

How to Answer an IB Music Question

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When answering a question on an IB Music exam paper, you must try to talk about all the points listed in the question and **explain** your information.

Except for the questions about the prescribed works, the question is the same for all other listening pieces on the exam.

The Generic IB Music Question

Unidentified Piece

Analyze what you hear in this extract in terms of relevant:

- **Musical Features:** such as (but not limited to) harmony, melody, rhythm, instrumentation
- **Structural Features:** such as (but not limited to) form, phrases, motifs, texture
- **Contextual Features:** such as (but not limited to) style, time, culture, geography, history

For high marks **all** three of the above features must be addressed in detail using accurate musical terminology.

The activity required to answer the IB Music question is threefold:

1. Listen to and analyze the music
2. Write down the details of what you hear
3. Prove your answer / Explain the details

Below is a breakdown of the IB Music Question. There are specific comments and questions you need to figure out. This is not a complete list, however, and the question states several times, “but not limited to” when prompting your response.

COMPONENT THINK ABOUT...

MUSICAL FEATURES

- Harmony Monody (none) / Polyphony / Major / Minor / Modal / Dissonance / Atonal
- Melody Describe it / Pick out characteristics / Pitch or tonality
- Instrumentation The medium – Solo / What kind of ensemble is performing the piece – be specific.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

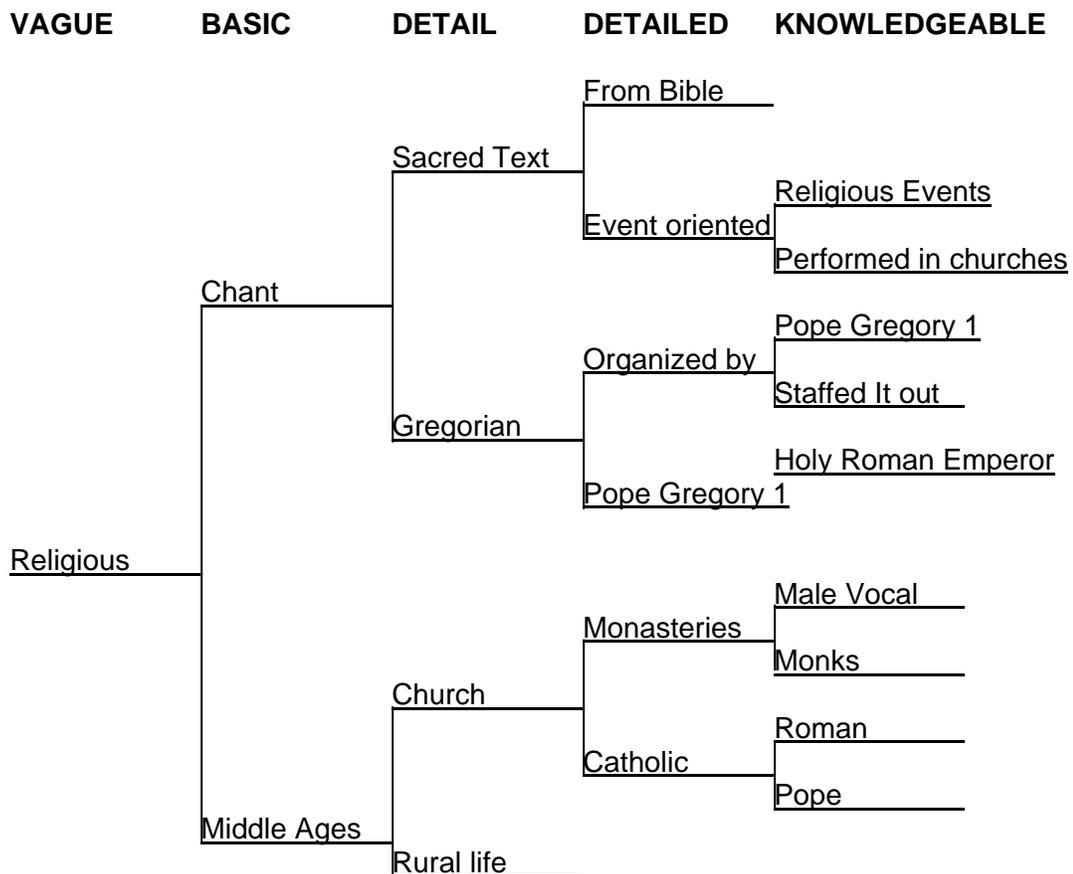
- Form The structure of the musical events in the music – can you figure this out?
Make a diagram to show what you hear – don't write it out in sentences
- Phrases What is happening in the phrases?
- Motifs Short repeated melodic or rhythmic segments of music – are there any?
- Texture Texture is an artistic word referring to the characteristic quality or essence of the music. Is the texture heavy, pointillist, fragmented, light, scant, etc? If it's a vocal piece, what is the text or language used?

CONTEXTUAL FEATURES

- Style What style is the piece? Is there a specific style you can attach to it?
- Time This refers to when it was composed – can you figure it out?
- Culture What was the culture of the area or time it was composed?
- Geography Where was it composed?
- History What was happening in place this piece was composed?

Recommendations:

1. Start your analysis with the Context. Try to figure out when and where, based on the style, it is placed in time and geography. If you do this, ***you'll have a set of information available to you to answer the question.***
2. Continue with Musical Features, which are usually the easiest things to identify. ***Based on the context, can you figure out why some of the musical features were used?***
3. On your third listen, can you pick out some Structural Features? ***Start with the small features like motifs and phrases.*** Identify and explain what you hear. Be specific.
4. To get a high score on your answer, ***dive into the form and texture.*** These are the most advanced concepts.
5. Expand your answers. (Music example: Gregorian Chant)



You must not limit your answers. If you have specific information relevant to the musical excerpt, i.e. your parents perform in Kabuki, and you know a fair amount about Japanese Kabuki opera, use your information!