

# Music

These subject guidelines should be read in conjunction with the “Introduction”, “Outline” and “Details—all essays” sections of this guide.

## Overview

An extended essay in music provides students with an opportunity to undertake in-depth research into a topic of genuine interest to them. The student is encouraged to develop and explore, in a disciplined and imaginative way, a research question appropriate to the subject.

The outcome of the research should be a coherent and structured piece of writing that effectively addresses a particular issue or research question and arrives at a particular, and preferably personal, conclusion.

**Real music** should be at the heart of an extended essay in music. This means that particular pieces of music, experienced via recordings, live performances or concerts, should be chosen as the core focus of the extended essay. Students should strive for a coherent verbal analysis and interpretation of **one or more pieces of music** in relation to the chosen research question.

Absolute reliance on textbooks and the Internet is discouraged and no extended essay in music should be based exclusively on such sources. Textbooks should be consulted only insofar as they may stimulate original ideas, provide models of disciplined, structured and informed approaches, and encourage direct and personal involvement with the essay topic.

## Choice of topic

The chosen topic may be inspired by one or several of the areas of interest listed here. (Please note, this is not an exhaustive list, but is intended for guidance only).

- Aspects of the Diploma Programme music course (for Diploma Programme music students)
- Local performances or concerts
- Musical cultures that students have encountered that are not their own
- Personal contact with composers and/or performers
- Direct involvement in actually making music
- Recordings
- Music on the Internet, or downloaded from it
- Other music that has a particular interest, emotional appeal or other importance for the student

It is strongly recommended that students are encouraged to be as much involved as possible in activities such as those listed previously during the writing process, if they are relevant to the chosen topic. However, it is recognized that students who choose an extended essay in music may not be studying the Diploma Programme music course.

It is **essential** that the topic chosen is distinctively musical. It is quite acceptable, for example, for a student to explore a topical question relating to popular music, jazz or blues, but the primary focus of the essay must be more concerned with the music itself than with the lives of the performers, the nature of the instruments used or the lyrics. Supervisors should, therefore, strongly discourage students who are primarily interested in analysing text or lyrics, particularly of pop songs, from submitting extended essays in music.

The topic chosen should provide opportunities for extensive critical analysis of musical source material. Topics that are entirely dependent on summarizing general secondary sources (such as textbooks and encyclopedias), and topics likely to lead to an essay that is essentially narrative or descriptive in nature, should be avoided. Restricting the scope of the essay will help to ensure a clear focus, and will also provide opportunities for demonstrating detailed musical understanding and critical analysis.

To achieve this goal, it is essential that the research question chosen can be effectively answered. Titles along the lines of “Clara Schumann”, for example, do not give much scope for effective analysis or argument—they are more likely to produce an account of her life and music. Topics such as “Computers and music” should be treated from both musical and critical perspectives, and should concentrate on musical, rather than technological, aspects. Redundant research questions such as the comparison of a play to an opera of the same title (which inevitably means that only half the essay is focused on music itself) should be avoided.

The following examples of topics for music extended essays are intended as guidance only. The pairings illustrate that focused topics (indicated by the first title) should be encouraged rather than broad topics (indicated by the second title).

- “The use of contrapuntal techniques in Bach's *Art of Fugue*” **is better than** “Bach's Fugues”.
- “Harmonic innovation in the bebop style of Dizzy Gillespie” **is better than** “The music of Dizzy Gillespie”.
- “The role of minimalist techniques in Balinese gamelan” **is better than** “Balinese gamelan”.
- “The influence of jazz in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*” **is better than** “Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*”.

Moreover, it may help if the student further defines the topic chosen for study in the form of a research question, followed by a statement of intent that indicates which broad process is going to be used in answering the question. In this way, the approach to the topic chosen may be even further clarified. Some examples of this could be as follows.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Edgard Varèse and Frank Zappa</b>
Research question	What is the influence of Edgard Varèse on the musical output of Frank Zappa?
Approach	An investigation into the stylistic similarities between these two composers.

<b>Title</b>	<b><i>Jesus Christ Superstar</i> and opera</b>
Research question	Is <i>Jesus Christ Superstar</i> a modern classical opera?
Approach	An investigation into Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical language and structures in this work, with reference to other relevant music from operas of the Western classical tradition.

<b>Title</b>	<b>The naming of Mozart’s music</b>
Research question	What evidence is there to support the title of Mozart’s divertimento <i>Ein Musikalischer Spass (A Musical Joke)</i> K. 522 (1787)?
Approach	An investigation into Mozart’s compositional techniques in this work.

However, it is important to bear in mind that, in the subject of music, a research “question” is sometimes not an accurate description of the task. Therefore, students should not force aesthetic or sociocultural issues into a question format when the articulation of a clear and probing inquiry into an idea is more appropriate. Examples of this could be as follows.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Emotional tension in traditional music</b>
Research question	Emotional tension and its significance in Japanese music.
Approach	An investigation into the mechanisms used in traditional Japanese music to create emotional tension, with reference to comparable examples in Western music.

Note that this approach is looking for a commonality of expressive device between two cultures, allowing for a probing inquiry through comparison. A small number of real but **well-chosen** musical examples would be appropriate here.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Musical continuity in Frederick Chopin’s 24 piano Preludes Op. 28</b>
Research question	An investigation into the presence and musical significance of a recurrent motif found throughout Frederick Chopin’s 24 piano Preludes, Op. 28.
Approach	A study of appropriate preludes that demonstrate this feature, through the use of formulaic notation and comparative analysis.

Note that this approach, while still using comparative analysis, is more focused on the musical mechanics of a series of works by the same composer, allowing for an in-depth study within the word limit. In this case, the student would only be able to study five or six preludes, given the parameters of an extended essay.

<b>Title</b>	<b>The music of Hildegard of Bingen—an explanation of its appeal and justification of its popularity</b>
Research question	An investigation into the reasons for the popularity of the music of Hildegard of Bingen today.
Approach	A study of Hildegard of Bingen’s musical style in comparison with other sacred music from her time, through analysis and comparison of musical examples, with particular reference to the aesthetic theory of musical expectation and inhibition.

This approach has its dangers, in the sense that it can be easy to make a supposition in a research question, without any evidence, and then try to prove the statement by subjective and superficial comment and analysis. However, at its best, this approach can allow investigation into other important areas of musical study and theory, while remaining focused on music itself.

## Treatment of the topic

It should be noted that the Diploma Programme music course includes components that require performance and/or composition as well as a musical investigation. An extended essay in music has a different purpose, in that the focus should be clearly on a verbal response to a research question.

In order to promote personal involvement in the extended essay, the use of primary sources that are locally available should be encouraged wherever possible. However, it is appreciated that, in certain situations, students may not necessarily have access to primary musical sources. In such situations, in order not to restrict the topics that can be investigated, recordings of a high quality are considered acceptable sources. It is important that the topic and research question reflect a firm emphasis on music, and that they do not become directed towards another subject area.

Appropriate resources for music include books, textbooks, the Internet, scores, interviews, recordings, and live performances or concerts of the music being studied. The inclusion of appropriate reference material, such as music notation, audio tapes or other musical examples, with music extended essays is encouraged as long as the material is directly supportive of, and relevant to, the argument/evaluation.

Students are expected to evaluate critically the resources consulted during the process of writing the essay by asking themselves the following questions.

- Which sources are vital to the support of my ideas, opinions and assertions?
- Which sources do not contribute to the analysis?

Students must choose a research question that is suitable for effective treatment within the word limit and is not of a trivial nature. Research questions that do not allow a systematic investigation that demonstrates critical musical analysis and detailed understanding are unlikely to be suitable. In some instances, it may become clear at an early stage in the research that too few sources are available to permit such an investigation. In such cases, a change of focus should be made.

Many different approaches to the research question can be appropriate, for instance:

- use of primary sources (music and musicians) and secondary sources (material **about** music) in order to establish and appraise varying interpretations
- analysing sources (primary and secondary) in order to explore and explain particular aspects of musical techniques
- using primary source material for an analysis, with emphasis on a particular aspect of the music
- collecting and analysing orally transmitted and/or written music from live musicians and/or composers through recordings, possibly leading to a comparison of similar or different music.

Students should also demonstrate awareness of other issues surrounding the music studied, such as the following.

- Do I show an awareness of the value and limitations of the music I am studying through analysing its origin and purpose?
- Do I show a consistently good musical understanding in setting the research question into context and addressing it fully and effectively?

Relevant outcomes of this analysis should be integrated into the student's argument.

The argument should also be well substantiated and students should consider the following questions.

- With what evidence do I support my comments and conclusions?
- Is this evidence relevant and well founded, and not based simply on my preconceptions?

Frequent reference to the assessment criteria by both the supervisor and the student will help keep a sharper focus on the project.

## Interpreting the assessment criteria

Please note: extended essays that do not focus on real music are likely to score 0 in criterion A, and are unlikely to score highly in criteria C, D, F and G.

### **Criterion A: research question**

The research question can often be best defined in the form of a question. It may, however, also be presented as a statement or proposition for discussion. It must be:

- specific and sharply focused
- appropriate to the particular area of music being explored
- centred on music and not on peripheral issues such as biography or social discourses
- stated clearly early on in the essay.

Note that larger-scale musical works or groups of pieces may limit the possibility of effective treatment within the word limit.

### **Criterion B: introduction**

The introduction should relate the research question to existing subject knowledge: the student's personal experience or particular opinion is rarely relevant here.

The introduction should not be seen as an opportunity for padding out an essay with a lengthy account of the context of the music.

### **Criterion C: investigation**

The range of resources available will be influenced by various factors, but above all by the topic.

- Students should use primary sources (scores, recordings, performances, interviews) in the first instance, with secondary sources (textbooks and the comments of other musicians) as evidential support.
- The proper planning of an essay should involve interrogating source material in light of the research question, so that the views of other musicians are used to support the student's own argument, and not as a substitute for that argument. It may thus be helpful for a student to challenge a statement by a musician, in reference to the music being studied, instead of simply agreeing with it, where there is evidence to support such a challenge.
- If students make use of Internet-based sources, they should do so critically and circumspectly in full awareness of their potential unreliability.

### **Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied**

Students are expected to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the music chosen, together with its historical, social and cultural, as well as academic, contexts. Wherever possible, this knowledge should be based at least partially on primary sources.

### **Criterion E: reasoned argument**

Students should be aware of the need to give their essays the backbone of a developing argument. Personal views should not simply be stated but need to be supported by reasoned argument to persuade the reader of their validity. Straightforward descriptive or narrative accounts that lack analysis do not usually advance an argument and should be avoided.

### **Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject**

Students should accurately and consistently analyse technical aspects of the music (melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, tone colour, and lyrics or text), demonstrating an understanding and a persuasive personal interpretation of the music.

### **Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject**

Students are expected to make effective use of musical terminology and, where appropriate, notation. Notation may take a variety of forms, depending on the type of music studied.

### **Criterion H: conclusion**

"Consistent" is the key word here: the conclusion should develop out of the argument and not introduce new or extraneous matter. It should not repeat the material of the introduction; rather, it should present a new synthesis in light of the discussion.

### **Criterion I: formal presentation**

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to academic standards about the way in which research papers should be presented. The presentation of essays that omit a bibliography or that do not give references for quotations is deemed unacceptable (level 0). Essays that omit one of the required elements—title page, table of contents, page numbers—are deemed no better than satisfactory (maximum level 2), while essays that omit two of them are deemed poor at best (maximum level 1).

In music, discographies should be included where appropriate; musical examples, and tables and charts, if relevant, should appear in the body of the essay, as close as possible to their first reference.

### **Criterion J: abstract**

The abstract is judged on the clarity with which it presents an overview of the research and the essay, not on the quality of the research question itself, nor on the quality of the argument or the conclusions.

### **Criterion K: holistic judgment**

Qualities that are rewarded under this criterion include the following.

- Intellectual initiative: Ways of demonstrating this in music essays include the choice of topic and research question, locating and using a wide range of sources, including some that may have been little used previously or generated for the study (for instance, transcripts of oral interviews).
- Insight and depth of understanding: These are most likely to be demonstrated as a consequence of detailed research, reflection that is thorough and well informed, and reasoned argument that consistently and effectively addresses the research question.
- Creativity: In music essays, this includes qualities such as comparison of musical features, inventive approaches to musical analysis and new approaches to popular topics.