

# Why choose A-level music?

**Enjoyment.**  
**Motivation.**  
**Academic achievement.**  
**Confidence.**  
**Fulfilment.**



Whatever your hopes for your child's final years of study at school, A-level music is a wise choice.

If they have a passion for a subject, they're much more likely to enjoy their study and be motivated to revise and practise.

Yet there are so many other reasons why they'll benefit from studying music.

**Read on to find out more, and learn about what's involved in A-level music.**



# What are the benefits of A-level music?

## It is an academic subject which counts towards any university course.

As a concerned parent or carer, you may believe that music won't be taken seriously by universities<sup>1</sup>. Sometimes teachers of other subjects might imply this too. This is not the case. A-level music is a rigorous academic subject which sets students up well for university study, and universities are aware of this.

Also, ABRSM qualifications count towards the UCAS points required for university.

A number of studies have shown that music benefits learning by activating all areas of the brain: auditory (sound processing); motor (rhythm processing); limbic (emotions)<sup>2</sup>.

**MYTH BUSTED:** Taking A-level music will NOT have a detrimental effect on your child's application for particular universities/courses.

## It will provide transferable skills

A-level music involves written, analytical, practical and social/personal skills such as:

- independent learning: having to be disciplined about practise
- team working: particularly if they're involved in weekly groups or ensembles, concerts and performances
- performance and presentation skills: which are useful for any job/career
- listening: these are highly developed in musicians and it is an important part of the course
- analytical and essay-writing skills
- confidence and self-esteem: which has a knock-on effect in all areas of life and learning
- creativity and self-expression: helping young people to think differently and harness the power of their imagination.

## Making music can help a young person maintain good mental health during a time of high pressure and anxiety.

Research has shown that music can improve mood and prompt creative flow, which helps with anxiety and self-doubt. It can also help young people to regulate their emotions<sup>3</sup>.

## There is usually only one exam – the rest is course work.

This takes the pressure off revision during those critical weeks where they will have many other exams.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly: students are more likely to succeed and achieve a higher grade if they study something they are good at, and enjoy<sup>4</sup>.



**Studying music opens doors to many opportunities.**

**Don't let them close before your child has a chance to explore.**

<sup>1</sup> Are some A-level subjects better than others? [bit.ly/Alevelssubjects](https://bit.ly/Alevelssubjects)

<sup>2</sup> Music activates all areas of the brain [bit.ly/musicbrainvideo](https://bit.ly/musicbrainvideo)

<sup>3</sup> Search 'mental health' on Music Education Works [bit.ly/musicedworks](https://bit.ly/musicedworks)

<sup>4</sup> Choosing A-levels for law [bit.ly/pickssubjectsbestat](https://bit.ly/pickssubjectsbestat)

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# FAQs about A-level music

Each school has different criteria and approaches. Do talk to the Head of Music/Performing Arts to find out the specifics for your child's school.

## What standard do students have to have reached/what qualifications do they need?

Generally, students will need to have GCSE music at grade 5 or 6 (eg B grade) or equivalent (eg BTEC level 2, Rockscool, etc). There may be exceptions – for example if they've achieved a high standard on their instrument, but couldn't choose music GCSE because of subject clashes.

Ideally, they'll be Grade 4/5 standard on an instrument (or voice) and be able to reach Grade 6/7 by the end of the course.

**MYTH BUSTED:** Your child **DOES NOT** have to have reached Grade 8.

## Is it essential to have instrumental lessons?

Ideally they'll have lessons, but exceptions can be made if they're at a high standard and practise regularly, particularly for vocalists. If money is an issue, ask your school about the financial assistance available.

## What if students don't read music, having learnt by ear?

Reading music is a core skill required by A Level Music courses, particularly for the Listening & Appraising unit. Many schools will allow a student who can't read music to take A-level but may put in early steps to build this skill quickly. The Composing unit does not require students to work with notation, as sequencing software such as Logic Pro can be used instead.'

## What if students don't play an instrument or sing, but use music technology, or rap/beatbox?

For some A Level courses, the Performance unit can be achieved using music technology or rap. However, this will vary across schools, so we advise that you check first. It might also be worth considering A Level Music Technology or BTEC Level 3 Music which may be more suitable.

## What subjects will it go well with?

Music is very mathematical in nature, and so Music and Maths complement each other well, so do Music and Languages – after all, music is a language in its own right.

In fact, Music goes well with pretty much any subject and some people believe that studying music can actually enhance your grades in other subjects.



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# FAQs about A-level music

continued

## What does the course cover?

Details – including the percentage weighting of the different elements – may vary, depending on which exam board the school uses.

However there are usually three main areas of study:  
Performance, Composition, Listening and appraising

Students will learn about a range of types of music, including vocal, instrumental, music for film, pop, jazz, fusion, and new music.

### Performance

30% of final score.

Students give a performance of eight to twelve minutes (around three pieces) in the final year of studies. This can be a solo or group piece and include varied repertoire (eg different composers, a range of genres).

### Composition

30% of final score.

Students create two compositions. In the first year of the course, they compose a piece of their choice. In the second, the piece is set by the exam board, usually from a choice of options. Examples include: 'Compose a theme and variations on a theme of x, y or z'; 'Arrange a song for a choir at a wedding'.

### Listening and appraising/understanding

40% of the final score.

This is the only exam and is usually two hours. Students are asked to listen to, and answer questions about, set works they've studied during the course. They then do the same for previously unheard pieces and may be asked to complete a score for one of the pieces.

## When will we need to apply?

Most schools have A-level information evenings in the autumn before students start their A-levels. You'll probably need to apply for the course in the January before the course starts.

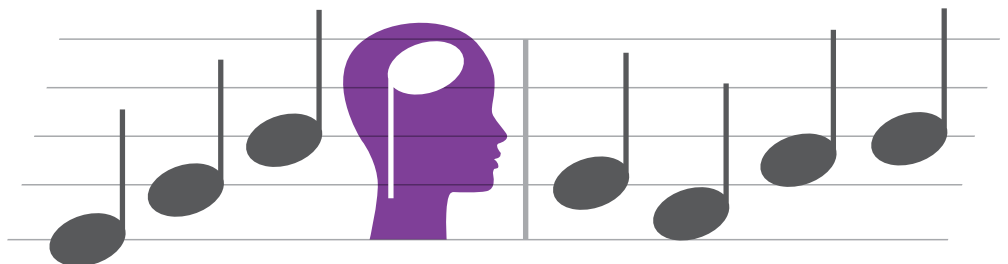
Often, schools won't know if they will have enough students to be able to run the course, until they have received everyone's applications. Even then, they may not know until the August GCSE results.

The more people that apply, the more likely it is that the course will run.

## Where could A-level music lead?

It could lead to a Music degree. Here's what Oxford University says about theirs:

"The varied nature of the course enables students to develop highly desirable skills in areas such as self-management, creativity, data analysis, performance, teamwork, problem-solving, and communication, all of which makes them an attractive prospect for potential employers... other popular destinations for Music graduates... include broadcasting, publishing, law, politics and the Civil Service. Rather than limiting your career prospects, a music degree opens doors to a wide range of careers."<sup>5</sup>



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<sup>5</sup> Why study music at Oxford? [bit.ly/musicoxford](https://bit.ly/musicoxford)

# FAQs about A-level music

continued

## If you don't want to be a musician or study music at University, A-level music is still a smart choice.

It can open doors to a range of education and employment pathways in:

### Music

Being a musician isn't the only career in music – other options include being a sound technician, community musician, music therapist, teacher, or private tutor, or a range of careers in the music industry, in a concert hall or music venue.

### The arts/creative industries

This might include work in film, TV, theatre, radio, arts administration, or creative education.

**MYTH BUSTED:** Music does not stop you getting into a profession such as law or medicine.

### Professions such as medicine, law, accountancy

Music is highly regarded as an academic subject and so could complement your other studies in leading to a professional career.

### Any other pathway a young person might choose

A-level music provides a range of transferable skills that will provide a good foundation, whatever pathway you choose.



This resource was originally devised by Wiltshire Music Connect (Wiltshire Council) during its tenure as the Music Education Hub for Wiltshire.

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music  
connect

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