ideas and use at least eight music concepts.
- ◆ For Assessment Standard 1.4, candidates are required to critically reflect on their music and creative choices and identify any chosen approaches which were particularly successful in meeting their creative intentions and identify at least one area for improvement.

Music: Composing Skills (Advanced Higher) unit

- ◆ For Assessment Standard 1.1, candidates are expected to analyse two selected examples of music and demonstrate a **high level understanding** of the influences on composers' work and their specific approach to creating music.
- ◆ For Assessment Standard 1.2, candidates are required to experiment in **sophisticated** and creative ways and to use at least **12 music concepts**.
- ◆ For Assessment Standard 1.3, candidates are required to develop ideas and use least **12 music concepts**.
- ◆ For Assessment Standard 1.4, candidates are required to critically reflect on their music and the impact of their creative choices and identify any chosen approaches which were particularly successful in meeting their creative intentions, **identify two areas of strength and identify two areas for development** in the music.

Does a candidate have to compose an extended piece of music for the Composing Skills unit?

For the Music: Composing Skills unit at all levels, evidence for the unit may be, but need not be, a complete piece(s) of music. The key focus of this unit is the ongoing acquisition of composing skills and this can be evidenced in short sections of music.

Some candidates may benefit from a range of tasks to strengthen and further develop their composing skills, but for others one task may suffice.

Do the eight concepts required for the Composing Skills (Higher) unit have to come from the Higher concept list and can they be taken from the literacy concepts?

The eight concepts need not all be at Higher level and can come from lower levels, but the way in which they are deployed should show the increased selection/discrimination, development and refinement through the levels, ie a step up from National 5 to Higher.

It is likely that literacy concepts will occur naturally in the course of the work of the Composing Skills unit. However, literacy concepts could be used as part of the (minimum) eight and should be deployed in a Higher level way and context. It is not recommended that the majority of the (minimum) eight concepts are literacy concepts as this would not provide enough breadth or scope at Higher level.

Understanding Music unit

For Understanding Music Assessment Standard 1.2 at Higher level, are candidates required to carry out these assessment tasks on two styles of music?

Candidates are not required to analyse two different styles. If adequate evidence is generated during one assessment task, which focuses on one style of music, this is acceptable.

Analysis skills at Higher level should be demonstrated by:

- ◆ identifying key features and significant components within the music
- ◆ establishing and describing the relative importance of components on the style of the music
- ◆ explaining the impact of specific social and cultural influences on the distinctive sounds and development of the musical style

Understanding and Analysing Music (Advanced Higher) unit

Are there set periods or styles of music we should be using in the Understanding and Analysing Music unit?

Music listened to and analysed can be drawn from any genre/period/style, but the music selected must be sufficiently contrasting to provide breadth and scope for Advanced Higher candidates.

How many pieces of music should be studied?

A minimum of two pieces should be studied. These may be from the same style or period but, again, should be sufficiently different to give breadth and scope.

Is there a set number of concepts that should be covered?

The context and content of the music provides the challenge at Advanced Higher. A set number of concepts are not stipulated and concepts may be drawn from a number of levels, eg it could be a lower level concept used in an Advanced Higher context.

Does the evidence for this unit have to be presented in essay format and, if so, what is the word count?

The evidence may be presented in essay format, however, there is a range of ways of presenting the evidence (PowerPoint, radio broadcast or video). If an essay is chosen, it has no specified word count. As this is a sideways step from the former Advanced Higher Listening Commentary, use this as a guide — approximately 1,500 words. Other forms of evidence should provide equivalent points and features included in an essay.

How can the unit be approached?

This unit is all about personalisation, choice and opportunities for specialism. There are a number of creative ways to approach it. One is to listen to a number of contrasting pieces of music from different genres and styles. Then, according to the interests of the candidate, start to specialise.

One approach is to relate the pieces of music chosen for study to the instrument the candidate plays. A guitarist could look at two movements from different guitar concertos — one by Vivaldi and one by Rodrigo. There is also potential for integration with the Music: Performing Skills unit in that the candidate could perform examples of music from these works and fulfil the evidence requirements of the Performing Skills unit in that way. Another example: a candidate who is interested in vocal music could select two songs to study, eg Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* and The Beatles' *Eleanor Rigby*. These songs are from contrasting eras, genres/styles and lend themselves to exploration of social and cultural factors.

Does evidence for this unit require to include individual audio files for all sections of the music that have been analysed by the candidate?

No, individual audio files are not required. Sections could be referenced using extracts from the score or a reduced score. Where a full score is not available, the full audio should be provided along with timings for the particular sections the candidates have analysed.

Music: Performing Skills unit

What duration should a candidate's programme for the Performing Skills unit be?

The Music: Performing Skills unit does not specify how long each example of music should be in order for the candidate to meet Assessment Standard 1.1 on both instruments or instrument or voice.

Candidates need not perform complete pieces. However, they may choose to focus on the section(s) of a piece that demonstrate that the music is of the appropriate level.

In order to fully meet Assessment Standard 1.1, candidates must perform a minimum of four examples of music (two on each instrument).

What are the requirements for drum kit players for the Performing Skills unit?

For the Music: Performing Skills unit drum kit candidates have to play a minimum of two examples at the appropriate level (Grade 5 for Advanced Higher, Grade 4 for Higher, Grade 3 for National 5, Grade 2 for National 4 and Grade 1 for National 3).

The examples of music for National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher candidates should include three different fills and demonstrate four-way independence.

The examples of music for National 3 candidates should include two different fills and demonstrate three-way independence.

At all levels candidates should perform examples of music in contrasting styles and should select only one style from each of bank 1–9. Please refer to page 20 of the [National 5 Music Course Specification](#). The drum kit style bank applies to all levels.

What standard should songs be for the Music: Performing Skills unit at National 3 and 4 level?

As new music is becoming available all the time, here is some general advice to help benchmark songs:

- ◆ National 3 — limited melodic range with no demanding leaps. Short phrases and very simple rhythmic patterns.
- ◆ National 4 — range of an octave or just over. Simple rhythms. No great demands regarding phrasing or vocal leaps.

National 4 Added Value Unit

What is the minimum and maximum time requirement on each instrument for the Added Value Unit?

Level	Associated board equivalent (minimum standard)	Total programme duration	Maximum time on one instrument	Minimum time on other instrument	Other possible combinations of minutes
National 4	Grade 2	8 minutes	6 minutes	2 minutes	4 and 4 5 and 3

For the Added Value Unit assessment are the two instruments considered separately?

Yes. Basic competence must be reached on both instruments to pass the Added Value Unit. During the assessment, a holistic judgement is made for each instrument. Assessors should take account of the quality of all of the evidence available for each instrument/voice across the full programme.

For the performance in the Added Value Unit, do all pieces have to be recorded by the centre?

Yes. Centres must record all pieces for both instruments/voice. This forms part of the evidence requirements for this unit.

For the performance in the Added Value Unit at National 4, can the assessment of the two instruments/voice be split over a period of time?

The procedure for the National 4 Added Value Unit and the National 5 course assessment should operate on similar lines, ie the National 4 performance should replicate as far as possible the external assessment conditions for National 5. It may not be possible to perform both instruments back to back but they should be performed within a reasonable period. We advise that both instruments should be completed within an assessment session. This session could be within a day — it might be possible to perform on instrument one in the morning and instrument two in the afternoon.

Another example: for National 5 Course assessment it would be acceptable to present the two instruments within the time that the Visiting Assessor is in the centre and this could be termed the assessment session. However, it is not acceptable for the National 4 Added Value Unit or the National 5 Course assessment for the two instruments to be presented separately over an extended period of time, eg weeks apart.

What are the drum kit requirements for the National 4 Added Value Unit?

Centres should be working from the drum kit style bank. Players have to play in three styles, demonstrating four-way independence and include three appropriate and different fills within each style. The pieces should be of Grade 2 level.

What are the chordal guitar requirements for the National 4 Added Value Unit?

Chordal guitarists must demonstrate nine chords in a continuous accompanying style which could include arpeggiated chords.

Appendix 1 — National 5 Music scaling table

Mark	Scaled mark 40–35 (question paper)	Scaled mark 30–15 (assignment)	Scaled mark 30–25 (performance)
1	1	1	1
2	2	1	2
3	3	2	3
4	4	2	3
5	4	3	4
6	5	3	5
7	6	4	6
8	7	4	7
9	8	5	8
10	9	5	8
11	10	6	9
12	11	6	10
13	11	7	11
14	12	7	12
15	13	8	13
16	14	8	13
17	15	9	14
18	16	9	15
19	17	10	16
20	18	10	17
21	18	11	18
22	19	11	18
23	20	12	19
24	21	12	20
25	22	13	21
26	23	13	22
27	24	14	23
28	25	14	23
29	25	15	24
30	26	15	25
31	27		
32	28		
33	29		
34	30		
35	31		
36	32		
37	32		
38	33		
39	34		
40	35		

National Qualification questions and answers can be found on the [frequently asked questions section](#) of SQA's website.