

THE ELEMENTS OF MUSIC



The same way a cake is made up of ingredients that are mixed together to create unique flavours, Music is made up of a number of elements combined in different ways to create unique sounds.

You will be expected to use these elements of music to talk about the pieces you will be studying for the Listening and Appraising Component of the course.

CONTEXT/HISTORY

- When was the piece composed?
 - Why was it composed?
 - What was it composed for?
- What was happening at the time of composition socially/culturally?

- How are the elements of music relevant to the context of the piece?



PERFORMING FORCES

(TIMBRE/SONORITY)

The unique tone quality of an instrument and the sounds it is capable of producing by the use of different techniques.

- What instruments are used?
- How/in what way are they used?
- Do they play any special technique?

PERFORMING FORCES

(TIMBRE/SONORITY)

High/low
Tessitura

Rock Band

Strings, brass,
woodwind,
percussion

Symphony
Orchestra

Large/small
range

Extended
Techniques

Use of studio
effects

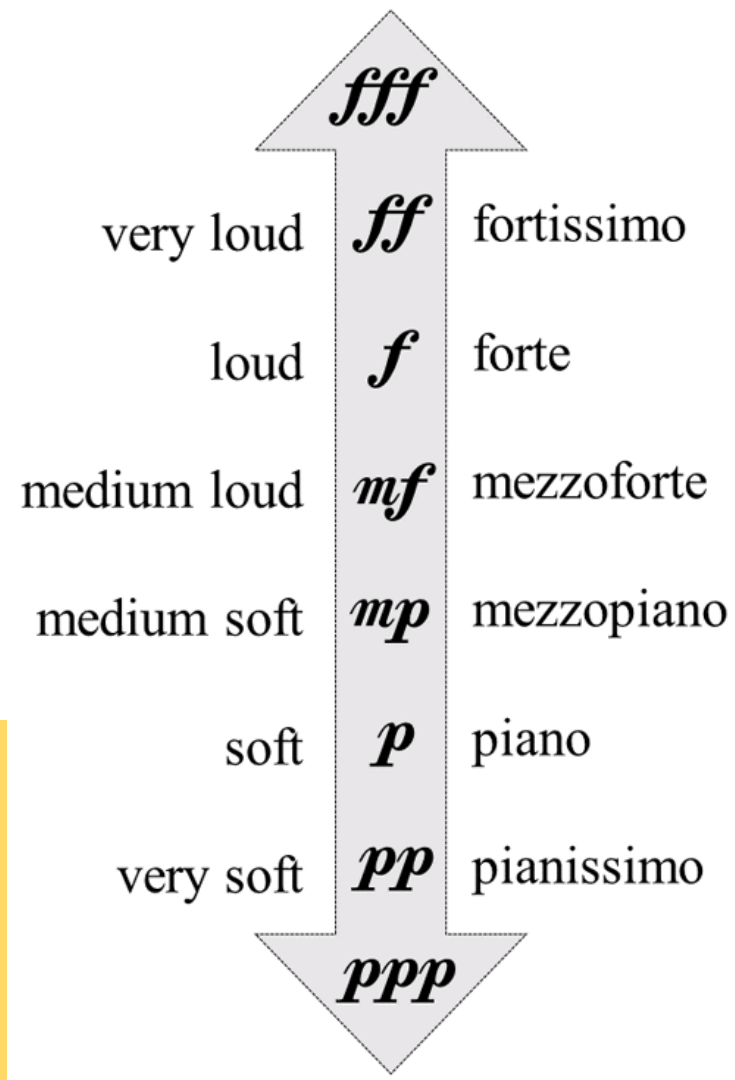
Voice:
Soprano, alto,
tenor, bass

DYNAMICS

Volume: The **loudness** or **softness** of music

If the question in the exam is worth more than 1 mark, you will be expected to not only say **what** the dynamics are, but how they change at different points during the extract.

Eg. for 3 marks:
The music starts piano (1), there is a crescendo (1), and it ends in mezzo forte.(1)



DYNAMICS

Crescendo

Accents

Use of mute

**Alternates
between loud
and soft**

**Pianissimo,
piano, mezzo
piano**

Diminuendo

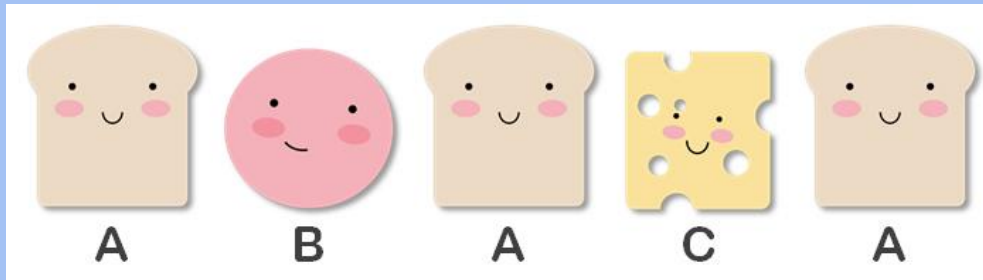
**Mezzo forte,
forte,
fortissimo**

**Whisper vs
Shout**

STRUCTURE/FORM

The way a piece is laid out and the characteristics of each section.

- How many sections does the piece have?
 - What are the sections called?
- Do the sections have any particular characteristics?



STRUCTURE/FORM

Verse/chorus

**Through
Composed**

**Ternary Form
(ABA)**

Movements

**Solo
Improvisation**

Outro/Coda

**Sonata Form:
Exposition,
Development,
Recapitulation**

Intro

Concerto

**Ritornello form
(ABACA)**



MELODY

The horizontal organisation of pitch.

- Does the melody move by step or does it have leaps?
 - Does it ascend or descend?
 - Does it use a small or wide range?
- Careful you don't focus on **word setting** unless you are asked in the question. Melody refers to what is happening in the **music**.

MELODY

Intervals

Chromatic melody

Steps vs leaps

Sequence

Wide/small range

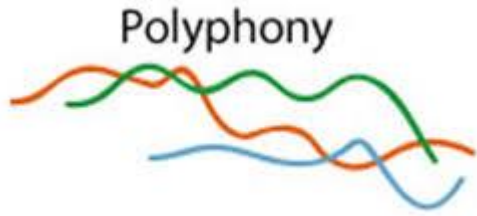
Motif/
leitmotif/
theme

Conjunct or
disjunct
movement

Ornamentation

Ostinato/riff

Ascending or
descending



TEXTURE

How the melody and harmony are combined to determine the overall quality of the sound in a piece.

- How many instruments are playing?
- What exactly are those instruments playing?

If the question in the exam is worth more than 1 mark, you will be expected to not only say **what** the texture is, but how it changes at different points during the extract. What instruments are added, drop out and the relationship between them.

Eg. for 3 marks:

The extract starts with a solo flute (1), the piano then comes in and plays a chordal accompaniment creating a homophonic texture (1), a bass is then added playing a tonic pedal (1).

TEXTURE

Unison

**Polyphony/
Counterpoint**

Imitation

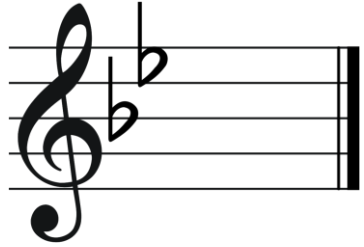
**Homophony/
melody
dominated
homophony**

**Call and
Response**

Monophony

Homorhythm

Pedal



TONALITY

What key a piece of music is in. Not to be confused with harmony (chords), although they will often appear together in a question.

- Does the piece modulate (change key) during the music?
 - Is it in a major key or minor key?
 - Is it modal?
 - Atonal?

TONALITY

Modality

Frequent
modulations

Minor tonality

Relative
minor/major

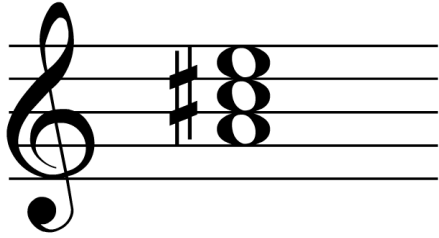
Major tonality

Tonic, Dominant,
subdominant

Home key
(tonic)

Modulations to
distant vs related
keys

Atonality



HARMONY

**The vertical organisation of pitch
(eg. chords)**

- What chords are used in the piece?
- What are the chord progressions?
 - Any interesting patterns?

HARMONY

Major, minor,
augmented,
diminished

Extended
chords (7ths,
9ths)

Functional or
non functional
harmony

Cadences

Suspensions

Consonance vs
Dissonance

Harmonic
Rhythm

Pedal (Tonic,
dominant,
inverted, bass)

Diatonic or non
diatonic

Chord
inversions/
Slash chords

Chromatic

RHYTHM

The pattern of **long** and **short** notes



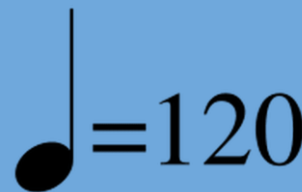
METRE

How many beats in a bar, and the note value.



TEMPO

The **speed** at which music is played/pulse.



RHYTHM

Moto perpetuo

Ostinato

**Straight
rhythm**

Cross rhythm

Triplets

Homorhythm

Dotted rhythm

**Lombardic/
Lilting
rhythm**

Syncopation

Polyrhythm

**Irregular note
groupings**

METRE & TEMPO

Free time

Colla Voce

Compound
metre (6/8,
9/8, 12/8)

Rubato

Simple metre
(2/4, 3/4,
4/4)

Steady pulse

Changes of
metre

Accelerando or
Ritardando



TECHNOLOGY

The effects applied to the voice or instruments through electronic means.

- These can be used in live performances to amplify, modify and extend the natural possibilities of an instrument.
 - Studio effects

TECHNOLOGY

Reverb

Delay/Echo

Panning

Multitracking

Synthesiser

Distortion

Samples

EQ

MELODIC DECORATION

The ways you can add interest to an established melody

Auxiliary note

**Acciaccatura/
grace note**

Mordent

Trill

Turn

Echappee

Passing note

Improvisation