

Musical Knowledge for ABRSM Aural, GCSE and A levels

Each grade requires knowledge of all grades previous to it.

Grade 1

Dynamics refers to contrasts in quantity of tone

Italian term	Abbreviation	English translation
piano	<i>p</i>	soft
mezzo piano	<i>mp</i>	moderately soft (literally half soft)
pianissimo	<i>pp</i>	very soft
forte	<i>f</i>	loud
mezzo forte	<i>mf</i>	moderately loud
fortissimo	<i>ff</i>	very loud

Changes in quantity of tone are referred to as graduation of tone. These changes can either be sudden or gradual

Italian term	Abbreviation	English translation
crescendo	<i>cresc.</i>	gradually getting louder
decrescendo	<i>decresc.</i>	gradually getting softer
diminuendo	<i>dim.</i>	gradually getting softer

Articulation refers to how the notes are performed

Italian term	Abbreviation	English translation
legato	<i>leg.</i>	smoothly joined
staccato	<i>stacc.</i>	detached, not joined

Grade 2

Recognition of Tempo Changes

Italian term	Abbreviation	English translation
tempo		the speed of the music
rallentando	<i>rall.</i>	gradually getting slower
ritenuto	<i>rit.</i>	gradually getting slower (literally "held back")
accelerando	<i>accel.</i>	gradually getting faster

Grade 3

Recognition of major or minor tonalities (from knowledge of scales, arpeggios, keys).

Grade 4

General Perception of the Character of the piece played

eg: march-like, song-like, dance-like or happy, sad, serious, solemn, thoughtful etc.

Grade 5

Terms used in previous grades such as dynamics, articulation, tempo changes, major/minor tonality and character of the piece should be understood **PLUS:**

General Perception of Texture, Rhythm, Form, Style and Period

Texture

“lighter” textures are: one melody on its own (monody); two melodies played together (two-part writing) or a melody together with a very simple accompaniment (eg: two note chords; alberti bass type broken chords etc) . Higher registers can also sound “light” in texture.

“thicker” textures could be: three parts or more played simultaneously or in imitation of each other (contrapuntal or fugal or polyphonic textures) OR a melody accompanied by three or four part chords OR more pianistic, romantic type of accompaniments with arpeggios etc over a bigger range of the piano. Thicker textures also include those when the melody and accompaniment change registers eg: the melody in the bass or middle parts with accompaniment above that OR melodies in the treble and bass parts with accompaniment figures in the middle parts etc. Lower registers and music across a wide range of registers also tend to thicken the effect of the texture.

Rhythm

- recognition of duple and triple and quadruple simple and compound time signatures.
- recognition of syncopation accents off the main beat (as in “jazzy” rhythms).
- recognition of dotted rhythms (especially when repeated).

Style and Character

- march-like** 2 or 4 beats, possible dotted rhythms
song-like sounds like a song and accompaniment (eg: a lullaby)
dance-like regular rhythm and phrasing especially if in **3 beats to a bar**
- Sarabande** slow triple time with emphasis on the 2nd beat
 - Minuet** moderate or fairly fast triple time - elegant, court dance
 - Waltz** quick triple time
- four beats**
- Gavotte** elegant court dance with phrasing from the middle of the bar e.g: 3 4 1 2 etc
- Others**
- Scottish dance** (dotted rhythms especially "scotch" snaps)
 - Polonaise** polish dance with characteristic dotted rhythm or triplet rhythm on the first beat of the bar
 - Gig** fast and in compound rhythms like 6/8 or 12/8
 - Jazzy, Blues, Rag or Latin American type dances**
 - Playful** (fast, light, staccato or teasing pauses etc)
 - Imaginative** (sounds as if its telling a story or creating an atmosphere - some idea extra to the music)
 - Dramatic** (sounds as if its describing action on a stage - acting, opera or ballet)

Form

Does any of the musical material get repeated?

Is the repeat EXACT? eg: the melody repeated without any change

Is the repeat VARIED? How is it varied? sometimes there are extra notes(figuration)

or extra ornaments such as trills, mordents, grace notes)

Is there NEW material? eg: a new and contrasting melody to the first one

- A B** A is the first melody and B the new contrasting melody
- A B A B** Something contrasting and something repeated
- A A B** Something repeated and something new and contrasting
- A B A** A common form called Ternary Form.
B is contrasting and the final A may be repeated exactly or varied or shortened)

Periods

- Early Period** like Bach and Handel and Vivaldi (**Baroque**)
- Classical Period** like Mozart and Haydn and early Beethoven
- Romantic Period** like later Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Grieg, Chopin, Brahms, Mendelssohn or Burgmuller
- Modern Period** like Bartok or Christopher Norton or Kabalevsky

Grade 6

General Perception of Texture, Form, Style and Period in more detail as listed under Grade 5 including use of Italian terms where appropriate **PLUS**

Recognition of Phrase Structure

regular 2 or 4 or bar phrasing grouped into bigger open and closed phrases (as in dance music of the Baroque or music of the Classical period)

longer 8 bar or 16 bar arch-shaped phrases (as in Romantic music) or extended phrases

irregular phrases (eg the typical Baroque "head motif" plus continuation melody)

Recognition of Cadences

A cadence is a standard progression from one chord to another at the end of a phrase.

Perfect Dominant Chord followed by the Tonic Chord (down a fifth or up a fourth in the bass)

Imperfect Any chord followed by the Dominant therefore sounds unfinished

Grade 7

Interrupted cadence - Dominant chord followed by Submediant chord (up a step in the bass)

Grade 8

	Baroque	Classical	Romantic	Modern
Approx. Dates	1600 – 1750	1732 – 1820	1820 – 1910	1910 - 2004
Prominant composer	J S Bach	Mozart	Schumann	Bartok
Other composers	Handel, Vivaldi, Scarlatti, Purcell, Corelli, Telemann	Bach's sons, Haydn, Beethoven, Clementi	Schubert, Chopin, Mendelssohn, Grieg, Brahms, Liszt,	Debussy, Prokofiev, Shostokovich, Gershwin

	Baroque	Classical	Romantic	Modern
HARMONIC LANGUAGE	<p>Development towards Major and Minor Tonality (centred on Tonic)</p> <p>Major key purest (minor pieces can even end with a major chord)</p> <p>Exception: JS Bach can be very chromatic.</p>	<p>MAJOR/MINOR TONALITY</p> <p>Chords not usually adventurous</p> <p>Triads in root pos. or 1st Inv. 2nd Inv used sparingly.</p> <p>Dom 7th & Dim 7th</p> <p>MODULATIONS to closely related Keys (Dom, Sub-Dom and Relative Minor or Major)</p>	<p>Basic Classical Tonality but more adventurous use of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 7th chords - chromatic chords <p>Modulation to more distant keys</p> <p>Extreme chromaticism in later Romantic period (Scriabin)</p>	<p>Chords used outside Tonal relationships (Debussy)</p> <p>Chromaticism leads to ATONAL music and 12 tone & Serial music (Schoenberg)</p> <p>Neo-Classic was Return to Tonality "spiced" up with Dissonance (Prokofiev, Shostokovich)</p> <p>Other Scales used Eg: pentatonic Bitonality</p> <p>DISSONANCE</p>
TEXTURE (including accompaniments)	<p>Complex with many parts (POLYPHONIC)</p> <p>IMITATION and FUGAL writing between parts common</p> <p>"Thin" or "Light" texture might be one or two parts</p> <p>"Thicker" or "complex" textures might be 3, 4, or more parts</p> <p>Dances such as the Sarabande can be more CHORDAL or HOMOPHONIC (melody + accomp)</p>	<p>"Light" textures with "clarity" of parts are common</p> <p>HOMOPHONIC (melody plus a simple chordal or broken chord accompaniment)</p> <p>"light" textures might be accomp consisting of 2 note chords or an "alberti bass" (broken chord patterns)</p> <p>middle register of piano used most</p>	<p>Thicker more complex textures mostly homophonic (melody plus accompaniment) but composers use polyphonic elements to thicken the texture (melody sometimes in the middle part or bass part as well as in treble parts)</p> <p>Broken chords and arpeggios used over a bigger range to create a bigger sound</p> <p>Typical thicker texture would be the melody in treble part, a more melodic bass part and 4 part chords in the middle parts (split between the two hands in piano music)</p>	<p>VARIED</p> <p>Chromatic pieces tend to be "thicker" textured and Neo-Classic pieces "lighter" textured</p>

	Baroque	Classical	Romantic	Modern
MELODY	<p>Typical fugue subject has a distinctive "head motive" which is easy to imitate, followed by a "continuation" which is not so distinctive and can be varied easily and a "cadential" ending. This makes phrases of irregular lengths.</p> <p>Dance pieces such as the Gavotte and Minuet are melodically more regular eg: 4 bar phrases</p> <p>Baroque melodies are often ORNAMENTED with trills, mordents, turns etc.</p>	<p>Regular 2 or 4 bar phrases that form regular 8 or 16 bar "sentences" with "open" and "closed" phrases.</p> <p>Phrases are often contrasting with each other.</p> <p>Short phrases and "motives" lend themselves to development</p>	<p>Long, arching melodies of 8 bars or 16 bars are common – tend to be complete in themselves and do not lead to "development" so the composer will introduce a completely different melody as a contrast (eg: an A B A form if the first melody is repeated after the second one)</p>	<p>VARIED</p> <p>Folk songs are a common feature of nationalistic styles</p> <p>Sometimes the "melody" is almost non-existent and the rhythm or chords dominant.</p>
RHYTHM	<p>"moto perpetuo" rhythms (strict, metronomic rhythms)</p> <p>Sarabande – a dance in slow triple time with emphasis on 2nd beat</p> <p>Minuet – a moderately fast triple time – an elegant court dance</p> <p>Gavotte – another court dance this time in 4 beats with phrasing from the 3rd beat thus: 3 4 1 2</p>	<p>Regular rhythms but syncopation can be used for variety</p> <p>Beethoven loved to include accents on the off beats to offset the regular rhythms</p> <p>Minuet – elegant Allegretto in triple time Beethoven speeded up the Minuet and called it the Scherzo (more playful)</p>	<p>Regular rhythms are made more complex with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 against 3 - syncopations - cross rhythms <p>Tempo Rubato very common to give expression and emotional content</p>	<p>Rhythms can be very complex</p> <p>eg: irregular 3 + 3 + 2 in a bar</p> <p>or 5 in a bar 7 in a bar</p> <p>influenced by slavonic music, jazz styles etc.</p>

	Baroque	Classical	Romantic	Modern
<p>FORM</p> <p>Depends on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - repetition - varied repetition - introduction of contrasting themes - return of previously heard material 	<p>BINARY A: B</p> <p>Not a lot of contrast – explores one main idea</p> <p>A starts in the tonic key and modulates to a closely related key</p> <p>B starts from the closely related key to return to the tonic key at the end</p> <p>TERNARY A;B:A form in late Baroque (B is contrasting)</p> <p>FUGUE All parts enter in turn with the same melody then there is a cadence</p> <p>Middle part – explores the material presented</p> <p>Final part -reintroduces the original subject</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sophistications such as overlapping entries, augmentation (doubling) of the theme or diminution of the theme (smaller note values) may occur. <p>Pedal point may occur before the final cadence</p> <p>VARIATION form is very common</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - most variations are figural (based on breaking the melody down into smaller and smaller note values) - occasionally a variation in a change of key and tempo will give a character variation - sometimes the variations are even based on the chord progression or bass line (eg:chaconne or passacaglia) 	<p>SONATA-FORM</p> <p>Developed from Binary Form (similar key scheme) but extended.</p> <p>Contrasting themes an important aspect as is the development of motives especially in the middle section after the double bar.</p> <p>Third section is a complete repeat of the First but remains in the Tonic key to the end.</p> <p>Not likely to come into the Gr 8 Aural because of the length of the Form</p> <p>TERNARY form Minuet and Trio</p>	<p>TERNARY</p> <p>A B A suits the smaller Romantic pieces the best</p>	<p>Ternary likely</p>

	Baroque	Classical	Romantic	Modern
STYLE				
Song-like	Possible	Possible	Possible	Possible
March-like	2 or 4 beats with dotted rhythms	Possible	Possible	Possible
Dance-like (use time signature to be more specific)	Sarabande, Gavotte, Minuet Other court dances	Minuet common Austrian dance the Landler is the fore-runner of the Waltz	Faster Waltz is most likely for a dance in triple time	Waltz (spiced with dissonance) Jazz styles - blues - rag - swing - rock
Imaginative			Pieces based on an imaginative idea or setting a mood are very common (pieces even have titles containing the extra – musical idea)	Latin American dances such as the Rumba, Samba etc

Other words used to describe music from any Period are: Dramatic, Happy, Playful, Sad, Serious, etc

Composition devices common to any Period:

Pedal Point – a Bass Note repeated or held for several bars