



National  
Qualifications  
2017

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**X724/76/11**

**English**  
**Reading for Understanding,**  
**Analysis and Evaluation — Text**

**THURSDAY, 11 MAY**

# **INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES**

Candidates should enter their surname, forename(s), date of birth, Scottish candidate number and the name and Level of the subject at the top of their first answer sheet.

**Total marks — 30**

Read the passages carefully and then attempt ALL questions, which are printed on a separate sheet.

The following two passages discuss the issue of music being played in public places.

## **Passage 1**

**Read the passage below and then attempt questions 1 to 8.**

*In the first passage, Roger Scruton gives his views on music being played in public places.*

## **Why it's time to turn the music off.**

In almost all public places today our ears are assailed by the sound of music. In shopping malls, public houses, restaurants, hotels and elevators the ambient sound is not human conversation but the music disgorged into the air by speakers — usually invisible and inaccessible speakers that cannot be punished for their impertinence. For the most part, the prevailing music is astoundingly banal — it is there in order not to be really

there. It is simply a background to the business of consuming things. The worst forms of this music — sometimes known as muzak — are produced without the  
15 intervention of musicians, being put together on a computer from a repertoire of standard effects.

The background sounds of modern life are therefore less and less human. Rhythm, which  
20 is the sound of life, has been largely replaced by electrical pulses, produced by a machine

programmed to repeat itself ad infinitum, and to thrust its booming bass notes into the very bones of the victim. Whole areas of civic  
25 space in our society are now policed by this sound, which drives anybody with the slightest feeling for music to distraction, and ensures that for many of us a visit to the pub or a meal in a restaurant have lost their essential  
30 meaning. These are no longer social events, but experiments in endurance, as we shout at each other over the deadly noise.

There is a fundamental reason why this  
vacuous music has flown into every public  
35 space: the vast change in our attitude to  
music brought about by the mass production  
of sound. For our ancestors, music was  
something that you sat down to listen to, or  
which you made for yourself. It was a  
40 ceremonial event, in which you participated,  
either as an active listener or as an active  
performer. Either way you were giving and  
receiving life, sharing in something of great  
social significance.

45 Since the advent of the record player, the  
radio and then the iPod, music is no longer  
something that you must make for yourself,  
nor is it something that you sit down to listen  
to. It follows you about wherever you go, and  
50 you switch it on as a background. It is not so  
much listened to as overheard. The same dull  
melodies and mechanical rhythms and stock  
harmonies are recycled in song after song.  
For many people music is no longer a  
55 language shaped by our deepest feelings, no  
longer a place of refuge from the dreary

repetition of everyday life, no longer an art in which gripping ideas are followed to their distant conclusions. It is simply a carpet of  
60 sound, designed to bring all thought and feeling down to its own level lest something serious might be felt or said.

And maddeningly, there is no law against it. You are rightly prevented from polluting the air  
65 of a restaurant with smoke; but nothing prevents the owner from inflicting this far worse pollution on his customers — pollution that poisons not the body but the soul. Of

course, you can ask for the music to be turned  
70 off. But you will be met by blank and even  
hostile stares. What kind of person is this who  
wants to impose his will on everyone? Who is  
he to dictate the noise levels? Such is the  
usual response. Background music is the  
75 default position. It is no longer silence to  
which we return when we cease to speak, but  
the empty chatter of the music-box.

I don't think we should underestimate the  
tyranny exerted over the human brain by  
80 muzak. The constant repetition of musical

platitudes, at every moment of the day and night, leads to addiction. It also has a dampening effect on conversation. Round and round in our heads go the chord progressions, 85 the empty lyrics and the impoverished fragments of tune, and boom goes the brain box at the start of every bar.

Is there a remedy? Yes, I think there is. The addictive ear, dulled by repetition, is shut tight 90 as a clam around its pointless treasures. But you can prise it open.

The first step is to introduce the precious commodity of silence, to young people in particular, so that they are listening with open  
95 ears to the cosmos, and are beginning to forget the addictive pleasures of the music that besieges them at every turn. The next step is to put a young person in a position to make music and not just to hear it. By  
100 teaching children to play musical instruments, we acquaint them with the roots of music in human life. The final stage is to get the students to perform — to sing in unison, and

then in harmony.

105 Very soon they will understand that music is  
not a blanket with which to shut out  
communication, but a form of communication  
in itself. And gradually they will know the  
place of this great art form in the world that  
110 they have inherited. Our civilisation was made  
by music and the musical tradition that we  
have inherited is as worthy of praise as all our  
other achievements in art, science, religion  
and politics. This musical tradition speaks for

115 itself but to hear it you must clear the air of noise.

## **Passage 2**

**Read the passage below and attempt question 9. While reading, you may wish to make notes on the main ideas and/or highlight key points in the passage.**

*In the second passage, Will Self describes his experiences with muzak.*

**Is there nowhere I can escape the tyranny of muzak?**

Sitting in the snug restaurant of Tarr Steps Farm in Exmoor National Park, I looked out over the wooded valley. I felt the stress of city life slacken in my shoulders. My wife  
5 observed at this point quite how strange it was that even a stylish establishment of this type still had a loop of soft rock music playing

in the background in its public areas. I had become so relaxed that for once I hadn't even  
10 noticed the muzak but as soon as I registered that Foreigner, or some other equally tedious rock group, was perturbing the air with their guitars, my breakfast — hitherto blissful — was entirely ruined.

15 Like all right-listening folk, I am an implacable enemy of all muzak. True, I'm not in the position of those factory workers in the 1940s and 1950s for whom muzak constituted a sort of mind-control designed to move their tasks

20 forward with its insistent and carefully  
calibrated tempo, while lulling them into the  
monotony of their tasks with its equally bland  
and repetitive melodies. However, even in  
modern Britain we are still subject to a form of  
25 control. I travel for work and there doesn't  
seem to be a hotel the length of the land that  
doesn't come equipped with its own piped  
sonic sewage, which is surely at least partially  
designed to send the punters quickly on their  
30 way.

I remember finding myself in one such establishment in Norwich — eating breakfast, naturally — when I became insistently aware of some particularly dreadful muzak and upon  
35 looking up saw the speaker cabinet immediately above my head, trailing some tempting wires. I stood up on my chair and detached them — bingo! Silence (except for the chewing of my fellow diners) fell like a 30-  
40 tog duvet across the room. Unfortunately, a maintenance man came into view, opened a stepladder and reinserted the jack plugs.

I waited until he'd retreated, then got back up on my chair and was about to commit this  
45 dreadful crime against oppression for the second time, when he leapt out at me from behind a pillar and near-screamed: "Don't you move!" I thought I was about to be dragged away to some inhuman reconditioning unit,  
50 where I would be subjected to muzak until I learned to love it. But this didn't happen, because I was in just such a unit already.

True, there was a backlash against the hateful "elevator music" in the 1960s. But this

55 resistance was outflanked effortlessly by  
incorporating the pop hits of the day into the  
play-lists, as well as devising something they  
termed “audio architecture”: muzak cunningly  
fashioned to sink below the level of ordinary  
60 consciousness, while retaining its ability to  
influence. The success of these strategies  
can only be gauged by just how little mass  
objection there is to the fact that hardly any  
part of the built environment remains  
65 untainted by these aural atrocities.

I found myself a while back eating dinner in a trendy restaurant. My dining companions showed no unhappiness towards the muzak playing. I, however, am made of less stoical  
70 stuff and confronted the waitress, explaining that since we were the only diners and we didn't want to listen to the so-called music, perhaps she could turn the appalling noise off! She looked at me quizzically and replied — as  
75 if this definitively settled the matter — “But this is a restaurant.” The obvious implication was that even when all human life is extinct

on this planet, there will remain buildings that continue to resound with Beethoven's 5th Symphony or indeed Foreigner warbling, "I wanna know what love is . . . !"

**[END OF QUESTION PAPER]**