Set works – Elgar’s *Symphony No. 1* or Shostakovich’s *Symphony No. 5*

**Learning objectives:**

- to understand how to study a work in sufficient detail for A2 Level
- to acquire detailed knowledge of the chosen work and its background
- to consider the types of question which may be asked and how to approach them.

**Methods of study**

The detailed study of a set work introduced in Unit 1 is developed further in Unit 4. From the 2013 examination the set work is a complete 20th-century symphony: either *Symphony No. 1 in A♭ major* by Elgar or *Symphony No. 5 in D minor* by Shostakovich. Both are very interesting works to study, but you will find that writers do not always agree about the aims and intentions of the composers. The initial stage is to understand what happens in the symphony. Afterwards, it is possible to learn more about the background and context. By the end of the course you should know your chosen work so thoroughly that you can form your own views from a firm basis of fact.

**First impressions**

Depending on your previous experience of listening to music and attending concerts, you may prefer to listen to the whole work at once or take one movement at a time. Following the score may be helpful but it is not essential at first, especially if you are not well practised in following a complex orchestral score. Note down any strong impressions and look at them again when you know the work better to see if they can be justified.

**Getting to know the music**

- Concentrate on one movement at a time, listen to it repeatedly and become familiar with the written notation. You should reach the stage where you can continue mentally if the recording is stopped at any point, and you can hear the sound on opening any page of the score.
- Ensure that you understand the names of instruments, tempo indications and technical instructions in the score. Both scores follow common practice in having performance directions in Italian. You will find some help in understanding the score at the end of each analysis.
- Identify the main themes and sections of each movement, noting down the key if it is easy to recognise. Draw a plan of the movement to see an overview of its structure.
- Both symphonies are based on a traditional four-movement plan with a scherzo as the second movement and a slow movement third. Revise the classical pattern by looking back at *Symphony No. 1* by Beethoven or another of the period. It is to be expected that forms will be reinterpreted by 20th-century composers, and it is interesting to discover where the music departs from expectations.
- Consider the use and importance of the musical elements in each movement: melody; harmony; rhythm and tempo; tonality and modulation; orchestration. In each case, select passages which demonstrate typical features of the composer’s style. You will not need to memorise quotations as you will be able to use an unmarked score in the examination.

**The music in context**

Once the set work is familiar, look at its historical position and context. The circumstances of Elgar in England and Shostakovich in Russia could
not be more different, but the societies in which they lived had a profound
effect on their music. Shostakovich completed his first symphony as a
student and wrote 15 symphonies in all; Elgar did not produce his first
symphony until the age of 51 and only completed one further symphony.
A third was left as sketches, which have now been realised into a complete
symphony by the composer Anthony Payne.

You should be aware of:
- the musical activities, interests and experience of the composer
- the work’s place in the composer’s life
- earlier works by other composers that may have influenced the
  symphony
- the circumstances of its composition and first performance
- reactions to it at the time of writing and in subsequent years
- any light which is thrown on the work by later events.

**Interpretation and recordings**

Listen to more than one performance of the symphony if possible and
note the date when each was recorded. Traditions of performance change
over time and styles may also change according to the orchestra playing
and the personal taste of the conductor. Different interpretations provide
interesting material for discussion on which view best reveals the
character of the music.

Elgar conducted a recording of *Symphony No. 1* in 1931 and this is
still available. The conductor Sir Adrian Boult worked closely with the
composer and his recording of 1950 has always been highly regarded.
There is a large number of recent recordings, especially since the
beginning of the 21st century. The first performance of *Symphony No. 5*
by Shostakovich was conducted by a young and unknown conductor,
Yevgeny Mravinsky. Shostakovich was delighted with his interpretation
and composer and conductor worked together on the first performances
of five later symphonies. A recording made by Mravinsky is still available,
and the recording by the composer’s son, Maxim Shostakovich, also has
considerable authority. Tempi vary particularly in the finale, which lasts
12 minutes in Maxim Shostakovich’s version, and less than nine minutes
in the version by Leonard Bernstein.

If possible, attend a live performance of the symphony you are studying.
Leave the score at home and enjoy the visual experience as well as the
sound. By the 20th century, the symphony had become a form in which
composers were expected to make their most significant and universal
statements. A live performance will convey, better than any recording, the
total experience that the composer intended to present.

**Elgar – *Symphony No. 1 in A♭ major***

**Background**

Edward Elgar (1857–1934), holds a vital place in the history of English
music. Although music was highly regarded and widely practised in England
in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the most important figures
nationally were English by adoption rather than by birth. After Purcell
(1659–95) it is hard to discover a truly English composer whose works were
recognised at home and abroad until Elgar appeared on the scene. His most
significant works are two symphonies, the oratorio *The Dream of Gerontius*,
certicos for violin and for cello, and the orchestral *Variations on an*
Original Theme (Enigma). Even before the composition of Symphony No. 1 he had received a knighthood, as well as honorary degrees from several universities and a specially created professorship in Birmingham. He served as Master of the King’s Music from 1924 until his death.

These achievements are even more remarkable because Elgar was self-taught. His only formal tuition was a short course of violin lessons, and he owed his mastery of composition to his own studies and practical experience as an orchestral player. Elgar’s father was a music seller and piano tuner in the city of Worcester, and the young Elgar made good use of the scores in the family shop, which he would borrow and take out into the fields to study. He improvised on the piano from an early age, took up the violin when he was 12 and later learned the bassoon. Elgar worked as a violin teacher and orchestral violinist, often playing for the Three Choirs’ Festival.

Elgar often had an uneasy relationship with the musical establishment and was sensitive about his unorthodox musical training. In fact, his skills as a composer and orchestrator were of the highest order. He made several extended visits to Germany to hear music by Brahms, Schumann and Wagner, and two of the strongest advocates of his music were German. His interests at the publishing firm of Novello & Co. were represented by A. J. Jaeger, who became a close friend and adviser; the conductor Hans Richter championed Elgar’s works during his appointment to the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester.

Most of the Elgar’s orchestral works were written between 1899 and 1911, with the Cello Concerto following in 1919. In 1920 his wife Alice died and without her devoted support Elgar found it difficult to compose with any enthusiasm. He became interested in the new field of sound recording, and conducted a number of sessions, including the famous recording of the Violin Concerto with the 16-year-old Yehudi Menuhin as soloist. Elgar died in 1934 at the age of 76. His international success inspired a younger generation of British composers such as Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst, and helped to re-establish British music as a force on the international stage.

Symphony No.1

The idea of writing a symphony was in Elgar’s mind long before Symphony No.1 was completed. In a letter of 1901, he mentioned ‘the symphony I am trying to write’, promising to dedicate it to Hans Richter, whose conducting of the Enigma Variations and Cockaigne Overture had done much to establish Elgar’s reputation. There were also rumours of a new symphony for the Covent Garden Elgar Festival in 1903 and for the Leeds Festival in 1904, where its place was filled by the new overture In the South.

In the summer of 1907 his wife’s letters mention that Elgar had written a ‘great beautiful tune’ and ‘a lovely river piece. You could hear the wind in the rushes by the water.’ These became the motto theme of the symphony and the trio section of the second movement. In October and November he sketched part of a scherzo and slow movement for string quartet. These sketches became the basis of the second and third movements of the symphony. The Elgar family spent the winter months from December to May in Rome, and there the first movement was completed. At home, later in 1908, work proceeded quickly. The scherzo was completed on 5 August, the slow movement on 23 August, and the symphony was finished by 25 September. As had been promised, the work was dedicated to Hans Richter. Rehearsals with the Hallé
Orchestra began on 23 November and the triumphant first performance took place in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester on 3 December 1908. The audience broke into enthusiastic applause after the slow movement, forcing Richter to bring Elgar to the stage. At the end of the work the orchestra rose and cheered the composer. The first performance in London four days later was given a standing ovation by a capacity audience. The success of the work can be measured by the fact that during 1909 it received 82 performances all over the world, including in America, Australia and Russia.

The plan of the symphony

Elgar had a great admiration for the traditional symphony. In his series of lectures given in 1905–06 as Professor of Music at Birmingham University he chose only two works for detailed analysis: Mozart’s Symphony No. 40 and Brahms’ Symphony No. 3. It is no surprise that he employed the familiar four-movement pattern for Symphony No. 1, with a scherzo and a slow movement enclosed by two fast movements. The forms within these movements are also based on traditional structures, but his free use of tonality goes far beyond his models and is often hard to explain, although it remains completely satisfying. Even the key of the symphony is a matter for discussion, as it begins and ends with a motto theme in A♭ major, but uses D minor as the main key of its first and last movements. The central movements are in F♯ minor and D major, strengthening the relationship to D minor. The symphony has many internal links between movements. The second and third share material in a very surprising way, given their different characters, and there are many shadowy hints of the motto theme apart from its main appearances in the first and last movements.

First movement

Introduction

The opening paragraph to fig. 5 announces the motto theme that haunts the whole symphony, Alice Elgar’s ‘great beautiful tune’. Melody and bass are entirely diatonic in the key of A♭ major, a complete contrast to the chromaticism to come. The music is given a gentle forward impetus by the steady tread of the bass and by melody notes tied over the bar line, especially when they are harmonic suspensions (e.g. the third beat of bar 3). The first statement of the motto theme is essentially in two parts, with two passing phrases from the horns the only addition.

The repetition of this theme at fig. 3 shows Elgar’s orchestration at its most glowing, with long string lines reinforced momentarily by brass, percussion and harps. The melody is elongated as it fades towards fig. 5, disappearing into the background rather than coming to a conclusion.
Exposition

The atmosphere changes immediately at the beginning of the Allegro, moving to the minor mode and into short, restless phrases for the first subject. The key is generally considered to be D minor here, far removed from A\textsuperscript{b} major, and this contributes to the contrast at this point.

![Allegro appassionato](image)

Melody and bass often suggest contradictory keys and the tonal centre seems to change from bar to bar. After a climbing link at fig. 7 the first subject is repeated a fifth lower in woodwind and horns at fig. 8. Hidden in this section is a violin countermelody which becomes an important feature of the development section. It begins nine bars after fig. 8.

![Countermelody](image)

There is a change of pace at the transition [fig. 9] as the time signature changes to 6/4 and the music calms. Elgar will make considerable use of the fleeting motifs a, b and c shown below.

![Motifs a, b, and c](image)

At fig. 12 the second subject appears — a calm melody in 2/2 time and F major, although the accompanying parts are still in 6/4. The emergence of the cellos with a repeat of this melody is a recognisable touch of Elgar. After a touching move to D\textsuperscript{b} major nine bars before fig. 14, the concluding part of the exposition calls on many previous ideas including a at fig. 14, the first subject eight bars later and again six bars after fig. 16, and c at fig. 17, transformed from a delicate clarinet comment into a powerful statement for horns and trumpet.

Development

The motto theme makes its presence felt briefly at fig. 18, played by muted horns in the key of C major. From here to fig. 32 the development flits from one idea to another, with many delicate moments but also a grand and imposing climax. The main events are:

- development of the countermelody quoted above in a gentle string arrangement beginning at fig. 19
- use of a from fig. 21, alternating with a quaver figure which arises from the accompaniment to the second subject
- motif b returning at fig. 23 and passed from one instrument to another in quick succession. Motif c also appears briefly before fig. 24.
- at fig. 24 a restless new idea in 2/2 time, derived distantly from the first subject. This is used in sequence to build a climax based on a leading up to fig. 28.
a climax, crowned by the return of the second subject in B minor at fig. 28. This is echoed in imitation throughout the orchestra
at fig. 29 the return of the restless idea from fig. 24, followed by a mysterious section combining fragments of many earlier motifs. The motto theme is suggested in the key of D major shortly before fig. 31, and the passage leading to the recapitulation at fig. 32 is based on the countermelody, expressed in two different rhythms.

Recapitulation
At fig. 32 the first subject returns in the original key, this time with the countermelody in the bass immediately. At the repeat, the key signature changes to A\textsuperscript{b} and this remains throughout the movement, although the key does not feel settled until the second subject appears at fig. 38. The recapitulation follows the same course as the exposition, but with some delicate adjustments such as the turn to E major at fig. 40. After the quiet interlude of the second subject the music again builds to a climax, with the high point at fig. 44 parallel to fig. 17. This material is extended to fig. 48, where the coda begins.

Coda
Once again, an important structural point is marked by the return of the motto theme. It is surprisingly scored for only the back desks of strings: Elgar knew from his long experience of orchestral playing that the effect is very different from entrusting this important theme to the front-desk players. At first the motto continues in tandem with the countermelody transformed into 6/4 time, but gradually the motto overpowers this idea and 2/2 time prevails at fig. 51. Unexpectedly, the restless and mysterious section which concluded the development section returns at fig. 52. There are reminders of the motto at fig. 54, showing its versatility by combining with the second subject's accompaniment. Motif \textit{c} has the last word at fig. 55 and this passage highlights the unresolved key conflicts in the movement: for three bars it appears to be in A minor but it comes to rest on an A\textsuperscript{b} major chord.

Second movement
Form
In style this is a scherzo – a light and playful movement which grew out of the minuet and trio in the classical symphony. The contrasting section is still known as a trio although it does not always use a reduced orchestration. The main sections are:

- \textit{Beginning to fig. 66} Scherzo in F\textsuperscript{#} minor using four main ideas: racing semiquavers in a subdued tone, rhythmic semiquavers [fig. 57], a march tune in C\textsuperscript{#} minor [fig 59] and a strong falling phrase [fig. 63]. These are interlocked in the pattern ABCBDA

- \textit{Fig. 66 to 71} Trio in B\textsuperscript{b} major using two ideas: a flute melody in sixths [fig. 66] and a clarinet theme in thirds in G minor [6 bars after fig. 68]. These alternate, and the final appearance of the clarinet melody overlaps into the next section.

- \textit{Fig. 71 to 77} Scherzo in F\textsuperscript{#} minor, rewritten and abbreviated from 129 bars to 77.

- \textit{Fig 77 to 82} Trio in B\textsuperscript{b} major based on the same two themes but rewritten.

- \textit{Fig. 82 to end} Coda, beginning with a combination of the scherzo material in the strings and the second trio theme in the clarinets. The first trio theme appears at fig. 85, and the opening scherzo material is successively augmented to prepare for its use in the slow movement.
Harmony
The rate of harmonic change varies considerably during this movement. The opening semiquavers occur over a repeated F♯, which anchors the harmony for the first 24 bars. The march theme at fig. 59 changes chord every crotchet to give it forward momentum. Long-sustained harmonies support the calmer atmosphere of the trio, which depends at first on an alternation of root position and first inversion chords over a B♭ in the bass, and the second theme of the trio is played over a long dominant pedal in G minor.

Instrumentation
This movement creates an impression of constantly changing sounds. The full orchestra is used for the march theme, but there are moments of great delicacy such as the opening of the trio. Details such as the pizzicato violas, the murmuring harp part and the silvery sound of a solo violin show the acuteness of Elgar’s ear for orchestral effects. He once instructed an orchestra to ‘play it like something you heard down by the river’, and this is one example of many where his love of the countryside can be sensed in an otherwise non-descriptive work. It is interesting to compare his scoring of repeated melodies: the march tune appears in a much more aggressive form at fig. 73, where the brass play a vital role. Harps can also be used to add to the excitement, as in the bar before fig. 73.

Melody
The opening semiquavers in the first violins appear at first to be a frantic and aimless scurrying, and it is startling to find the very same notes later transformed into the theme of the slow movement.

This transformation can be observed step by step in the coda. At fig. 84 the theme has been slowed to triplet quavers, four bars before fig. 87 it appears in simple quavers in the clarinet, and at fig. 87 the rhythm has been further augmented to crotchets. These changes can all be found in the sketch for string quartet, which was the basis of the second and third movements. Other themes in this movement change less and have a strongly rhythmic character. The march theme (fig. 59) retains its character but is subtly varied on each new appearance, altering the opening interval to an octave, or changing the rhythm of the second bar.

The trio themes are more conjunct and cover a smaller range than their more energetic counterparts in the scherzo.

Rhythm and metre
The scherzo has an unusual 1/2 time signature, indicating one minim beat in a bar. The sense of pulse is not strong at the beginning, nor in parts of the trio, but elsewhere the effect of a relentless march is very evident. The fascinating changes of rhythm in the coda have been discussed in the melody section.
**Texture**

Textures are varied and often complex. It is interesting to study fig. 57, where the apparent melody is shared between first and second violins, the passing of the march tune to different parts of the orchestra from fig. 59, and the way in which a powerful version of the trio dissolves into gentleness again within five bars of fig. 77. Elgar’s **contrapuntal** skill allows him to perform some surprising feats, such as the combination of the scherzo and trio material at fig. 71.

**Tonality**

It is much easier to identify the tonality in this movement than in the preceding one, but there are still some surprising features. At the opening the key of F♯ minor is clearly established, yet the semiquaver theme taken alone can be interpreted in several different ways, and will eventually be used unchanged as a diatonic theme in D major. Key relationships within sections are generally conventional, but the choice of B♭ major for the trio after a scherzo in F♯ minor adds to its sense of remoteness. Elgar’s transitions repay study, and it would be valuable to look at two examples here – the eight bars leading to fig. 66, and the subtle move from F♯ minor to D major at the end of the movement. The sketches make the key change in a different way, but in its final form the transition mirrors the magical move into the ninth of the ‘Enigma’ Variations, known as ‘Nimrod’ and inspired by his friend A. J. Jaeger. In both cases the key moves down by a third, linked by a sustained note which becomes the **mediant** of the new key.

**Third movement**

The slow movement follows the scherzo without a break and is the emotional heart of the symphony. The first 18 bars are found in the string quartet sketch of 1907 and Elgar made few amendments other than its realisation for full orchestra. The key of D major is profoundly satisfying after the predominance of the minor mode in the first two movements and the orchestration here is typically rich and detailed. The overall plan is of a short sonata form rather than a development section. The coda moves to deeper serenity by adding at fig. 104 a melody sketched by Elgar in 1904.

*The first subject* (beginning to two bars before fig. 94) takes the notes of the scherzo’s opening semiquavers and reshapes them twice. At first they appear as a deeply felt string melody; three bars after fig. 93 they are used in even semiquavers as a countermelody for second violins and violas with woodwind doubling. Compare this melody to the scherzo theme quoted above.

The fourth bar has been transposed down a semitone, but in the repeat the melody reaches the high A of the original. The transition (two bars before fig. 94 to fig. 96) turns darker and features falling woodwind phrases and a gently **syncopated** string accompaniment.
The second subject at fig. 96 is a duet between violins and violas, with equally important lines. The roles are exchanged in the repeat at fig. 97 and the prevailing key is the expected dominant, A major, adding to the sense of stability. The central interlude begins at fig. 98 and is based on the transition. It features the solo voices of clarinet, violin, bass clarinet and bassoon. At fig. 100 the opening returns in a revised recapitulation. The melody first heard at fig. 93 is now in A major and the second subject begins in C♯ major. The return of the tonic key at fig. 104 introduces one of Elgar’s most serene melodies, first found in a sketch dated 1904. This theme, together with some reminders of the central interlude, brings the movement to a close.

Fourth movement

The finale has the task of reconciling the two key centres, D and A♭, which have predominated at different times during the work. The outline of the structure is:

- introduction leading to the Allegro after fig. 11
- exposition (from the Allegro to fig. 120) with the second subject at fig. 114
- return of the first subject (fig. 120 to 122) in the tonic key. This unexpected return has led some commentators to describe this movement as a sonata rondo instead of simple sonata form
- development (fig. 122 to 134) using the march theme, elements of the second subject and (from fig. 129) the motto theme
- recapitulation (fig. 134 to 146) with the second subject at fig. 137
- coda (fig. 146 to the end), where the motto theme returns unopposed.

The introduction indicates the key of D minor at the beginning but quickly moves on. There are suggestions of the motto theme in B♭ major, A♭ major and E major (partly written as F♭ major), as if it is still searching for its home. A motif from the first movement can be found in bar 2 and again, diminished, at fig. 110, but the most significant ideas will be the march-like phrase x which begins in the bassoons three bars before fig. 108, and the rising clarinet idea y five bars later.

The first and second subjects are easily identifiable later in the movement by their rhythms. The first subject acts as a driving force at its first appearance, and also four bars before fig. 117. This is mirrored in the recapitulation and it also lies behind passages in the development at fig. 124 and five bars after fig. 125. The second subject is developed between fig. 127 and fig. 129 and creates the final stringendo at fig. 150. Although these ideas help to establish the structure of the movement, the use made of x and y is more interesting and varied. Motif x returns at fig. 118 and in a short time is built up from a quiet staccato comment into a commanding proclamation by the whole orchestra. It is the first material of the development section, used in counterpoint and sometimes inverted, and it later provides a steadying contrast to the syncopated rhythms derived from the first subject. Less obviously, it becomes a cantabile melody at fig. 130 with a flowing harp accompaniment softening its earlier ferocity.

Motif y also undergoes some surprising transformations. It appears in the transition section at fig. 113, now marked con passione and developing in an intensifying sequence.
In the recapitulation the idea is heard in augmentation at fig. 143 and in diminution four bars after fig. 144, helping to prepare the long-expected moment when the motto theme returns for the last time. The themes in this movement also have subtle relationships, so that the triplet idea ringing through the development three bars after fig. 124 refers both to motif y and to the second subject, and motif x at fig. 130 calls to mind the motto theme.

As might be expected, Elgar’s tonal relationships in this movement are formed by instinct more than by academic tradition. The first subject implies D minor but the second is constantly shifting. It passes through the expected key of F major, but only as part of a sequence of modulations. The recapitulation begins in E♭ minor, a semitone above the D minor of the exposition, and the second subject returns a major third below its first appearance. It is the F minor of the march theme at fig. 141 that paves the way for A♭ major to return, but not before the march has passed through a new key every four bars up to fig. 143.

The final pages are a fascinating study in Elgar’s use of the full orchestra to create a triumphant effect. The motto theme originally fell to its final cadence, but the composer prefers to end with the uplifting shape of its first phrase. These pages undoubtedly embody Elgar’s description of the symphony as expressing ‘a wide experience of human life with a great charity and a massive hope in the future’.

Understanding the score

The score is printed with the names of instruments and musical terms in Italian, as is traditional. You should find it easy to look up any terms in the score, although the description Nobilmente (nobly) is particularly characteristic of Elgar. Take care over the following points, which often cause confusion:

- Most instrument names are similar to their English translations but corno means French horn (not cornet) and tromba means trumpet (not trombone).
- The percussion instruments are kettle drums (timpani), bass drum (gran cassa), snare drum (tamburo piccolo) and cymbals (piatti).
- The third flute player sometimes changes to piccolo, which sounds an octave higher than written.
- Violas use the alto clef, with middle C on the middle line of the stave.
- Bassoons and cellos may move into the tenor clef when playing in high register, for example where the first bassoon begins on a middle C in bar 3 of the first movement.
- Transposing instruments sound at a different pitch from their written notes. In this score, clarinets and trumpets sound a tone lower; cor anglais and French horns sound a perfect fifth lower. Remember that the name of the instrument (e.g. trumpet in B♭) tells you what happens when the player reads the note C.
- Contrabassoon, tuba and double basses sound an octave lower than written, and bass clarinet a ninth lower.

Shostakovich, Symphony No. 5 in D minor

Background

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–75) lived through a turbulent period in Russian history and his life and work were overshadowed by revolution, war, terror and dictatorship. In 1905, the year before his birth in the city of St Petersburg, hundreds of protestors were killed when Cossacks opened fire on a crowd attempting to present a petition to the Tsar. Wartime
shortages and the Revolution in 1917 made life difficult for the family. His exceptional promise as a pianist and composer won him a place at the Petrograd Conservatory in 1919 at the age of 13. The events of this period were commemorated by Shostakovich in three later symphonies: *Symphony No. 2 (To October)* was commissioned for the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, *Symphony No. 11 (The Year 1905)* was completed in 1957, and *Symphony No. 12 (The Year 1917)* in 1961.

The 1920s were a period of change and experiment, both politically and in the arts and Shostakovich was able to follow the latest developments in painting, theatre and music. He composed his first symphony as a graduation exercise, and the authorities were sufficiently impressed to pay for its first performance in May 1926. The audience was enthusiastic and even critical commentators noted the promise of this 19-year-old composer. Physically, life was difficult throughout this period. The Conservatory was often unheated, food was scarce and unreliable public transport forced him to walk long distances to attend classes.

The second and third symphonies followed closely on the first in 1927 and 1929. Both are single-movement works with choral finales on a political theme, but they included some daring experiments. *Symphony No. 2* begins with an atonal canon building up gradually over a five-minute span. *Symphony No. 3 (The First of May)* was performed on the anniversary of Lenin's death in 1930.

The 1930s were a time of crisis in Shostakovich's life. At first, his development continued with the success of the satirical opera *The Nose (1930)* and the dark drama *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, which opened in 1934. He began a fourth symphony and had completed two movements by January 1936. Throughout this time the power of Joseph Stalin had been increasing. The drive to use all methods to further the Soviet ideology resulted in intense political vetting of literature, art and music. Composers were increasingly required to choose subjects which glorified the working people and to avoid any unnecessary complexity or ‘formalism’. Artists and academics who did not conform were arrested and exiled, sent to labour camps or executed. *Lady Macbeth* had received nearly two hundred performances and was an international success when Stalin attended a performance on 26 January 1936. Two days later Shostakovich was denounced in a savage newspaper article entitled ‘Muddle Instead of Music’. From that time onwards the composer lived in fear of arrest and kept a suitcase packed in the hall in case he was taken without warning. He completed the fourth symphony but political pressure caused the cancellation of a planned performance, and it was withheld until 1961.

The years 1937–38 in the USSR are sometimes described as ‘The Great Terror’, when 1.3 million people were arrested for ‘crimes against the state’, and many were shot. In this climate of fear, Shostakovich began a new symphony, his fifth, aware that not only his reputation but his life depended on its reception. In the event, the first performance on 21 November 1937 was a great success. Many of the audience were in tears during the slow movement, and the standing ovation at the end was so enthusiastic that Shostakovich feared it would be interpreted as a protest against the authorities.

This success was not the end of the composer’s troubles. During the Second World War, Leningrad suffered an horrific siege lasting 872 days, in which over a million inhabitants died of cold, disease and starvation. Shostakovich was evacuated from the city, taking with him the partially completed *Symphony No. 7*, which commemorates the siege. In 1948, he was again publicly denounced, in company with other prominent composers such as Prokofiev and Khachaturian. His works were banned and he was dismissed
from professorships in Moscow and Leningrad, surviving by writing film music to support his family.

Following the death of Stalin in 1953, the political climate began to change and he was at last allowed to travel more freely. In 1956, Shostakovich was honoured in Rome, Paris, Oxford and London, and in 1962 he spent a month in Britain to attend a celebration of his works at the Edinburgh Festival. He continued to compose to the last, completing a viola sonata a month before his death in August 1975.

**Symphony No. 5**

In writing *Symphony No. 5*, Shostakovich had to steer a difficult course between the requirements of his political masters and his integrity as a composer. He was very reluctant to speak about his music, fearful that any comment would place him in political danger. When the Composers’ Union required a presentation on *Symphony No. 5* in December 1937 in order to vet it, the analysis was provided by the conductor Mravinsky, with the composer contributing only by playing musical examples on the piano. At times Shostakovich was forced into making public pronouncements but these may not give a true picture as he was speaking under duress. His constant advice was to discover its meaning by listening to the music.

The contrast between *Symphony No. 4* and *Symphony No. 5* is very marked. The earlier work, which he considered too dangerous to perform in 1936, owes much to Mahler in its massive orchestration for 20 woodwind and 17 brass. The symphony is divided into three movements, but the last welds a Mahlerian slow march to a fast finale.

*Symphony No. 5* reverts to the traditional four-movement structure of the classical symphony, placing the scherzo second. The orchestration is also more modest than the fourth, with only 11 woodwind and 10 brass instruments. It has remained his most popular symphony.

**The plan of the symphony**

The expected plan of a classical symphony is of four movements, with a minuet or scherzo and a slow movement placed between two quick movements. Commonly, all movements are in the tonic key except for the slow movement, which uses the darker subdominant key. The four movements of Shostakovich’s symphony outline a D major triad (D–A–F♯–D). All four movements are in the minor mode, but the insistence on optimism in approved Soviet works made a move to the major key essential in the finale. In the event, it turns to D major for less than two minutes at the end. The preponderance of the minor adds to the solemnity of the symphony, and this is increased by a frequent tendency to flatten the supertonic (the second note of the scale), so that E♭ is a feature of the D minor first subject, B♭ is found in bar 7 of the A minor scherzo, and G♯ appears as early as bar 5 of the third movement, in F♯ minor.

The first three movements have very evident ‘signposts’ to their structure, no doubt to make the work as approachable as possible. The finale reaches its audience by other means, as will be explained.

**First movement**

*Exposition*

The introduction (from the beginning to fig. 1) announces a sparse and angry theme, worked into an angular **canon**.

The key of D minor is established by the early appearance of B♭ and C♯ but there is no key signature, and the music quickly demonstrates a tendency...
to slip from key to key, creating an unsettling effect. Abrupt double-dotted rhythms are a distinctive feature, but these soften into single-dotted patterns to form a background for the first subject. Two features of this opening, indicated here as $a$ and $b$, will be developed later.

The first subject melody (introduced at fig. 1) is a thread of sound for the first violins, already including $b$ and introducing a further rhythm $c$.

The melody is curiously rootless, so that the bass can slip up a semitone almost unnoticed, again emphasising the flattened supertonic of the key. After fig. 2 the melody melts away and the opening motifs reassert themselves. At fig. 3 the melody continues, constantly creating new rhythmic ideas which are often free of the accentuation of the bar line.

The scoring of this section is light – violins and violas only, with some flute highlights. The climax just before fig. 5 is achieved by high register and intensity rather than by massed numbers. The melody collapses rather than ends.

The beginning of the transition section (two bars after fig. 5) is marked by the first significant entry of woodwind, in which a rising oboe and falling bassoon mirror one another. The passage begins in D minor but moves through a bright moment of C major after fig. 7 to reach E♭ minor for the second subject. This section combines the introduction theme contrapuntally with the first subject’s continuation, originally heard two bars after fig. 3. It uses $b$ and $c$ in several guises, such as the horns’ commanding call immediately before the second subject enters at fig. 9.

The second subject in a sonata form movement is commonly more lyrical than the first. Here it takes the form of a wide-ranging melody for first violins, and the contrast is acute after the drama and intensity earlier in the movement.
The gentle throb of the accompaniment is something of a fingerprint of Shostakovich in later works, although it can also turn into something obsessive and menacing. The key is also a surprise – E♭ minor is very remote from the D minor of the opening, but it provides another example of a key which shifts by a tone or a semitone. The expected major key would have been F, but there is a richness and warmth about this choice of key which provides one of the few tranquil moments in the whole symphony. The melody dies away towards fig. 12 and is repeated in a shorter form by violas with a new accompanying motif of quavers rising a third and falling back. There is no hint at this stage that this motif will shortly become the driving force of the development section. This motif is spun out into reflective melody for the flute and clarinet, during which the climax idea first heard just before fig. 5 makes another appearance. A further reminder of the second subject leads into the development, where the mood changes abruptly.

**Development**

The development section begins at the upbeat to fig. 17. It returns to the intensity of the opening and develops the exposition themes to explosive effect, often transforming their character completely. The main stages in this process are:

- There is persistent and urgent use of the quaver motif, defined further by the first entry of the piano. The first subject melody from fig. 1 appears threateningly in low horns, joined in canon by trumpets at fig. 18.
- The quaver motif climbs through the orchestra while the woodwind declaim the first-subject melody followed by themes from the transition – the oboe and bassoon lines from fig. 5 and the dotted rhythm pattern c. Tension increases to fig. 22.
- The tempo has accelerated to Allegro non troppo at fig. 22. It is hard to realise that the leaping phrases that begin at this point had their origin in the peaceful second subject. Transition themes remain powerful, often announced in fortissimo octaves by the strings, and the jagged rhythm a also returns.
- Four bars after fig. 25 the first-subject melody is hammered out in canon between woodwind and low strings. The tempo continues to increase.
- At fig. 27 the first subject becomes a burlesque march, as if Shostakovich is caricaturing the triumphal celebrations of the Soviet regime.
- Timpani and tuba play an ostinato on F and C, stubbornly repeating these notes whether or not they have anything to do with the melody. The march theme, given to three trumpets and later to woodwind as well, is constructed from the first subject melody and from c, further brutalised by the rhythms of side drum and later xylophone.
- Two bars after fig. 30 the wide intervals of a in augmentation are added by low strings, trombones and tuba and the bass notes force the key centre back to D. The tempo is still increasing to fig. 32.
- The high point of the development arrives at fig. 32, where a frantic version of a is heard in canon between low and high woodwind and strings while heavy brass and double basses insist on the second subject, also in canon.

**Recapitulation**

Fig. 32 could be seen as the moment of recapitulation but it is perhaps preferable to regard the recapitulation as beginning at fig. 36, the point...
to which the long build of the development has eventually been leading. The power is all focused in the orchestra’s massive octave statement at the *Largamente*. The recapitulation is very compressed, as if there is little more to say. The overwhelmingly forceful statement beginning at fig. 36 is parallel to the exposition melody, but not at the original pitch. It takes two forceful cadence patterns insisting on D minor to compel the melody to adopt its original key, which is reached at fig. 37.

Ideas from the exposition have been transformed and contorted by this stage. The pulsating rhythm which accompanied the second subject returns as a hammering figure, and it is accompanied by motif *a* inverted. The transformation of the second subject has been more positive. The mode is now major instead of minor, and the key centre is D, as might be expected. The violin melody has become a gentle duet for flute and horn, setting an exposed challenge for the first horn player. A transition theme is recalled in the bar after fig. 41, and the repeat of the melody is again accompanied as before by the quaver motif. This too has been inverted: the melody is now in the bassoon and the answering parts are delicately scored for oboe and clarinet solos.

**Coda**

A short coda begins at fig. 44. Even here the music has not reached a full resolution. The brief reminder of the first subject melody is inverted and many of its intervals have contracted from tones to semitones. Its accompanying pattern begins with an E in the bass and only drops to D after fig. 45. After the force and bluster of the movement the ending is magically quiet. Strings and horns are muted, the transition melody is sketched in by a solo violin and the celesta adds a silvery touch at the close.

**Second movement**

**Form**

The scherzo is a common symphonic form from Beethoven onwards. It developed from the minuet and trio and is a triple-time movement in dance style, often with a humorous character. The main scherzo material usually alternates with a lighter section known as a trio in a ternary pattern (ABA), or in a longer pattern such as ABABA. In classical times the minuet and trio are each in binary form, creating a complex pattern of repeats. Here the repeats are written out because they are orchestrated differently on each appearance. The pattern of the second movement is:

*Fig. 48 to 53* First half of scherzo. This has an internal ABA pattern. B begins at fig. 49 and the repeat of A is concealed in the bass line at fig. 51.

*Fig. 53 to 55* Second half of scherzo.

*Fig. 55 to 57* Second half of scherzo repeated.

*Fig. 57 to 59* First half of trio.

*Fig. 59 to 61* First half of trio repeated.

*Fig. 61 to 63* Second half of trio.

*Fig. 63 to 65* Second half of trio repeated.

*Fig. 65 to 73 + 3 bars* Repeat of entire scherzo [Fig. 48 to 57].

*Fig. 73 + 3 bars to end* Coda, suggesting a further repeat of the trio.

**Harmony**

Texture is often sparse in this movement, and the harmony arises from the contrapuntal direction of the lines. Chord movement is often by a
descending stepwise sequence rather than by classical chord progressions where the chord roots often move by fourths and fifths. In places there are distinct perfect cadences to establish a new key, such as the move to A major in the trio [3 bars after fig. 58]. More often the chord sequence is driven by descending bass patterns. Examples can be found two bars before fig. 49, four bars after fig. 53 and three bars before fig. 54. The trio uses a very limited selection of chords, and sounds almost like a musical box confined by its mechanism to a few bass notes. Many passages of this movement avoid harmony by using a single line or octave texture.

**Instrumentation**

Shostakovich was a renowned orchestrator. The following points illustrate how carefully the composer has used his forces in this movement.

- The sections of the orchestra have very distinct roles and changes of orchestral colour help to mark the main sections of the structure. The ABA pattern of Fig. 48 to 53 uses strings for the A sections and woodwind for the B section.
- The overall sound is weighty and he omits the bright sounds of celesta, piano and bells.
- The E♭ clarinet has an important role, taking the melody at fig. 49 and adding a high, penetrating sound.
- Horns have an impressive theme at fig. 54, repeated at fig. 56. When this returns at fig. 70 in the awkward key of F♯ major the trumpets take over, but the theme returns to horns at fig. 72 when F major is restored.
- The trio is very lightly scored for solo violin, pizzicato cellos and harp, with waltz-like glissandos in the violin part. When this section is repeated a flute takes over the solo, and the glissandos are subtly supplied by the harp (fig. 60).
- The reprise of the scherzo at fig. 65 exchanges the roles of strings and wind. Originally the E♭ clarinet melody was decorated by trills and these cannot be played on pizzicato strings, but they are discreetly added by the piccolo (Fig. 66 + 1 bar).
- Dark colours can also be found, such as in the unison theme for low woodwind at fig. 62.

**Melody**

The opening melody, played by cellos and double basses, is typical of a heavy-footed type of scherzo in the Germanic tradition.

![Allegretto](image-url)
The melody of the trio (fig. 57) constantly returns to E and experiments with many different upward leaps from this note, ranging from a third to a tenth. The larger leaps are covered by a glissando, giving the impression of a slightly drunken folk fiddler.

When the melody returns in the coda it struggles to rise more than a minor third from the E and is brusquely dismissed.

**Rhythm and metre**

Triple time is very clearly established by rhythm patterns in the melody and accompaniment patterns with string emphasis on the first beat of the bar, as at fig. 53. This makes it all the more effective when the pattern is changed. Four bars before fig. 53 the accents imply duple time and there are unexpected bars of quadruple time at fig. 54 and four bars previously. These can be seen as part of the humour of the movement, as if a whole section of the orchestra has somehow entered a beat late. The trio has no displacements of this sort, but the rit. and a tempo at the cadence to A major prevent the rhythm from becoming mechanical and also hint at a Viennese waltz style.

**Texture**

Every kind of texture is used, from single-line melody at the opening to full orchestra. There are many colourful moments using instruments very economically, such as the passage for Eb clarinet and two horns shortly after fig. 49 and the parallel passage for bassoon and lower strings beginning a few bars before fig. 51. The military sound of four horns with timpani and side drum (fig. 54) is very striking. Some changes are very abrupt, such as the move from full orchestra before fig. 57 to the delicacy of the trio. Counterpoint came naturally to Shostakovich and there is an example when the bassoon melody mentioned above overlaps with the return of the opening theme at fig. 51.

**Tonality**

The key centre of the movement is A, but it is more modal than tonal. There is little sign of G♯ being used as a leading note at cadences, and the supertonic is often amended from B to B♭. The main key centres of the scherzo are A minor, C minor (fig. 53) and F major (fig. 56). In the return of the scherzo the subsidiary keys are shifted to C♯ minor (fig. 69) and F♯ major (fig. 70) but they revert to their original pitch when repeated. The
trio begins in C major and modulates to A major before returning to its beginning. Classical symphonies depended most on modulations to the dominant and subdominant keys. From the beginning of the 19th century tertiary relationships became increasingly common, and Shostakovich follows this in matching A minor with C minor and C major with A major. His tendency to move keys by a tone or semitone is also evident here.

Third movement – Largo

The third movement is the most deeply felt of the symphony. The brass instruments rest, and the string texture is enriched by dividing violas and cellos into two parts and violins into three instead of two. Shostakovich completed this movement in three days and recognised from the start that it was touched with inspiration. The key is F♯ minor and the subsidiary keys are all in the minor mode. A classical symphony might have relaxed into a major key at this point but Shostakovich continues to insist on the minor. There is no relief from this sombre sound until the magical tierce de Picardie in the final chord.

A symphonic slow movement may have various forms but the design is usually simple. This Largo can loosely be described as a rondo based on returns of the opening theme in the subdominant (B minor, fig. 81), the tonic (F♯ minor, fig. 87) and dominant (C♯ minor, shortly after fig. 91). A further statement in C minor (fig. 93) is not entirely unexpected as it follows the practice identified elsewhere of shifting key by a tone or a semitone.

Main theme (fig. 75 to fig. 79) The first idea is solemn and restrained after the bombast of the second movement.

The melody is scored as a duet for violins and violas accompanied by a steadily moving bass line. Although unhurried, it creates forward motion by its persistently independent movement, and by the clouding of expected cadences with an inconclusive note in one of the parts. As in previous movements the melodic lines feature the flattened supertonic – here a distinctive G♯ first heard in bar 5. Extra string voices are gradually added, with first violins withheld the longest. They enter with a new idea at fig. 78 which is quiet and expressive on this occasion but which will become powerful and insistent later (fig. 89), with added definition from the xylophone. This opening section cadences in B minor.

First episode (fig. 79 to 81) A solo flute introduces a new theme with a light harp accompaniment oscillating between two chords. The second flute adds a countermelody, and it is no accident that this is an inversion of the first subject of the first movement: one of several hints of interconnections between the movements. A winding line for cello and double bass leads to the first return of the main theme.

Main theme (fig. 81 to 83) This return, in B minor, dwells on bars 1 and 2 of the original theme. Tension is increased almost unbearably by the rising chromatic line in the first violins and the music is moved into C minor by an obstinate G pedal. It seems a natural move, although this key is very remote from the F♯ minor of the beginning.
Second episode (fig. 83 to 87) Low strings declaim a phrase developed from the main theme, leading to a new idea played by the oboe. The string phrase at fig. 85 is a reminder of the violin idea at fig. 78 and the following clarinet solo combines this with elements of the oboe melody. This appears again on the flute. Once again the key has slipped by a semitone, this time to C# minor, easing the return to F# minor at fig. 87.

Main theme (fig. 87 to 90) The third appearance of the main theme, although in the tonic key, brings no relief because of its exceptionally dark scoring. Although it mirrors the opening of the movement the climax is far more powerful, drawing in piano and xylophone for the first time in the movement.

Third episode (fig. 90 to 93) The key has migrated again to D minor, and the theme from the second episode returns, transformed from a plaintive oboe solo to a passionate lament exploiting all the power of massed cellos in a high soloistic register. At the climax of this melody, three bars after fig. 91, the main theme is outlined by the first violins. The energy falls away again, and another semitone shift causes a diversion.

Main theme (fig. 93 to 94) The main theme returns in C minor, reflecting the theme’s appearance at fig. 81 by its quiet mood and rising chromatic descant. There is a brief turn to D minor leading up to fig. 94.

Reprise of first episode (fig. 94 to 96) The second theme is at last recalled, played by violins instead of flutes and suggesting C# minor. The harp accompanies as before, handing on its role to violas and cellos at fig. 95. Shostakovich, a master orchestrator, thereby covers the difficulty of the chromatic moves from A# to A and A♭ on the harp. There is a further hint of the main theme at fig. 95 but the tonic key is not reached until the bar before fig. 96.

Coda (fig. 96 to the end) The theme from fig. 84 has the last word, magically scored for celesta and harp harmonics. This at last brings the movement to rest on an F# major chord – one of the rare moments of real repose in the symphony.

Fourth movement – Allegro non troppo
The first three movements of Symphony No. 5 follow the pattern of a traditional symphony, but the fourth is more difficult to categorise. In common with most sonata form movements it has two main subjects in different keys but the relationship between them is not balanced in the traditional way. It is unusual for the first subject to be dominant for such a long period at the beginning of a movement, and for both tempo and key to be so unsettled. The problem is increased by the widely different interpretations of conductors, choosing many different variations of tempo throughout the movement. There are conflicting statements about the final move to the major mode: some see it as a triumphant resolution and some as a forced celebration of artificial rejoicing.

It is perhaps unwise to think in terms of sonata form in this instance. Shostakovich was also a composer of film music, and this movement could be seen as a description of a dramatic confrontation between two very different characters. It can be divided into a number of stages.

Opening statement (fig. 97 to 100) The shrill opening in D minor is a wrench after the F# major chord at the close of the third movement. The opening theme played by brass over a timpani ostinato contains three ideas x, y and z, which will be developed later.
Two more melodic ideas are generated in the bars following fig. 98 and fig. 99: the second of these is similar to the transition of the first movement. The tempo increases constantly throughout this section and the next, creating a frantic and unsettled effect.

**Development of opening statement (fig. 100 to 108)**

The music continues its headlong drive, and by the end of this section the marked tempo has almost doubled from the opening. The material remains the same but the key begins to modulate, often using the stepwise moves familiar from earlier in the work. Figure 101 implies C minor, and fig. 104 begins the subject in E♭ minor but reaches E minor after five bars. There are also passing references to F major (one bar after fig. 106), D♭ major (fig. 107) and B minor five bars later. Excitement is increased by the repeated use of the melodic motifs in sequences at fig. 102 and four bars after fig. 104.

**Introduction of second idea (fig. 108 to 112)**

This is an area of conflict within the movement. The new idea, which is essentially another of Shostakovich’s wide-ranging and lyrical melodies, is played by a solo trumpet and has to fight to be heard against a background of racing semiquavers. At first everything seems designed to defeat it but at fig. 110 the whole orchestra throws its weight behind the theme and plays it in A major – a natural key to use in a D minor movement. This is a gloriously film-like moment, with a confidence that is a complete contrast to the madness and instability that preceded it. At fig. 111 the first subject tries to reassert itself in G♯ minor but it judders to a halt in a funereal orchestration for brass and other bass instruments.

**Second idea (fig. 112 to 121)**

At last the second theme is allowed to create its own atmosphere, and a passage of unexpected tranquillity results. It is presented in B♭ major by a solo horn with a gently oscillating quaver accompaniment, and strings take the melody onwards, building to an impassioned climax at fig. 114. This gives way to a reflective woodwind passage at fig. 115.

At fig. 116 the strings begin a rocking accompaniment and elsewhere there are hints of motifs from the first theme. Motif x is echoed between low strings and horns from fig. 117, and expanded by first violins at fig. 119. At fig. 120 the motif from fig. 99 appears in augmentation in the bass, and the string accompaniment climbs ever higher until it reaches the harp.

This moment of peace before the first subject reasserts itself is given extra significance by the discovery that the accompaniment figure can also be found in a song to a text by Alexander Pushkin written by Shostakovich in 1936. The poem describes how a work of genius may be defaced, but in time the beauty of the masterpiece will be seen again. It is hard to escape the conclusion that this is a deliberate reference to Shostakovich’s situation but would only be recognised by those who knew his music intimately. Compare the two examples overleaf.
Before this idea comes completely to rest in the key of B♭ major, the bass forces the key to change and timpani and side drum create a new sense of urgency.

**Return of first theme (fig. 121 to the end)**

From this point to the end of the movement the first theme dominates again and the key is unable to settle, moving from D minor (fig. 121) through A minor (fig. 123), F minor (fig. 125), A♭ minor (fig. 127) and C minor (fig. 129). The rhythms become ever more insistent and repetitive, and gradually the entire orchestra is engaged. The final modulation is to D major at fig. 131, and the final 35 bars remain on the chord of D major, role at the opening of the movement.

**Understanding the score**

Most of the information given for the Elgar symphony also applies to the Shostakovich work (see page 153). The following differences should be noted:

- There are two flutes (flauti grandi) and one piccolo.
- Shostakovich does not include cor anglais and bass clarinet, but uses a small clarinet in E♭, which sounds a minor third higher than written.
- First and second trombones are here written in the alto clef.
- In the percussion section the snare drum is called *tamburo militare*. Shostakovich also uses triangle, a type of gong (*tam-tam*), two harps (*arpe*), bells (*campanelli*), xylophone, celesta and piano.
Examination questions

In the examination you will be asked to write one substantial essay from a choice of two on your set work. You are allowed to use an unmarked score of your chosen set work and this will help you to make detailed reference to the music to support your answer.

- Read the question carefully and be sure that you understand the point of the question. You do not need to write out the question on the examination paper but it is important to keep it in mind while you are writing so that you do not include irrelevant material.

- Plan the essay briefly before you begin. A few moments’ thought can ensure that the main points are included and should help you to plan your time.

- There is no need to write out musical quotations for this answer unless you wish to refer to a work other than the symphony. You should indicate as clearly as possible the position of any passages you discuss: for example, ‘Third movement, fig. 66 flute’.

- Write legibly and in good English, taking care to use technical terms correctly. Give the number of the question you are answering.

- If you identify a theme by name [e.g. motif x] give a bar reference when you first use the term. There are many different ways of analysing these works and the examiner must be able to understand the terms you are using.

Types of question

Essay questions will be of different types. You will often find that the two alternative questions offer a choice between writing in detail on a selected passage or musical feature, and taking a broader view where you will need to choose appropriate sections to discuss. Here are some examples:

- Description of a long section, such as a complete movement, in the form of a programme note. This is usually straightforward to answer. Balance the essay so that all parts of the movement are covered according to their importance. For example: ‘Write a detailed programme note on the third movement of Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 5’.

- Comparison of two passages, such as two appearances of the same theme. For example: ‘Explain how the opening theme of Elgar’s Symphony No. 1 is used in the first and fourth movements of the symphony’.

- Discussion of a musical element, such as rhythm, orchestration or form. You may be asked to select interesting passages to discuss, and you can prepare for this in advance by identifying sections that demonstrate the composer’s style particularly well. For example: ‘Choose two or three passages which show how Shostakovich used rhythm and metre creatively in Symphony No. 5’.

- Questions which relate the set work to its context or the composer’s life. These need broader knowledge but it is important to support your answer by detailed reference to the symphony. For example: ‘Elgar’s Symphony No. 1 was hailed as “the greatest symphony of modern times” in 1908. Which features of the symphony contributed most to its enthusiastic reception internationally in the early years of the 20th century?’