

GCSE MUSIC FAQs

Do I need to be able to play a musical instrument?

Ideally you need to be learning a musical instrument when you start the GCSE course as there is a performance unit as part of the overall assessment criteria. This can include online learning at the moment and you may start now in year nine if you are able. Please ask if you need help getting music lessons started at the moment.

Does singing count as an instrument?

Yes the voice is equal to all other instruments and you can sing for your GCSE performance.

Do I need a second instrument?

No.

Do I need to have completed grade 5 theory to study GCSE music?

No - but if you are able to practise any theory using websites such as musictheory.net this will help.

Do I need to have a computer at home with music software to complete the composition coursework?

No. We have fully up-to-date software available within both lessons and during Activity times for students to access, in order to achieve the best possible marks for music coursework.

What does the music exam involve?

At the end of year 11, during the main exam sitting, there is one exam which lasts an hour and a half. This involves listening to extracts of music from the different set works you will have studied in class and answering questions such as identify the melody instrument or describe the texture. There is one longer essay based question as the final part of the exam for which you will have scores and listening examples available to help. As with all other GCSE exams, extra time is also available to those students who qualify.

Is the GCSE only about Classical music?

No. There are Classical styled works by Beethoven and Bach, but the course also covers Film Music such as Star Wars or Pop music such as Killer Queen.

Do I have to perform a solo in front of everyone in the class?

No. Students are encouraged to perform regularly (as students currently do for year nine music lessons). Students are required to record a solo performance towards the end of year 11 for coursework but this only needs to involve the music teachers if students would prefer, and they can repeat the performance as many times as they wish until it is perfect.

How much coursework is there?

By April of Year 11 each student needs to have completed two compositions and one solo and one ensemble performance. Each piece is marked by the music teachers so that students are aware of their teacher assessed coursework marks (making up 60% of the course) before going into the exam sessions. The coursework is also prepared during the school music lessons and/or with their instrumental teacher to help you with your individual needs.

What is the difference between the two-hour and the three-hour options?

Just the amount of teaching time. Both options cover the same course but naturally there is more teaching time available alongside development opportunities to delve more deeply into the subject material within the three-hour option. If you are able to take the three-hour option then you will benefit from more teacher contact time but if this does not suit your option choices then it is perfectly possible to access the GCSE music course on two teaching hours per week. It's more a question of what suits you.

Have musicians gained grade 9s at GCSE music at St Bart's in the past?

Whilst we aim to make music accessible to all abilities we are also delighted to share that students have gained grade 9s in music at St Bart's every year since the very first exam sitting of the new GCSE syllabus. Music is a very inclusive subject and besides the academic aspects, is also a lot of fun, so I would recommend studying GCSE music to any student who clearly enjoys the subject.

If you have any further questions that are not covered here, please contact Mrs Roberson, Head of Expressive Arts: groberson@stbarts.co.uk.

