BTEC LEVEL 2

Teamwork and Personal Development in the Community



Cadet Vocational College

LEARNING GUIDE

for completing Unit 13

Version 3.1

Pearson BTEC Approved Centre

Unit 13: Solo Musical Performance

On successful completion of this unit you will:

1. Be able to plan repertoire for a solo performance
2. Be able to prepare for a solo performance
3. Be able to perform music to an audience as a soloist

Unit 13

Solo Musical Performance

Developing a career as a solo performer takes lots of dedication, versatility and practice. Soloists spend vast amounts of time exploring repertoire and honing their technical and interpretive skills so that they can give flawless and consistent performances every time.

In this unit, you will learn how to select appropriate musical material for a particular performance context. You will develop your technical and interpretive skills by undertaking a practice routine that will enable you to present a solo performance to an audience. You will also explore the required preparations that are needed when planning and presenting a solo performance.

Unit 13 has:



- Two tasks which require a written answer.
- You need to understand what the command verb is telling you to do before answering the questions.
- Additionally, you should read any case studies as they will help you to complete each task.



- A requirement for you to complete a **minimum of 30 hours** rehearsal time carried out under direct supervision and independently. You **must** complete a practice log to evidence this.
- Evidence of your performance **must** be uploaded for assessment.

LO

Learning Outcome 1

Be able to plan repertoire for a solo performance

This learning outcome requires you to select pieces of music for a performance. This will demonstrate your ability to choose and justify pieces.

Choosing the right music



A solo performer requires high levels of technical ability using their instrument or voice. In order to do this, musicians need to be able to develop practice routines which involve self-discipline and perseverance. It is also very important to choose the pieces you are going to perform very carefully.

When choosing the right music the most important things to remember are:

- to select pieces that will showcase your technical and musical ability
- to select music that you can play well
- to select music that is appropriate for your target audience and venue
- to select music which will give a balanced and contrasting programme

Do not choose music that is not rehearsed well or that will take longer than the time you have available to prepare.

The easiest way to do this is to make a list of your best pieces, i.e. those that you feel best represents your ability. More often than not these will be pieces that you like and get a great deal of satisfaction from playing or singing.

From that list, you should then select your final choices which you will then be able to prepare in order to present polished performances. The selection of your final programme should be well considered and carefully rehearsed.

- **Why do I like this specific piece?**
- **How does it help show off my level of proficiency?**
- **Will it demonstrate my musicality?**

Building a balanced programme

As you begin to consider which pieces to play for your solo performance, it is a good idea to think about how to balance your programme. For instance, if you play four pieces that are all similar in style, then they can sound very 'samey' and your audience may become bored. To begin this process, you should carry out some background research and listen to recordings of the pieces you might include your programme. You should select pieces which stretch your skills and abilities; choosing pieces that are too easy may not give you the challenge you need to produce an exciting and musical performance.

Try to choose a mixture of different types and styles of pieces. One way of structuring your programme, for example, might be to start with a lively piece which will grab the audience's attention. You could then follow this with a contrasting slower piece. The third piece could be something really straightforward, but that you know you can play well. Your final piece should be something strong and spectacular which leaves the audience impressed with your overall performance.

When planning your repertoire you will need to consider:

- **How to create a contrasting and balanced programme**
- **What venue and equipment do you have available?**
- **Who will be your audience?**
- **What genre, style and mood will you choose?**
- **What preparation time do you have?**
- **What accompaniment requirements do you have?**

Task 1: Plan repertoire for a solo performance

(AC 1.1 & 1.2)

After identifying your chosen instrument and details for your solo performance there are two parts to the task.

Part a.
IDENTIFY three pieces of music that are appropriate for the performance context.

The pieces need to be **contrasting** and at least **two minutes** in length.

Part b.
You now need to give at least **one** reason to **JUSTIFY** why your repertoire is suitable for the **audience**, the **venue** and your **level of technical ability**.

? Example

An acceptable answer for technical ability would be:
"I chose pieces that would challenge me to use a range of techniques to showcase my technical ability. I practice these pieces regularly, can perform them well and with confidence, and always receive positive feedback."

An answer that would not be accepted:
"I chose straightforward pieces to play that would not need additional practice."

Top Tip

When you are **JUSTIFYING** your repertoire (Part b.) there are **three** parts to your answer.

You must include details on **why** your repertoire is suitable for the **audience**, the **venue** and **your level of technical difficulty**.

Recap

To check your understanding you may wish to answer the following questions:

- **A balanced and varied programme would keep your audience engaged. True or False?**
- **Name two points you would need to consider when building your programme**

If you want to check your answers, they are located on page 20.

LO **Learning Outcome 1 - complete** ✓

LO

Learning Outcome 2

Be able to prepare for a solo performance

This learning outcome requires you to demonstrate your solo performance skills by undertaking the necessary preparations for a performance.

Practice techniques

The phrase you must familiarise yourself with as a musician, is as follows:

"Amateurs practice until they get the music right. Professionals practice until they can't possibly get it wrong".

Adapted from Harold Craxton (1885-1971), professor at the Royal Academy of Music.

We are all familiar with the phrase '**practice makes perfect**', but if you follow a few simple techniques, your playing will improve significantly in a relatively short period of time.

Where a lot of inexperienced musicians sometimes go wrong is that they confuse 'practicing' with simply 'playing'.

There are many constraints placed on young people today, especially with the amount of coursework and homework which needs to be done for school or college. Sometimes it can feel like doing thirty minutes practice a day is just not feasible.

One answer is not to waste your very valuable time by running through the bits you can already play – practice the parts in a piece that you find difficult or cannot play.

>> TONE >> TECHNICAL EXERCISES

>> MOTOR SKILLS AND CO-ORDINATION

>> WARM-UPS >> STUDY >> TIMING

>> DEXTERITY >> SOUND >> SPEED

Examples

When practising, you need to identify what passages in a piece are causing you difficulty and what you need to do in order to fix the problem.

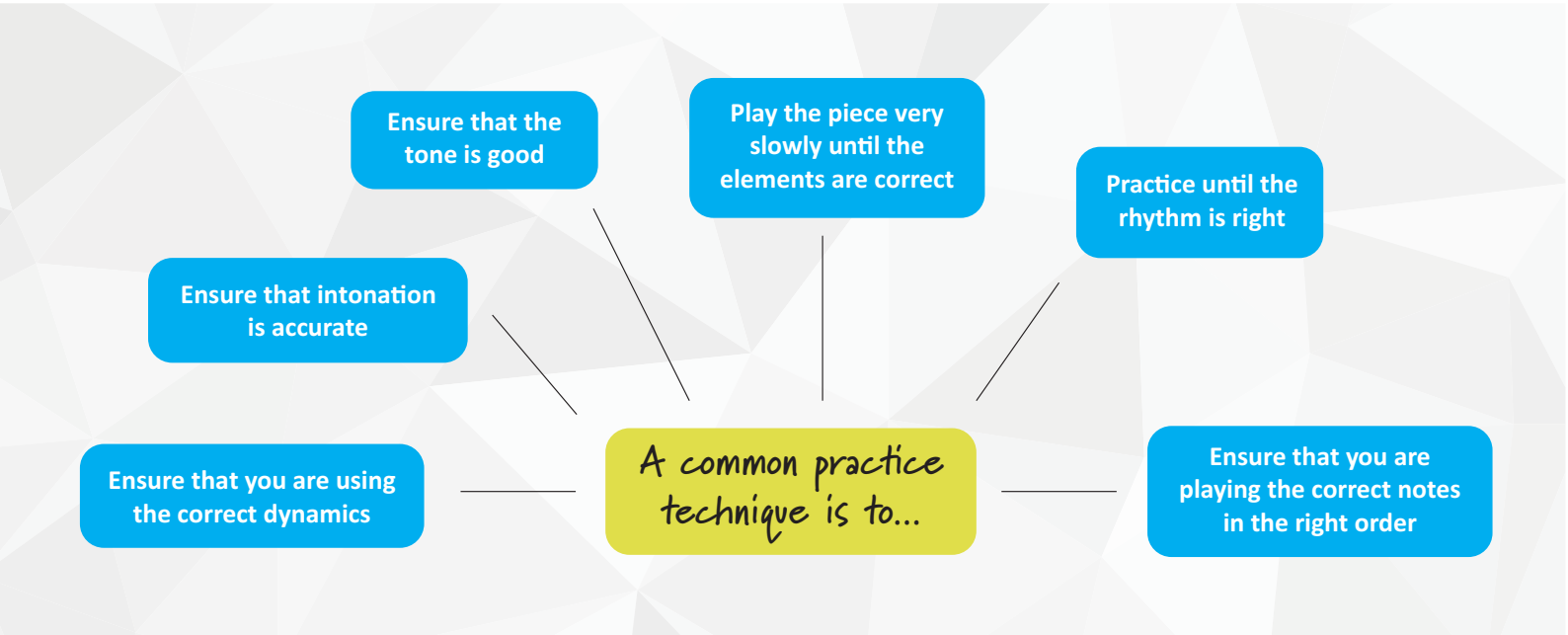
Practice techniques can vary according to your instrument. With wind, string and brass instruments for example, a lot of time and effort is put into improving the tonal quality. This is achieved by playing long notes, developing breathing techniques and introducing vibrato.

Scales may seem a little dull, but knowing your key signatures and how to play the scales on your instrument is a good way of making sure that you will be able to use the correct finger placement as well as being more likely to remember which accidentals you need. Professional musicians, however good they are, still practice their scales!

Percussionists spend a long time strengthening their weak hand (opposite to the one they write with). This can be done by doubling the workload in the weak hand and allows the performer to play as evenly and confidently in either.

For singers, techniques may focus on articulation, developing the head and chest voice, improving breath control and learning how to pitch intervals correctly.





You could try to play or sing passages using different rhythms. This enables you to play intervals both slowly and quite quickly. Doing this, will enable you to really concentrate on the parts of a piece that are giving you trouble. The long-term benefit is that by practising in this way, you will improve your technical ability and instrumental control.

Once you have mastered the practice techniques, try increasing the tempo at which you play the piece. Most performers try and play something twice as fast as they should. That way, when they actually come to perform the work, they are more than capable of playing it at the correct speed.

The biggest downfall of any performer is lack of self-confidence. In order to overcome this, you must spend time with your instrument one-to-one. Develop your technique until you are 100% confident that nothing can go wrong, irrespective of the performance environment.

Do not make the mistake of thinking you can get away with 'iffy' bits. You might be able to if you are playing in your bedroom, but when you are sounding Last Post at a memorial service, there simply is no room for error. Everyone will notice if you make the smallest slip.

Practice techniques help us to discipline ourselves into fault-finding and correcting errors. It is vital as a performer that we learn to evaluate ourselves and our abilities. By concentrating on various practice techniques, the overall technical control of your instrument will improve, as will your aural skills (listening). You will also be able to identify problem areas much more quickly and therefore your time will be used more effectively.

Undertaking a practice routine

>> REVIEW PROGRESS

>> SKILLS AUDIT >> SET YOURSELF TARGETS

>> MAKE PROGRESS >> IMPROVE SKILLS

>> REFINING PRACTICE >> ADJUSTING PRACTICE

Benefits of effective practice routines

- They focus the mind
- They remind you of what you need to practice
- After a few weeks, practice will become habitual
- They help you to overcome weaknesses in your technique
- They help you to develop good aural skills

Practice dos
Plan what you want to achieve (small achievements at each practice session)
Make time to practice for about 10-30 minutes
Start with something you know well as a warm up (2 minutes)
Practice scales and arpeggios (5 minutes)
Perform exercises or technical studies slowly at first and then increase in speed
Break difficult sections down into smaller pieces - one bar at first, then two or three bars together, and finally a whole section of music
Always perform with a sense of musicality (even scales and warm-ups can be beautiful!)
Sight read or improvise a melody to create something new
Finish with something you can do well; pretend it is a final performance of a piece

Practice don'ts
Avoid getting distracted by friends or other musicians (practice should be an individual activity unlike a rehearsal)
Don't perform an entire section over and over when the error is in one particular bar alone (save time and break it down instead)
Try not to shy away from anything that is difficult. Do not just perform music you know well (or how else will you improve?)
Don't stand or sit with bad posture even when you are practising (your breathing and breath control will suffer and you will develop unnecessary aches and pains)
Avoid leaving practice to the week before a performance. Learning new music is a detailed process that is more than just being able to play the notes

Scan me!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqVTF9GOtrE

Task 2: Identify practice techniques that can improve own performance skills (AC 2.1)

For this task you should **IDENTIFY three** practice exercises or techniques that could improve your performance skills.

The practice exercises or techniques you **IDENTIFY must** be relevant to the instrument identified in Task 1 and the music pieces chosen.



An acceptable answer would be:
"I begin by practising my scales and arpeggios, then move onto technical exercises, followed by techniques to improve my tone."

An answer that would not be accepted:
"I practise by playing a piece through three times."



Think about how **you** can improve your performance skills.

What exercises/techniques do you use currently?

Preparing for a solo performance

Using a **practice plan**, you should keep a diary of your preparation for the solo performance. You can use this to record targets that have been set (either by you or by your tutor) and the progress you have made towards reaching each one. You should take into account all aspects of preparation for the performance, including **technical** factors and **physical** or **musical** considerations.

A practice plan is in the form of a table which asks you to identify specific targets (musical, technical or physical) and then gives you space to record the progress you make in preparation for your solo performance.

The targets you set will be **specific** to your instrument or voice. Below are a few examples for you.

Technical preparations



- Preparing instrument or voice e.g. in working order, warm-up
- Preparing sheet music, backing tracks, etc.
- Contingency planning e.g. spare strings, reeds, etc.
- Setting up
- Liaising with technicians and venue staff

Physical preparations



- Relaxation exercises
- Concentration techniques
- Exercises for controlling nerves
- Rehearsing with accompanist
- Dress rehearsal and sound checks
- Verbal communications e.g. introductions
- Presentation and stagecraft e.g. entrance and exit of stage, bows, etc.

Musical preparations



- Memorise the Last Post for a Remembrance Day performance
- Perform bar 10-17 at the correct tempo (120 bpm)
- Pitch all intervals correctly for 'Ave Maria'
- Use the correct sticking in the central passage of 'Roll on Friday'
- Ensure the fingering in 3rds in bar 42 is tight and not messy
- Play my solo piece using dynamic contrast and staccato articulations
- Tidy up the lip slurs in 'The Swan'
- Improve my tone quality using long note exercises
- Improve my breathing technique by singing long sustained phrases

Task 3: Prepare for a solo performance

(AC 2.2)

There are two parts to this task.

Part a. Complete an initial skills audit.

Read through the list of judgements provided and take a moment to reflect. Do you have the necessary skills to deliver your chosen music for your planned performance?

If you highlight any areas for development, you can refer to them in part b.

Part b. Following on from your initial skills audit, now produce a practice plan detailing **how** you are going to prepare for your planned solo performance.

Set yourself **three** suitable targets and evaluate the progress you have made for each one.

? Example

An example entry of a musical target that would be accepted:

Musical skill target	By when	Progress made
I want to be able to play the fast passages in bars 64 to 96 of Pachelbel's Canon more accurately and up to speed.	30 Sept	I set my metronome to 85 so that I could play at a steady tempo. I tried increasing to 90 but I can't play the semiquavers neatly enough at this speed.

Top Tip

Setting yourself a target will help provide focus for the practice sessions.

You can set yourself targets or your tutor can set some for you.

Task 4: Carry out technical and physical preparation for your solo performance (AC 2.3)

There are two parts to this task.

Part a.
In preparation for your solo performance you will need to evidence **30 hours** rehearsal time using a practice log (**VQF 657***).

**You will find this template at the back of your workbook.*

Part b.
Write a **reflective account** detailing **why** the **technical** and **physical preparations** you detailed in Task 3 were appropriate to help you prepare for your solo performance.

Recap

To check your understanding you may wish to answer the following questions:

- **Relaxation exercises and concentration techniques are what types of preparation?**
- **Name one technical and one musical preparation a soloist may practice**

If you want to check your answers, they are located on page 20.

LO **Learning Outcome 1 - complete** ✓

LO **Learning Outcome 2 - complete** ✓

LO

Learning Outcome 3

Be able to perform music to an audience as a soloist

This learning outcome requires you to demonstrate your competence in performing to an audience as a soloist.

Case study

Ella is a saxophonist and member of a six-piece jazz band. Over the last twelve months the band have put on two concerts.

The case study below shows the preparation that is involved.



Ella

Ella is really passionate about playing with her band and has improved significantly over the last year. Ella has invested the time to **practice and perfect** her musical skills and has planned out a detailed **practice timetable** to **build her skills** in preparation for the performance.

Ella set herself a number of **specific targets** and **worked hard** to achieve them. **Feedback** from her tutor was essential and Ella **regularly tested the performance** of pieces on family and friends, **asking for advice**.

Not only did Ella's skill level improve, her **confidence** grew significantly as the pieces became more familiar. Previously Ella had struggled with nerves and **tried hard to control** them before every performance. **Being conscientious, taking the time and effort to prepare and warm up before any performance, hydrate and focus on tone and expression** were all factors that helped.

Ella is working on an improvised solo for the next performance.

Performance preparation

There are all sorts of different preparatory routines you will use as a performer – and often you do not even realise you are doing it!

Make sure your uniform or stage costume is pressed, clean and tidy. If not, you end up going on stage feeling a bit scruffy and not altogether with it. If you look good, you feel good and if you feel good, you play well. It is that simple.

Check to make sure your instrument is in working order. Play a couple of bars to confirm this.

Warm up - properly!

Take yourself off into a corner and play a few notes.

- If you are a wind or brass instrumentalist, play long notes. This will warm up the instrument gradually and slow down the accumulation of water inside the instrument.
- If you are a percussionist, loosen up your wrists and arms. Practice stick work in a mirror.
- Singers should warm up their vocal chords by singing different pitches and intervals and get the articulators (teeth, tongue, lips) going.

Control your nerves

If you suffer from nerves, this is often a good thing as they give you the edge as a performer. Nerves make you more aware of things around you as your senses are on red alert.

- There are two different types of nerves - good nerves and bad nerves! The difference between the two is simple. With good nerves, you have butterflies in your tummy. With bad nerves, you will be hot and sweaty and will probably feel sick. Most young performers have good nerves as it is often only when we mature into adults that we develop a fear of consequence and failure.
- Take long, deep breaths. Apart from having a calming feeling, this allows more oxygen into your body feeding those cells overrun with adrenalin. When we are stressed, we hunch our shoulders and hold our breath. If you breathe, more oxygen reaches your brain, and therefore you will have higher levels of energy. Low levels of energy cause an imbalance between the left and right side of the body. Catastrophic if you are a drummer!

Eat a banana!

These have very high levels of potassium and sustain your energy levels for longer.

Think positively

You cannot go onto the performance platform thinking you are going to mess it up even before you have started! Once this begins to happen, you lose all faith in your ability to perform. Examples below of poor self-talk:

- Will I split the high note?
- Will I play the wrong notes?
- Will I forget to breathe?
- Will I get the words mixed up?

There are a number of **physical** actions that can potentially damage your performance so should be avoided. Two of them, **Don't eat or drink high sugar foods or drink** and **don't rush around** are detailed on the following page. You may think of others that are specific to your own instrument.

Don’t eat or drink high sugar foods or drinks

Consuming these types of foods result in one thing – dehydration. If you are nervous, you will naturally have a dry mouth – a nightmare for wind and brass players and vocalists alike. You do not want to make this worse by drinking a can of coke just before you walk on stage or step off. Sugary food and drink will also give you an instant sugar rush as your body tries to process the extra glucose. You will feel energised and elated for a while, but when the glucose is all gone you will experience a ‘sugar crash’ which will leave you feeling sluggish, irritable and tired.



Don’t rush around

If you use up all your energy by running around backstage or just before you step off, you will have nothing in reserve for the performance. You will be out of breath, you will not get enough oxygen to your brain and the nerves will get increasingly worse. Be organised and be ready.

Make sure you have everything you need well in advance of the performance and be there in plenty of time. You will still be nervous, but hopefully these will be the good nerves instead of the bad ones.



No two performances will ever be the same, but that is what makes it a wonderful and exciting experience. And it does not matter if you make a mistake. What matters is how you recover from it.

Drink plenty of water

If you feel thirsty, that is your brain’s way of telling you that you have gone too long without fluid. Water is essential for proper circulation in the body and flexibility of the blood vessels. Most importantly, it helps regulate your body temperature. Just imagine a car engine running without water in the radiator. It would simply overheat – just as you will during the performance (if not before).



Solo performance

Performing as a soloist is quite a daunting thing to do, especially playing in front of an audience. There is no quick solution to this and you will need to give yourself plenty of practice playing to people. Some of the skills you will need to demonstrate we have already looked at in the ensemble performance section of this learning guide.

Additional skills required as a soloist in addition to **pitch, rhythm, intonation and pulse** are:

Use of expression

This is the main way we can communicate with our audience and is conveyed mainly by using the dynamics and phrases of a piece. It is quite difficult when you are playing a military side drum to be expressive as the instrument is quite unforgiving. However, you can play loudly and softly so the audience understands the direction and all music is written in phrases.

Confidence

This is something that will come with ability and practice. There are times when self-doubt creeps in and you may find yourself thinking, “If I get through this it will be a miracle.” The solution is to know your pieces back to front and inside out. Know them so you can’t possibly make a mistake and then you will have nothing to worry about.



Activity 1: Perform music to an audience as a soloist (AC 3.1)



To complete the next part of the unit, you must **perform** contrasting pieces of music as a soloist with competent technical and interpretive skills.

To provide **evidence** of this **you must:**

- Perform at least **three*** contrasting pieces of music as a **soloist** in front of an **audience**.

Each piece must be a minimum of* ***two* *minutes in length. It is not necessary for you to perform all pieces at once as they may be presented over time.*

To provide **evidence** of this **your tutor must:**

- Take a video recording of the performances that show the audience present.
- Complete a tutor testimony (**VQF658***) to give you feedback and to provide evidence of your solo music performance.

**Both templates can be found at the back of the workbook. Guidance on how to upload the video recordings for assessment is given on the tutor testimony form.*

LO Learning Outcome 1 - complete ✓

LO Learning Outcome 2 - complete ✓

LO Learning Outcome 3 - complete ✓

Answers

LO 1 Be able to plan repertoire for a solo performance

Q1: True.
Q2: Answers may include: venue, audience, genre, time required or accompaniment requirements.

LO 2 Be able to prepare for a solo performance

Q1: Physical preparations.
Q2: Preparing sheet music or others are listed on page 12. Memorising notes or others listed on page 12.

Additional reading

Should you wish to know more about this subject area, the following resources may be useful:

Reading
Each instrument will have its own set of technique development materials that can be found in libraries, music shops and periodicals. For the health and wellbeing element of the unit, learners will find periodical journals on exercise useful, along with the material listed below.

Textbooks
De Alcantara P – Indirect Procedures: Musician's Guide to the Alexander Technique (Oxford University Press and Clarendon Paperbacks, 1997) ISBN 9780198165699

Paull B and Harrison C – The Athletic Musician: A Guide to Playing Without Pain (Scarecrow Press, 1997) ISBN 9780810833562

Robinson L et al – The Official Body Control Pilates Method – For Fitness and Health, Sport, and at Work (Macmillan Paperback, 2002) ISBN 9780330393270

Websites
https://gb.abrsm.org/en/exam-support/apps-and-practice-tools/
https://gb.abrsm.org/en/exam-support/coping-with-nerves/
https://store.trinitycollege.com/

Additional units of interest

As part of this qualification there are other units of study. A number of them have clear links with Solo Music Performance and include:

Unit 12: Planning and Creating a Music Product
Unit 14: Working as a Musical Ensemble

LO Learning Overview

Criteria reference	To achieve the criteria the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	Task	Evidence (page no.)
Learning Outcome 1: Be able to plan repertoire for a solo performance			
1.1	Select pieces that are appropriate for the performance context	Task 1	WB Pages 4-5
1.2	Justify pieces of music chosen for the performance context	Task 1	WB Pages 4-5
Learning Outcome 2: Be able to prepare for a solo performance			
2.1	Identify practice techniques that can improve own performance skills	Task 2	WB Page 6
2.2	Undertake a practice routine to improve identified performance skills	Task 3	WB pages 7-8
2.3	Carry out the technical and physical preparations appropriate for the chosen solo performance	Task 4 **and** VQF 657	WB page 9 **and** 13-14
Learning Outcome 3: Be able to perform music to an audience as a soloist			
3.1	Perform contrasting pieces of music as a soloist with competent technical and interpretive skills	Activity 1 **and** VQF 658	WB page 10 **and** 11-12

Contact

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