

Choosing Questions in Section A

Most students have limited time, and do not want to have to spend the time available preparing to answer more questions than they have to; they will, then, decide long before the exam which questions to answer. Here are some observations which may guide your choice.

1. **Lutheran chorales** is quite a long course, as it is a big step up from grade 6. However most students take it, as it fits best with the theory they have done at grade level. It is fact-based to some extent, as the notes in the melody either do or do not fit the chords you choose, although to gain high marks you would need to have a good understanding of Baroque style – which chords Bach would or would not have used, which progressions and cadences he might have used, and how a chorale might end – bearing in mind the need for good voice-leading and chord-voicing.
2. **Classical orchestration** is largely factual – a note is either right or wrong, and it either can or can not be played on the instrument it is given to. There is however an element of style, in that you are expected to orchestrate the passage in the way Mozart, Haydn or Beethoven would have done using the instruments they had available. For example, important themes are seldom given to wind instruments, and cellos and basses seldom have separate parts. Another point to bear in mind is that there are a lot of notes to write out, so you will have to be able to decide quickly which notes to give to which instruments and to write them out quickly.
3. Very few students tackle the **piano solo**, and examiners often comment that those who do tend to gain low marks. Style is important: it isn't a "fact-based" question. The piece you write has to look as if an early Romantic composer – such as Schumann or Mendelssohn – had written it. If you are a pianist, you may be able to remember playing pieces by such composers – although pianists do not always link the sort of music they have played with the sort of music they should be writing. However doing chorales should be a help, and you may enjoy studying the style of piano music of the period.
4. Most students do much better in the **20th century popular songs** option. It is largely fact-based: the notes in the chord are either right or wrong, and the accompaniment either does or does not follow the style given. If you like jazz, this could be a good choice.
5. Some students do not have the confidence to answer the **melody-writing question**. Students who have passed senior Trinity College grade exams should be used to recognising non-diatonic tonal systems (such as modes, the blues scale and the whole-tone scale), so should not be worried by this question. The question is fact-based in the sense that the notes either do or do not fit the tonal system used, although you can be quite creative in the way you develop your ideas. If you know the mode or scale the melody is based on, and if you are familiar with the various means of developing ideas (such as sequence and isorhythm), you may find you can answer the question quite quickly.

Your choice of question depends to some extent on which sort(s) of music you have played / sung / conducted, and what you are interested in.

- If you enjoy singing in or conducting choirs, or have done grade exams in which you had to write for SATB, you may want to answer question 1, the **Lutheran chorale**.
- If you play an orchestral instrument, or like doing fact-based questions, you may want to do question 2, **Classical orchestration**.
- If you are a pianist, you should have a natural advantage over others in writing for **piano solo**, in that you know how to lay out the notes so they fit the hands, and what dynamics and pedalling are appropriate. (For example, you can not alter the sound of notes after you have played them.) If you are not a pianist, you may find this question difficult to answer well.
- If you like jazz or light music, question 4, **20th century popular song**, might be a good option.
- If you play a melody instrument, or have done senior exams in which you have had to recognise and write music for different tonal systems, you may like to tackle question 5, **melody-writing**.