



Higher
Coursework
Assessment Task



Higher Music

Assignment

Assessment task

This document provides information for teachers and lecturers about the coursework component of this course in terms of the skills, knowledge and understanding that are assessed. It **must** be read in conjunction with the course specification.

Valid from session 2025-26 and until further notice.

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This edition: September 2025 (version 2.1)

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Introduction

This document contains instructions for teachers, lecturers and candidates for the Higher Music assignment. You must read it in conjunction with the course specification.

This assignment is worth 30 marks. This is 15% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

This is one of three course assessment components. The other components are a question paper and a performance.

This assignment has two parts:

Part one 'composing music' has 20 marks.

Part two 'composing review' has 10 marks.

Instructions for teachers and lecturers

For candidates to demonstrate creativity, teachers and lecturers should avoid structured template approaches to composition. For example, they must not set some or all of the following features in a template:

- ◆ number of instruments
- ◆ instrumentation
- ◆ prescribed harmonies in certain bars
- ◆ changes of time signature in certain bars
- ◆ prescribed rhythmic, melodic or structural features in certain bars

This restrictive template would go beyond the acceptable amount of reasonable assistance.

Candidates are required to explore and develop musical ideas to create an original piece of music for their assignment. For teaching and learning purposes only, it is acceptable to provide candidates with, for example, accompaniment patterns, bass lines or rhythm banks. However, as the assignment is an assessment and not a learning and teaching exercise, candidates should then create their own individual composition. Candidates should not select, copy and paste musical ideas provided by their teacher or lecturer into their composition.

Teachers and lecturers should not provide candidates composing review templates with, for example, pre-populated phrases that only require candidates to insert one or two words into the text at designated places.

Marking instructions

The marking instructions for the Higher Music assignment are in the course specification.

Instructions for candidates

This assessment applies to the assignment for Higher Music.

This assignment is worth 30 marks. This is 15% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

It assesses the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

- ◆ planning and reviewing your own music
- ◆ exploring and developing your musical ideas
- ◆ creating music that is original to you

This assignment has two parts:

Part one 'composing music' has 20 marks.

Part two 'composing review' has 10 marks.

Your teacher or lecturer will let you know if there are any specific conditions for doing this assessment.

Composing music

In this part of the assessment, you have to:

- ◆ plan your composition
- ◆ explore and develop musical ideas using at least four of the following elements: melody, harmony, rhythm, structure, timbre – one element must be **harmony**
- ◆ create one complete piece of music

Your composition can be in any style or genre and must last a minimum of 1 minute and a maximum of 3 minutes and 30 seconds.

For serial compositions, you must annotate your score showing where and how you have used your note row. You should refer to this in your review. When writing a review for a serial piece, it is good practice to describe how you have explored and developed the note row.

Composing review

In this part of the assessment, you have to write a composing review.

You must refer to the compositional methods you used and include clear details of:

- ◆ your main decisions
- ◆ how you explored and developed your musical ideas
- ◆ your strengths and/or areas for improvement

You can present your review in prose or bullet points. It should be approximately 200 to 350 words.

You must use the SQA composing review template, which is restricted to one page. You must submit only one composing review document. The template is available from the Higher Music subject page.

As you work through the assignment, your teacher or lecturer may check your work before you move on to the next step.

Your completed assignment

Your completed assignment must include:

- ◆ an audio recording of your composition
- ◆ a score or performance plan of your composition
- ◆ your composing review for your composition

Information about your creative input

You should clearly identify your input in your composition. For example, you should:

- ◆ make it clear if any part, such as a piano or guitar accompaniment or a drum kit part, has been fully realised by someone else, or what directions you gave for that part
- ◆ state if you used any software to generate chord progressions or melodic or rhythmic ideas
- ◆ state if you used an electronic program to devise an accompaniment

Information about performance plans

If you submit a performance plan, you should ensure that there is sufficient information in it to clearly show the main features of your composition. This applies to all types of performance plan, including screenshots from a digital audio workstation.

Performance plans should include information about:

- ◆ the structure of the composition
- ◆ instrumental or vocal parts, and detail any parts not fully created by you

- ◆ the key or keys used and significant harmonic progressions

In addition to the above, performance plans for songs should include both lyrics and chords.

Where applicable, a performance plan should also include details of:

- ◆ whether accompaniments or loops were fully or partially created by you or sourced from elsewhere

There are many ways in which you could show the main features of your composition. For example, you could annotate the screenshot(s) from the digital audio workstation, or present the information in prose.

Here is an example of acceptable information in a performance plan:

- ◆ Structure:
 - introduction bars 1 to 4
 - section A bars 5 to 20
 - section B bars 21 to 36
- ◆ Instrumental or vocal parts:
 - electric guitar – melody
 - rhythmic guitar – chords
 - bass guitar – based on the root and fifth of the chords
 - drum kit – imported drum kit loop
- ◆ Keys used and significant harmonic progressions:
 - introduction and section A in G major based on G, Em, C, D
 - section B in E minor based on Em, Am, B, Em

You could include additional information such as notated riffs, melodic and rhythmic ideas, or facts about chords used, for example, block or arpeggiated chords.

Checklist for candidates

You may want to use this checklist to track your progress.

Composing music (20 marks)

Step 1: plan

- ◆ Think about what you want to create.
- ◆ Think about instruments and/or voices. Consider instrument(s) you are familiar with. Your composition should be appropriate for the instrument(s) and/or voices you have chosen to compose for.
- ◆ Think about a structure. For example:
 - verse and chorus
 - beginning – middle – end
 - ABA
 - AB
- ◆ Make a note of the decisions you have made with reference to the compositional methods you have used.

Step 2: explore

- ◆ Start simply – you can always add later.
- ◆ Explore musical ideas using at least four of the following elements: melody, harmony, rhythm, structure, timbre – one element must be **harmony**.
- ◆ Reflect as you experiment – which of your musical ideas are the most effective?
- ◆ Make a note of the decisions you have made with reference to compositional methods used.

Step 3: develop

- ◆ Think of ways you could develop your selected musical ideas.
- ◆ Develop your musical ideas.
- ◆ Make a note of the decisions you have made with reference to compositional methods used.

Step 4: create

- ◆ Decide what you think works best.
- ◆ Use these ideas to create your composition – have you used the element of harmony?
- ◆ Make a note of the decisions you have made with reference to compositional methods used.
- ◆ Create a score or performance plan of your composition.
- ◆ Create an audio recording of your composition.

Composing review (10 marks)

In your review you must refer to compositional methods used and include a summary of:

- ◆ the main decisions you have made
- ◆ the ways in which you have explored and developed your musical ideas
- ◆ strengths and/or areas which may be improved

Check over your work to make sure you have completed all sections and steps of the assignment. Check that you have collected all the required evidence.

Let your teacher or lecturer know when you have finished the assignment.

Administrative information

Published: September 2025 (version 2.1)

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date
2.0	<p>'Instructions for teachers and lecturers' section added.</p> <p>Amendments made to 'Instructions for candidates' section for clarity and accessibility, and to add instructions on the composing review.</p>	September 2024
2.1	<p>Guidance on clearly identifying candidates' input in their composition added on page 5.</p> <p>Guidance on information that should be included in a performance plan added on pages 5 and 6.</p> <p>What you need to do differently Make sure candidates are aware of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ needing to clearly identify their input in their composition◆ the information they should include in a performance plan <p>You must update your teaching notes and teaching practice.</p> <p>You must refer to the updated course specification and coursework assessment task for the assignment, and use the template for the composing review.</p>	September 2025

Note: you are advised to check SQA's website to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this document.

Security and confidentiality

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