

Elements of Music Summary

Structure (*writing about the overall shape of works, movements and sections*)

- The most common questions about structure are in relation to set works – discussing the overall form of movements or describing their subsections
 - With unprepared music you may be asked to identify smaller scale structures (e.g. verse/chorus/bridge or AABA' etc.)
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Melody (*writing about individual melodic lines*)

Key terms and concepts

- type of movement (i.e. steps/conjunct or leaps/disjunct, diatonic or chromatic)
- type of scale (major, minor, whole tone, pentatonic, octatonic)
- phrases (long, short, regular, irregular, structure)
- range/tessitura (high, low, small, large)
- direction and shape (ascending, descending)
- repeated (or varied) motifs and/or phrases
- specific devices (e.g. sequence, ostinato, Klangfarbenmelodie, portamento)
- prominent intervals (octave, seventh, minor second etc.)
- ornaments (trill, mordent, turn etc.)

Other valid points

(particularly if comparing or if the question is more generally about melodic writing)

- setting of words (syllabic/melismatic)
 - rhythm and tempo of a melody
 - the development of melodic material through other parameters
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Sonority (*writing about the use of instruments and voices*)

Basic features

- number and names of instruments used
- number and types of voices (soprano, alto, contralto, countertenor, tenor, baritone, bass)
- specific instrumental techniques (e.g. double stopping, sul tasto etc)
- use of articulation (staccato, legato, tongued, slurred, pizzicato, arco)

More sophisticated features

- the timbral qualities of instruments and voices
- how different sonorities are used to create contrast
- how sonorities are blended and combined (e.g. in doubling)
- the roles and groupings of instruments and voices (e.g. vocal duets/trios/quartets or strings and horns combining to provide accompaniment for solo oboe)

- what the writing for particular instruments like (e.g. brass fanfares, virtuosic violin writing etc.)
- what can you say about the historical development of instruments and groups of instruments (e.g. independence of wind parts in later Classical music etc.)

Texture (*writing about how the different parts relate to each other*)

Key terms and concepts

- Basic textures (monophonic, unison / octave unison, polyphonic, homophonic, melody-dominated homophony, heterophonic)
- Textural devices (imitation – canon/ fugue/stretto, antiphony, call and response, drone/pedal, ostinato)
- Roles (melody, accompaniment, counter melody, descant)
- Relationships (parallel motion– sixths/thirds/octaves, contrary motion)

Other valid points

- (particularly if comparing or if the question is more generally about melodic writing)
- Descriptions of what particular instruments or voices are doing in the texture (e.g. the strings are playing a particular rhythm or the trombone is playing a dominant pedal)

Rhythm (*writing about the tempo and grouping*)

Key terms and concepts

- tempo

Slow tempos: one beat per second and slower	Largo (very slow)
	Adagio (slow)
In between tempos	Andante (walking pace)
	Moderato (moderate)
Fast tempos: two beats per second and faster	Allegro (fast)
	Presto (very fast)

- metre (duple, triple, quadruple, simple, compound, regular, irregular, additive)
- pulse (clear, unclear, free rhythm, rubato)
- actual rhythms (e.g. dotted rhythms, swung quaver, triplets, continuous crotchets/quavers/semiquavers, rests, pauses)
- specific features (syncopation, hemiola, cross rhythms, augmentation/diminution, polyrhythm, isorhythm, double time, rhythmic ostinato, regular/irregular accents)
- phrasing (regular, irregular, cross-phrasing)
- harmonic rhythm

Dynamics (writing about changes in volume)

Key terms

- *fff* through to *ppp*
- Gradual changes (*crescendo*, *diminuendo*, *morendo*, *al niente* etc.)
- Sudden changes (*sforzando subito piano* etc.)

Other valid points

- How wide or narrow is dynamic range?
- Does it change suddenly/gradually/frequently/infrequently?

Harmony (writing about chords and chord progressions)

Key terms and concepts

- diatonic/chromatic
- consonant/dissonant
- types of chords used (triads, sevenths, primary, secondary, diminished, quartal etc.)
- types of scales used (diatonic, whole-tone, octatonic)
- cadences (perfect, imperfect, plagal etc.)
- specific harmonic devices (e.g. suspension, pedal, false relation, circle of fifths, sequence, Tierce de Picardie)
- specific chords (diminished seventh, augmented sixth, Neapolitan, secondary dominant)

Other valid points

- inversions of chords (root, first, second, third)
- harmonic rhythm
- if you are being asked to describe the harmony, some of the tonality points might also be valid

Tonality (writing about keys and modulations)

Key terms and concepts

- keys and scales (major, minor, named specific keys)
- modulation and tonicisation (tonic, dominant, subdominant, relative minors, closely related keys, distant keys, enharmonic changes)
- alternative systems (modes, atonal, bitonal, polytonal, serial)

Other valid points

- harmonic features that make the key clear (cadences, circles of fifths etc.)
- harmonic features that make key unclear (chromatic, dissonant)