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WELCOME TO THE ROCKSCHOOL SAMPLE BOOKLET FOR MUSIC PRODUCTION

This interactive booklet is designed to give a flavour of the coursework tasks contained within the graded exam syllabus and information on the technical skills and understanding that have been benchmarked at each grade. This sits alongside the Syllabus Guide which provides full details of the Rockschool graded examinations in Music Production which run from Grades 1 - 8. This pack contains examples of coursework tasks at Grade 1, Grade 3, Grade 5 and Grade 8 to give you a flavour of the progression students can expect to enjoy as they engage with the syllabus.

Learners can be taught individually or in groups and our fees have been grouped into bands to help you plan taught programmes for mixed ability groups.

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Purchase your digital copies of the full Rockschool syllabus book on the RSL Awards shop **here**

The Rockschool Music Production graded exam syllabus can be taught using any appropriate hardware and DAW. RSL Awards often run offers with industry partners to support you in getting started and delivering Music Production both inside and outside the classroom so please see our **Partnerships and Discounts Page** for more information.

CONTENTS

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Designed to prepare and develop candidates for the creative industries, Rockschool Music Production develops both the technical and musical skills required for the studio and live environment. This includes having the practical and theoretical understanding of music production software, hardware and techniques to be able to create your own music and collaborate with others on theirs.

The Rockschool books are divided into three key sections:

MUSIC PRODUCTION THEORY

Rockschool's Music Production syllabus provides the necessary material needed to achieve an understanding of key music production terminology, as well as sound and audio fundamentals, in relation to modern music production.

LISTENING SKILLS

Using audio examples provided, the producer will learn how to demonstrate effective listening skills relevant to modern music production. In this section, Rockschool's Music Production syllabus looks at sonic fidelity, music theory & harmony and stylistic awareness.

THE COURSEWORK TASK

In order to enhance a producer's technical skills, they will be asked to complete a coursework task which will demonstrate the ability to use the digital audio workstation (DAW) of the candidate's choice.

The producer will be given the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and creativity in a simulated professional situation, being assessed on their ability to resolve industry standard scenarios using appropriate music production techniques.

At Grades 6 – 8 the candidate may choose to specialise in Audio Production, Electronic Music Production or Sound for Media.

"There's a niche in each of the coursework tasks for students to think 'this might be the thing that I can get really good at'."
Randeep Ahira, Lead teacher for Music Technology at Twyford School

MUSIC PRODUCTION SAMPLE PACK

COURSEWORK TASKS:

The creative composition briefs are based on real-life scenarios that, throughout the grades, allow the learner to progressively master music production and get them familiar with the situations that arise in a professional environment in the creative industries. From DAW fundamentals, knowledge of studio equipment and hardware to understanding melodic and harmonic complexities.

Rockschool Music Production's coursework tasks are creative briefs that get the learner working with a DAW of their choice. At Grade 1, the candidate is tasked with producing a session with an artist, making sure that everything they are doing is clearly organised and in time. By working out how to write the melody and bass line tracks that goes with a background set of chords, the candidate creates their own original track as well as learning the skills required to write 'guide' or 'ghost' tracks which another musician can listen to so they get an idea of what sound is wanted to be produced.

As the grades increase, the techniques become more sophisticated as candidates focus on more complex harmonies and structures alongside the soundstage, incorporating increasingly subtle use of elements such as Pan, EQ and Compression to finesse the sound.

By Grade 8, there is the chance to specialise. For example, an EDM (Electronic Dance Music) producer might be sent a track that a singer has recorded into their phone and has requested it be turned into a full-scale dance track. Some of the greatest collaborations of recent years have started like this. The candidate will have learnt by now how to use all sorts of techniques and skills to be able to fully remix the track, adding depth and space to the vocal line and adding samples and their own original music to create an authentic final mix.

"The course helps us to identify and cultivate Music Production cohorts earlier so that we can ensure they are even better prepared and retain healthy numbers at recruitment."
Richard Bannister, Head of Music at Highcliffe School

AUDIO / VISUAL:

Depending on the coursework task at each grade, audio is primarily provided in the form of stems. Where applicable, there's also accompanying video too. Audio tracks are also included for the listening tests, with additional audio to support the example papers. Audio files are supplied in a range of formats to enable playback on a wide range of compatible devices, including; MP3, Flac and Wav files, whilst video is generally supplied as MP4. Digital versions of the book include audio files in the download. Physical versions of the book include a code to download the audio at rslawards.com/downloads.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The books also contain information on exam procedures, including online examination entry, marking schemes, sample exam papers, glossary of terms and other useful information.

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EXAMS:

Rockschool Music Production exams are split into three parts:

A written examination covering knowledge of:
- Music production terminology
- Sound and audio fundamentals

A listening test divided into three sections:
- Sonic fidelity
- Music theory and harmony
- Stylistic awareness

A Coursework Task, including technical skills, which candidates must complete prior to the exam and upload during the exam.

Learners can take their exam at any time via our online portal. Candidates are given a set time to log-in and upload their coursework task and then complete the Theory and Listening sections online. You can arrange for the session to be invigilated in-house or we can invigilate the exam remotely with the candidate working from home or at your venue.

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ASSESSMENT:

Candidates are assessed against specific Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria which are detailed in full in the Syllabus Guide and on our **website**.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

1. Understand the key terminology used in modern music production.
2. Understand the fundamentals of sound and audio in relation to modern music production.
3. Demonstrate effective listening skills relevant to modern music production.
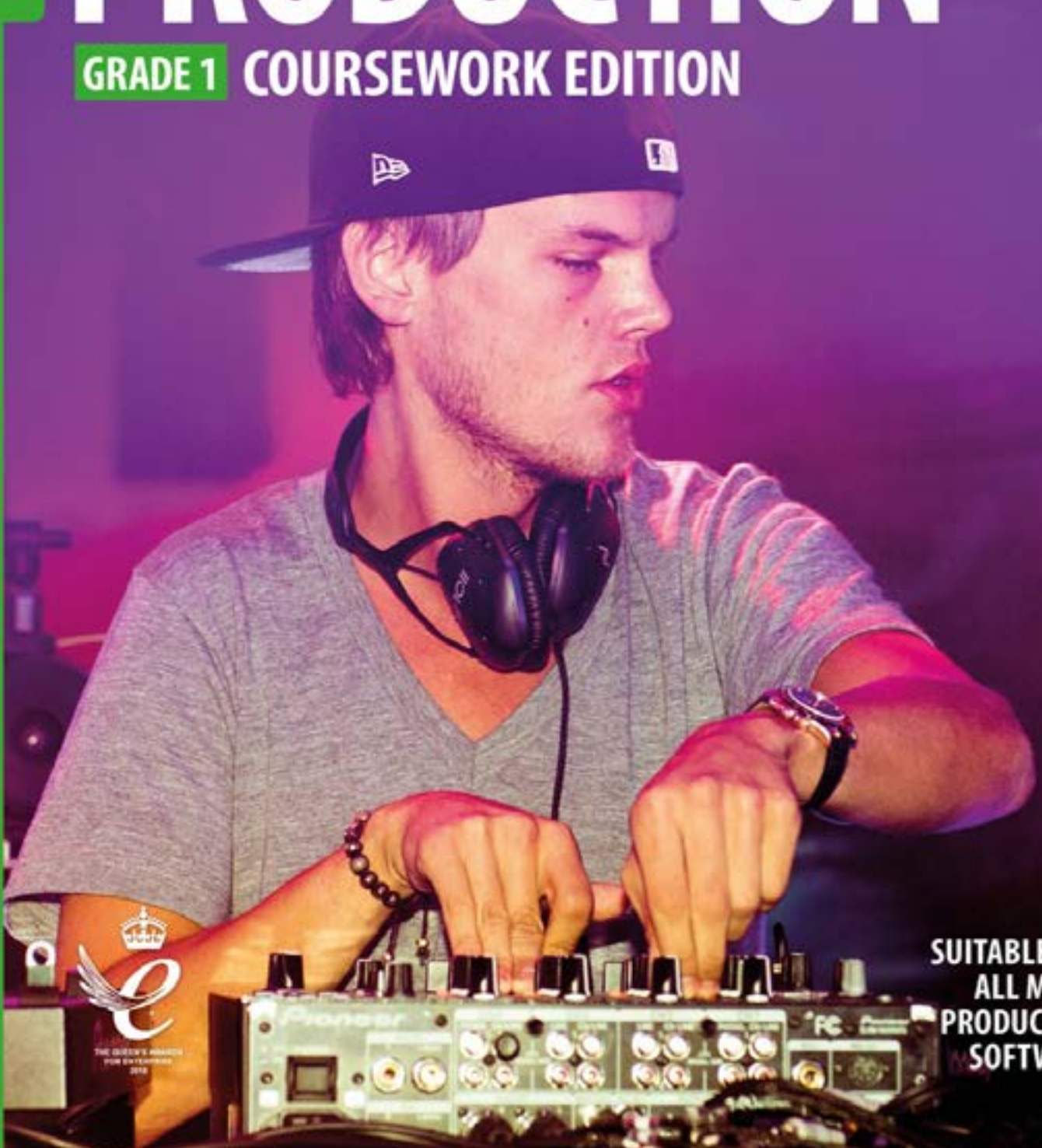4. Demonstrate effective music production technique.

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Title	RSL Level 1 Award in Music Production – Grade 1
Qualification No.	603/0049/8
Level	1
Credit Value	5
GLH	10
TQT	50

Learning Outcome You will:	Assessment Criteria You can:

1. Understand the key terminology used in modern music production	1.1 Demonstrate a knowledge of Grade 1 terminology related to:
	   a. Music production equipment
	   b. Industry standard formats & protocols
	   c. Industry standard connectivity
	   d. Digital technology
	   e. Digital Audio Workstations

2. Understand the fundamentals of sound and audio in relation to modern music production	2.1 Demonstrate an understanding of Grade 1 fundamentals related to:
	   a. Microphone technology and technique
	   b. Audio recording, editing and processing
	   c. MIDI & audio programming
	   d. Audio Technology
	   e. Acoustics

3. Demonstrate effective listening skills relevant to modern music production	3.1 Demonstrate Grade 1 level aural skills in the areas of:
	   a. Sonic fidelity
	   b. Music theory
	   c. Stylistic awareness

4. Demonstrate effective music production technique	4.1 Demonstrate skills appropriate to Grade 1 in the areas of:
	   a. File management
	   b. Digital Audio Workstation programming
	   c. Audio mixing
	
	4.2 Demonstrate skills and understanding appropriate to Grade 1 in the areas of:
	   a. Interpretation of briefs
	   b. Music creation or editing
	   c. File sharing

Please note: candidates are required to achieve a minimum overall mark of 60% in order to achieve a pass. Regardless of the overall mark, candidates must also achieve a minimum of 40% in every part (part A, B & C), therefore demonstrating a knowledge and understanding of every learning outcome.

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SUMMARY	
SECTION *(Current section highlighted)*	**MARKS**
> **Theoretical Written Exam**	**25 [25%]**
Listening Test	15 [15%]
Coursework Task	60 [60%]

The *Theoretical Written Exam* section of Rockschool Music Production Examinations covers the following:

- Music Production Terminology
- Sound & Audio Fundamentals

At Grade 1 the theory content covered will include subject areas such as identifying studio hardware, physical audio formats, analogue connectivity, computer & digital technology, DAW basics, microphones, MIDI basics, basic audio technology and the fundamentals of mono & stereo sound.

Digital Audio Workstation
The digital audio workstation (abbreviated to DAW) is the name given to the computer system and software that can be used to record and edit the music.

DAWs are used in almost all forms of music production, from rock and pop to electronica and country music. The functionality and flexibility that modern software provides is extremely valuable to the modern music producer.

Looking back a few years, a producer would need to spend over £1000 per day to use a commercial studio with an expensive mixing desk that on it's own might have cost over £300,000. Now, a modern DAW is available for the cost of a computer and some software. This has made it possible for almost anyone to make great sounding music.

Hardware: DAWs can be based on any computer hardware, including Apple Mac OS, Windows PCs, Linux PCs and even iPad and iPhones.

Software: There are many different software packages available, but the most common ones are:

Apple Logic Pro

Hardware Controls

While some mixing desks offer additional functionality, there are some functions which you will always find. Such as:

Fader
Controls the level of the audio leaving a channel

Pan pot (Panoramic potentiometer)
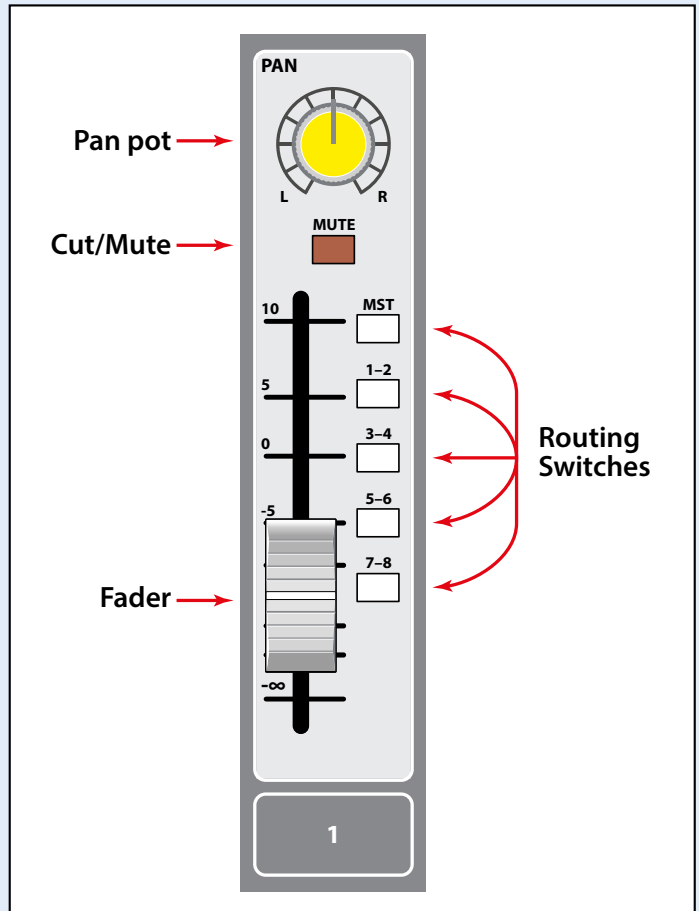Controls where the sound sits in the stereo spectrum between left and right.

Cut/Mute
Prevents any sound from leaving the channel.

Routing
Controls the path that the audio will take through the mixing desk.

Headphone Volume

Controls how loud the mix will be in the sound engineer's or performer's headphones. This might be found on the audio interface, mixing desk or a separate headphone amplifier.

Music Theory & Harmony

Objective: Identify Higher Pitch/Lower Pitch

As a music producer, a basic understanding of music theory and some ear training will be invaluable to you. It is important that you can recognise when pitches are ascending (higher than the previous note) and when they are descending (lower than the previous note). Here are two files for you to listen to so you can hear the differences in pitch. Both files will contain two notes, the first being middle C, the root note in all listening exercises.

- In audio example `LSG1H1.mp3`, you can hear the second note is a higher pitch than the root note.
- In audio example `LSG1H2.mp3`, you can hear the second note is a lower pitch than the root note.

Objective: Basic Note Length Recognition

Tempo literally means 'time'. In practice, tempo is the basic pulse of a piece of music; the rhythm of the music is based on this pulse. In a band, each member might be playing a different rhythmic pattern but for it to sound tight, all of those parts have to be played at the same tempo. A ticking clock divides time into units we call seconds. Music often has a regular 'ticking clock' running through it in the form of the pulse which divides the music into beats and bars. Tempo is measured in beats per minute (bpm). A clock ticks at a tempo of 60bpm but music can be played slower than that (at say, 40bpm) or faster (sometimes beyond 200bpm).

The beat is often defined by a note called a crotchet, also known as a quarter note. In much pop and rock, music is written in 4/4 time (also referred to as common time). The snare drum is often played on the second and fourth quarter note (referred to as the 'backbeat') and the bass drum is played in or around beats 1 & 3. The quarter note is often the note value we use to describe the tempo of western music and is defined by the bottom note in the time signature $\frac{4}{4}$. This refers to four quarter notes in a bar (sometimes also referred to as a measure).

In reality, music is played with a mixture of really long notes and extremely short notes and everything in between. Each note length has a different symbol that can be combined in any order you like.

This syllabus doesn't require the student to read standard music notation, but does include some examples purely for illustrative purposes. The table below shows the most common note values, starting with the longest note at the top and the shortest notes at the bottom. At this point, it's worth mentioning that there are two note-naming systems in use. First, there's the British system which is more traditional and uses words like 'crotchet' and 'quaver'. Second, there's the more modern American system which may be easier to understand because it simply divides $\frac{4}{4}$ time into fractions like quarter notes and eighth notes. You should be aware of both names, so we have shown both in the table.

BRITISH NAME	AMERICAN NAME	SYMBOL
SEMIBREVE	WHOLE NOTE	
MINIM	HALF NOTE	
CROTCHET	QUARTER NOTE	
QUAVER	EIGHTH NOTE	
SEMIQUAVER	16TH NOTE	

The whole note is one of the longest note types you're likely to see in popular music. A whole note sustains for the same amount of time that it takes to count '1, 2, 3, 4' beats at the tempo of the music. By comparison, a half note sustains for exactly half the time of the whole note, or in other words, two halves equal one whole. Likewise, four quarter notes equal one whole note and so on, with 8 eighth notes and 16 16th notes. In music, these fractions are called subdivisions.

- In audio example `LSG1R1.mp3`, you will hear a piano playing quarter notes on every downbeat of the measure.
- In audio example `LSG1R2.mp3`, you will hear a piano playing eighth notes on every downbeat of the measure.

From these, you can hear that the eighth notes in example 2 are played for half the length of time than the quarter notes in example 1.

Coursework Task

The Coursework Task element of the grade examination will put you in a situation that you are likely to be in as a working music producer. Your examiner will be assessing how well you respond to that situation, how you choose the technique required and how you demonstrate those skills.

Collaboration is a large part of music, therefore you will find this coming up a lot in the Rockschool grade exams. The scenario will quite often start with "You are working with…", which might be another producer, an artist or a record label.

Whenever you're working with someone else remotely, it's vital that you can share your work with them without losing any files. Therefore a fundamental skill you must master is organising your files and saving your sessions correctly.

Once you have mastered this, you will be able to work with people whether they are in the next building or on the other side of the planet.

A common scenario you might face is to work with a backing track that has been created by another artist or producer. They might send you their work so far for you to record a vocal, guitar line, or enhance the rhythm track in some way to help take the track in a new direction. For the Grade 1 Coursework Task you will be required to import a backing track into your DAW, record a melody and bounce the resulting mix to a new stereo audio file.

MUSIC PRODUCTION COURSEWORK TASK SAMPLE GRADE 1

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Title	RSL Level 1 Award in Music Production – Grade 3
Qualification No.	603/0054/1
Level	1
Credit Value	11
GLH	16
TQT	102

Learning Outcome You will:	Assessment Criteria You can:

1. Understand the key terminology used in modern music production	1.1 Demonstrate a knowledge of Grade 3 terminology related to:
	  a. Music production equipment
	  b. Industry standard formats & protocols
	  c. Industry standard connectivity
	  d. Digital technology
	  e. Digital Audio Workstations

2. Understand the fundamentals of sound and audio in relation to modern music production	2.1 Demonstrate an understanding of Grade 3 fundamentals related to:
	  a. Microphone technology and technique
	  b. Audio recording, editing and processing
	  c. MIDI & audio programming
	  d. Audio Technology
	  e. Acoustics

3. Demonstrate effective listening skills relevant to modern music production	3.1 Demonstrate Grade 3 level aural skills in the areas of:
	  a. Sonic fidelity
	  b. Music theory
	  c. Stylistic awareness

4. Demonstrate effective music production technique	4.1 Demonstrate skills appropriate to Grade 3 in the areas of:
	  a. File management
	  b. Digital Audio Workstation programming
	  c. Audio mixing
	
	4.2 Demonstrate skills and understanding appropriate to Grade 3 in the areas of:
	  a. Interpretation of briefs
	  b. Music creation or editing
	  c. File sharing

Please note: candidates are required to achieve a minimum overall mark of 60% in order to achieve a pass. Regardless of the overall mark, candidates must also achieve a minimum of 40% in every part (part A, B & C), therefore demonstrating a knowledge and understanding of every learning outcome.

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SUMMARY	
SECTION *(Current section highlighted)*	**MARKS**
> **Theoretical Written Exam**	**25 [25%]**
Listening Test	15 [15%]
Coursework Task	60 [60%]

The *Theoretical Written Exam* section of Rockschool Music Production Examinations covers the following:

- Music Production Terminology
- Sound & Audio Fundamentals

At Grade 3 the theory content covered will include subject areas such as interpreting the functions of studio hardware, digital protocols, analogue connectivity, computer memory & storage, microphones, using loops, the MIDI protocol, dynamic processing and frequency.

Outboard Equipment

In a recording studio you will be faced with more than just the mixing desk as there are numerous devices around the studio for you to use to enhance the sound. Here are some of the most commonly used devices you're likely to use:

Compressor

A compressor is a device which reduces the dynamic range of an audio signal, making the loud parts quieter and the quiet parts louder. It does this by reducing the level of the loudest signals, then increasing the overall level to compensate. *A more detailed explanation of compression is included at Grade 4.*

A compressor would normally be connected to the insert send and return of the mixing desk.

Limiter

A limiter is a kind of compressor but with an extremely high compression ratio. The ratio will typically be in the region of 80–100:1. As this ratio is so harsh, it provides the effect of not letting the signal get any louder at all.

The settings available are the same as a compressor, barring the ratio.

A limiter would normally be connected to the insert send and return of the mixing desk.

Gate

A gate is a device which enables the sound engineer to tidy up a recording. It works in a similar way to a compressor (in that it uses threshold, attack and release) except that a gate will only allow the signal to be heard when it is louder than the threshold.

A gate would normally be connected to the insert send and return of the mixing desk.

Sonic Fidelity

Objective: Identify Both Mono and Stereo Audio Files

As a producer or sound engineer, your aural skills are extremely important as they enable you to hear the music and production values, so be mindful to always look after them. Avoid listening to music too loud and always be cautious of listening for too long. If you find yourself unavoidably subjected to high volume levels, be prepared to wear hearing protection.

While it is difficult to improve your hearing per se, there are ways you can improve your aural skills. This can be achieved by training your ears and brain to identify the sounds that you hear. Your aural skills are associative in nature i.e. by associating particular labels to particular sounds your brain will associate the label with the sound and subsequently you'll stand a greater chance of identifying (and ultimately using) these sounds in the future. Be prepared to listen intently and always try to label new sounds.

The two most common formats for sound are mono and stereo and we can record and mix in both.

Monophonic, or monaural sound is a single audio signal which can be sent to either one or multiple speakers, whereas a stereo or stereophonic signal is comprised of multiple audio signals (normally two) and must be played through a minimum of two speakers.

Stereo recording and mixing techniques enable the listener to hear direction, space and perspective which mono signals cannot create. The ability to manipulate the resulting stereo image is crucial to the modern producer and engineer.

However, the ability to identify mono and stereo recordings and mixes is a skill like most others i.e. it needs to be practised. Certain stereo mixes may be glaringly obvious (Trevor Horn is one such producer renowned for his ability to manipulate the stereo image to dramatic effect), but quite often stereo mixes may be quite subtle in nature.

The listening skills test at Grade 3 will require you to listen to a pair of audio files and determine which is mono and which is stereo.

- In audio example LSG3SF1.mp3 you will hear an organ recorded in stereo
- In audio example LSG3SF2.mp3 you will hear an organ recorded in mono
- In audio example LSG3SF3.mp3 you will hear a band recorded in stereo
- In audio example LSG3SF4.mp3 you will hear a band recorded in mono

Please note, Rockschool uses the term 'sonic fidelity' to define anything of an audible nature, but it would be just as likely for this to be referenced as 'audio fidelity' and subsequently both terms should be learnt.

Coursework Task

The Coursework Task element of the grade examination will put you in a situation that you are likely to be in as a working music producer. Your examiner will be assessing how well you respond to that situation, how you choose the technique required and how you demonstrate those skills.

Very few music producers work solely as sound engineers. It's very common to also be musical and be part of the songwriting team – if not the sole songwriter.

Therefore it's important to have a basic understanding of chord structure and arrangement.

At Grade 3, the Coursework Task part of the exam will require you to create a piece of music to a given chord progression. All you will be presented with is a sequence of chords, it's then up to you to spend the available time creating a backing track.

The style of music is your choice, as is how you choose to set the pace.

With experience of this technique, you should practice creating new chord sequences, listening to successful pieces of music and recreating their chord sequences. This will help build up an arsenal of progressions which you know will work and inspire you when the time comes to create something under pressure.

MUSIC PRODUCTION COURSEWORK TASK SAMPLE GRADE 3

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Title	RSL Level 2 Certificate in Music Production – Grade 5
Qualification No.	603/0056/5
Level	2
Credit Value	16
GLH	21
TQT	158

Learning Outcome You will:	Assessment Criteria You can:

1. Understand the key terminology used in modern music production	1.1 Demonstrate a knowledge of Grade 5 terminology related to:
	  a. Music production equipment
	  b. Industry standard formats & protocols
	  c. Industry standard connectivity
	  d. Digital technology
	  e. Digital Audio Workstations

2. Understand the fundamentals of sound and audio in relation to modern music production	2.1 Demonstrate an understanding of Grade 5 fundamentals related to:
	  a. Microphone technology and technique
	  b. Audio recording, editing and processing
	  c. MIDI & audio programming
	  d. Audio Technology
	  e. Acoustics

3. Demonstrate effective listening skills relevant to modern music production	3.1 Demonstrate Grade 5 level aural skills in the areas of:
	  a. Sonic fidelity
	  b. Music theory
	  c. Stylistic awareness

4. Demonstrate effective music production technique	4.1 Demonstrate skills appropriate to Grade 5 in the areas of:
	  a. File management
	  b. Digital Audio Workstation programming
	  c. Audio mixing
	
	4.2 Demonstrate skills and understanding appropriate to Grade 5 in the areas of:
	  a. Interpretation of an intermediate level brief
	  b. Music creation or editing
	  c. File sharing

Please note: candidates are required to achieve a minimum overall mark of 60% in order to achieve a pass. Regardless of the overall mark, candidates must also achieve a minimum of 40% in every part (part A, B & C), therefore demonstrating a knowledge and understanding of every learning outcome.

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SUMMARY	
SECTION *(Current section highlighted)*	**MARKS**
> **Theoretical Written Exam**	**25 [25%]**
Listening Test	15 [15%]
Coursework Task	60 [60%]

The *Theoretical Written Exam* section of Rockschool Music Production Examinations covers the following:

- Music Production Terminology
- Sound & Audio Fundamentals

At Grade 5 the theory content covered will include subject areas such as signal routing, the compact disc format, patch bays, networking, file sharing, ambient microphone technique, multitrack recording, MIDI controllers, PCM theory and constructive interference.

Cymbals	As close as possible. Pointing towards the place where the stick strikes the cymbal.	Condenser	AKG C451	Be careful that the cymbal doesn't touch the microphone as it moves.
Overheads	Two microphones above the drum kit, pointing down towards the snare drum.	Condenser	AKG C451	Consider using a stereo technique such as XY.

Room Ambience	One or more microphones, place further back in the room to add reverberation to the sound.	Condenser	Rode NT1 AKG C414 Neumann U87	This captures the sound of the room, so make sure the room sounds good.
Trash Microphone	One or more microphones placed far away, pointing away from the drum kit.	Any	Any	This is to provide a low fidelity recording which can be mixed in with the kit. Consider placing a microphone outside the room and leaving a door open to capture the distant reverberation.

Section B | Listening Skills

Stylistic Awareness

Jazz

The term jazz covers a multitude of subgenres. Some, such as dixieland and swing are simpler and more diatonically based. Others, such as bebop, cool and modal jazz tend to be more harmonically sophisticated, making more use of extended and altered chords and modes. Many jazz chord sequences revolve around the chords II, V and I rather than the I, IV and V so typical of pop. They are also likely to make more use of chords built upon the second, third and seventh degrees of the major scale.

Jazz has remained popular since its evolution from blues, ragtime and other styles in the late 19th century. Part of its enduring appeal can be attributed to jazz musicians absorbing other styles of music, creating endless fusions, such as jazz blues, Latin jazz and jazz funk. While jazz is often played solo (e.g. piano), it is also played in a variety of instrumental combinations from duos to Big Bands. A typical sextet might comprise piano, double bass, drums, trumpet, alto sax and electric guitar. However, all kinds of skilled instrumentalists have achieved popularity in jazz such as the acoustic guitarist Django Reinhardt and the harmonica player Toots Thielemans.

Diatonic Chords

This chord sequence shows a simple extract of 'rhythm changes', a progression named after Gershwin's 'I've Got Rhythm'. As you loop back round from the repeat you complete the chord progression IIm V I which forms the backbone of many jazz standards such as 'Autumn Leaves', 'Perdido' and 'Giant Steps'.

C		Am		Dm		G	
I		VIm		IIm		V	

Extended Chords and Altered Chords

This progression is much more harmonically challenging. It uses extended chords (the $A^{\flat 13}$ and $Cmaj^7$) and altered chords (such as the $A^{7\sharp 5}$). The $B^{\flat 7\flat 5}$ and $A^{\flat 13}$ chords are rooted on notes not found within the home key, however, they are chromatic passing chords, adding complex tensions and resolutions to the underlying chord sequence. Don't worry, you're not expected to analyse scores to this depth but it is worth becoming familiar with both the sound and look of jazz harmony.

$B^{\flat 7\flat 5}$	$A^{7\sharp 5}$	$A^{\flat 13}$	$G^{7\flat 9}$	$Cmaj^7$	$E^{7\sharp 5\sharp 9}$
	VI		V	I	III

Chromatic Walking Bass

Other styles of music such as rockabilly, rock 'n' roll and blues, all make heavy use of the walking bassline but jazz adds its own slant by approaching the main chord tones from a note a semitone above or below.

Swing Ride Patterns

Ride and hi-hat parts featuring a repeated pattern of a quarter note followed by a pair of swung eighth notes are common, appearing on recordings such as 'Straight, No Chaser' (Thelonious Monk), 'Take Five' (Dave Brubeck) and 'Milestones' (Miles Davis).

- In audio example `LSG5SA1.mp3` you will hear a jazz recording

Coursework Task

A music producer is more than simply someone who can operate the equipment. They also need to have a musical ear.

While they don't need to be a virtuoso musician, the ability to hear, identify and repeat melodies is a key skill.

In the Grade 5 Coursework Task candidates will be required to add musical layers to tracks using software instruments. This layering technique is a common one in modern music production as it will add weight to an instrument or melody. A piano on its own can sound very nice but layer it with strings and it will sound like an epic film soundtrack.

This is not only a useful practical skill for layering, this skill will also enable you to better communicate with musicians. It's far more effective to demonstrate to someone what you want them to do rather than try and explain it and correct them when they misunderstand.

MUSIC PRODUCTION COURSEWORK TASK GRADE 5 SAMPLE

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Title	RSL Level 3 Certificate in Music Production – Grade 8
Qualification No.	603/0059/0
Level	3
Credit Value	30
GLH	49
TQT	292

Learning Outcome You will:	Assessment Criteria You can:

1. Understand the key terminology used in modern music production	1.1 Demonstrate a knowledge of Grade 8 terminology related to:
	  a. Music production equipment
	  b. Industry standard formats & protocols
	  c. Industry standard connectivity
	  d. Digital technology
	  e. Digital Audio Workstations

2. Understand the fundamentals of sound and audio in relation to modern music production	2.1 Demonstrate an understanding of Grade 8 fundamentals related to:
	  a. Microphone technology and technique
	  b. Audio recording, editing and processing
	  c. MIDI & audio programming
	  d. Audio Technology
	  e. Acoustics

3. Demonstrate effective listening skills relevant to modern music production	3.1 Demonstrate Grade 8 level aural skills in the areas of:
	  a. Sonic fidelity
	  b. Music theory
	  c. Stylistic awareness

4. Demonstrate effective music production technique	4.1 Demonstrate skills appropriate to Grade 8 in the areas of:
	  a. File management
	  b. Digital Audio Workstation programming
	  c. Audio mixing
	
	4.2 Demonstrate skills and understanding appropriate to Grade 8 in the areas of:
	  a. Interpretation of an professional brief
	  b. Music creation or editing
	  c. File sharing to industry standards
	
	4.3 Demonstrate skills and understanding appropriate to Grade 8 in the areas of Electronic Music Production:
	  a. Interpretation of professional briefs
	  b. Electronic music creation or editing
	  c. File sharing to industry standards
	
	4.4 Demonstrate skills and understanding appropriate to Grade 8 in the areas of Sound for Media:
	  a. Interpretation of professional briefs
	  b. Audio creation or editing to enhance a visual medium
	  c. File sharing to industry standards

Please note: candidates are required to achieve a minimum overall mark of 60% in order to achieve a pass. Regardless of the overall mark, candidates must also achieve a minimum of 40% in every part (part A, B & C), therefore demonstrating a knowledge and understanding of every learning outcome.

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SUMMARY	
SECTION *(Current section highlighted)*	**MARKS**
> **Theoretical Written Exam**	**25 [25%]**
Listening Test	15 [15%]
Coursework Task	60 [60%]

The *Theoretical Written Exam* section of Rockschool Music Production Examinations covers the following:

- Music Production Terminology
- Sound & Audio Fundamentals

At Grade 8 the theory content covered will include subject areas such as comparing studio hardware, audio file formats, analogue vs. digital technology, microphone technique choice, vocal comping, triggered samples, balanced audio advantages and acoustic room design.

Technique:

Spaced Pair (AB)

Description:

Two omnidirectional microphones (or cardioid if omnis aren't available) spaced apart by several feet.

Sound:

Stereo, with a wide stereo image, good balance of room sound and source which can be adjusted by moving the microphones closer or further from the source.
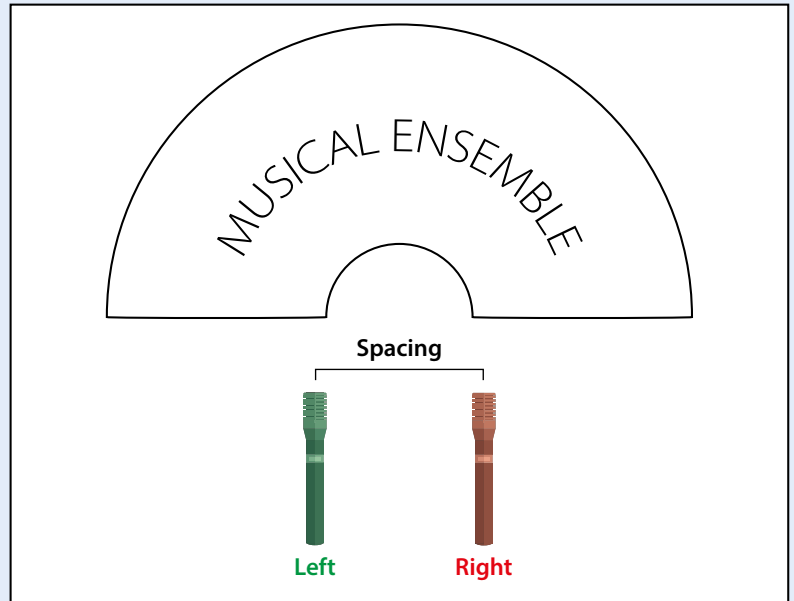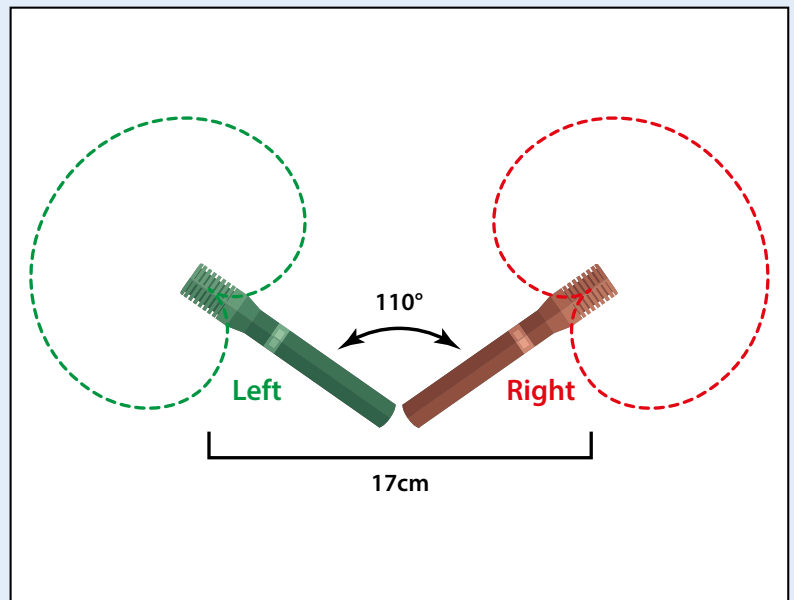

Technique:

Near coincident pair (ORTF)

Description:

Two cardioid microphones, placed with each capsule pointing away from the other about 18cm apart.

Sound:

Similar to coincident pair, but with a slightly wider stereo image. Not quite as mono compatible due to the time distance between the capsules.

Technique:

Mid-Side

Description:

One cardioid pointing directly at the source, and a figure of 8 microphone placed perpendicular to capture the left and right stereo image. Requires coding and decoding by the mixing desk (see Glossary).
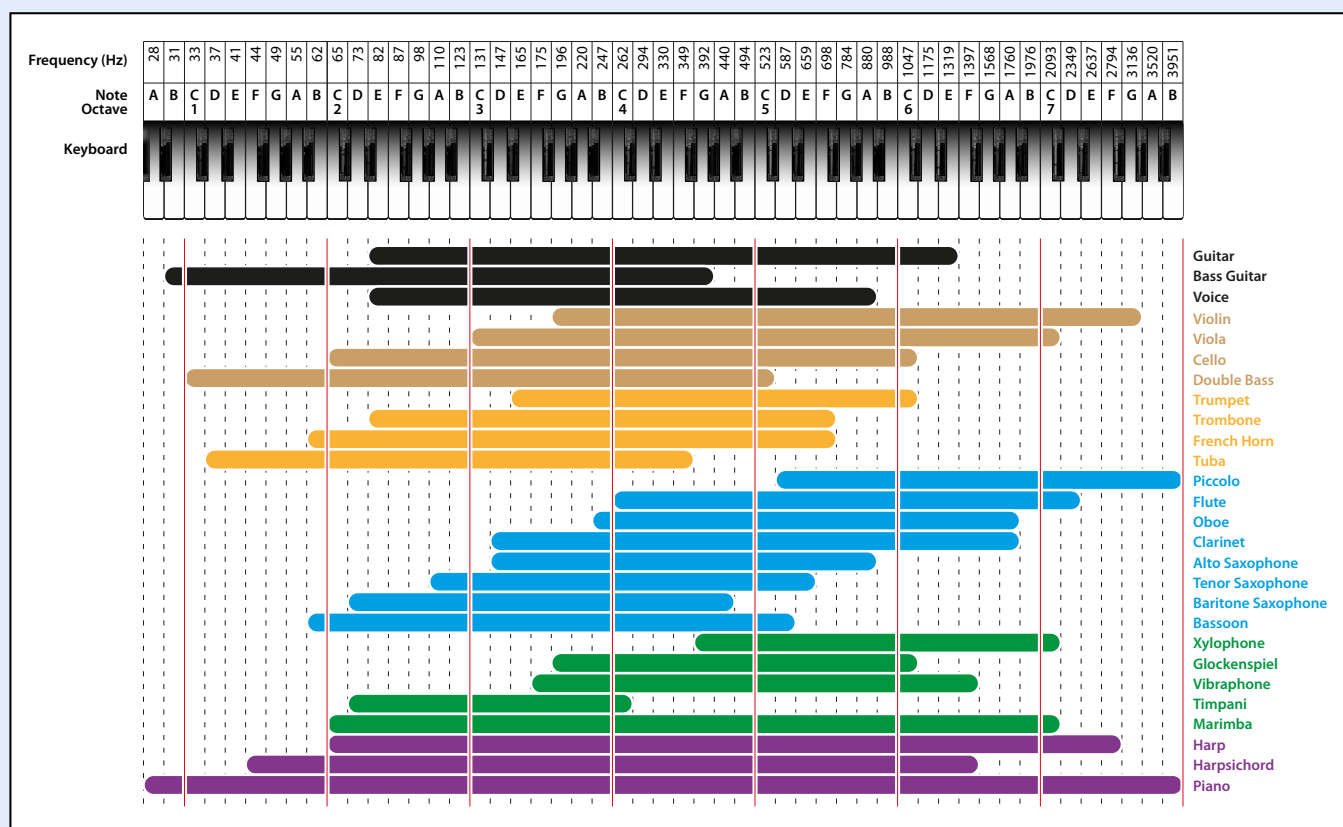
Sound:

When used in stereo the image is very good, with good focus on the source due to the cardioid. Not as wide an image as spaced pair. Good mono compatibility because left and right will phase cancel.

Section A | Music Production Theory

Frequency Content Of Instruments Diagram

Equalisation

When working with multiple mixes, even from the same producer/engineer, it is quite common for there to be a difference in tonal balance. It would then be the mastering engineer's role to ensure consistency. These differences may be very subtle, so will require a very keen ear, and subtle adjustments, to the EQ settings.

It's worth remembering that any changes to tone have a counter effect. If a mix sounds dull it could be one of two things causing the problem:

- The mix doesn't contain enough high frequencies
- The mix contains too many low frequencies.

Try cutting the lower frequencies before you add high frequencies and listen to how it sounds. Experience will help you identify which it is.

It's also important to carefully monitor the bass frequencies within the mix, particularly in bass heavy music styles. It's possible that there could be bass frequencies in the mix that you can't hear because they're too low in the spectrum for your hearing. These frequencies are particularly problematic, as any compression or limiting you apply will be triggered by the high level in the bass, even though you can't hear what is pushing the signal over the threshold.

A high pass filter may be appropriate to keep these extremely low frequencies under control.

Compression

Dynamic control should be taken care of at the mix stage, however, some subtle compression using a high quality compressor may help tighten up a mix and match it to the expectations of radio, TV, games or other broadcasters.

Section B | Listening Skills

Sonic Fidelity

Objective: Identify High and Low Quality Audio File Formats
As a producer or sound engineer, your aural skills are extremely important as they enable you to hear the music and production values, so be mindful to always look after them. Avoid listening to music too loud and always be cautious of listening for too long. If you find yourself unavoidably subjected to high volume levels, be prepared to wear hearing protection.

Whilst it is difficult to improve your hearing per se, there are ways you can improve your aural skills. This can be achieved by training your ears and brain to identify the sounds that you hear.

Your aural skills are associative in nature i.e. by associating particular labels to particular sounds, your brain will associate the label with the sound and subsequently you'll stand a greater chance of identifying (and ultimately using) these sounds in the future. Always be prepared to listen intently and be aware that the producer's analytical ear is one of his/her greatest tools.

In your role as producer or sound engineer it is your responsibility to ensure that the quality of the audio is as good as it can possibly be, therefore you should develop your ability to listen critically to what you are hearing.

You should therefore be able to identify if a recording is high or low fidelity, for example if an audio file is a full quality wav or a compressed MP3, or even if it is a high quality 320Kbps MP3 or a low quality 128Kbps MP3.

For the Grade 8 audio fidelity test, you will be required to identify the difference between two audio files.

- In audio example LSG8SF1.mp3 you will hear a guitar recording converted from a full resolution WAV file
- In audio example LSG8SF2.mp3 you will hear a guitar recording converted from a low resolution MP3 file
- In audio example LSG8SF3.mp3 you will hear a full mix converted from a full resolution WAV file
- In audio example LSG8SF4.mp3 you will hear a full mix converted from a low resolution MP3 file
- In audio example LSG8SF5.mp3 you will hear a full mix converted from a high resolution MP3 file
- In audio example LSG8SF6.mp3 you will hear a full mix converted from a low resolution MP3 file

Please note, Rockschool uses the term 'sonic fidelity' to define anything of an audible nature, but it would be just as likely for this to be referenced as 'audio fidelity' and subsequently both terms should be learnt.

Coursework Task

At Grade 8 you will be able to specialise in one of three areas:
- **Audio Production** – focusing on traditional studio production technique.
- **Electronic Music Production** – focusing on techniques for electronic music genres.
- **Sound For Media** – focusing on techniques relevant to film and TV sound.

Audio Production
Mastering is a skill which enables you to demonstrate that you can think about the last 5% of a production, helping make the difference between a good mix and a finished production.

For the Audio Production Grade 8 Coursework Task you will be required to master a final mix with EQ, compressions and limiters.

Electronic Music Production
As an electronic musician, you will be creating music and collaborating with others constantly. The type of collaboration will vary massively, but perhaps the most common collaboration will be with vocalists.

Almost all successful electronic music in the commercial sector features some kind of vocal performance, however, what we hear in the end is probably not what the singer originally performed, in fact the producer and singer may never have even met.

For the Electronic Music Production Grade 8 Coursework Task you will be required to create a remix using the supplied vocal sample.

Sound For Media
The sound used in media can be split into these categories:
- **Location Sound** – the sound which was recorded at the same time as the visuals.
- **Dialogue** – the speech of the actors
- **Sound Effects** – any artificial sound added to enhance the audio track
- **Foley** – sounds that are added to enhance the realism, such as clothes rustling or footsteps
- **Music**

Most people don't think about the sound when they watch a film or TV show. It's just there.

It's easy to get drawn into the story and assume that the sound was always there, part of the action that ensues on screen.

However, the reality is that it has taken a huge amount of work to put that sound together, whether it be the sound effects on a James Bond film, or the footsteps on creaky floorboards in a horror movie, or the epic soundtrack that tells us that Harry Potter is about to have another magical adventure.

It's not just film and TV that need sound. Let's not forget computer games, which in some cases have larger production budgets than Hollywood films.

The sound effects we hear are seldom created with the on location sound, as reality would be far less exciting. For example, the real sound of a car driving fast around a corner wouldn't feature nearly as much squealing from the tyres, but adding those sound effects makes it seem like the car is driving so much faster, implying that the action is more dangerous and exciting.

In order to make sounds more exciting, the sound designer on a project will be responsible for coming up with new ways of creating these sounds and layering them together with other sounds to make them sound big and impressive.

MUSIC PRODUCTION COURSEWORK TASK GRADE 8 SAMPLE

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MUSIC PRODUCTION SAMPLE PACK

FURTHER READING

Please see the below RSL Music Production blog posts which we hope you find useful:

- **Getting Started in Music Production**
- **Careers in Music Production**
- **An Introduction to Rockschool Music Production – Virtual RSL on Tour Playback**
- **Music Production A - Z**
- **A Brief History of Music Production**