

Musical Elements (GSMIRTH)

One of the following two pages is a summary of the main elements of music organized according to the mnemonic GSMIRTH (Genre, Structure, Melody, Instrumentation, Rhythm, Texture and Harmony). In answering questions and writing essays in practice for the exam, you should use GSMIRTH to help you keep your answers relevant. Sometimes you will be asked to restrict your comments to one or two GSMIRTH elements and at other times you can use this mnemonic to organize answers for which you can talk about any aspect of the music.

These first two pages give a very brief summary of the musical elements followed by a more detailed glossary of terms and concepts relevant to each. **This part of the handbook is not designed to be read through – it is for dipping into for reference and guidance. This guide covers most of the terms you will need for both AS and A2, so do not worry if it looks daunting!**

Genre (p. 33)

- Period (e.g. Classical, C20 etc.)
- Style (e.g. Sturm und Drang, Jazz etc.)
- Type of work (e.g. Concerto Grosso, Symphony, Ballad etc.)

Structure/form (p. 35)

- Identification of sections (A, B etc.)
- Type of musical form used (e.g. Binary, Ternary, Strophic etc.)
- Tonal structure (i.e. main key of each section)
- Clarity of structure (i.e. how clearly are the beginnings and ends of sections marked)

Melody (p. 37)

General description

- Character of melody (movement by step, by leap, scalar, triadic, chromatic etc.)
- Phrase lengths (periodic, irregular, continuous melody)
- Direction, shape and range
- Repetitions

Specific features

- Sequence (transposed repetition)
- Transposition, inversion, retrograde
- Ornamentation and embellishments (trills, appoggiaturas etc.)

Instrumentation (p. 39)

- Instruments (or forces) used
- Roles and groupings of instruments (e.g. solo concerto, concerto grosso)
- Changes in timbre (instrumental colour) and range
- Performance indications / special effects
 - pizzicato, arco, piano pedal etc.
 - mutes, tremolo, sul ponticello etc.
- Dynamics
- Difficulty of parts (is there any particularly virtuosic writing?)

Rhythm (p. 41)

General description

- Tempo
- Time signature (duple, triple, simple, compound etc.)
- Pulse and accent (regular, irregular etc.)
- Level of rhythmic activity (busy, sparse)
- Harmonic rhythm

Specific features

- Syncopation (rhythmic accentuation not on the strong beat of the bar)
- Cross rhythm (e.g. triplets against duplets)
- Hemiola (two in time of three or vice versa)
- Augmentation / diminution
- Backbeat (pop music)
- Additive rhythm / polyrhythms

Texture (p. 42)

General description

- Number of different parts/voices
- Relationship between parts
- Rhythmic unison
- Monophonic, unison, octave unison
- Homophonic: chordal or melody with accompaniment
- Polyphonic (rhythmically independent parts)
- Antiphonal (call and response between groups)

Specific features

- Contrapuntal devices
 - imitation
 - canon
 - fugue
- Accompanying textures
- Homorhythmic (usually describing a section within a piece)

Harmony and tonality (p. 44)

General description

Harmony

- Triadic harmony
- Diatonic/chromatic
- Consonant/dissonant
- Functional harmony



Tonality

- Key (or modal/atonal/bitonal)
- Clarity of tonality
- Functional tonality (including modulations)

Specific harmonic features

- Sequence
- Suspension
- Pedal
- Chromatic chords (dim. 7th; aug. 6th; Neapolitan)
- Circle of fifths
- False relation
- Tierce de Picardie
- Phrygian cadence