

MUSIC DEPARTMENT

GCSE to A Level Transition Booklet

Eduqas A Level Music

Everything you need to make the step up from Edexcel GCSE (9–1) Music to Eduqas A Level Music — what changes, what you already know, and how to prepare over the coming months.

From: Pearson Edexcel Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9–1) Music (1MU0)

To: WJEC Eduqas GCE A Level in Music



Welcome to A Level Music

Why the course is a natural next step — and how this booklet helps



A Level Music keeps the three things you already do at GCSE — **performing, composing and appraising** — and lets you go further in each. The Eduqas specification is designed to build directly on the knowledge, understanding and skills you established at GCSE, so the transition should feel like a step up rather than a fresh start.

What the course aims to develop

- Performing skills that show understanding of musical elements, style, interpretation and expression.
- Composing skills that manipulate musical ideas and use musical devices and conventions.
- The links between performing, composing and appraising, underpinned by attentive listening.
- Knowledge and understanding to appraise contrasting genres, styles and traditions of music.
- An awareness of musical chronology and the contexts in which music is created.

Source: Eduqas A Level Music specification, Aims and objectives.

How to use this booklet

Work through it in order. It first sets out the course at a glance, then compares each GCSE component with its A Level counterpart so you can see exactly what changes. The "Prepare now" boxes turn each comparison into practical action. A Grade 5 theory self-check and a set of summer bridging tasks finish the booklet.

You can specialise

A Level lets you lean into your strength. You choose **Option A** (specialism in performing) or **Option B** (specialism in composing) — the same choice runs across Components 1 and 2. Everyone studies Component 3 (Appraising).

Good news for GCSE students

The shape of the qualification is familiar: you still perform, you still compose to a brief and write a free composition, and you still sit a listening-and-analysis exam. What grows is the **depth, length and standard** of each.

The A Level Course at a Glance

Three components — choose Option A in both 1 & 2, or Option B in both



Component	What it is	Weighting
Component 1: Performing Non-exam assessment, externally assessed by a visiting examiner	A recital of pieces, solo and/or ensemble. Repertoire links to the areas of study.	35% (Option A) or 25% (Option B) 10–12 min (A) · 6–8 min (B)
Component 2: Composing Non-exam assessment, externally assessed by WJEC	A portfolio of compositions, one of which responds to a Western Classical Tradition brief set by WJEC.	25% (Option A) or 35% (Option B) 4–6 min (A) · 8–10 min (B)
Component 3: Appraising Written examination, approx. 2 hours 15 minutes	A listening and analysis paper across three areas of study (one compulsory, two chosen).	40% 100 marks · taken by all learners

Assessment objectives

- **AO1** — Interpret musical ideas through performing, with technical and expressive control and an understanding of style and context.
- **AO2** — Create and develop musical ideas with technical and expressive control and coherence.
- **AO3** — Demonstrate and apply musical knowledge.
- **AO4** — Use analytical and appraising skills to make evaluative and critical judgements about music.

The two specialism routes

Option A — Performing focus	Option B — Composing focus
Performing 35% · Composing 25%	Performing 25% · Composing 35%
Appraising 40%	Appraising 40%

You may apportion an extra 10% of assessment to performing or composing as an in-depth study.

GCSE → A Level: The Step Up

The same three disciplines, taken further



	Edexcel GCSE (9–1) Music	Eduqas A Level Music
Performing	Solo + ensemble, minimum 4 minutes combined. Each performance one minute or more. 30% of the GCSE.	A recital of pieces (min. 2 or 3 depending on option), 6–12 minutes, around Grade 6 standard, linked to areas of study. 25–35%.
Composing	Two compositions, min. 3 minutes combined: one to a Pearson brief, one free composition. 30%.	Two or three compositions, 4–10 minutes: one to a Western Classical Tradition brief, a free composition, and (Option B) one in another area of study. 25–35%.
Appraising	1 hour 45 min written paper. Four areas of study, eight set works. 40%.	Approx. 2 hr 15 min written paper. Three areas of study — one compulsory (the symphony) plus two you choose. 40%.

The big picture

The proportions barely move — performing, composing and appraising stay at roughly a third each. What changes is the **standard, the length, and the breadth of repertoire**. If you keep performing, keep composing, and keep listening analytically over the next few months, you arrive in September already moving in the right direction.

Three things that are genuinely new

The symphony

Area of study A (The Development of the Symphony 1750–1900) is compulsory and new to most GCSE students.

A Western Classical brief

Every A Level composer writes one piece in a Western Classical style, in response to a set brief.

Higher performance standard

Repertoire is pitched around Grade 6; harder pieces are scaled up, easier pieces scaled down.

Component 1 — Performing

From a four-minute GCSE recording to a Grade 6-standard recital



At GCSE you did this...

A **solo** performance and an **ensemble** performance, on any instrument or voice, in any style.

Minimum four minutes combined; each piece a minute or more.

Internally marked, externally moderated.

At A Level you will do this...

Option A: at least three pieces, at least one as a soloist, with two pieces reflecting two different areas of study (10–12 min). **Option B:** at least two pieces, one linked to an area of study (6–8 min).

Repertoire pitched around **Grade 6**. The mark is scaled up for harder pieces and down for easier ones.

Performed live and assessed by a **visiting examiner**.

What the examiner rewards

- **Accuracy** of pitch and rhythm, and fluency at an appropriate tempo.
- **Technical control** — technique, intonation, projection and tone quality.
- **Expression and interpretation** — style, dynamics, phrasing and (in ensembles) balance and empathy.

These are the same musical priorities you met in the GCSE performance grids — now sustained across a longer, more demanding programme.

Prepare now

- Keep up regular practice with the aim of working **towards Grade 6** repertoire on your main instrument or voice.
- Build a varied programme: pieces do not have to be classical, but should let you show accuracy *and* expression.
- Take every chance to perform to an audience and to play in ensembles.
- Record yourself and listen back for the three things above.

Component 2 — Composing

A familiar brief-and-free structure, with a new Western Classical strand



At GCSE you did this...

Two compositions (min. 3 minutes combined): one to a **Pearson brief** linked to an area of study, and one **free composition**.

Briefs released on 1 September; compose in any style to fit the brief.

Submit a score (or written account) and a recording.

At A Level you will do this...

Option A: two compositions (4–6 min) — one to a Western Classical Tradition brief, one free.

Option B: three compositions (8–10 min) — the WCT brief, a piece in a different area of study, and a free composition.

A choice of **four set briefs** in the Western Classical Tradition, released in the first week of September. Each must result in a piece in a Western Classical style (Baroque, Classical or Romantic).

Submit a recording, a score or detailed written description, and a **composition log** for each piece.

What is assessed

- **Creating musical ideas** — constructing and presenting ideas that respond to the brief.
- **Developing musical ideas** — thematic material, compositional techniques, and combining elements coherently.
- **Technical and expressive control** — of instruments, music technology and communication.

The "brief + free" structure is exactly what you met at GCSE. The new demand is writing convincingly in a Western Classical style.

Prepare now

- Brush up on **Western Classical harmony** and conventions — chords, cadences, phrase structure and voice-leading.
- Practise *developing* a small idea, not just inventing new ones: sequence it, vary it, fragment it, re-harmonise it.
- Compose in several styles and keep your ideas short to begin with.
- Notate clearly — a DAW, manuscript or a detailed written description are all valid.

Component 3 — Appraising

Three areas of study: one compulsory, two chosen by your class



Area of study	Set works & focus
A — The Western Classical Tradition The Development of the Symphony 1750–1900 Compulsory	Two set works — Haydn : Symphony No. 104 in D, 'London' and Mendelssohn : Symphony No. 4 in A, 'Italian'. One is chosen for detailed analysis, the other for general study.
Choose one of: B — Rock and Pop C — Musical Theatre D — Jazz	B : five genres 1960–2000 (pop, rock, soul, funk/disco, folk/country). C : six musical-theatre composers from Rodgers to Schwartz. D : six jazz genres 1920–1960, from ragtime to cool jazz.
Choose one of: E — Into the Twentieth Century F — Into the Twenty-first Century	E : Poulenc, <i>Trio</i> (Mvt II) and Debussy, <i>Nuages</i> — Impressionism, Expressionism, Neo-classicism. F : Adès, <i>Asyla</i> (Mvt 3, <i>Ecstasio</i>) and Beamish, <i>String Quartet No. 2</i> (Mvts 1 & 4).

From your GCSE set works to A Level

At GCSE you analysed eight set works across Instrumental Music 1700–1820, Vocal Music, Music for Stage and Screen, and Fusions. At A Level you study fewer areas but in much greater depth — and the compulsory symphony strand is brand new, so it rewards an early head start.

Component 3 — How the Paper Works

Question types, and the symphony you'll meet first



The kinds of question

- Analysis of a set work, with a score (Area A and Areas E/F).
- Questions on **unprepared extracts**, with and without a score — testing aural perception.
- **Comparison** questions between two extracts (Areas B/C/D).
- An **extended essay** on the development of the symphony, set in its wider social, cultural and historical context (Area A).

Prepare now

Your GCSE Section B already asked you to **compare a set work with an unfamiliar piece** — that is excellent preparation for A Level comparison and essay writing. Keep practising extended writing that makes a point and backs it up with musical evidence.

The symphony: what to listen for

Area A asks you to understand how musical elements work across the Classical and Romantic symphony:

- **Structure** — sonata form, minuet and trio, scherzo, rondo, variation and cyclic forms.
- **Tonality & harmony** — related keys, cadences, dominant/diminished 7ths, circle of 5ths, chromaticism and modulation.
- **Melody & thematic development** — sequence, ornamentation, augmentation, diminution, fragmentation.
- **Texture** — monophony, homophony, polyphony, imitation, counterpoint, fugue.
- **Sonority & the orchestra** — the decline of basso continuo, the rise of independent woodwind, and larger forces.
- **Tempo, metre, rhythm & dynamics** — dotted rhythms, hemiola, triplets, syncopation and expressive markings.

The Knowledge You Already Have

The musical elements and language that carry straight over



A Level does not replace your GCSE vocabulary — it deepens it. The seven musical elements you used to describe your GCSE set works are exactly the analytical tools you'll use on the symphony and your chosen areas of study.

The seven musical elements (GCSE & A Level)

Element	You'll go deeper into...
Organisation of pitch	Melodic devices, thematic development, motivic working.
Tonality	Related keys, modulation, extended and (later) atonality.
Structure	Sonata form and the larger Classical/Romantic forms.
Sonority	Orchestral colour, instrumental techniques and combinations.
Texture	Counterpoint, imitation, fugue and complex part-writing.
Tempo, metre & rhythm	Hemiola, syncopation, simple/compound time at speed.
Dynamics	Expressive and structural use across a long movement.

Musical language to keep sharp

- **Reading and writing staff notation** in treble and bass clefs, in simple and compound time.
- **Key signatures**, and major and minor **chords and chord symbols**.
- The technical vocabulary and terminology for each area of study.

Why this matters

The A Level symphony strand explicitly assumes you can read staff notation in both clefs and recognise chords and their symbols. The stronger your theory, the easier every component becomes — which is why the next pages are a Grade 5 theory self-check.

Music Theory: Grade 5 Self-Check

A solid theory foundation makes performing, composing and analysis far easier



Reading and writing staff notation and handling chords is part of both specifications, and around Grade 5 standard is a comfortable place to be starting A Level. Use the checklist to spot gaps, then try the sample questions on the next two pages.

Can you confidently...

- Read and write in **treble and bass clefs** (and recognise the alto/tenor C-clef)?
- Work out **time signatures**, group notes and rests correctly, and add bar-lines?
- Name and write all **major and minor key signatures** up to six sharps and flats?
- Identify and build **intervals** by number and quality (major, minor, perfect, augmented, diminished)?
- Write **major, minor, harmonic and melodic minor, and chromatic scales**?
- Give the **technical names** of scale degrees (tonic, supertonic ... leading note)?
- Recognise and build **chords I, IV and V** and identify cadences?
- **Transpose** for common transposing instruments?
- Explain Italian, German and French **terms and signs**, ornaments and articulation?

How to use this section

Tick the things you can already do. For anything you can't, the sample questions overleaf give you a focused place to practise. The questions below are written in the Grade 5 style — for full, notation-based exam practice, try the official ABRSM sample paper.

Official practice paper

ABRSM Grade 5 Music Theory sample paper:

abrsn.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/music-theory-grade-5-sample-paper-200722.pdf

Free theory practice is also available through interactive theory websites — ask your teacher for the department's current recommendations.

Grade 5-Style Questions (1 of 2)

Rhythm & metre · intervals · scales & technical names



Rhythm and metre

- 1 A bar in **4/4** already contains a minim and a crotchet. In crotchet beats, how much value is still needed to complete the bar?
- 2 How many quavers make one complete bar of **6/8**, and how are they normally grouped?
- 3 Is **3/4** simple or compound time, and how many beats are in each bar?

Intervals

- 4 Name the interval (number and quality) from **E up to C#**.
- 5 Name the interval (number and quality) from **D up to Ab**.
- 6 An interval of a **perfect 4th above G** is which note?

Scales and technical names

- 7 Write the notes of the **D harmonic minor** scale, ascending.
- 8 Give the **technical name** for the note **B** in the scale of **E major**.
- 9 Name the **leading note** in the key of **Ab major**.

Grade 5-Style Questions (2 of 2)

Key signatures • chords & cadences • transposition • terms, signs & instruments



Key signatures

10 Name the major and minor keys with a key signature of **four sharps**.

11 How many flats are in **D $\flat$ major**, and name them in order.

Chords and cadences

12 In **G major**, name the notes of chord **V** in root position.

13 A progression from chord **V** to **chord I** is which cadence?

Transposition

14 A **clarinet in B $\flat$** plays a written **C**. What is the sounding (concert) pitch?

Terms, signs & instruments

15 Give the meaning of: (a) *ritardando* (b) *sostenuto* (c) *giocoso*.

16 Name the ornament shown by **tr** above a note, and describe how it is played.

17 To which family does the **cor anglais** belong, and to which instrument is it most closely related?

Check yourself

Answers are on the next page. Aim to explain *why*, not just *what* — that habit of justifying your answer is exactly what the A Level appraisal paper rewards.

Theory Self-Check — Answers

Mark your own work and note anything to revisit



1 One crotchet beat (minim = 2 + crotchet = 1 = 3; 4 - 3 = 1).

2 Six quavers, grouped 3 + 3 (compound duple time).

3 Simple time; three crotchet beats per bar.

4 Major 6th (C# is the 6th degree of E major).

5 Diminished 5th (D-A is a perfect 5th; A $\flat$ is a semitone smaller).

6 C.

7 D - E - F - G - A - B $\flat$ - C# - D (raised 7th).

8 Dominant (5th degree of E major).

9 G (the 7th degree of A $\flat$ major).

10 E major and C# minor.

11 Five flats: B $\flat$, E $\flat$, A $\flat$, D $\flat$, G $\flat$.

12 D - F# - A.

13 Perfect cadence.

14 B $\flat$ — a B $\flat$ instrument sounds a tone (major 2nd) lower than written.

15 (a) gradually getting slower; (b) sustained; (c) playful / humorous.

16 A trill — a rapid alternation between the written note and the note a step above it.

17 Woodwind family; it is a member of the oboe family (an alto oboe pitched in F).

Next step

Anything you got wrong is worth ten minutes of focused revision now. A confident Grade 5 theory base will pay off across all three A Level components — especially the symphony analysis and the Western Classical composition brief.

Summer Bridging Tasks

Short, practical tasks that map directly onto the three components



Performing

- Choose one piece you can have ready to perform early in the Autumn term, ideally moving towards Grade 6.
- Pick a second contrasting piece that could link to a different area of study.
- Record one performance and note one thing to improve in accuracy, technical control and expression.

Composing

- Write a short passage of music in a **Western Classical style** — a clear melody with simple, functional harmony and cadences.
- Take a four-bar idea and **develop** it: sequence it, vary the rhythm, change the key.
- Notate it (software, manuscript, or a clear written description with chords).

Appraising

- Listen to a Classical or Romantic **symphony movement** and describe it using the seven musical elements.
- Choose a piece you love and write a paragraph that makes an argument about it, backed by musical evidence.
- Revisit your GCSE comparison skills: compare two pieces and explain what's similar and different.

Bring these in

Keep your notes, recordings and any composition sketches together so you can share them in your first A Level lessons. Even rough work shows the department where you're starting from — and gives you a head start.

Your Transition Checklist

Where you're heading, at a glance



Component	Be ready to...
Component 1 — Performing	Work towards Grade 6 repertoire; build a varied programme (solo and ensemble) that links to areas of study; perform accurately, with control and expression.
Component 2 — Composing	Compose confidently in a Western Classical style for the set brief; create <i>and</i> develop ideas; write a free composition; notate and log your work.
Component 3 — Appraising	Analyse the symphony and your two chosen areas of study using the seven musical elements; handle unprepared extracts; write comparisons and extended essays.
Theory foundation	Read both clefs fluently, handle key signatures, intervals, scales, chords and transposition to around Grade 5 standard.

Five habits that carry you through

- Practise your instrument regularly and perform whenever you can.
- Compose little and often; develop ideas rather than just starting new ones.
- Listen widely and analytically across many genres.
- Keep your staff-notation and harmony sharp.
- Get an early start on the symphony — it's compulsory and new.

Specifications

GCSE: Pearson Edexcel Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9–1) in Music (1MU0).

A Level: WJEC Eduqas GCE A Level in Music (Option A — A660PA; Option B — A660PB).

Refer to the full specifications for complete assessment detail and the official set-work editions.

See you in September — come ready to perform, compose and listen.