

# **MUSIC**

**JANE WADE**

**LEAVING CERTIFICATE**

**HIGHER LEVEL**

**6<sup>th</sup> year**

**2025-2026**

**Aural Skills**

**Question 6**



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## CONTENTS

Basic theory revision	P4
Key signatures	P5
Basic Italian terms	P6
Rhythm revision	P7 - 8
Western classical music	P9
How to approach Q6	P10 - 16
Top tips	P17
Student notes	P18



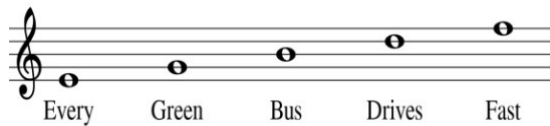
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## BASIC THEORY REVISION

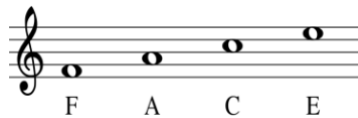
### LINES AND SPACES IN THE TREBLE AND BASS CLEFS

Treble Clef (upper voices; high register instruments; right hand of a piano etc)

Lines:



Spaces:

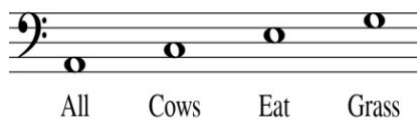


Bass Clef (lower voices, lower register instruments, left hand of a piano etc)

Lines:



Spaces:



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## KEY SIGNATURES

Remember: All major keys share a key signature with their relative minor

To work out the major key, use the following rules:

*Sharp keys: 'If sharps you see, the last is ti'*

*Flat keys: 'If flats there are, the last is fa'*

To work out the relative minor, identify the *do* (ie the major home note) and count downwards by step: *do-ti-la (to get to the minor key, go back three)*

The *la* note is the relative minor

### SHARP KEYS



### FLAT KEYS



Note the order in which the clef, key and time signatures appear:

1. Clef
2. Key signature
3. Time signature



It is also important to remember that the time signature only appears once in the music, at the very beginning, whereas the clef and key signature need to be restated at the beginning of every line of the stave



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## BASIC ITALIAN TERMS and MUSICAL TERMINOLOGY

**DYNAMICS** (How loud/soft a piece is):

*pp* (pianissimo)-very soft

*p* (piano)-soft

*mp* (mezzo piano)-moderately soft

*ff* (fortissimo)-very loud

*f* (forte)-loud

*mf* (mezzo forte)-moderately loud

*crescendo*-gradually getting louder

*decrescendo/diminuendo*-gradually getting softer

**TEMPO** (The speed of a piece)

*Allegro*-fast

*Andante*-at a medium, walking pace

*Lento/Largo/Adagio*-slow

*Accelerando*-gradually getting faster

*Ralentando/Ritardando*-gradually getting slower

**ARTICULATION** (how smooth/detached a piece is)

*legato*-smoothly

*staccato*-detached

*marcato*-with added emphasis

### INSTRUMENTAL TECHNIQUES

*Glissando*: sliding between two notes

Bowed strings:

*pizzicato*: pluck the string

*arco*: play with the bow

*con sordini*: play with mutes

*tremolo*: rapid bowing back and forth across the strings to give a 'trembling' effect

*vibrato*

Piano:

*Una corda*: play with the soft pedal

### OTHER IMPORTANT TERMS

Anacrusis/Upbeat: when the piece does not start on the first beat of the bar

Descant: a higher melody in opposition to the main melody

Interval: the gap between two notes

Pitch: the note/notes being played; the position of the note in relation to other notes

Range: the distance from highest to lowest notes in a piece/passage

Syllabic: one note per syllable

Melismatic: many notes per syllable

Tutti: everyone

NB: This list is a starting point only; you will continue to build on this throughout the course



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## BASIC RHYTHM REVISION

### BASIC NOTE VALUES



Semibreves last for 4 beats



Dotted minims last for 3 beats



Minims last for 2 beats



Dotted crotchets last for 1.5 beats



Crotchets last for 1 beat



Quavers last for half a beat

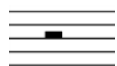


Semiquavers last for a quarter beat

### BASIC RESTS



Semibreve rest (4 silent beats)



Minim rest (2 silent beats)

*(Remember: 'Mini sits and Semi hangs!')*



Crotchet rest (1 silent beat)



Quaver rest (1/2 silent beat)



Semiquaver rest (1/4 silent beat)



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BASIC TIME SIGNATURES

$\frac{2}{4}$  2 crotchet beats per bar, eg:



$\frac{3}{4}$  3 crotchet beats per bar, eg:



$\frac{4}{4}$  4 crotchet beats per bar, eg:



$\frac{6}{8}$  In  $\frac{6}{8}$  time there are two main dotted crotchet beats and these are grouped into two groups of 3 quavers (ie 6 quavers in total), eg:



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## WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC: A VERY BRIEF OVERVIEW

### BAROQUE (c. 1600-1750) e.g. BACH, VIVALDI, HANDEL

- basso continuo (harpsichord plus cello)
- (mostly) polyphonic texture
- often very ornamented
- vocal music often very melismatic
- melodies are mostly tonal but often complex to sing
- phrases can be uneven
- little performance direction
- Orchestra:** string section provides main body; wind: flutes (or recorders), oboes; limited brass (horn, trumpet); very limited percussion (timpani)

### CLASSICAL (c. 1750-1820) MOZART, HAYDN

- (mostly) homophonic texture
- symmetrical phrasing and forms
- slightly more performance directions (e.g. dynamics and articulation)
- singable melodies
- clear cadences
- Orchestra:** woodwind section developed: flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon; brass and percussion still limited

### ROMANTIC (c. 1820-1900) e.g. BERLIOZ, TCHAIKOVSKY

- expansive and expressive melodies
- greater dynamic and melodic range and contrast
- virtuosity: instruments and instrumentalists pushed to the limits
- chromaticism increasingly prominent
- rich harmonies
- more precise instructions
- fully developed symphony orchestra: large brass (including tuba and trombone) and percussion sections now standard

### 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY/CONTEMPORARY e.g. BARTOK, BARRY

- (often) atonal
- chromaticism
- dissonance
- use of cells as opposed to keys
- complex rhythmic structures and unusual time signatures
- orchestra: much more experimentation with sounds and instrumental techniques



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## How to approach Q6 in the exam

- Question 6 is the final question of your listening paper. This question is based on a piece or pieces of music that you likely have not studied before. You may have heard of the piece or song, but this is not guaranteed. We treat this as an 'unfamiliar listening' question.

### **This question is worth 20 marks (5% of your overall grade)**

- It is usually divided into three sections: A, B and C. Generally, the questions in section A tend to be one-answer or multiple choice. Section B will require a bit more detail and Section C would be the most detailed (though this is not always the case). Each excerpt is usually heard three times.
- Students often feel they cannot revise for this question – **this is not true**. Aural skills are developed and built over time through active listening and regular revision of your theory booklets. There are several things you can do to improve your aural awareness and aural literacy. The first step is to do as much active listening as possible and to practice past questions.
- Active listening involves paying attention to the working parts or layers within a piece of music. Although it may get annoying, analysing any music you hear, will only help you for this exam. From the alarm you hear first thing in the morning, to the pieces/songs you hear during TV-shows and movies, you can analyse it all!

### **The Elements of Music:**

Understanding how the elements and ingredients of music work, how to recognise them and how to describe them will change how you listen to music. This will also improve how you respond to exam questions.

### **Recap:**

Rhythm	The pattern of long and short sounds, when grouped together we call them rhythmic patterns
Pulse	A steady continuous beat, measured in BPM
Silence	When rests are inserted
Pitch	How high or low a sound is
Tempo	How fast or slow the music should be played (speed)
Dynamics	How loud or soft the music should be played (volume)
Harmony	Created when two or more note of different pitch are played or sung at the same time, designed to support a melody
Melody	The combination of note values at different pitches to create a tune
Timbre	The unique tone quality of different sounds, voices and instruments
Mood	The feeling or emotion evoked by a piece of music
Tonality	The overall sound of a piece of music based on the combination of notes it uses
Structure/Form	The overall plan of a piece of music, how a piece is built e.g. verse/chorus, ABA, Sonata
Texture	The layers of sound heard in a piece of music
Style	Specific term used to identify different kinds of music e.g. rock, jazz, classical
Instrumentation	Which instruments are playing and what they are playing



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## How to approach Q6 in the exam

To succeed in question 6, it's important to stay focused and structured. You should be able to recognise musical elements clearly and apply the strategies suggested below.

### 1. Build a Consistent Method

Using the same approach each time can improve accuracy and confidence. Everyone has their own way of working, but the following suggestions can help you build a reliable routine:

- Highlight or underline the important terms in the question so you stay focused on what's being asked.
- If you're given a score and directed to comment on a specific bar, locate and mark it straight away.
- Think: What might the answer involve? Jot down potential ideas in the margin to guide your response.
- When asked to comment on a certain passage, try listing possible musical features (e.g. melody, rhythm, texture) in your rough work, and refer to a few of them in your response. DR. T. SMITH is your go to here!

### 2. Understand Exactly What's Being Asked

Misinterpreting the question is one of the most frequent causes of mistakes.

#### Always read the question carefully!

For example, if the question asks, *"Give one melodic feature of the vocal line,"* make sure you're not answering with a rhythmic feature - this is a very common mistake of leaving cert students every year resulting in easy marks being lost.

Make sure your answer is RELEVANT. If you're asked to identify an instrument, please make sure you have mentioned an instrument in your answer.

### 3. Melody Dictation

Melodic dictation is the part of the exam where you're asked to notate a short section of a melody by ear. This task typically shows up in Questions 1–4 or occasionally in Question 6. It's rare for more than one dictation to appear on the same paper.

Although many students find this question intimidating, it's usually not as difficult as it seems. In fact, dictation examples in the Leaving Cert often involve a repeated phrase or a melodic sequence you've already heard. Look for patterns in the melody given - does it ascend or descend? Is it moving by steps or leaps? So don't skip it and give it a try. Even if you're unsure, make an attempt as you may be marked separately for rhythm and pitch and every mark or 0.5-mark counts!

More often than not, it's simply a case of recognising a familiar musical idea and transcribing it with minor adjustments.



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## How to approach Q6 in the exam

### 4. Comparison Questions

You'll come across comparison-style questions throughout the listening paper—for example: "How does Section B differ from Section A?" or "Compare Section A and Section B." It is important to look ahead at the questions. As you may not have heard these pieces before, I highly recommend that you jot down basic points about each excerpt as they are being played. Have your musical elements (DR. T. Smith) bullet pointed in your rough work ready to fill in. Making a table in your rough work can be useful for these kinds of questions:

Excerpt 1	Excerpt 2
Tonality	Tonality
Dynamics	Dynamics
Instruments	Instruments
Tempo	Tempo
Texture	Texture
Etc.	Etc.

The golden rule with these types of questions is:

**Refer to both sections in your answer.** Focusing on only one will limit your marks.

Half marks: "Section B is louder" or "Section B has brass instruments."

Full marks: "Section A features only strings, while Section B adds brass instruments" or "Section A is quieter, but Section B builds with a fuller texture and louder dynamics."

### 5. Instruments

You need to be familiar with the instruments of the orchestra. You will need to recognise the sound of each instrument as a common question that appears is 'Identify the instrument that is playing the melody'.

Strings	Woodwind	Brass	Percussion Tuned
Violin Viola Cello Double Bass	Flute Oboe Clarinet Bassoon	Trumpet French Horn Trombone Tuba	Timpani Xylophone Glockenspiel Tubular Bells
Other	Other	Other	Percussion Untuned
Harp	Piccolo Cor Anglais Bass Clarinet Saxophone Contrabassoon	Bass trombone Trumpets in different keys	Cymbals Woodblock Triangle Bass Drum Shaker



## How to approach Q6 in the exam

### 6. Question terminology:

The word 'Describe' can often panic students. One-word answers will not work here. You need to make sure that you are providing enough detail. These types of questions tend to be 3-4 marks so provide as much detail as possible. Have your musical features listed in your rough work if you are worried about forgetting them. This could even be done at the start of the exam when you are listening to the test excerpt. They will be useful to refer to throughout the exam.

You must use musical terminology in your answers. Think of the features as musical facts, something that cannot be argued e.g. the tempo of this piece is *allegro* or the tonality of this piece is *minor*. If you are asked to specifically describe the music under a particular heading like instrumentation, texture, tempo, tonality – please make sure you only answer using relevant musical features to that heading.

If a question asks you to identify the texture of a piece of music, try to give some detail about the melody and the accompaniment e.g. *This texture of this song is homophonic as the melody is sung by an alto, and the accompaniment is played on the piano using broken chords.*

### 7. The open-ended questions

First, do not panic. This is an opportunity for you to show off your knowledge of all the musical features. The marking scheme will have many different possible answers covering a wide range of the musical elements. I would always suggest students refer to the musical elements as much as possible if you are asked a more open-ended question. Please see example below:

*Question: "How does the composer create a tense atmosphere in this extract?"*

#### i. Identify the Mood or Effect Being Asked

Make sure you clearly understand the mood the question refers to—in this case, *tension* (suspense, unease, nervous anticipation)

#### ii. Focus on Musical Elements That Help Create Tension

Look out for how these features contribute to a tense sound world:

Musical Element	How It Might Create a Tense Atmosphere
Dynamics	Sudden changes, crescendos, unexpected silences
Harmony	Dissonant chords, clashing intervals, chromaticism
Rhythm	Repeated patterns (ostinatos), syncopation, irregular pulses
Tempo	Very slow (suspenseful) or fast with sudden stops
Instrumentation	Low strings, muted brass, high-pitched sustained notes, tremolo, percussion (e.g. timpani, snare rolls)
Melody	Narrow range (claustrophobic), jagged or rising lines, repetition
Texture	Sparse (isolated instruments), or dense and chaotic



## How to approach Q6 in the exam

### iii. Be Specific

Use correct musical vocabulary and refer to what you hear:

*“The use of tremolo in the violins and dissonant chords in the low brass build a sense of unease.”*

### iv. Mention Change Over Time (If Relevant)

If the tension builds or releases, comment on that:

*“The atmosphere becomes increasingly tense as the dynamics swell and the harmony grows more dissonant.”*

### v. Stay Focused on the Question

Don’t just describe the music—explain how each element helps to create *tension*.

### Key terms to remember and not mix up:

Composing	Performing/ Instrumental	Melodic	Rhythmic	Harmonic/Tonality	Texture
Retrograde	Staccato	Sequences	Syncopation	Pedal notes	Monophonic
Repetition	Legato	Ornamentation	Dotted rhythms	Sustained chords	Homophonic
Sequence	Pizzicato	Scales	Triplets	Broken chords	Polyphonic
Imitation	Arco	Range	Upbeat/anacrusis	Block chords	
Ostinato	Falsetto	Repetition	Compound time	Modulation	
Inversion	Vibrato	Chromatic movement	Changing time	Arpeggios	
Canon	Tremolo	Arpeggio/triadic	signatures	Alberti Bass	
Augmentation	Glissando	movement	Steady rhythm	Ostinato	
Antiphony	Strumming	Step movement -		Major	
Diminution	Con/senza	(conjunct)		Minor	
Modulation	sordino	Octave leaps		Modal	
Contrary motion		Wide leaps- (disjunct)		Atonal	
				Dissonant sounds	



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## Wider Listening:

Genre/Style	Key Features	Listening examples
<b>Baroque</b> (c.1600–1750)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Harpsichord</li> <li>- Ornamentation (trills, mordents)</li> <li>- Terraced dynamics</li> <li>- Contrapuntal texture</li> <li>- Sequences and imitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Handel – Messiah</i> (e.g. “And the Glory of the Lord”)</li> <li>- <i>Bach – Brandenburg Concerto No. 5</i></li> <li>- <i>Vivaldi – Spring from The Four Seasons</i></li> </ul>
<b>Classical</b> (c.1750–1820)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Balanced, clear phrases</li> <li>- Homophonic texture</li> <li>- Alberti bass</li> <li>- Regular cadences</li> <li>- Simple diatonic harmony</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Mozart – Eine Kleine Nachtmusik</i></li> <li>- <i>Beethoven – Symphony No. 5 (1st movement)</i></li> <li>- <i>Haydn – Surprise Symphony</i></li> </ul>
<b>Romantic</b> (c.1820–1900)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expressive, dramatic dynamics</li> <li>- Rubato</li> <li>- Chromaticism</li> <li>- Thicker texture</li> <li>- Lyrical melodies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Tchaikovsky – Romeo and Juliet Overture</i></li> <li>- <i>Chopin – Nocturne in E-flat major</i></li> <li>- <i>Schubert – Erlkönig</i></li> </ul>
<b>20th Century/Modern</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dissonance</li> <li>- Irregular rhythms/time signatures</li> <li>- Atonality or modality</li> <li>- Unusual instrumentation</li> <li>- Layered textures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Stravinsky – The Rite of Spring</i></li> <li>- <i>Debussy – Voiles</i></li> <li>- <i>Bartók – Concerto for Orchestra</i></li> </ul>
<b>Jazz</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Swing rhythm</li> <li>- Syncopation</li> <li>- Improvisation</li> <li>- Blue notes</li> <li>- Walking bass</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Miles Davis – So What</i></li> <li>- <i>Louis Armstrong – What a Wonderful World</i></li> <li>- <i>Dave Brubeck – Take Five</i></li> </ul>
<b>Rock/Pop</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Backbeat on 2 and 4</li> <li>- Repetitive riffs/hooks</li> <li>- Verse-chorus structure</li> <li>- Simple harmony (I–IV–V)</li> <li>- Use of electric instruments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>The Beatles – Hey Jude</i></li> <li>- <i>Queen – We Will Rock You</i></li> <li>- <i>Taylor Swift – Blank Space</i></li> </ul>
<b>Traditional Irish Music</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Modal melodies (Dorian, Mixolydian)</li> <li>- Repetition (AABB form)</li> <li>- Ornamentation</li> <li>- Dance types: reel (4/4), jig (6/8), hornpipe (dotted 4/4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>The Chieftains – The Morning Dew</i></li> <li>- <i>Seamus Ennis – The Bucks of Oranmore (Reel)</i></li> <li>- <i>Planxty – Sí Bheag, Sí Mhór</i></li> </ul>
<b>Film Music</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Leitmotifs</li> <li>- Wide range of dynamics</li> <li>- Matches mood/action</li> <li>- Often orchestral</li> <li>- Tempo and key changes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>John Williams – Star Wars Theme</i></li> <li>- <i>Hans Zimmer – Time (from Inception)</i></li> <li>- <i>Howard Shore – The Lord of the Rings</i></li> </ul>



## Wider Listening continued:

<b>Musical Theatre</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Word painting</li> <li>- Character-driven songs</li> <li>- Repetition of motifs</li> <li>- Speech-like rhythm</li> <li>- Usually orchestral accompaniment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Stephen Sondheim – Into the Woods</i></li> <li>- <i>Lin-Manuel Miranda – My Shot (Hamilton)</i></li> <li>- <i>Andrew Lloyd Webber – Phantom of the Opera (Phantom of the Opera)</i></li> </ul>
<b>Electronic/Techno</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Looping and layering</li> <li>- Synthesised instruments</li> <li>- Strong beat</li> <li>- Repetitive rhythmic patterns</li> <li>- Minimal harmony</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Daft Punk – One More Time</i></li> <li>- <i>Kraftwerk – Autobahn</i></li> <li>- <i>The Chemical Brothers – Galvanize</i></li> </ul>
<b>Reggae</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offbeat rhythm (skank): guitar or piano accents on beats 2 and 4</li> <li>- Laid-back groove with slow to moderate tempo</li> <li>- Prominent basslines (often melodic and syncopated)</li> <li>- Lyrics often about social or political themes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Bob Marley – No Woman, No Cry</i></li> <li>- <i>Toots &amp; The Maytals – Pressure Drop</i></li> <li>- <i>Jimmy Cliff – You Can Get It If You Really Want</i></li> </ul>
<b>World/Ethnic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Traditional or folk music from non-Western cultures (often passed down orally)</li> <li>- Use of non-Western scales or modes (e.g. raga, pentatonic, microtones)</li> <li>- Complex and varied rhythmic patterns (e.g. polyrhythms in African music, tala in Indian music)</li> <li>- Call and response and repetition are common</li> <li>- Often no harmony; instead, focus on rhythm, melody, and timbre</li> <li>- May include drones, chanting, or layered textures (especially in African music)</li> <li>- Use of world instruments e.g. table, djembe, sitar, gongs, guzheng/zither, panpipes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Indian Classical – Ravi Shankar (Sitar)</i></li> <li>- <i>West African Drumming – Ewe or Mandinka Ensembles</i></li> <li>- <i>Balinese Gamelan – Semar Pegulingan style</i></li> <li>- <i>Andean Folk – El Cóndor Pasa</i></li> <li>- <i>Chinese Traditional – Jasmine Flower (Mo Li Hua)</i></li> </ul>



## TOP TIPS:

## TOP TIPS:

- Broaden your musical horizons, listen to a variety of musical styles throughout the course.
- Try analysing new music every Friday using the 'New Music' playlists on Spotify or Apple Music or YouTube– a weekly task for your Friday commute to and from school.
- Research different genres and watch performances online. Make a playlist of your favourites!
- Listen to instruments playing regularly to get used to their sound quality. Watch solo performances on YouTube to help get familiar with the tone quality of each instrument.
- Practice past papers – start with multiple choice questions if you are struggling with the open-ended questions.
- Jot down musical features about any piece of music you are listening to using the musical elements as headings. Cross check your answers using preview pages on Musicnotes or a quick Google search will often do!
- Revise your theory booklets e.g. you may be asked questions about identifying cadences. Use the appropriate term perfect/imperfect.
- Attempt all questions – do not leave any blanks!
- Read the questions carefully, underline KAP (key asking points).
- Tick the correct number of boxes for multiple choice questions.
- Have your musical element rough work ready. If you are comparing two excerpts, make sure to jot down features you hear as you are listening. Draw a table if it helps!
- If asked to describe similarities and differences between two excerpts, it is very important to refer to both in your answer.
- Texture- always explain how texture is used by referencing the instrumentation e.g. The texture of this piece is homophonic as the melody is performed on the violin with block chord accompaniment on piano. Linking your answer with musical evidence is crucial for these questions.
- If you are asked to identify, name, choose a specific number of features or instruments/ each incorrect answer cancels a correct one – be careful!!
- Do not mix up melodic, rhythmic or harmonic features. Use the table on page 14 to help.
- **Keep your answers within the boundary boxes of the exam paper. Do not write answers in the margins and carefully label any material which is placed in the rough work space provided.**



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