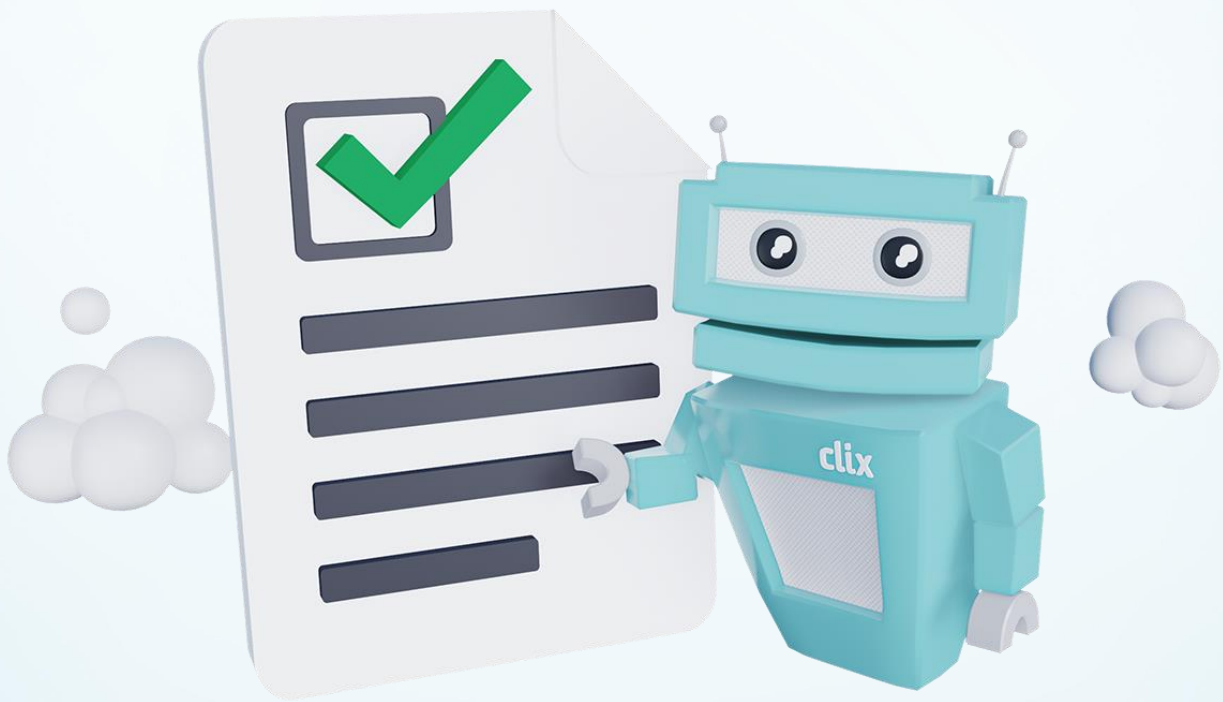


# Music

How to get a Distinction in Junior Cycle Music



by **John Casey**

*John Casey is a secondary school teacher of Music with over 30 years of experience. He is very familiar with preparing students and correcting Music at Junior cycle level.*



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## Introduction

Music is an exciting subject to study at Junior Cycle. It is a fun and engaging subject that allows you to be **creative**. Music classes are different to other subject classes. There's a lot of listening to music, and who doesn't enjoy listening to music, especially during the school day? Plus, there are plenty of performing and music-making opportunities with most music classes giving you the chance to learn a musical instrument as well. If you're already learning an instrument or singing in a choir your chances of doing well are **even better!**

Music at Junior Cycle is a subject that **everyone** can succeed at. No matter what level of musical talent you have, there is a way to showcase it in the music exam with questions that examine your listening skills, composing short jingles for radio ads, creating playlists and sharing music online.

Music is already **everywhere** around us – on our phones, in the computer games we play on social media – and music, as a subject at Junior Cycle, wants you to interact with that world of music in an **active** way.

The exam and your CBAs will test your ability to **actively listen and recognise** elements present in all types of music and expect you to then take these skills to the next level by composing your own music. This guide will show you how to succeed at Music at Junior Cycle. So, let's get started!

## How Is music assessed?

The Music syllabus outlines **three areas** to be examined in the written paper and in the CBAs. It's important that you know these, so you are aware of what skills you are trying to develop to succeed. They have very fancy titles but what they mean is quite simple:

**Procedural Knowledge:** This is the “nuts and bolts” of music as a **language** - the symbols and the terminology we all use as musicians to understand each other. It is here that you learn to read and write music properly and this knowledge is examined in **ALL questions** on the exam paper.

**Innovate and Ideate:** This is where you can be **creative**. You show that you can use these same “nuts and bolts” of Music to create and compose your own music and in turn make it possible for others to read and perform your music the way you intended. This is examined in detail in **your CBA I** and in **two questions** in the written exam paper - the **Melodic Composition** and the **Backing Chords** questions.

**Culture and Context** – This is where you bring together **all your musical knowledge** to help you identify the **different musical elements** in a piece and use these to place it in a musical context. This is examined in **your CBA II** and is examined in several sections spread across the entire written exam paper.

### Tip

Musical *Context* simply means what musical era or genre would this piece belong to? For example, if I sang “Silent Night” you would know that it is a Christmas Song – so *Christmas Carol* is a “Context” into which we can place it. You could also say that it is a *Religious Song* so that is another *Context* into which it could be placed.

The additional work you do in the CBAs is important as they give you an opportunity to develop and grow these skills over time. The written paper then seeks to test your level of understanding and ability to use these skills at the end of the Junior Cycle.

## Areas you are examined In

Music at Junior Cycle is examined in 3 distinct ways:

### Classroom-based assessments

**CBA 1- Your composition portfolio:** Your first CBA is completed in class time in your second year of school. You can participate in as many composing tasks as you wish and can do so, either on your own or in a group. You then pick your two best compositions to be your portfolio which is then presented, assessed, and graded.

It's not just the compositions that are assessed. Your Reflective Learning Document is also an area where you can gain marks. Highlight clearly that you are aware of the skills you learned and developed during your work on this CBA to score highly here.

**CBA 2- Your performance programme note:** As a tie-in with your Music Practical exam in third year, your CBA II task asks you to prepare a Programme note on the three pieces that you will be performing for your Music Practical Exam.

To maximise marks, **highlight** the following:

- A.** An awareness of the Context of your pieces is critical,
- B.** Knowledge of the musical elements in each piece.
- C.** An awareness of your audience and what they might listen out for.

The result of these two CBAs is displayed in your Junior Certificate Profile of Achievement (JCPA).

## Your Musical Practical exam

Your practical exam awards **30%** of your overall Music result (**120 marks** out of 400 total marks) and is held in May of your third year.

You are required to perform **three pieces**. They can be on any combination of instrument or voice, and either **solo** or **group performance**. The choice is totally up to you. In addition, you have a **short sight-reading test** to assess your knowledge of music notation.

## The Written exam

The Music written paper takes place towards the end of the Junior Cert Exam Timetable in June and awards **70%** of your total mark (**280 marks** out of 400 total marks).

This, coupled with your **Music practical result**, determine your **overall result**. Music is now a common-level paper, which means everyone sits the exact same paper. It is **one and a half hours** long and is **timed for you**, as it has an accompanying CD to play the musical excerpts needed for each question, so a lot of your exam time is spent **listening** and **responding** to the music you hear

Written Exam Layout **at a glance**.

- The Music Paper is 1 ½ hours long.
- There are 6 questions, **all** of which have to be answered. There is no choice in any question, so you have to complete **all sections** in each question.
- It is a **common-level paper** with questions that cater for all abilities.
- All questions are of a “**Tick the Correct Box**” or **short paragraph type** – so there are no long essays to learn or write in the exam.

The music exam itself has changed dramatically in the last year as Music was one of the last subjects to change its exam paper structure.

In general, the exam paper sets out to examine **three main areas**:

1. Your ability to listen critically, and respond to music you, more than likely, have not heard before.
2. Your composing ability, which you have trained for in class and across your CBA I task. 3.
3. Your ability to recall and apply information learned in class and in your CBAs.

## Two Helpful Tips for the Exam Day

**Exam Tip 1:** You might struggle when asked to respond to music you have not heard before, but don't worry - a lot of people do. You might not know where to start or what to listen for, but it's a skill you can get better at.

The DRAMATICS acronym is a handy tool to help you with this. When listening to an excerpt go through the keywords in the acronym below. They will identify musical features for you that you can comment on.

- D for Dynamics
- R for Rhythm
- A for Accompaniment
- M for Melody or Mood
- A for Articulation
- T for Tempo or Triads or Texture
- I for Instrumentation
- C for Chords or Cadences
- S for Style or Structure



Learn this acronym and at the beginning of your exam, write this down in a rough work section and refer to it anytime a question asks you to identify a musical feature or highlight a similarity/difference between excerpts.

**Exam Tip 2:** Right at the beginning of your written exam, a “Test Piece” is played. There are no questions on this piece. It is designed to calm your nerves and, most importantly, to ensure that you can hear the music clearly and at an appropriate level.

Don't be afraid to ask the examiner to adjust the volume. If it is too low, you obviously can't hear it properly and might miss out on something critical to a question, but equally, if it is too loud, it might distort through the speakers and become indistinct and “fuzzy”.

## A Word on Timing:

Unlike a lot of other exam subjects, the written exam in Music is timed for you. The pre-recorded CD with the excerpts and appropriate pauses for time to answer is played from start to finish. That means you don't need to be worried about clock-watching as in other subjects or spending too long on one question – this is taken care of for you.

Of course, this also means that you must answer the questions in the order they appear – again, unlike other subjects, there is no skipping ahead to your favourite type of question or section of the course! But it is very helpful in that it is structured for you and clearly announced what question and excerpt you are on, so you just have to keep up with the CD and you will have completed all the questions by the time the exam ends.

## The Written Paper

The written paper is designed to examine **three areas**:

1. Your Listening Skills
2. Your Composing Skills
3. Your Ability to Recall Studied Material

Let's look at these three areas in detail.

## Listening skills

Every question on the exam paper will test your listening skills in some section of the question so to get top marks always:

- Make sure you can hear the CD at an appropriate level
- Use the DRAMATICS acronym to highlight musical features
- Use formal musical terms as much as you can
- Use the rough work areas provided first!

### Tip

Most students make the mistake of rushing into an answer and writing the very first thing that comes to them. Remember, stay calm! Your first idea might not be your best and you might come up with a better answer on the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> listening. Once you have fully gathered your thoughts and confirmed your answer in the roughwork area, it is then time to answer the question in the appropriate answer box.

Most of the questions in the listening skills section require you to “Tick the Correct Box” or “Choose the Correct Word” from a word bank.

NEVER leave these “Tick” or “Choose” the correct answer spaces blank. Even if you don’t know, guess! You might be lucky!

Other questions ask you to describe something in a short paragraph-style answer. When answering with a short paragraph make sure you use full sentences and that you use the formal musical terms you have learned in class or in music rehearsals. This will add to your chances of scoring highly.

### Tip

Make sure you answer **EACH** section. Do not leave any blank spaces. Also look at the amount of lines/space provided for each answer. Longer spaces normally mean that answer has more marks going for it so write as much as you can for these answers to maximise your marks.: Read the question carefully. If asked to describe **ONE** feature, then only give one and give as much detail as you can on it. You will **not** get extra marks for giving two.

### Topics to know for listening questions

- The Families of Instruments and be able to identify them by their sound
- Irish Instruments and be able to identify them by their sound
- Tempo, Dynamic and Performance markings
- Staff Notation including Ledger Lines, Time and Key Signatures

### Tip

Don't forget the rest symbol that corresponds to the note value when revising your musical notation.

- Graphic Notation
- Musical Form
- Voice Types – SATB
- Chordal Accompaniment – Block/Broken Chords
- Chords and Triads – what word they change on/what triad certain printed notes will form.
- Texture
- Melodic Dictation – fill in the missing notes

### Tip

Remember in this question, the rhythm of the missing pitches is printed above the staff. Use these in your answer. Even if this is a weak area for you, always **try** as marks are given for having **ANY** of the five notes in the correct place and even if you get all 5 wrong but you get the shape or contour of the melody right, you will get marks for that too!

## Structuring a Rehearsal and planning for improvement

This type of question is examining your **critical listening** and your ability to create an **action plan** to improve. Don't panic. We have all, at some stage, practiced something and planned how to improve.

Simple, clear ideas work best here and remember **your DRAMATICS** acronym for help. For example - *"I would tell the performers to listen more to each other so that they stay in tempo/stay in pitch."* or, *"I would tell them to remember it is a performance and all performances need variety, so dynamic variation is important"*.

Again, keep your answers musically relevant and use technical terms to show you understand them and write as much as you can.

### Identifying Musical Features

Don't be afraid of what you think might be too simple or too straightforward answers. They are more than likely correct. Just make sure they **are musically relevant**. For example, don't say - *"They both have singers"* – instead **use the language and terminology** you have gathered over the three years of your Junior Cycle and say: *"Both excerpts have male vocalists singing the melody line."*

## Composing task questions

There are two composing tasks in the exam paper.

1. Asking you to add backing chords to a given melody.
2. Asking you to compose a melody to a given rhythm and word pattern.

### Tips for backing chord questions

**Tip 1:** Write the correct pitch name under each note in the printed music extract. This will help you figure out what triad/chord you need. And remember, a chord symbol will cover **all** the notes until the next empty chord box. This may extend over 2 or more bars and you must take **all** these notes into account before finally identifying the correct chord to place in the box.

**Tip 2:** The Chord Bank Grid WILL be **provided for you** in this question BUT it may be printed on the next page, so look carefully for it as ALL the information you need for your answers are in it, such as your Key, Roman Numerals for Cadence points, and what chords are Major/Minor.

### Tips for melody writing question

Remember, a lot of the information you need is already **in the question**. Use this to your advantage! In 2022 the lyrics and the rhythm required to complete the answer were given to you. You then had to complete a melody using those words and rhythm.

Remember to:

- Identify your key as this will point you towards the correct keynote to end on.
- Ensure you add your suitable phrasing.

These are two instructions that are highlighted for you at the start of this question. They are vital to scoring highly so use them as a checklist and when reading over your final answer put a tick next to them to ensure you completed them.

**Topics you need to know for Composing Skills questions:**

- Key and Time Signatures
- Names of lines, spaces and Ledger lines
- Note Values and their respective rest symbols
- Triads and Chords
- Cadences

## Recalling studied material

These types of questions seek to examine material covered in class or in your CBAs and are usually designed as short paragraph answers.

It's important to know all the topics in your listening and composing skills, but also:

- Texture
- Musical Context/genres
- Name and describe a piece you have already studied especially music by Irish Songwriters, artists or ensembles
- How to Create a Playlist
- How to Share Music online
- Copyright, Royalties and Organisations involved in these activities in Ireland
- Your Composition Portfolio - CBA I
- Music Technology and Recording Software
- Rehearsal Skills/Creating a public performance.

### Tip

Keep a list of all the music you hear in class and what genre or type of music they are. It is a great resource for these types of questions and gives you confidence going into the exam that you have listened to a wide variety of musical styles.

## Final Tips:

1. The extra knowledge that you get from playing an instrument or singing certainly adds to the prospect of you doing well, so take advantage of any opportunities you might get in school or in your local community to join a performing group or a choir.
2. Keep a log of new words or terms you hear and see if you can apply them to your own music-making activities.
3. Similarly make a list of pieces that you hear in class and go online afterwards and try and find pieces that were written around the same time or in a similar style and see can you recognise what makes them similar or indeed what makes them different. By doing this you are creating an awareness of musical context!



4. Use the DRAMATICS acronym to help you hear what is similar or different about the pieces on your listening list.
5. Use the CBAs as an opportunity to develop both your composing skills and your “Procedural Knowledge.”

Apply these extra steps and you will undoubtedly succeed and master Music at Junior Cycle!



Best of luck in the exam!  
You will be great

