

Summer Tasks for A-Level Musicians

In preparation for starting A-level it is important to have your GCSE skills finely tuned for the step up in the level of learning. The following tasks will ensure that you start A-Level Music as you mean to go on, with an ability to mix all the skills needed for the performing, composition, listening and analysis of all styles of music.

1: Be practicing your instrument or voice. You will be expected to perform shortly after starting the course as a baseline, so having a piece ready is a must. You may perform with a backing track or unaccompanied. Grade 5 standard is a good starting point for Year 12, but above or below that is acceptable.

2: We need good music theory knowledge in order to analyse and write music. Everyone comes to A-level with a different level of music theory skills, but the course below should make sure that you are in a good place to start the composition and analysis elements of the course. The learning can be completed at your own pace. Do keep a list of any questions that you have as you complete the course for us to answer when we meet.

All courses are free. You may wish to pay for a certificate of completion, but this is not necessary. Participation in class discussion will demonstrate the knowledge that we need to see.

<https://www.coursera.org/learn/edinburgh-music-theory>

3: If you come to A-level with a background in Popular Music, then the following MOOC will also be an excellent grounding in the Western Classical Tradition, which is a large proportion of the A level syllabus. Again, this is free and can be completed as quickly or as slowly as you wish, and keep a list of any questions that you may have.

<https://www.coursera.org/learn/introclassicalmusic>

4: Listen to as much music as you can. Listen to as many different styles and genres of music as you can. Watch streams and videos of online concerts, or music documentaries. Keep a note of what you listen to, what you like and what you don't, and why? Use the acronym DR CAT SMITH to help prompt a critically analytical mindset. The meaning of this is below.

We look forward to discussing the work you have completed with you in September.

Dynamics – Volume of the music

Rhythm – The effect of combining a variety of notes with different durations and use of rhythmic devices

Context – The time, place, purpose and other information surrounding a piece of music.

Articulation – The way that each note is played (i.e. legato and staccato)

Texture – The different layers in a piece of music and how they interact

Structure – The overall plan of a piece of music, the order of the different sections

Melody – The effect created by combining notes of different pitches and use of melodic devices.

Instrumentation – The combination of instruments used, and their specific timbre and techniques

Tonality – The key or mood of a piece of music

Harmony – How notes are combined to build up chords and use of harmonic devices