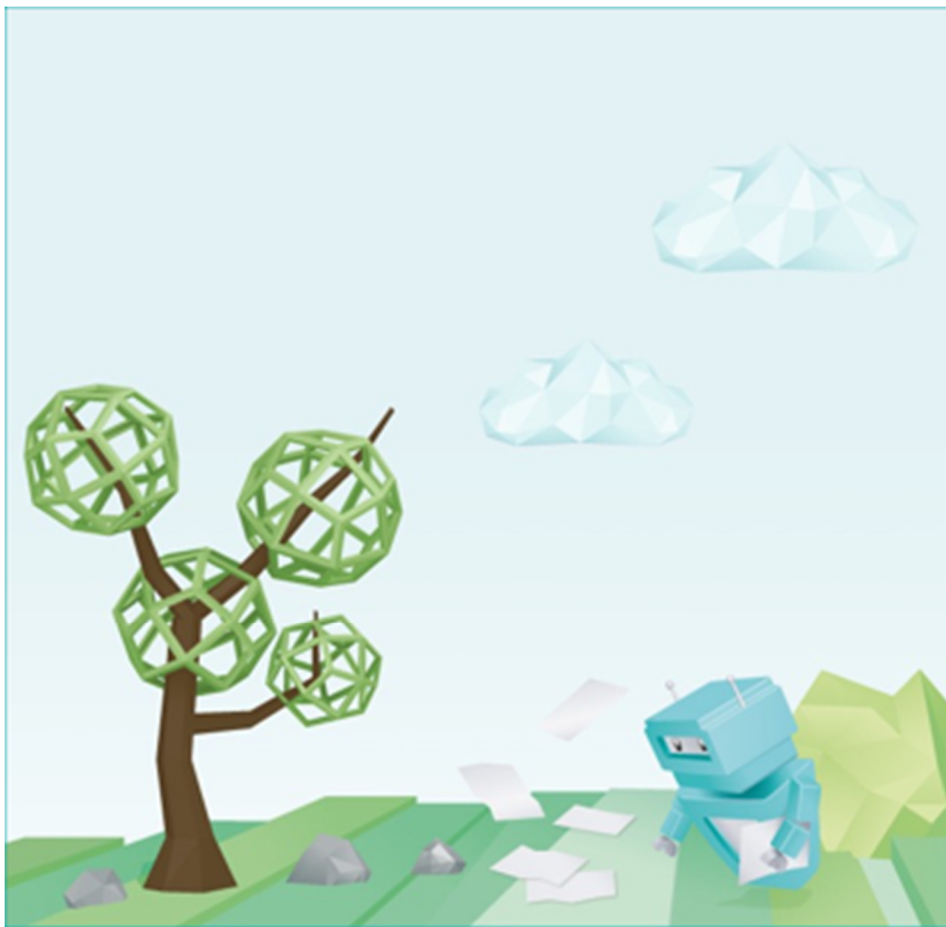


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Music

How to get a H1 in the Leaving Cert
Music Exam



by Sarah E.

Sarah got a H1 in her higher Leaving Cert Music exam. She's now studying in Marino Institute Dublin and looks forward to using Music in her future career. Here she shares what she learned.

Music is a great subject to do for the Leaving Cert. I always felt very lucky going into music class, as there were many relaxed and enjoyable moments, but we still learned lots. For me, a class where I spent a lot of time either playing or listening to music, was a great choice.

Table of Contents:

Leaving Cert Music – An Overview	3
Key Dates	4
The Breakdown of Marks	5
The Practical Exam	6
The Written Exam	10
Some Final Tips	13



Leaving Cert Music – An Overview

Most people who do Music for LC do, or have done music outside school at some point, often learning an instrument. Many of them hope to maybe pursue a career in music. Careers in music include:

- Performing (voice or instrument)
- Song writing
- Composing music for films, video games, or advertising
- Recording and producing
- Music business and touring
- Music Health (e.g. therapy of children through the use of music)
- Music Teaching

Doing Music outside school gives you a great head start. If you are advanced at your instrument, some of what you do in music class will just be revision. It is essential that you either play an instrument or sing for Leaving Cert music. It's never too late to improve though!

Advantages of doing LC Music:

- Music has a very high rate of good grades. This is probably because many people do much of their learning in their instrument classes outside of school.
- One of my favourite things about doing Leaving Cert Music was that our class had lots of opportunities to perform. We were sought for the choir, musicals, open evenings, masses, and graduation ceremonies. I really enjoyed this aspect of Music class and I think my confidence grew greatly as a result. It also really bonded our class strongly together.
- My final point about Leaving Cert music is that you can have passed it before you ever sit the exam! I think this is brilliant. Because the practical is worth 50%, if you do a very good practical,



then you have already passed overall. This helps spread-out the pressure much more evenly throughout the year in comparison to other subjects.

In summary, the advantages of Leaving Cert music are:

- ✓ A more relaxed subject than most
- ✓ Great for students who have an interest in music outside of school
- ✓ Great for students who would like to pursue music as a career
- ✓ High rate of good grades
- ✓ Lots of performance opportunities
- ✓ Ability to perform with friends, in the practical
- ✓ You can have passed Leaving Cert music before you sit the exam

Key Dates – Don't Forget Them!

Know your dates in order to be well prepared and to stay focused:

- The LC Oral Tests and Practical Music Tests are usually between March 25th and April 9th.
- The HL elective in composing is due on the last Friday in April. (Most people don't do this).
- The LC Written Exam is usually between the 18th and 23rd June.



The Breakdown of Marks

There is a total of 400 marks going for LC Music, i.e. each 4 marks equals 1%. Below I am giving the marks at the overall percentage of your Leaving Cert Music grade, for each element.

There are four elements to the LC Music course:

1.	Listening	25%	100 marks
2.	Composition	25%	100 marks
3.	Practical	25%	100 marks
4.	Elective	25%	100 marks

However, almost everyone does the practical elective, which adjusts the marks to:

1.	Listening	25%	100 marks
	Q1	6.25%	25 marks
	Q2	2.5%	10 marks
	Q3	2.5%	10 marks
	Q4	2.5%	10 marks
	Q5	6.25%	25 marks
2.	Composition	25%	100 marks
	Section A: Melody Composition	10%	40 marks
	Section B: Harmony	15%	60 marks
3.	Practical	50%	200 marks

The breakdown for the practical can be more complicated. Unprepared tests always account for 5% of your overall mark (i.e. 20 marks). The remaining 45% of your overall mark is split between your performance and your music technology, depending on your choices, and your level.



The Practical Exam

The standard of performances is generally very high. Music presented often exceeds required standard. As such, don't over prepare for it at the cost of exam study time.

General:

- Some of the Leaving Cert practical exam can be done with group recitals. I would recommend this if you are a nervous performer. If having a friend strum their guitar while you sing helps, then go for it.
- You have a couple of options with the practical - you can do 1 or 2 activities:
 - 1 Activity - You play 6 pieces of your choice marked to honors standard.
 - 2 Activities - You play 4 pieces of your choice for each activity, marked to ordinary level standard. (For example: 4 pieces on one instrument / voice and 4 on another, or 4 on one instrument / voice and Music Technology.)
- Normally the Music teachers advise that it is easier to score with two activities even though that gives 8 pieces in total, as the standard expected is lower. You have a total of 25 mins to play and the standard expected is around grade 5/6, although the Department of Education never mention actual grades anywhere. I wouldn't recommend that you play higher than that even if you are able, as it's wasted effort and you're more likely to make a mistake.
- You must choose a variety of genres and pieces. Your teacher is the best person to advise you on what to pick. But I would **STRONGLY** suggest you settle on the pieces many weeks, or even months, before the practical exam.



Chosen Music and Standard of Performance:

From the marking scheme, to get the highest points in your Chosen Music and Standard of Performance, you must achieve the following:

- Your control of the instrument or voice should have very good pitch, intonation, rhythm, control of sound, and tone quality.
- Your musicality, interpretation, and programme content should have excellent musical performance, confidence, sense of style (melodic and rhythmic), feel for words (if applicable), rhythm, phrasing and dynamics.
- For groups, the student being tested must make a positive input to the musical balance of the group, have very good interaction with the rest of the group and be a very strong member of an ensemble.
- Your pitch and rhythmic accuracy should have note accuracy and be rhythmically consistent.



Music Technology

Not all schools do Music Technology, which is a pity, as it is quite simple. It has to be done on specialised software but there are many tutorials for these on YouTube, if you need help getting started.

- Music Technology involves inputting a few bars of sheet music into the software system, saving, closing, re-opening, playing and editing the file.
- Many students are a bit confused about what type of edits you might have to do. This would be things like changing the metronome mark, changing the rhythm of notes, changing an instrument or transposing work up or down 2 semitones. Much of this is just changing drop down menus, or typing a higher tempo in the tempo box, so once you've seen it a few times you should be very fast at it.
- From the marking scheme, to get the highest points in your Music Technology, you must achieve the following:
 - Inputting with complete note accuracy and very good control of the software.
 - Your **musicality, interpretation and programme content** should have very confident inputting, very good musical outcome, very confident editing, printing, recording, saving and retrieving, very musical results of edits (where relevant), and very good understanding of the system.
 - Your pitch and rhythmic accuracy should have note accuracy and rhythmically consistent.



Unprepared Tests:

Unprepared tests are to test your aural memory, your sight reading and your rhythm.

From the marking scheme, to get the highest points in your Unprepared Tests, you must achieve the following:

- Your sight reading should be fluent and accurate, have excellent tempo and dynamics and be musically expressive.
- Your aural memory should have confident response, be accurate, have an excellent feeling for pulse, and be fluent.
- Your improvisation should have excellent development of given material, excellent response and feeling for pulse, and fluency.

Practical Exam Recap:

So, to recap, my top tips for the **practical exam** would be:

- ✓ Two groups of four pieces / songs is easier to get marks on than one group of six.
- ✓ Consider doing Music Technology, as it's actually very easy when you get the hang of it. If you've practised it a few times, you shouldn't have a problem.
- ✓ Do your practical with a group if it helps you feel relaxed.
- ✓ Make sure you have practised with your accompanist.
- ✓ Perform with confidence.



The Written Exam

Listening:

This consists of questions on your set works, Irish music (including a short essay) and a piece that you most likely won't have heard before. You need to actively listen to the pieces. For the classical pieces, you need to know the Form, Instruments, and Themes of the pieces. It's tricky but manageable. The books are helpful. Some more specific advice below.

Depending on the set works in your year, you will need to know certain vocabulary. Your teacher will advise you as to what vocabulary you need for your pieces. There won't be a lot of words for each, but make sure you know them and use them correctly.

- **Baroque pieces:** Know the sections; be able to tell them apart and what order they're in, and what voices and instruments sing where.
- **Modern pieces:** Know recording techniques, the instrumentation, the chord progressions. This is a relatively easy one.
- **Contemporary pieces:** Be able to tell all the sections apart and know what section comes next (it helps if you have some kind of storyline to it all because it may be difficult depending on the composer). Know the composer's compositional techniques like retrograde, inversion, canon. Know the instrumentation.
- **Romantic pieces:** Know the instrumentation, rhythmic features.
- **Irish music:** Know the difference between a reel, jig and hornpipe. Be able to tell instruments apart and know features of sean-nós singing. There's a 10-mark question at the end where you write a short essay about something like the harping tradition. They give you 4 options to



choose from. Because the question is time restricted, write fast, and stick to bullet points and short sentences. Make sure you get the main points down.

Top tips for the Listening Section:

- ✓ Give more details on the set works. Many students are losing marks for giving answers that are vague. You won't lose marks for too much detail, but you will for too little.
- ✓ Remember that the Irish Music question is only 2.5% of the total mark. Don't spend too long learning it, and give short but informative sentences.
- ✓ The aural skills question is quite easy, use this to your advantage to get marks.



Composition:

Knowing your theory is essential for composition. There are a few rules that you must know and follow. You must answer two questions on the paper: Melody and Harmony. In my opinion, these are the hardest questions on the paper. You have to be able to fill in a bar of a score of your set works and the aural skills, just by listening. You need to have practised this.

- The **melody** writing section involves composing a melody to a given 4 bars, or compose in a given dance meter, or compose to set words (e.g. a poem).
- The **harmony** writing section involves either composing bass notes and chords to a given tune, or adding descant and chords to a given tune, or composing a melody and bass from given chords.

My Top Composing Tips for Section A: Melody Composition

- ✓ Need to be rhythmically accurate.
- ✓ Don't confine rhythm patterns in melodies to those given in opening phrases.
- ✓ Don't forget to insert phrasing or expression marks.

My Top Composing Tips for Section B: Harmony

- ✓ Most students have difficulty completing the bass line correctly. Practise this before the exam, and get your teacher to help.
- ✓ Cadences are generally okay to recognise, but make sure you get the correct bass note.



Some Final Tips

- **Be confident** when you are performing on front of your class mates. We all have shy moments, but the more preparation and practise you do, the easier it will be at the time of your practical exam.
- **Download your set works onto your phone.** Listen to them occasionally. You will quickly become quite familiar with them.
- **Attempt every part** to every question. Even if you know very little, **write it down.**
- If you make a mistake and have a better answer, put a line through it and try again. Don't Tippex it out! If you think your answer is wrong, but don't have anything better, **then leave it there.**
- Use the resources on **Studyclix.** Practising past questions will help you be more prepared!
- Read through all the available resources on examinations.ie – there are past papers, marking schemes, past aural tests, sight tests, improvisation tests and so on. These are invaluable.
- Take advantage of the fact that you get to **spread the workload** throughout the year, completing 50% of your marks long before the written exam.
- Take advantage of the fact that it's one of your last exams, so there's a good chance you'll have a few days exam-free beforehand to study.





*Finally, I would like wish you
the best of luck in the exam!
You will be fine. 😊*

