

Mental prompts for aural questions

This article (written by Paul Owens from Sydney Technical High School) provides a series of prompts and possible discussion points for each of the musical concepts. The material will be particularly useful for Music 1 students who are preparing for the aural section of their examination. However, it is also a useful tool for Music 2 students.

Concept: Pitch (Melody)

Sub-concepts	*Possible points of discussion
Strands	Themes; statement; tune; subject; counter-melodies; focus lines; competition.
Contour	Intervals (conjunct/disjunct); shape (angular, undulating); direction (ascending/descending); intervals (focus/central tone(s), simple/compound, microtones); predictability (consistent/inconsistent); harmonic implications (arpeggio, broken chord, triadic).
Structural divisions	Phrases (symmetrical/asymmetrical; regular/irregular; predictable/unpredictable; short/extended; sub-phrases; cells.
Structural features	Climax; question & answer; internal variations; repetition; subsequent contrasts (diminution, augmentation, inversion, retrograde); sequence; imitation; cadential points; recognition (conventional/unique); use of motifs/riffs; function (ostinato).
Interpretation	Performance techniques (ornamentation, e.g. trills, turns, sliding, vibrato); timbral effects; stylistic features.
Pitch dimensions	register; definite/indefinite; intonation; tuning.
Pitch organisation	Diatonic (major, minor); other (modal, jazz scale, whole tone, ethnic scale, alternative, chromatic); atonal (12 tone, aleatoric, electronic); traditional/non-traditional; weakened/ implied; key schemes (relationships, modulation).
Melodic timbre	Individual/group; exploration; programmatic; articulation.

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Concept: Pitch (Harmony)

Sub-concepts	*Possible points of discussion
Chords	Vocabulary (primary/secondary, extended, altered, chromatic, poly); alternative (clusters, quartel, open fifths).
Pitch organisation	Modulation; reinforcing tones; pedal/drone. (See melody for further information).
Progression	Established (12 bar blues); repetitive; focal chords; modulation; regular/irregular; cadences; motion. (See texture for further information).
Voicing	General spread (closed/open, sparse/compact); range/register; patterns (arpeggios/broken chords; triads; alberti bass); number of parts (2, 3, 4 etc); inversions.
Textural emphasis	Voice leading; linear/vertical; type (monophony, polyphony, homophony, heterophony); counterpoint.
Rate / rhythm	Rapid/slow; rhythmic patterns, regular/irregular harmonic change; pedal point/drone; ostinato.

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Concept: Duration

Sub-concepts	*Possible points of discussion
Beat/pulse	Regular/irregular; reinforced (strong/well marked), suppressed (weak/unmarked); agogic; sub-pulse; changing pulse; pace (level of activity in relation to the beat).
Tempo	Static; changing (abrupt, ritenuto, accelerando, rubato); relationship to pace.
Metre	Time signatures (simple/compound); hemiola; triple, quadruple etc; regular/irregular (isometric/multimetric); groupings; suppressed/implicit; ambiguous; superimposed; anacrusis.
Note values, rhythm	Note values (unity, contrast, recurrence); notational methods (conventional, graphic); average lengths (short/long); note types (dotted, sustained).
Patterns	Riffs; important figures; polyrhythms; syncopation; key groupings; unusual figures (couplets, duplets); known patterns (waltz, rap etc).
Levels (texture)	Cohesive; fragmented; prominent/secondary.
Articulation	Accents; staccato; legato; slur; attack/decay; vibrato.

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Concept: Tone colour

Sub-concepts	*Possible points of discussion
Category	Brass, woodwind, strings, chordophone/electrophone etc; traditional/non-traditional.
Ensemble	Established (string, orchestra, rock band etc); traditional/non-traditional.
Instrumentation	Identification (tenor sax, soprano, didjeridoo etc); traditional / non-traditional.
Orchestration	role (individually and in combination); effects.
Technique and effects	Mute; glissando; double stopping; flutter tonguing; pizzicato; harmonics; vibrato; sliding/ bending; virtuosity; dexterity; intonation; ornaments (trill, turn etc, appoggiatura).
Quality	Breathy, penetrating, resonant, mellow, majestic, piercing, sonorous, piercing, oily, rich, shrill; harsh.

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Concept: Dynamics and expressive techniques

Sub-concepts	*Possible points of discussion
Level	f, p (and their multiples and subdivisions); relative change; terraced/block; internal variation.
Gradations	Crescendo, decrescendo, diminuendo.
Silence	Pause; rests; textural definition; highlighting; tension/resolution.
Orchestration	Blend, contrast, manipulating dynamic levels; balance; acoustical properties.

Articulation, tempo	(See Duration)
Stylistic indications	Swing, electronic.
Technique and effects	(See Tone colour)

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Concept: Texture

Sub-concepts	*Possible points of discussion
General type	Homophonic; polyphonic; monophonic; heterophonic; contrapuntal; antiphonal; number of lines; foreground/background emphasis; opposing/complementary; solo; accompaniment.
Motion	Contrary; similar; oblique; parallel; imitative; sequential; staggered; cascaded; discrete; continuous.
Level of activity	Sparse/dense; cluttered; busy; confused; well-defined. Role Linear dependence/independence; harmonic; melodic;
Role	Linear dependence/independence; harmonic; melodic; accompaniment; rhythmic support; pulse reinforcing; countermelodic; doubling; backing; open/close harmony.

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Concept: Structure

Sub-concepts	*Possible points of discussion
Macro	Binary; ternary; rondo; sonata; theme & variation; fugal; strophic; through composed; episodic; 12 bar blues; organic.
Micro	Introduction; coda; verse; chorus; bridge/transition; phrase; motif; riff/ repetitive pattern; call & response/question & answer; fragment; theme; statement; exposition, development,recapitulation; growth; dialogue; refrain.
Repetition	<p>Music is either through-composed or dependent in some way on repetition. The repetition may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • symmetrical (repeating the same material)§ a variation or development (repeating it with a difference) • a digression (doing something else with the material) • a recurrence (eventually repeating the same thing). <p>Is it the material the same? Is it different? Is it new? (See Contrast & Unity below)</p>
Unity	Repetition of a melody or phrase; use of a rhythmic motif; consistent style and use of concepts; repetition of a harmonic pattern (e.g. ground bass; rhythmic or melodic ostinato); drones or pedal point; sequences or modified patterns; static instrumentation; modulation (same material); structural repetition e.g. rondo, theme & variation; instrumentation changing roles but using previously heard material.
Contrast	Modulation; one line may be conjunct whilst the other is disjunct; introduction of new material; change in metre, tempo or rhythmic patterns/feel; changes in the accompaniment or in one part;

	moving from one register to another; tonality (major/minor/modal/pentatonic); harmony (consonance/dissonance); structural (new section); stylistic contrast; differing phrase lengths; dynamic contrast.
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