

# Solo artists from the 1990s to the present day

## DIGITAL EFFECTS

Even more effects have been available to musicians since the 1990s. The most common effects are still reverb, echo, delay and distortion. However you may hear effects such as **filters** (such as the 'telephone filter' effect used in Christina Aguilera's 'Genie In A Bottle' and the now-overused **auto-tune** effect.

**Pop music diversified into many different genres from the 1980s onwards. Solo artists of the 1980s and 1990s didn't always fall neatly into a specific bracket: their music often changed from album to album.**

In the 1990s, the main strands running through pop music included rock, dance, rap and electronic music, alongside more conventional pop music. Music videos had become as important as the music itself, with MTV becoming increasingly popular over the decade.

Digital technology was well established by now, with digital effects often being added to instruments and voices. By this time a lot of music was recorded on computer sequencers (such as Pro Tools or Cubase), allowing producers much greater control over their music.

**Technology you may hear in 1990s music includes:**

- Sampling (sections and loops taken from other recordings)
- Drum loops
- Reverb/echo (though not as much reverb as in 1980s recordings)
- **Overdubbing** - due to the advances in technology, it was possible to record many more instrumental and vocal parts, often resulting in complex and thick textures.

As with the pop ballads, with the following tracks you will hear a build-up in instrumentation, texture, and dynamics over the course of the song.

## Michael Jackson: 'Black Or White' (1991)

- First single from Jackson's eighth album, *Dangerous* (1991).
- The song contains elements of rock, dance, rap and funk.
- Accompanied by a high-budget music video, and an accompanying narrative.
- The opening 'skit' features Guns N' Roses guitarist Slash.
- We will be referring to the video of the song (available on YouTube/Vevo), which differs significantly from the album version.

Structure	Highlights
<b>Introduction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The two-bar electric guitar riff is played 12 times (making the introduction 24 bars long).</li> <li>■ Michael Jackson's famous 'ow!' exclamations make an early appearance.</li> <li>■ The drums and percussion (the cowbell is used a lot here) give the music its driving force. The drums are looped (they are effectively an ostinato).</li> <li>■ The bass guitar is doubled by a synthesiser throughout the song, creating a more electronic sound.</li> </ul>
<b>Verse 1 (2:40)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The instrumentation of the introduction stays largely the same. Michael Jackson sings the first verse.</li> </ul>
<b>Instrumental break (3:00)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The guitar riff is played six times (12 bars).</li> </ul>
<b>Verse 2 (3:26)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The bass guitar rhythm is joined by an acoustic guitar at the start of this verse.</li> <li>■ Backing vocals highlight certain phrases sung by the lead vocal.</li> <li>■ Michael Jackson adds his idiosyncratic high-pitched exclamations.</li> </ul>
<b>Instrumental break (3:47)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The guitar riff is played eight times, with spoken and sung phrases from Michael Jackson.</li> </ul>
<b>Rock section (4:20)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The guitar riff and percussion stop.</li> <li>■ The rhythm of the accompaniment becomes repeated semiquavers on the drum kit and guitar.</li> <li>■ The texture becomes much more complicated, with a riff played on a distorted guitar, and triplet rhythms in the synth part.</li> </ul>
<b>Rap section (4:38)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ There is an eight-bar rap over a funk-influenced riff, played using a 'clean' guitar sound.</li> </ul>
<b>Refrain from verse (4:55)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Michael Jackson returns with the second half of a verse. The original instrumentation of this verse returns.</li> </ul>
<b>Outro (5:28)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Repeated guitar riff and words for the changing faces which appear in the video.</li> </ul>



## Kylie Minogue: 'Red Blooded Woman' (2004)

- Written for Kylie's ninth studio album *Body Language*, 'Red Blooded Woman' was released as a single in 2004.
- Kylie's aim for *Body Language* was to create a dance-pop album inspired by electronic music of the 1980s. The song contains a quote from the 1980s synth-pop hit 'You Spin Me Round (Like A Record)'.

### Musical elements and devices

### Features heard in 'Red Blooded Woman'

#### Instruments and timbre (acoustic and electronic)

- Synthesisers are used, as are programmed drum loops.
- The song incorporates many different sounds, some of which are **panned** left or right to separate them from one another.
- The backing vocals have been heavily treated with effects – often with reverb, and often with a **filter** effect, where the vocals have a 'squeezed' sound.

#### Pitch and melody

- The melody of the chorus is higher than that of the verse.
- 'Boy! Boy!' is a short vocal **hook** which is used in the chorus.
- The chorus uses a relatively small range of pitches.

#### Rhythm and metre

- Backbeat with prominent semiquaver pattern on the hi-hat.
- The rhythms (especially in the lead melody) are often syncopated.

#### Tempo

- The tempo is fast (140bpm), designed to get people up on the dance floor.

#### Texture

- Complicated, busy texture, although the song is essentially melody-and-accompaniment.
- The different instruments create a **collage** effect.
- The backing vocals become more prominent as the song progresses.

#### Structure and phrasing

- Verse-chorus structure with a 'break' section, which focuses on the backing vocals.

#### Technology, including amplification and recording techniques

- Drum loops.
- Synthesiser (bass lines and synth strings).
- Digital effects, especially filtering and **pitch-shifting** on 'la la la; freakin' around!' in the break (2:50–2:56).
- Use of samples (the choir sample, panned hard right).
- Use of reverb/echo.



## TEST YOURSELF

### 'Someone Like You'

This song, by Adele, was written in 2011. It is a reflective song about Adele's ex-boyfriend, who had broken up with her.

Listen from 0:00–0:42 and answer the following questions:

1. Describe the piano accompaniment at the opening of the extract. (1)
2. What is the interval of the first two notes of the vocal line ('I heard...')? 2nd, 3rd, 4th or 5th? (1)
3. Select the most appropriate term for Adele's treatment of the word 'dreams' (0:33). (1)  
 i. staccato    ii. tremolo    iii. vibrato    iv. glissando

Listen to the first chorus (1:13–1:48)

4. How does the melody differ from the verse to illustrate passion and intensity? (1)

See answers on page 177.

### FURTHER LISTENING

- Mariah Carey: 'Always Be My Baby' (1996)
- Beyoncé: 'Crazy In Love' (2003)
- Sam Smith: 'Like I Can' (2014).

# Exam preparation

## What to expect from the exam

**As you know, the listening exam is worth 40% of your total mark at GCSE. You have a lot of time to study and prepare for the listening exam, but you only have one-and-a-half hours to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of all the Areas of Study covered in the previous chapters.**

Although the exam contains 'unseen' listening, you can prepare for certain types of questions in advance, and knowing *how* to answer these different types of questions will help to ensure your knowledge and understanding comes across. Your teachers will probably go through example papers with you, and this guide contains several 'exam-style' questions for you to practise.

**You will notice the same words come up over and over again in the questions:**

- Give
- Name
- Identify
- Describe
- Explain
- Suggest
- Compare.

Different questions require a different level of detail. You can look at the number of marks available for each question to give you an indication of how many points you need to make.





The following table will also help you approach each question:

Words used in the question	Guidance for answering that question
<b>Give</b>	<p><i>'Give the musical term for a repeated musical pattern.'</i></p> <p>A simple one-word answer or two-word phrase is appropriate here.</p> <p><i>'Give two features...that are typical of this style.'</i></p> <p>Short phrases or words are fine here, as long as they describe musical features that a) are typical of the style you are hearing, and b) can actually be heard in the extract.</p>
<b>Identify (same as 'Name')</b>	<p><i>'Identify the period of composition for this extract.'</i></p> <p>A simple one-word answer or two-word phrase is fine here.</p>
<b>Describe</b>	<p><i>'Describe the rhythms played by the different layers of the steel band.'</i></p> <p>Questions that ask you to 'describe' something expect specific musical detail. You will need to comment on the music itself, rather than its effect, or how it makes you feel. Use as much musical terminology as you can. If you can't remember the correct terms, descriptions need to be as specific as possible. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The snare drum plays on beats 2 and 4.</li> <li>■ The bass drum plays on every beat.</li> </ul>
<b>Explain</b>	<p><i>'Explain how the music conveys the scene of a battlefield.'</i></p> <p>Questions that ask you to 'explain' are usually worth more marks. We will tackle this type of question in more detail below, but just remember that you are given credit for specific musical detail.</p>
<b>Suggest</b>	<p><i>'Suggest a suitable composer for Extract A.'</i></p> <p>You do not need to get this question exactly right. Sensible answers are given credit. A composer or artist from the same period or style will be fine here.</p>
<b>Compare</b>	<p><i>'Compare how the articulation is used in both extracts. Give similarities and/or differences.'</i></p> <p>Easier than it looks. As long as your responses mention both extracts, you can pick up lots of marks here. Below are some examples of comparisons, and the number of marks they could be worth (if they are correct):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Both extracts are staccato. (2 marks)</li> <li>■ Extract A is staccato, Extract B is legato. (2 marks)</li> <li>■ Extract A uses accents, Extract B does not. (2 marks)</li> </ul>

### Other top tips for the exam paper

- All questions will be read to you – make sure that you fully concentrate on each question. You will always be told which Area of Study the extract comes from, and maybe the specific style of the piece. Often the circumstances behind a piece of music are detailed (e.g. 'This piece was written for a supernatural film') giving you more clues as to the correct answers for each question.
- Make a mental note of the number of times the music is going to be played.
- Can you answer any questions before the music starts? If you know the piece of music is in a particular style, does that mean you can name the artist, year or location before hearing the music? If yes, you will have more time for the tougher questions, and these are usually worth more marks. Be careful though; check your answers thoroughly to avoid silly mistakes.
- Stick to the focus or musical element in each question. If you are asked to write about articulation, write about articulation! Even the most intelligent answers about rhythm or harmony won't get any marks if the question is about something else. Look back at the first bullet point – listen to and read the question!

Some questions occur again and again in the exam paper, and are often worth several marks. The next section in this book includes some helpful tips for specific questions in the paper.



# The long answer

## Brainstorming ideas

**Here are some tips for approaching longer questions.**

You will be asked one question in the exam that will look something like this:

**This is the theme tune from the video game *Battlefield 2*.**

**Write a paragraph, using sentences, explaining how the music conveys the scene of a battlefield. You may wish to refer to instruments, rhythm, melody, texture, tempo and any other features that are relevant.' (9 marks)**

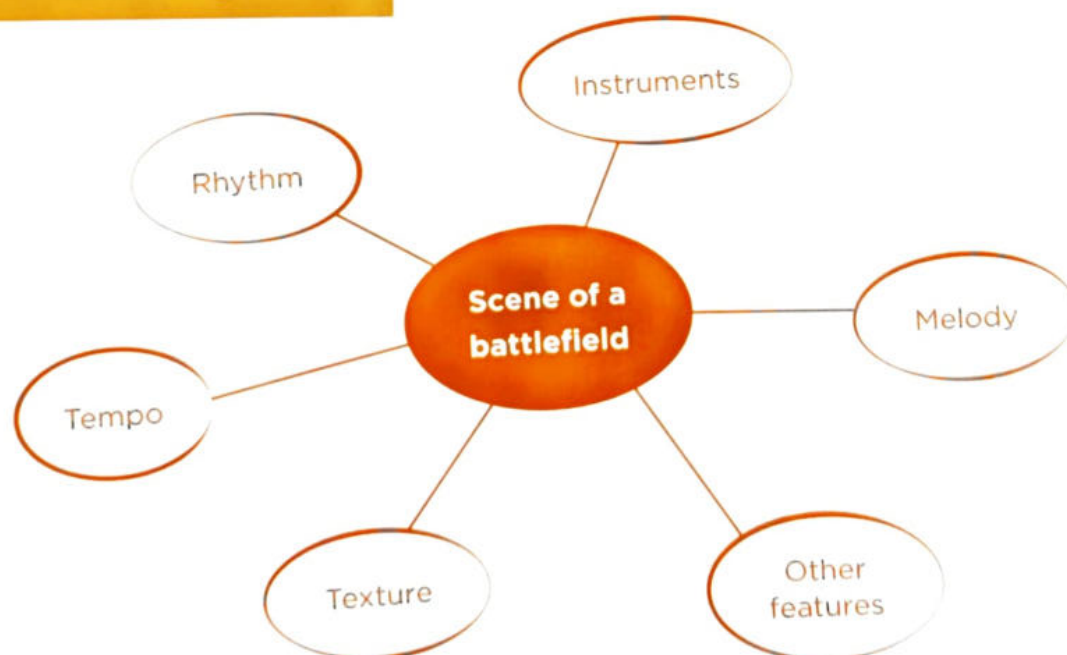
(This extract is available on the album *The Greatest Video Game Music*.)

There are usually eight or nine marks available for this question, so it is important to get it right.

Below are some tips for approaching a question like this.

In the exam, the page opposite will be left blank for you to make notes in preparation for your answer.

### Brainstorming





## Using a table

Element	Musical feature	Scene of battlefield
Instruments		
Rhythm		
Melody		
Texture		
Tempo		
Other		

- Use the table to ensure you are making points from a range of different elements, not just one or two.
- Write about the music. Don't just say 'it sounds like people fighting' without having some musical points to back this up.
- Write in clear sentences.
- Give specific musical detail, and refer to the question. It may be useful to write things down in the order that they happen in the extract.

The examples below show how some answers, although they cover the same point, are better than others:

- **'There is a double bass and a cello playing.'** Though this may be true, it doesn't give much detail, and doesn't explain how the music reflects a battlefield.
- **'There is a double bass and a cello playing staccato notes.'** This is better. If you are going to talk about instruments, don't just name them, describe the music they are playing.
- **'There is a double bass and a cello playing a repeated pattern, using staccato notes.'** Here we are given not just one feature of the music, but two.
- **'There is a double bass and a cello playing a repeated pattern, using staccato notes. This could represent the tension of a battlefield.'** Now the answer refers to the question. The musical description is the most important, but remember to describe the effect if you want to access top marks.

And if you really want to show off...

- **'There is a double bass and a cello playing a repeated pattern, using staccato notes. This could represent the tension of a battlefield. Later, the brass joins in at a higher pitch, again playing a staccato repeated pattern. This could represent more soldiers joining the battle.'** Music changes, and the very best answers will describe exactly how the music changes throughout the extract.

### PRACTICE AND PLANNING

Practice and planning are essential if you are to do well with the 'long answer' question. Remember to keep your points about the music, describe specific musical detail, and always refer back to the question.

# Writing tips

## Quality of written communication

**Some questions will take into account your quality of written communication: your spelling, punctuation and grammar.**

Most of the preparation for this will happen in your English lessons, but here are a few reminders:

- Start sentences and names with capital letters, and end sentences with a full stop.
- Brush up on your spellings of common instruments and relevant composers.
- When describing musical features, be aware of different parts of speech:
  1. Nouns: The violins use **imitation**.
  2. Verbs: The music **crescendos**.
  3. Adjectives: The guitar plays **repeated** quavers.
  4. Adverbs: The ostinato is played **quickly**.

### The 'notation' question (melodic dictation)

**There is always a question that asks you to complete a bar or two of music. This is called dictation, and it really is easier than it looks.**

**Here are some tips for approaching the dictation section of the exam:**

- The rhythms are usually given for you, so you know how many notes there are. Make sure you add notes directly underneath the rhythms so as not to confuse yourself or the examiner.
- Often a similar melodic idea occurs earlier or later in the piece. Look around the rest of the score. Can you hear another place where the 'missing' melody occurs? If yes, it may be very similar, altered by only one or two notes.
- You get credit for melodic shape, as well as getting the correct notes. If you can't work out the first note, don't give up! Try to add notes depending on whether the melody goes up, down, or stays the same.
- Most of the time, the melody will move by step (notes next to each other), and there may be occasional 'leaps'.

## TEST YOURSELF

### Look, say, cover, write

Can you spell these musical terms? Read the word aloud first, then cover it up and write it in the adjacent box.

Amplifier

Arpeggio

Baroque

Cadenza

Chaal

Chromatic

Classical

Homophonic

Melisma

Modulation

Mordent

Ornament

Polyphonic

Romantic

Rhythm

Rubato

Sequencer

Tala

Ternary form