MUSIC

Overall grade boundaries

Higher level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-15	16-32	33-48	49-57	58-67	68-76	77-100

Standard level group performing

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-14	15-31	32-51	52-61	62-68	69-78	79-100

Standard level solo performing

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-14	15-31	32-48	49-58	59-70	71-80	81-100

Standard level creating

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-15	16-31	32-47	48-58	59-68	69-79	80-100

Solo performing (HL/SLS)

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-3	4-7	8-11	12-13	14-16	17-18	19-20

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The solo performing submissions demonstrated a broad range of achievement levels with most of the work faring from adequate to very good in suitability.

The recordings were of good quality: microphone placement and overall balance were monitored appropriately so that the work of the candidate was displayed with prominence and suitable musical accompaniment was provided when needed.

There was a noticeable effort in the submissions from some schools to demonstrate breadth of musical exploration in the candidates' preparation. There were several successfully explored genres from clearly contrasting musical traditions. Traditional African, Asian and European folk numbers were presented along with the more usual contemporary urban genres and pieces by well-established composers. Style differences were often carefully attended. Candidate preparation ranged mostly from appropriate to outstanding. In a few schools the range of repertoire was too limited. Some candidates submitted very short and basic pieces with limited, if any, style contrast. These submissions are not appropriate for solo performing skill demonstration and achieve very low marks.

Although rare, a few performances were on out of tune pianos. An out of tune instrument is unsuitable and all efforts should be made to avoid a candidate performance on such an instrument. Teachers must ensure the work of the candidates is appropriately supported.

It is important to note that some of the candidates are selecting demanding pieces that are not out of their reach technically and musically, but they are not always working effectively to deliver the musical elements with clarity; the standard lacks precision or accuracy. The pieces are sketched rather than convincingly performed. In many cases the actual musical content did not emerge.

In some other cases the technical challenges in the musical programmes were considerable and the candidates rose to the challenge. They demonstrated an impressive range and depth in musical learning.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

The repertoire was often well chosen. The pieces were suitable to the candidates' abilities; a few demonstrated interesting musical explorations, substantial and out of the ordinary in content, with expressive and technical demands. Accompaniment guidelines were followed.

Some submissions had less suitable repertoire selections, for example, many short pieces of very basic, dubious musical content. These did not support the candidates in their demonstration of musical skill or communication abilities.

Criterion B

The technical aspects of many of the performances were of a high standard. Mostly, the pieces matched the capabilities of the candidates. There were some instances where this was not the case and the candidates struggled to get through with technical inconsistencies. In some schools, there was a lack of attention and rigor in the preparation of the component. The standard of the performances presented was wanting in overall musicality, rhythmic character and note accuracy.

Phrasing, dynamics and tone colour subtleties were considered in most of the pieces. Several performances showed a real understanding of structure, with clear definition in the roles of musical lines and textures within the pieces. Some performances, however, could be mechanical, and did not demonstrate understanding of the importance of defining structural aspects.

Criterion C

There was a range in the understanding of musical style demonstrated. From indistinct performances where no style is apparent to nuanced and informed renderings. There was stylistic variety in most submissions, with a good number of candidates demonstrating some understanding of style.

Criterion D

Musical understanding was evident in a variety of levels, from some to highly consistent and mature musical communication. There were instances of impressive communication of musical intent and understanding.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

A good number of schools attend very effectively to the preparation of candidates in solo music performing. To these schools no recommendation is needed.

In several other cases, repertoire selection, general standards and performing detail would benefit from more deliberate consideration.

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Stay away from selections that are too short and basic to allow the candidate to demonstrate performing choices. Encourage candidates to select pieces of quality different from those over-exposed and familiar. Ensure clear stylistic contrast is demonstrated between the selections.

Direct and encourage critical listening to recorded or live performances of established artists to develop awareness of expressive choices, nuance and style. Develop a vocabulary and a listening practice to support an understanding of the elements that support musical process, musical intent, style and communication.

Group performing (SLG)

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-3	4-7	8-12	13-14	15-15	16-17	18-20

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The format of electronic submissions presented some challenges. In some cases, schools seem to have uploaded an inappropriate format. However, most of the uploads worked well.

While traditional ensembles such as band, orchestra, and choir predominated, the presence of less traditional groups continues to grow. These include rock groups, trios, quartets and other chamber groups. Many groups, especially those framed in the school activities, had a teacher as director. However, candidates seem to demonstrate more creativity and independence in this aspect of the component. That is, some of the groups were autonomous in terms of their artistic direction.

The artistic performance of all the groups was in general from satisfactory to high. However, as in previous years, there were several cases where the requirements of the component were not clearly understood. Here are two of the main issues that arose:

- Submissions that were 'following' a student instead of a group. For instance, submissions consisting on a series of pieces where a singer performed with different groups (for example, a cappella group, women's chorale, church choir). This is not an acceptable practice for this component because the goal of the component is to assess a group and not an individual.

- Some groups presented submissions including collaborations with other groups. For instance, a choir presenting half of the repertory a cappella or with piano accompaniment and the other half together with a full symphonic orchestra. While it is true that the choir was present in all the tracks, the 'group' changed dramatically once the orchestra appeared. This was not the same group anymore. The nature / composition of a group cannot change in such a substantial form between compositions. Otherwise the submission is really presenting two different ensembles.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

The selection of repertoire was in general appropriate to the level of the ensembles. Maybe due to the fact that the selection is often made by teachers / conductors, the repertoire offered variety in style and contrast between the pieces. However, certain types of groups, for instance rock bands, showed less variety. While it is true that a 'specialized' group such as a 'hard rock' band will have more limitations in the available repertoire, groups should not neglect this aspect of their submissions.

Criterion B

Some of the submissions presented reached very high levels in this criterion. In some cases, the nature of the ensembles (schools) resulted in submissions that did not achieve such high levels. This was often the case where the ensembles included a first-year student or even MYP candidates in the ensemble.

Criterion C

This aspect did not receive the same attention that the other criteria. While some submissions presented clear differentiations in style, in others this differentiation was less satisfactory.

Criterion D

The often excellent level of commitment demonstrated by the ensembles was engaging. Collaboration between performers was often evident, resulting in fine artistic products.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

As stated before, the number of 'independent' ensembles seems to be growing. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to clearly explain the requirements of the component to these 'independent' groups. Teachers should insist on the need to present appropriate and varied repertoire. Invest time in selecting the repertoire. It is not simply matter to fulfil the time requirement. A good selection of varied repertoire offers the opportunity to showcase the group capabilities.

Further comments

The quality of recording (placement of microphones) could spoil what could be otherwise a good performance. The quality of the recordings should be monitored.

Creating (HL/SLC)

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-5	6-11	12-16	17-19	20-23	24-26	27-30

The range and suitability of the work submitted

With very little work at the lower end of the spectrum the portfolios mostly ranged from acceptable to excellent.

With compositions remaining the most numerous component, there were increases in arrangements and stylistic techniques.

Among the arrangements there has appeared a new tendency to want to combine ('mash') two pieces. This is stretching the definition of the task and more importantly, generally leads to a less effective arrangement, since the student seems only intent on combining ideas from two pieces rather than arranging one of them in a new and creative way.

There was some improvement in the standard of stylistic techniques submissions, although there do remain a good number of submissions which appear to have been inadequately prepared for the task.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

There was evidence of competent handling of musical elements with some good thematic development and creative use of dynamics. Strong candidates' work had good handling of textures and competent use of harmony. Weaker work tended to lack variety in the internal parts and competent use of chords and bass lines.

There were cases of imaginative exploration of musical ideas although in quite a few cases material was not adequately developed.

In pieces presented in jazz style there tended to be limited development of jazz rhythmic idioms such as syncopation, harmonic language and opportunities for improvisation.

Criterion B

Stronger scorers achieved cohesion and identity in their work without giving in to too much basic repetition. It should be remembered marks are awarded for consistency and cohesion in a work, but this should not be achieved at the expense of variety. Basic thematic development, or variation was sometimes lacking; for example, a candidate might present a 'classical sonata' movement that stayed in the same key from start to finish. The best creations achieved coherence whilst still exploring many aspects of the music.

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Criterion C

On the occasions when it was clear that candidates had effective working knowledge of the instruments for which they were writing, the scores were high. There was some excellent string writing which explored the string instruments' timbre and range. There were few examples of totally inappropriate writing, but sometimes it could be noted that candidates were thinking in term of tone colour (from a sound card?) rather than of real instruments.

In music technology creations, the use of programmes generally showed competence and some creativity. Although there was a move back towards electronic pieces rather than songs presented as music technology creations, the more extreme, 'experimental' end of sound manipulation was not very present.

Criterion D

Notation continues to be a criterion where candidates can and often do score well. The difference between good and maximum marks was quite often an oversight; not transposing parts for transposing instruments, or forgetting to give an initial tempo or dynamic instruction. Weaker notation was often from programmes not originally intended for music publishing and that give a printout rather than a score. Candidates using this type of software should remember to take the time to add the required performance instructions.

In music technology creations, sound quality ranged from adequate to good, with some creative use of panning and sound manipulation.

Improvisations, slightly more present in this session, tended to go for safer contexts – soloing with a backing track in a jazz or rock context. This work was usually competent but quite often lacked variety, tending to go along at the same dynamic, filling the space correctly without then taking any risks.

Criterion E

Although usually in line with criteria A and B, this criterion is useful in offering the chance to award marks for work with strong communicative intent, even if perhaps lacking some finesse in the use of elements and form. Amongst the more mechanical, less engaging works were pieces presented in traditional forms; these often lacked personality, as if the adoption of a style or pre-set structure was a substitute for creative intent.

Criterion F

Although generally a little better in this session, reflections continue to suffer from two weaknesses: a tendency to be too subjective, at the expense of useful information that the examiner can reward, and tendency to omit completely or to underestimate the importance of the 'outcome' element. Here the examiner is looking for reflection on what has been acquired during the process: what might have been done differently.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates should be reminded that simple development of material, key change and varying of instrumentation can give breadth, variety and form to a piece.

Candidates could be encouraged to explore the characteristics and potential of the instruments for which they are writing.

Teachers should encourage candidates to seek out and listen to composers who are working in fields that interest them.

When attempting stylistic techniques, the 'rules' of the genre should be studied in depth. Care should be taken to know (from the music guide) the requirements of each component – imitation, modulation and so on, so that marks can be earned for these. For the twelve-tone exercise, a general aesthetic could be outlined, for example, avoidance of octaves. It should be remembered that the row is being used to create a piece, and that the row is not in itself the piece; something more than simple exposition of the notes is required.

Candidates presenting improvisations should remember that examiners are looking to award spontaneity, risk taking and variety.

Those offering arrangements should try to present the piece in new, creative context, leaving the original piece recognisable but creatively transformed.

Paper one (Listening paper) (HL)

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-13	14-26	27-39	40-43	44-47	48-51	52-100

Paper one (Listening paper) (SLS, SLG, SLC)

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-9	10-19	20-31	32-37	38-43	44-49	50-80

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

Once again, some candidates seemed to have difficulty understanding (or perhaps deliberately reinterpreted) what was required of them in Section A, particularly Question 1 (see below). There were fewer problems with Section B, but here candidates often performed less well than they might have done owing to problems with examination technique (for example, omitting to address one or more of the assessment categories, or presenting their responses in an inefficient format as described below). In both parts of the paper, some candidates tended to locate examples inadequately or not or all.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Many candidates' responses to Section A demonstrated a detailed familiarity with the prescribed works – particularly the Gershwin – and if they did not always perform so well in their answers, this was rather for other reasons as suggested below. Section B responses tended to be of a slightly better standard overall and, for example, there were some extensive discussions of the Baroque features of the Marcello extract which suggested candidates had been well prepared in this period of music history.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Section A

Question 1

As usual this was the more popular choice, and several candidates gave good examples of instrumental usage/tone colour, with stronger answers using these to demonstrate various kinds of 'contrast'. However, once again many candidates used their own interpretation of the question to provide the vehicle for a memorised response. One popular strategy was to seize on the idea of 'contrast' in the rubric and discuss other kinds of contrast than those directly relating to instrumental writing (for example, between programmatic descriptions of 'Paris' and 'the American', or between other musical elements such as dynamics, metre or rhythm). In extreme cases the response mostly consisted of a narrative account of the piece or discussion of irrelevant elements, almost completely ignoring the specific question that had been posed.

Question 2

This was the less popular choice, but candidates who selected it generally seemed to have a better understanding of what was required than those who chose Question 1. Most of them clearly understood the concept of 'texture', and stronger answers provided detailed analyses of the various types used in these three extracts, sometimes going into considerable detail about the canonic and fugal processes involved. However, there was also occasional confusion about basic terminology (for example, identifying 'a cappella' as a textural type), and some candidates tended to focus on the vocal writing to the exclusion of the instrumental parts.

Question 3 (Higher Level only)

This was clearly a challenging question for many candidates. The rubric provided some pointers towards the kind of issues that might be investigated, and this seemed to help most candidates remain focused on the subject, with stronger candidates providing appropriate and well-located examples – although there were also some who digressed to discuss other elements such as 'melody' or 'structure'. Interestingly, however, remarkably large numbers of candidates chose similar topics to discuss – chromaticism, tertiary modulations and extended chords were popular choices which, as with Question 1, often suggested memorised responses, possibly taken from an external revision aid. Few candidates attempted detailed harmonic analyses of their selected examples either and, where they did so, the results often indicated serious shortcomings in their grasp of the necessary theory.

Section B

Question 4 Higher Level/Question 3 Standard Level

Candidates generally offered some perceptive observations here, often making good use of the score to identify precise features of instrumentation, metre, rhythm, and structure (with many giving accurate descriptions of individual phrase lengths). On the other hand, some seemed to be unaware that the extract consisted of separate movements, and a considerable number identified Bartók as a 'Romantic' composer, even though the score contains many features that would not readily be associated with that style. In some responses, moreover, the first movement was described in some detail and the remainder given progressively less attention, suggesting that candidates had not taken the length of the piece sufficiently into account when managing their time.

Question 5 Higher Level/Question 4 Standard Level

This was (as usual) the less popular choice, but again there were many successful responses. Most candidates were able to identify the contrasts between 'solo' and 'tutti' sections and the Baroque context; however, while many detected the thematic repetitions, the term 'ritornello' was very seldom applied to them. The concept of 'basso continuo' was also sometimes misunderstood (for example, identified with the harpsichord) and the solo instrument was sometimes mistaken for a clarinet (despite the rubric).

Question 6 Higher Level/Question 5 Standard Level

Many candidates were able successfully to describe the more standard pop/jazz elements of piece, such as the use of ostinato bass lines, or identify major structural changes and indeed (in some cases) individual phrase lengths. However, the exact context of the piece was difficult to identify, and while most candidates were aware of its 'fusion' elements, few came close to locating where the 'fused' elements came from – with the nasal tones of the instruments often suggesting a Middle Eastern or Indian origin. (Examiners were, however, sensitive to the difficulties of accurately locating the music's provenance, and exercised an appropriate degree of latitude when assessing Criterion D of this question.)

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Question 7 Higher Level/Question 6 Standard Level

The musical elements of this piece – strophic structure, major tonality, use of 3 chords and a clear 4/4 metre – were familiar to many candidates, and many gave a good account of them. Some, however, built their structural account around changes in instrumentation rather than underlying strophic repetitions, and once again few were able to guess at the very specific context – in many cases, 'Europe' was as close as they came to it. Again, examiners were aware of this and have assessed responses accordingly in their marking.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Once again the main recommendation is regarding Section A of the paper, and in particular Question 1 (SL/HL), where over the past four examination sessions many responses have taken the form of memorised answers that either distort or ignore the specific question posed in the rubric. Candidates should be made aware that these questions are not 'open-ended' opportunities for presentation of a prepared discussion, and that irrelevant material does not earn them any credit in the final assessment.

As with Question 2 in May 2016, Question 3 (HL) again seemed to suggest that many candidates lacked sufficient preparation in music theory and its associated terminology to engage with more analytical questions on anything above a generalised or superficial level. The suggestion seems to be that, while candidates are mostly confident with handling very general descriptive terms (for example, 'conjunct', 'disjunct'), few have the necessary depth of theoretical knowledge to probe the musical features on a more detailed level (for example, by describing what musical intervals are actually involved in the above cases). Question 2 (SL/HL) also pointed to some ongoing confusions about basic terminology (for example, the almost universal misunderstanding that 'homophony' is simply a synonym for 'melody and accompaniment'), while Question 3 (HL) in particular suggested that many candidates simply identified the 'key' of a given passage of music by reference to whatever was indicated in the overall key signature. Other terms with which some candidates had problems were 'modulation' (often used as a synonym for transposition) or 'sequence' (confused with 'sequencing'), while some also evidenced confusion between very basic terms such as 'texture' and 'timbre'.

In Section B overall, the most important recommendation would (once again) concern the way some candidates present their answers. Many for example begin by offering a series of comments on categorised 'musical elements' in note form, often consisting of generalisations or decontextualised observations that examiners have difficulty relating to specific details. In some cases, they may simply provide lists of terms in isolation, suggesting a need to remind candidates that the use of 'terminology' with no relation to any context does not earn them any credit. Additionally, some candidates then go on to discuss the piece in chronological order, which often involves their repeating the same information twice over – clearly a waste of both their own time and the examiner's. The most satisfactory presentation of Section B answers, by contrast, is almost certain to be something like that shown in the markscheme – with only general features (for example, tempo) listed under 'musical elements' at the beginning, and the bulk of the answer devoted to a timeline outlining the structure of the piece and identifying key features, followed by a discussion of context at the end.

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Many candidates who performed well on Section B in this session were clearly let down in their overall mark by their responses to Section A, particularly those who had opted to answer Question 1. This might have something to do with lack of sufficient preparation in the prescribed works, but there is certainly a strong suggestion that another major factor is continuing reliance on memorisation of externally sourced, prepared responses. As we enter a new examination period with different prescribed works, it is to be hoped that more candidates will rely more on their own resources and take care to focus on the question when answering Section A, and – in so doing – achieve the kind of overall results that their performance in Section B so often demonstrates them to be capable of.

Musical Links Investigation (HL, SLS, SLG, SLC)

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-14	15-17	18-20

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The range of the work was generally good, covering the spectrum, but mostly from satisfactory to good. Most work presented had addressed all the criteria, was informed and well presented. However, there are many candidates who forget that the MLI is an exploration, or research into musical cultures, using musical examples to illustrate their points, and not just an analysis of two works.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

With few exceptions, the choice of cultures was appropriate and there was some adventurous selection of musical examples. In some cases candidates presented cultures that were not clearly distinctive, such as 'video game culture' or 'film music culture', or a fusion of cultures. There was also a tendency for some candidates to identify only the name of a country, rather than a specific musical culture.

The weakest aspect of Criterion A was in the choice of links, which were often insubstantial (for example, 'dynamics', 'meter') or not clearly defined and not allowing for in-depth investigation.

Criterion B

The best MLIs showed clear arguments supported by appropriate examples, and maintained a focus on comparing and contrasting the musical links. Several candidates did not include musical evidence to support their findings, or simply directed the reader to audio examples to draw their own conclusions.

Criterion C

There were several MLIs presenting excellent use of terminology, including analysis using appropriate chord identification. The best submissions showed candidates who were confident in their application of musical terminology, using the language of music consistently, rather than giving lists and definitions taken from secondary sources. Many candidates continue to confuse their technical terms, with texture probably being the term that presented the biggest challenge.

Criterion D

Layouts were generally interesting and well thought out, with a high standard of presentation, visually. More care could be taken with the organisation of musical examples – often the figures presented did not have labels or captions or were placed in different parts of the page or even on different pages from the commentary that they were illustrating.

Referencing within the body of the MLI (footnotes, citations) was more proficient than in previous sessions, however, there were still many cases where candidates did not provide detailed bibliographical information (if any) about primary sources, scores or illustrations.

Criterion E

In the better MLIs, the level of engagement was high, with effort being put into transcriptions. Some interesting choices of music and cultures added to this. Despite this, there is a tendency for candidates to rely heavily on existing exemplars of other student work (even to the point where these appear in the bibliography) or on secondary sources. This diminishes the quality of originality of the MLI and leaves one with the sense of a pre-formulated exercise well done.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

Teachers and candidates should be advised that they should not upload an entire track of music but should prepare specific audio examples and label these clearly in their written document for easy identification. Many candidates are going well beyond the five-minute limit set for supporting audio material. Uploading of whole scores when they are not referred to is also not advised.

Where musical examples are used, these should be inserted into the document so that the examiner does not need to go and search for them. This also applies to audio reference points.

Teachers must remind candidates that the focus of the MLI is to investigate musical cultures (that is, not just musical works) and that analysing aspects of the pieces that are not characteristic of the culture studied does not enhance the MLI. Links also need to exemplify these cultures.

Teachers and candidates should be encouraged to look at cultures from their own areas. In addition, encouraging candidates to select music where they must transcribe would be leading them on a path that is more vigorous and exciting for all.

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Further comments

Teachers should clarify with candidates the concept of culture. In describing the culture as, for example, 'Music from China', or 'African Music', candidates are showing a lack of awareness that in these countries or continents there are several very different cultures. Within the 'international' setting of the IB, this lack of understanding is less than appropriate.

It was good to see that the overall standard for this session was higher than earlier in the year. Most work presented was middle of the road or higher, which shows there is an understanding of this task and that good results can be achieved.