

Experimenting with music

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Music · SL

IB Diploma Programme Music SL (first assessment 2022; 2020 guide). This topic equips EXPERIMENTING WITH MUSIC, the internally assessed experimentation report (30% at SL): a written report (a rationale and a commentary for each process) supporting practical musical evidence of experimentation in creating and performing, in two areas of inquiry in a local and/or global context. This handout teaches the experimental loop, the evidence discipline and the report. All worked examples are original.

Must-know for experimenting with music:

Family	Content
loop	question, trial, evidence, verdict: one variable changed at a time
areas	two areas of inquiry, local and/or global context: not the personal only
roles	experiments in creating AND performing
report	rationale (why) and commentary (what the evidence shows)
evidence	recordings, sketches, versions: the trial preserved, not summarised

The experimental loop

An experiment is not practice. Practice repeats; an experiment asks a question (what happens if one thing changes?), runs the trial, keeps the evidence (a recording, a sketch, two versions side by side) and reaches a verdict. The discipline: change ONE variable at a time, so the evidence can be attributed; keep the failed trials, because a verdict on what did not work is still a finding; and write while the experiment is live, not from memory.

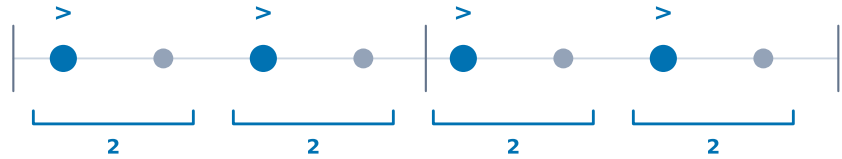
Worked example. The **experimentation** begins from a fixed four-note melody (four equal notes C4 D4 E4 G4). The question: what does a sustained C3 below change? The trial is recorded twice (without, then with the added part); the melody and rhythm stay fixed while the texture moves from monophonic to two-part and the harmonic context shifts; the verdict names what moved and what stayed, with the balance dependent on timbre.

Accent and metre: a second experiment

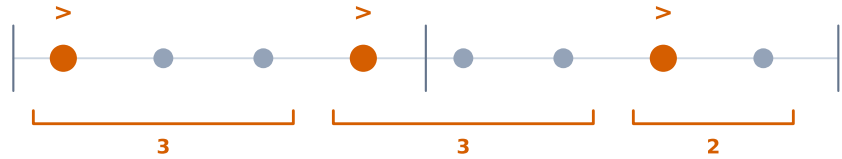
A second worked experiment tests **accent** : the same eight notes played twice, once with the accent on every second beat, once displaced onto every third. The question: does the metre the listener hears follow the notation or the accent? The evidence (two recordings, listeners' taps) shows the perceived grouping following the accent: the verdict feeds the creator's next piece, where a notated four is heard as three until the accent returns.

same notes, same bar lines (in four)

accent every
second note



accent every
third note



heard grouping (listeners' taps) follows the accent, not the notation

Same notes, same bar lines: the grouping listeners tap follows the accent.

Both experiments sit in the area of inquiry of listening and performance in a local context; the report needs a SECOND inquiry (a global-context technology experiment, say a DAW transformation of unfamiliar repertoire) to satisfy the two-area requirement.

Worked example, the second inquiry. A work song from unfamiliar repertoire, loaded into a DAW and halved in tempo. Question: does halving change the work the song does, or only its surface? Evidence: the original and the half-speed render side by side, plus a listener's description of each. Verdict: the call-and-response survives intact but the functional lift is gone – the context that made the music is part of the music, and the report has its second area of inquiry.

The report: rationale and commentary

The report supports each process with a **rationale** (why this experiment: the question and what motivated it) and a **commentary** (what the evidence shows, element by element). The discipline: the rationale precedes the trial's outcome (a rationale written after the fact reads as hindsight), the commentary quotes the evidence rather than summarising it, and the verdict is honest about failure.

Worked example, concluded. The texture experiment's rationale: a fixed melody isolates one variable (the added part) so the change can be heard alone. The commentary: take one, monophonic and exposed; take two, the same melody now sitting on a sustained tone, two-part, the E4 reinterpreted as part of a new harmony. Verdict: texture and harmony can move while melody stands still.

Checklist

- Question, trial, evidence, verdict: the loop closed on every experiment (loop).
- Two areas of inquiry, local and/or global: the personal not the only context (areas).
- Creating and performing both evidenced (roles).
- Rationale before outcome, commentary on the evidence, failure kept (report).
- The worked texture and accent experiments understood (worked). Boundary notes: the examiner must see the music happening: engagement shown in the elements, the processes evidenced, the work finished. All worked examples are original.