

Music: Subject-specific guidance

See also: *Extended essay guide* and *Extended essay teacher support material*

Overview

An extended essay (EE) in music gives students an opportunity to undertake in-depth research into a topic in music of genuine interest to them.

Music—as a form of expression in diverse contexts, with intent, purpose and meaning—should be at the heart of the essay. It must focus on particular pieces of music, experienced by the student through:

- recordings
- score study or
- performances and concerts.

The student is required to embark on a systematic, disciplined and imaginative investigation of musical works. The basis of that investigation, for the purpose of the EE, is musical analysis.

The outcome of the investigation should be a structured and coherent piece of writing in the form of an academic research paper. It requires:

- an analytical research approach, based on both primary and secondary sources
- formal language, including the use of appropriate subject terminology
- meticulous presentation.

Students also need to display:

- knowledge and understanding of their chosen musical context and genre
- critical thinking in relation to their topic through reasoned arguments, discussion, interpretation and evaluation.

Students do not have to be enrolled in the Diploma Programme music course to write an EE in music. However, they must be familiar with the different aspects and requirements of the course.

Choice of topic

Researching and writing their EE allows students to gain a deeper understanding of music. A simple analysis of a piece of music is not enough. Students must also develop critical arguments with the aim of gaining deeper insights into, for example, musical contexts or theory.

Their choice of topic must therefore give them scope to do this.

Sources of ideas may include:

- the Diploma Programme music course
- performances or concerts
- musical cultures students have encountered within their own experience
- personal contact with composers or performers

- direct involvement in the making of music
- recordings (distributed in various forms)
- other music that has a particular interest, emotional appeal or specific importance for the student.

This list is not exhaustive, but is intended for guidance and inspiration.

Topics and research questions for students to avoid

- Research questions that lead to essays that are essentially narrative or descriptive.
- Research questions that are too broad to support effective analysis or argument within 4,000 words. For example, “What is African Music?” or “What influence did Michael Jackson have on the 20th Century?”
- Overly studied themes—they will lead to essays that are obvious or predictable.
- Non-musical topics, such as:
 - the life of a performer
 - the nature and development of instruments or technology
 - lyrics
 - biological, neurological, therapeutic or educational issues.

Research question


Once they have decided upon their area of investigation, students must develop a focused research question. The question must have a clear musical focus but not unduly restrict the development of students’ research.



For example, the research question: “How is counterpoint used in Bartók’s *Concerto for Orchestra*?” is a good one because:

1. It clearly indicates:
 - the music that will be studied—Bartók’s *Concerto for Orchestra*—a musical source of appropriate scope
 - the compositional element—counterpoint—the focus of the investigation.
2. It does not limit the potential development of the study unnecessarily.
3. The investigation of how counterpoint is used in Bartók’s concerto could subsequently inform a student’s work for the Diploma Programme music course component of creating.

Examples of topics

These examples are just for guidance. Students must ensure their choice of topic is focused (left-hand column) rather than broad (right-hand column).

 Focused topics	 Broad topics
The role of folk music in Bartók’s <i>Concerto for Orchestra</i>	Bartók’s music

 Focused topics	 Broad topics
The rhythmic and harmonic aspects in the style of Dizzy Gillespie as evident in pieces X and Y	The features of bebop
Compositional techniques in Balinese gamelan pieces X and Y	The characteristics of Indonesian music
A comparison of the singing styles of Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan, as evidenced by their interpretations of standards X, Y and Z	Understanding jazz singing

Treatment of the topic

Musical analysis is the starting point of the investigation, but it is not sufficient for completing the essay successfully. Students are also expected to place their analysis in context:

- to relate their findings to the wider field of music and
- if possible, to add their own creative perspective.

Throughout the EE, their arguments must be supported by findings from their research.

At the beginning of the EE, students should:

- clearly state their research question
- outline their methodology for answering it.

Research methodology

Primary sources

Musical analysis is the starting point for the research and data collection. This may involve the study of a score or recording. Through their analysis, students identify musical elements and compositional devices and how these have been used.

Primary sources of information for students' initial analysis include:

- recordings
- scores
- concerts
- observation
- interviews with performers
- questionnaires or surveys.

Students should also consider the "bigger" picture. Typical questions may start with "Why?", for example:

- Why has the composer made specific musical decisions?
- Why are specific combinations more effective than others?
- Why does a piece of music work in one context but not in another?

Students may also want to discuss:

- performance conventions and interpretations of the piece
- influences on the piece or its genre
- the importance of the piece in its time.

Secondary sources

To inform their explanation and interpretation of their chosen piece of music, students should explore what others have said about:

- the piece of music itself
- its musical context or
- other music of the same genre and style.

Sources for this include:

- textbooks
- books about music
- academic music journals
- the internet.

The EE should not be based exclusively on material from textbooks, scripts or the internet.

When choosing their topic, students must ensure that they will have access to a sufficient range of relevant and appropriate sources. If it becomes clear at an early stage in the research that too few sources are available, students should change their topic.

Developing an argument

Ultimately, students' analysis needs to lead them to formulate a reasoned argument. These questions may help them to do this:

- What are the conclusions and impacts of this investigation?
- What do the results and findings tell us about the field of music?
- What are the lessons learned from the musical analysis of this composition?
- How does it affect other musicians, or my composing and performing studies?

Their conclusion(s) should cover some or all of the following:

- what they have learned from their analysis
- how it fits into the field of research concerning the topic
- any shortcomings of the study and questions that arose but remain unanswered.

To further refine the focus of their topic, students can follow their topic and research question with a statement outlining the research approach they will take to answer it.

Examples of topics, research questions and suggested approaches

Once students have identified their topic and written their research question, they can decide how to research their answer. They may find it helpful to write a statement outlining their broad approach. These examples are for guidance only.

Topic	Ennio Morricone's film music
Research question	What compositional techniques support characterization in the music Ennio Morricone wrote for the film <i>The Mission</i> ?
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A study of pitch, motives, orchestration and texture used in three pieces from the soundtrack to <i>The Mission</i> (musical analysis). • An investigation to determine and discuss how Ennio Morricone's use of musical elements and compositional devices support characterization in the film (eg comparative analysis, questionnaires, literature review).

Topic	The music of Astor Piazzola
Research question	What is the significance of Piazzola's <i>New Tango</i> style in the development of the genre?
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An analysis of the harmonic, melodic, rhythmic and stylistic elements in "Libertango" by Astor Piazzola to identify important characteristics of his new tango style (musical analysis). • A brief summary of the history of tango to identify how the characteristics have transformed the genre (eg literature review). • An investigation into how the identified characteristics have impacted upon the further development of the style (eg literature review, musical analysis, interview with composers).

Topic	Musical contribution of the rock group Muse
Research question	How do the musical influences found in pieces X, Y and C by the rock group Muse impact upon the listener experience?

Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An analysis of melodic, rhythmic and harmonic elements in pieces X, Y and C by Muse that reveals influences from Chopin, Schubert and Rachmaninoff respectively (musical analysis). • A discussion of how the influence of composers of the Romantic has shaped the musical style of the group (eg literature review). • An investigation into the impact of these influences on the listener (eg through a questionnaire or interviews).
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Topic	Koto music
Research question	To what extent are compositions for Koto by Tadao Sawai distinct in the 20th century?
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A study of three Koto pieces by Tadao Sawai detailing their traditional and innovative elements (musical analysis). • An investigation into the origins of these traditional and innovative elements, what inspired their effective use in these compositions and how they shaped Tadao Sawai's compositional style (eg literature review, interview with performers of these pieces). • A discussion on whether the chosen compositions for Koto break with Japanese musical conventions and traditions (eg comparative analysis, interviews with performers).

Important note on evidence

The EE should be modelled on an academic journal or research paper. The reader should be able to read and understand it without access to external web links, video files, CDs or DVDs.

Examiners will not access any material contained in an external source when assessing an essay (not even in an appendix). If information central to the argument is included in an external link, the examiner will treat it as though the point has not been made.

However, as long as they directly support and are relevant to the EE's analysis, the following do constitute useful evidence:

- notated examples of music
- score excerpts
- transcriptions
- graphs
- references to an attached score.

An important note on “double-dipping”

Students must ensure that their EE does not duplicate other work they are submitting for the Diploma Programme. For example, a student’s work for the musical links investigation must not be submitted for an EE. Similarly, the music pieces selected as prescribed works are not acceptable topics for EEs.

The music EE and the internal assessment

An EE in music is not an extension of the internal assessment (IA) task. Students must ensure that they understand the differences between the two.

- Students may not investigate pieces for the EE they have chosen to submit for the performing component.
- Students may not submit research on pieces that have influenced the student’s submissions for the creating component.

Supervisors play an important role in guiding students on these distinctions. Students risk their diploma if academic misconduct is detected.

Interpreting the EE assessment criteria

Criterion A: Focus and method

(Strands: Topic, Research question, Methodology)

To successfully meet this criterion, students will choose a topic that focuses on analysis, investigation, discussion and evaluation of actual music, that is, musical source material.

While students may be inspired by their musical encounters and experiences, it is important that the chosen topic is relevant and with a distinct research purpose.

The topic is expressed through a clearly stated research question, which is focused and specific without being unduly restrictive to the development of the research study.

The essay must outline the methodology that is followed throughout the research. It should include:

- musical analysis of performances, scores or transcriptions
- collecting and evaluating data, for example through comparative analysis of:
 - interpretations
 - interviews or
 - questionnaires.

The data collection, analysis and evaluation will lead to critical arguments that reflect the student's deeper insight into the material studied.

Students must refer to secondary sources to place the study into a wider context.

Students also need to demonstrate that:

- their essay and research has been well planned
- the methodology used or the approach to the topic is appropriate to the research question.

Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding

(Strands: Context, Subject-specific terminology and concepts)

To successfully meet this criterion, students are expected to demonstrate their prior knowledge of the material studied and how the research is developed in relation to existing insights. Thus, the essay must demonstrate an effective and critical understanding of the topic chosen.

Students should show that they have consulted secondary sources and, throughout the investigation, draw on that existing knowledge to:

- support their research
- enrich the argument and findings.

Thus, sufficient musical preparation and understanding are prerequisites for effective research in music, as is fluency in the use of appropriate subject-specific terminology and reference to or application of musical concepts.

Another important aspect of all research and investigation is the reliability and validity of the study. This refers to choice and use of sources, the musical analysis as well as the evaluation of the collected data within the relevant musical context.

The information and evidence presented needs to be critically evaluated. Students must demonstrate critical awareness of the quality, balance and quantity of their sources. They are also expected to show awareness of any limitations or uncertainties inherent in their approach.

Subjective accounts are not appropriate.

Students should demonstrate fluency in the use of appropriate subject-specific terminology and reference to or application of musical concepts.

Criterion C: Critical thinking

(Strands: Research, Analysis and Discussion and evaluation)

Students must be able to interrogate the musical and critical sources selected in order to construct and support a reasoned argument that culminates in a conclusion and answers the research question.

Students should aim to develop their own argument rather than simply adopting the views of critics. EEs that mainly provide viewpoints derived from secondary sources, or that are wholly or largely narrative or descriptive of the material, do not provide evidence of analytical skills and do not score well.

The points contained in the argument and analysis must, at all times, be supported by specific, relevant material chosen from the student's research.

Special efforts should be made to maintain a reasoned, logical argument focused on the research question throughout.

An assessment of the extent to which the research question is answered by the information accessed should form part of the argument.

The conclusion ought to summarize the student's response to the research question and must be consistent with the position and evidence presented in the essay. It should not introduce material that has not already been discussed. Questions that have arisen as a result of the research, and that are considered relevant, may be included.

Criterion D: Presentation

(Strands: Structure, Layout)

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to accepted academic standards in relation to how research papers should be presented. It also relates to how well these elements support the reading, understanding and evaluation of the essay.

Students may provide a section and sub-section structure to their essays, with appropriate informative headings.

Use of charts, images and tables

Any charts, images or tables from literature sources included in the essay must be carefully selected and labelled. They should only be used if they are directly relevant to the research question, contribute towards the understanding of the argument and are of a good graphic quality. Only selected materials (photographs, images, figures, notation scores) that are central to the argument of the essay should be included in the body of the essay, as close as possible to their first reference.

Special attention is necessary when including score excerpts so that the information needed to read them appropriately is presented, including name of the work, composer, source information, location of the excerpt within the score, recording or performance, clefs, key signatures, tempo, etc. When size permits, it is recommended that the excerpts appear in the body of the essay, in close proximity to the text they illustrate.

Sometimes, the inclusion of a separate annotated score, to be consulted with the reading of the EE, may be the most effective option. This may be included in the appendix of the EE, but students must be aware that any information with direct relevance to the analysis, discussion and evaluation of the EE must be contained in the body of the essay. Examiners are not required to read information in an appendix.

Any material that is not original must be carefully acknowledged, with specific attention paid to the acknowledgment and referencing of quotes and ideas. This acknowledgment and referencing is applicable to audio-visual material, text, graphs and data published in print and electronic sources. For music, students must also reference transcripts of music and live performances as well as include time within a recording or track and bar numbers within a score. If the referencing does not meet the minimum standard as indicated in the guide (name of author, date of publication, title of source and page numbers as applicable), and is not consistently applied, work will be considered as a case of possible academic misconduct.

A bibliography is essential and has to be presented in a standard format. Title page, table of contents, page numbers, etc must contribute to the quality of presentation.

The essay must not exceed 4,000 words of narrative. Students should be aware that examiners will not read beyond the 4,000-word limit, nor assess any material presented thereafter.

Criterion E: Engagement

(Strands: Reflections on planning and progress)

This criterion assesses the student's engagement with their research focus and the research process. It will be applied by the examiner at the end of the assessment of the essay, after considering the student's *Reflections on planning and progress Form* (RPPF).

Students are expected to provide reflections on the decision-making and planning process undertaken in completing the essay. Students must demonstrate how they arrived at a topic as well as the methods and approach used. This criterion assesses the extent to which a student has evidenced the rationale for decisions made throughout the planning process and the skills and understandings developed.

For example, students may reflect on:

- the approach and strategies they chose, and their relative success
- the [Approaches to learning](#) skills they have developed and their effect on the student as a learner
- how their conceptual understandings have developed or changed as a result of their research
- setbacks they faced in their research and how they overcame these questions that emerged as a result of their research **student** thinking, creativity and originality within the research process.

The **student** voice must be clearly present and demonstrate the learning that has taken place.