BTEC Music Practice

Key vocabulary and definitions

Pearson BTEC Level 1/Level 2 Tech Award in Music Practice
Qualification 603/7055/5 - Specification Issue 5

A student-friendly revision glossary organised around Components 1, 2 and 3. It covers styles, musical elements, theory, performance, composition, production, professional development, responding to a brief and assessment language.

How to use this resource

Cover each definition and retrieve it from memory. Add a listening example or practical application. When writing about music, identify the feature, describe what can be heard and explain its effect or how it serves the style, audience or brief.

Source: Pearson BTEC Level 1/Level 2 Tech Award in Music Practice specification, Issue 5, May 2026. Definitions are concise student-friendly explanations aligned to the specification. This independent revision resource is not an official Pearson publication.

Component 1: Musical styles and contexts

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Musical style	A recognisable type of music with shared conventions, sounds and techniques.
Genre	A category of music identified by common musical characteristics and cultural context.
Stylistic feature	A musical characteristic that helps identify a particular style.
Popular music	Commercially distributed music intended for a broad audience, including rock, pop, hip-hop and electronic styles.
Rock 'n' roll	A 1950s popular style combining rhythm and blues and country influences, often using a strong backbeat and 12-bar blues.
British invasion	The international popularity of British rock and pop groups during the 1960s.
Motown	A soul style associated with the Motown label, featuring strong melodies, backbeats, bass lines and polished arrangements.
Psychedelic music	Music using experimental sounds, studio effects and unusual structures, associated with late-1960s culture.
Heavy metal	A loud rock style featuring distorted guitars, powerful riffs, strong drums and forceful vocals.
Progressive rock	Rock using extended structures, complex rhythms and influences from classical, jazz or experimental music.
Punk	Fast, direct rock music often using simple chords, energetic performance and an anti-establishment attitude.
Disco	Dance music featuring a steady four-to-the-floor beat, syncopated bass and rich arrangements.
Reggae	A Jamaican style commonly featuring offbeat chords, prominent bass and distinctive drum patterns.
Synth-pop	Pop built around synthesisers, drum machines and electronic production.
Hip-hop	A culture and musical style featuring rap, beats, sampling, DJ techniques and rhythmic vocal delivery.
Grunge	A 1990s alternative-rock style combining distorted guitars, contrasting dynamics and raw vocals.
Britpop	British guitar-based pop and rock of the 1990s, often drawing on earlier British styles.
Rave	Electronic dance music and culture centred on repetitive beats, DJs and large dance events.
Techno	Electronic dance music using repetitive programmed rhythms and synthesised sounds.
House	Dance music typically using a four-to-the-floor beat, repeated grooves and electronic production.
Drum and bass	Fast electronic music built around breakbeats, heavy bass and sampling.
Dubstep	Electronic music characterised by syncopated rhythms, sub-bass and manipulated bass sounds.
Reggaeton	A Latin popular style commonly using the repeated dembow rhythm, rap and melodic vocals.
Grime	A UK electronic and rap style using fast, sparse beats and MC-led vocals.
Trap	A hip-hop style featuring programmed hi-hat patterns, deep 808 bass and sparse textures.
World music	A broad term for musical traditions and popular styles from cultures around the world.
Fusion	Music combining features from two or more styles or traditions.
Samba	A Brazilian style featuring layered syncopated percussion and energetic rhythms.

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Bhangra	A Punjabi music and dance style often featuring dhol rhythms, vocal lines and modern electronic instruments.
Gamelan	An Indonesian ensemble tradition using tuned gongs, metallophones and interlocking patterns.
Baroque	Western classical music approximately from 1600-1750, often using ornamentation, contrapuntal texture and continuo.
Classical period	Western art music approximately from 1750-1820, often emphasising balance, clarity and regular phrasing.
Romantic period	Nineteenth-century art music often featuring expressive melody, rich harmony and expanded forces.
Minimalism	Music built from repeated short patterns that change gradually.
Serialism	A compositional approach that organises pitches or other elements into a predetermined series.
Blues	A style using blues scales, expressive performance, call and response and often a 12-bar structure.
Swing	A jazz style and rhythmic feel in which beats are unevenly divided; also associated with big bands.
Bebop	A fast, harmonically complex jazz style featuring virtuosic improvisation.
Music for media	Music created for film, television, advertising or computer games to support mood, narrative, identity or action.
Diegetic sound	Sound whose source exists within the story world and may be heard by the characters.
Non-diegetic sound	Sound added for the audience that does not originate within the story world, such as background score.
Foley	Recorded or performed sound effects synchronised to on-screen action.
Jingle	A short, memorable piece used in advertising or branding.
Theme tune	Music associated with a programme, character, product or recurring idea.
Soundscape	A layered sonic environment created from musical and non-musical sounds.

Component 1: Musical elements and theory

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Instrumentation	The instruments, voices and sound sources selected for a piece.
Ensemble	A group of musicians performing together.
Solo	A single performer or a prominent individual part.
Duet	Music for two performers or two principal parts.
Texture	How musical lines and layers are combined.
Monophonic	A single melodic line without harmonic accompaniment.
Homophonic	A texture with a main melody supported by chords or accompaniment.
Polyphonic	A texture containing two or more independent melodic lines.
Unison	Two or more performers playing or singing the same notes together.
Timbre	The distinctive tone colour or sound quality of a voice, instrument or sound source.
Sonic feature	A characteristic of how music sounds, such as timbre, texture, instrumentation or production effect.
Tonality	The organisation of music around a central key or tonal system.
Major scale	A seven-note scale with a characteristic bright tonal pattern.
Minor scale	A seven-note scale commonly associated with a darker tonal quality.
Pentatonic scale	A scale containing five notes per octave.
Blues scale	A scale based on the minor pentatonic with additional blue notes.
Mode	A scale pattern with its own sequence of tones and semitones.
Raga	A melodic framework in Indian classical music governing pitch material and characteristic phrases.
Diatonic	Using notes belonging to a particular major or minor key.
Chromatic	Using notes outside the prevailing key or moving in semitones.
Harmony	Simultaneous pitches and the relationships between chords.
Triad	A three-note chord formed from a root, third and fifth.
Power chord	A chord using mainly the root and fifth, common in rock styles.
Seventh chord	A triad with an added seventh above the root.
Suspended chord	A chord in which the third is replaced, commonly by the second or fourth.
Extended chord	A chord containing notes beyond the seventh, such as ninths or elevenths.
Inversion	A chord voicing in which a note other than the root is the lowest note.
Chord progression	A sequence of chords.
Arpeggio	The notes of a chord played separately in succession.
Broken chord	A chord whose notes are sounded separately in a pattern rather than simultaneously.
Melody	A sequence of pitches perceived as a musical line.
Conjunct	Melodic movement mainly by step.
Disjunct	Melodic movement containing leaps.

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Phrase	A musical idea with a sense of shape or completion.
Motif	A short, distinctive musical idea.
Leitmotif	A recurring musical idea associated with a character, place, object or concept.
Thematic development	Changing or extending a theme while retaining a recognisable connection to it.
Sequence	Immediate repetition of a musical pattern at a higher or lower pitch.
Ornamentation	Decorative notes added to a melody.
Riff	A short repeated melodic or rhythmic pattern, often central to a piece.
Hook	A memorable musical idea designed to catch the listener's attention.
Improvisation	Creating or performing music spontaneously.
Call and response	A musical exchange in which one phrase is answered by another.
Rhythm	The organisation of note lengths and rests through time.
Pulse	The regular underlying beat.
Metre	The grouping of beats into recurring patterns, shown by a time signature.
Tempo	The speed of the music, often measured in beats per minute (BPM).
Syncopation	Emphasis on normally weak beats or offbeats.
Backbeat	Strong emphasis on beats two and four in common time.
Four-to-the-floor	A bass drum played on every beat of a 4/4 bar.
Swing rhythm	Unequal division of paired notes, producing a long-short feel.
Polyrhythm	Two or more contrasting rhythms performed at the same time.
Hemiola	A temporary rhythmic effect in which two groups of three are heard as three groups of two, or vice versa.
Phasing	A process in which repeated patterns gradually move out of and back into alignment.
Dynamics	The volume of music and changes in volume.
Articulation	How notes are attacked, sustained and released, such as legato or staccato.
Expression	Use of dynamics, articulation, phrasing, tone and timing to communicate musical meaning.
Structure/Form	The overall organisation of sections in a piece.
Verse	A recurring song section usually using new lyrics each time.
Chorus	A recurring section usually containing the main hook and repeated lyrics.
Bridge/Middle eight	A contrasting section that links or provides relief from repeated verse and chorus material.
Introduction	The opening section that prepares the listener for the main material.
Outro	The closing section of a piece.
12-bar blues	A repeating twelve-bar chord framework, commonly based on chords I, IV and V.
Through-composed	A structure with little or no large-scale repetition of sections.
AABA form	A four-section form with two similar sections, a contrasting bridge and a return of A.
Round/Canon	Music in which the same melody is begun by different parts at different times.

Component 1: Music products and realisation

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Music product	A completed musical outcome, such as a performance, recording, composition or DAW project.
Live ensemble performance	A real-time performance by a group of musicians.
Live solo performance	A real-time performance by one featured musician.
Audio recording	Captured sound stored in analogue or digital form.
Original composition	New music created by the learner rather than a direct copy of existing work.
Arrangement	An adaptation that decides how existing musical material is performed, structured or orchestrated.
Orchestration	Selecting and distributing musical material among instruments or voices.
SATB	Soprano, alto, tenor and bass - four common vocal ranges or parts.
Rhythm section	The instruments that establish pulse, harmony and groove, often drums, bass, keyboard and guitar.
Creative intention	What the creator wants the music to communicate or achieve.
Stimulus	A musical or non-musical starting point that inspires creative work.
Contrast	Deliberate difference between musical ideas or sections.
Music realisation	Turning musical ideas into an audible performance, recording, composition or production.
DAW	Digital Audio Workstation: software used to record, edit, arrange, mix and produce audio and MIDI.
Software instrument	A virtual instrument played or programmed within music software.
MIDI	Digital performance data that communicates note, timing, velocity and control information; it is not recorded sound.
Audio	Recorded sound represented as a waveform.
Sequencing	Arranging audio or MIDI events along a timeline.
Sampling	Taking a portion of recorded sound and reusing or manipulating it.
Looping	Repeating a section of audio or MIDI material.
Quantisation	Moving recorded or programmed notes towards a timing grid.
Automation	Programming changes to parameters such as volume, pan or effects over time.
Controllerism	Performing or manipulating digital music using physical controllers.
Turntablism	Creative performance using turntables, records and DJ techniques.
Microphone placement	Positioning a microphone to capture the desired balance, tone and level.
Effect/FX	Processing used to alter sound, such as reverb, delay or distortion.
Plug-in	Software added within a DAW to provide an instrument, effect or processing tool.
Preset	A stored group of settings for an instrument or effect.
Mix	The combined balance and processing of recorded tracks.
EQ	Equalisation: boosting or cutting frequency ranges to shape tone and clarity.
Compression	Processing that controls dynamic range by reducing level above a chosen threshold.
Panning	Positioning sound between left and right in a stereo mix.

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Mastering	Final processing and preparation of a finished mix for release or distribution.

Component 2: Professional skills and development

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Professional skill	A behaviour or working practice expected in the music industry.
Time management	Planning and using time effectively to complete work and meet deadlines.
Self-discipline	Maintaining focus, effort and reliable working habits without constant supervision.
Collaboration	Working constructively with others towards a shared musical outcome.
Resource	A person, instrument, item of equipment, space, software or material needed for a project.
Skills audit	An honest review of current strengths, weaknesses and development needs.
Development plan	A structured plan showing goals, actions, resources and timescales for improvement.
Goal	A clear intended improvement or outcome.
Milestone	A significant planned checkpoint showing progress in a project.
Portfolio	An organised collection of evidence showing process, development and outcomes.
Rehearsal diary	A dated record of rehearsal activities, decisions, progress and next steps.
Studio track sheet	A record of tracks, takes, inputs, settings and notes from a recording session.
Production notes	Written evidence of technical and creative choices made during production.
Compositional sketch	An early notation, recording or outline used to capture a musical idea.
Raw recording	Audio captured before detailed editing, mixing or processing.
Draft	An unfinished version used for review and development.
Initial mix	An early balance of tracks used to identify improvements.
Demo	A demonstration recording used to communicate a song, performance or production idea.
Remix	A new version created by altering, reorganising or adding to existing recorded material.
Remote collaboration	Musicians working together from different locations using digital communication and file sharing.
White label	An unofficial or promotional recording distributed without standard commercial branding.
Development routine	A regular sequence of focused activities used to improve skills.
Technical exercise	A focused activity designed to improve a specific musical or production skill.
Monitoring	Regularly checking and recording progress against goals.
Refinement	Improving work through review, adjustment, rehearsal or editing.
Reflection	Thoughtful consideration of what happened, why it happened and how to improve.
Feedback	Information from self-review or others used to judge and develop work.
Repertoire	The collection of music a performer has learned and can perform.
Tuning	Adjusting pitch so an instrument or voice matches the required notes or reference pitch.
Accompaniment	Musical support for a main melody, soloist or vocal part.
Stage presence	How a performer communicates confidence, engagement and character to an audience.
Stylistic accuracy	How convincingly an outcome uses the expected features of its chosen style.
Technical proficiency	Control and accuracy in applying performance, composition or production skills.

Component 3: Responding to a music brief

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Music brief	A set of requirements defining the purpose, audience, context and expected musical product.
Target audience	The particular group of people for whom the product is intended.
Client	The person or organisation commissioning or receiving the musical product.
Company vision	The values, identity and long-term aims that a response should reflect.
Commercial intention	An aim connected to attracting an audience, promoting a product or generating income.
Experimental intention	An aim to explore unusual, innovative or less conventional musical ideas.
Purpose	The reason the product is being created and what it should achieve.
Requirement	A condition that must be met in the final response.
Rationale	A reasoned explanation for a choice or decision.
Investigation	Research and exploration used to inform creative decisions.
Proposal	A clear outline of the intended product, approach and resources.
Timeline	A schedule showing tasks, milestones and deadlines.
Scope	The planned size and boundaries of the work.
Format	The form in which the final outcome will be presented, such as video, audio or DAW project.
Constraint	A limit on the work, such as time, equipment, technical format or available performers.
Feasibility	Whether an idea can realistically be completed with the available time, skills and resources.
Contingency	A backup plan for possible problems or changes.
Safeguarding work	Protecting files and evidence through clear organisation, secure storage and backups.
Groove	The combined rhythmic feel created by interacting parts.
Sound palette	The chosen collection of timbres, instruments and sonic textures.
Creative process	The stages through which ideas are planned, developed, refined and presented.
Self-analysis	Critical review of one's own work to identify strengths and improvements.
Polishing	Final detailed improvement of musical or technical aspects.
Fitness for purpose	How well a product meets its intended purpose and brief.
Accessibility	How easily the intended audience can access, understand or engage with the product.
Appropriateness	How suitable a creative or technical choice is for the brief, context and audience.
Audience expectation	The standard and features the target audience is likely to anticipate.
Final product	The completed musical response submitted or presented to the client.
Annotation	A short note attached to evidence explaining a choice, technique or development.
Justification	A reasoned explanation supported by evidence for why a decision was appropriate.
Evaluation	A balanced judgement using evidence about strengths, weaknesses and success against requirements.
Synoptic assessment	Assessment requiring learners to combine knowledge and skills from across the qualification.
AO1	Understand how to respond to a music brief.
AO2	Select and apply musical skills in response to a music brief.

Key word	Student-friendly definition
AO3	Present a final musical product in response to a music brief.
AO4	Comment on the creative process and outcome in response to a music brief.

Assessment and marking vocabulary

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Internally assessed	Marked by the centre using Pearson's marking grid.
Externally moderated	Centre marking is checked by Pearson for consistency with national standards.
External assessment	A task set and marked by Pearson under specified conditions.
Pearson-set Assignment	The official assignment used for summative assessment of an internal component.
Summative assessment	Formal assessment used to measure achievement at the end of learning.
Formative assessment	Practice and feedback used during learning to help improvement.
Evidence	Work submitted to demonstrate achievement, such as recordings, portfolios, notes or screenshots.
Authenticity	Confirmation that submitted evidence is the learner's own independent work.
Mark band	A range of marks linked to a descriptor of performance.
Descriptor	A statement describing the quality of performance expected within a mark band.
Best fit	A holistic marking approach that selects the band most closely matching the evidence overall.
No rewardable material	Work that does not demonstrate evidence relevant enough to receive a mark.
Limited	Showing a narrow range, basic understanding or inconsistent control.
Adequate	Showing sufficient understanding or application, though with gaps or inconsistency.
Competent	Showing clear, appropriate and generally secure understanding or application.
Comprehensive	Showing broad, detailed and well-organised coverage.
Effective	Producing the intended result successfully and purposefully.
Perceptive	Showing insightful understanding and well-judged creative awareness.
Cohesive	Unified and logically connected so musical elements work together.
Pertinent	Directly relevant and well selected for the purpose.
Iterative	Developed through repeated cycles of making, reviewing and improving.
Sequential	Arranged in a clear and logical order.
Superficial	Showing little depth, detail or meaningful development.
Tentative	Uncertain, hesitant or only partly controlled.