

DJ SCHOOL UK GCSE MUSIC DJ SKILLS CPD SESSION:

Examples of techniques and how they should be assessed on GCSE assessment grids.

NB – THE STUDENTS LEAD SHEETS ARE VERY IMPORTANT FOR EXPLAINING WHAT IS BEING ATTEMPTED AND SO - Students should explain in lead sheet where accuracy is required - e.g. cuts, drop ins. Students should explain what they are expressing and how in the way they mix - choices of mix points, changes in rhythm etc are expressive moments as are the songs chosen themselves. Interpretation of the songs mixed helps students decide what they are wanting to do.

LEAD SHEETS CAN ALSO BE USED TO EXPLAIN THE FOLLOWING: 1) SYNC function on DJ software and certain CD players automates the beat matching process and so we feel the level of demand has not been achieved if it has been used – clarification of this would be useful – 2) NON Quantised Music is much harder to beat match as it does not necessarily remain at the tempo it was set to thus meaning the DJ has to keep a very close ear on it and nudge accordingly – Non-quantised music has a much higher level of demand than quantised music and we feel this should also be recognised, again clarification of this would be useful.

SKILL	Relevant to Area:	
	Level of Demand	Accuracy
Beat Matching	All levels of demand require beat matching – this is the synchronisation of two tracks to create a bi-rhythm so that both tracks can be played simultaneously while blending between them.	Accurate beat matching is hard to hear as it should sound like one track is playing. Inaccurate beat-matching is very easy to hear as it sounds like two drummers doing different rhythms at the same time.
Nudging	A part of Beat Matching. See above.	Accurate nudging should be inaudible – A DJ should prepare their beat-match in their headphones using nudging to “fine-tune” the match. In the mix which the audience or listener hears a DJ should be able to hear if their two songs are slipping out of beat match and should nudge to compensate. Ideally the DJ pre-hears the slip and compensates before the listener has noticed any issue. Inaccurate nudging sounds like one song has been sped up or slowed down, sometimes with a corresponding temporary change in pitch. Just because a beat match sounds right it does not mean nudging has been accurate, you should see the DJ make nudges using their platter – if they don't they haven't nudged at all. This can be the case if they are using SYNC function or are using two quantised songs which have been produced at exactly the same tempo.
Cueing	A part of Beat Matching. See above.	A good cue point results in a song starting from a point that makes audible sense to the listener. A bad cue point may begin a song half way through a word, phrase or even kick drum sample.
Counting in	A part of Beat Matching. See above.	Exactly the same as counting in on any instrument.
Mixing/Advanced beat matching	All levels of demand require that in addition to matching two beats students have done so to achieve a blend between two songs with respect to the structure and arrangement of the two tracks and with no clash of key or vocals	If keys or vocals clash a mix is considered to be of low accuracy – In certain cases use of EQ can avoid a key clash and be used to expressive effect. If notes on the lead sheet describe how and when two songs are mixed to respect the structure of both and this is not achieved it indicates low accuracy. Dynamic is important and so how and when the two songs are faded is important to accuracy as is the trim or gain setting of the songs being used.

Cue Stuttering	Considered a basic skill by AQA so evidence of it with one other basic skill proves the level of demand was at least level 2 or higher.	Stuttering is the use of the cue or hot cue buttons to trigger a song or sound to start playing. It is like playing a key on a keyboard but the sound produced can be anything. Accurate Stuttering should create a new rhythm which adds texture to the overall mix.	Expressive stuttering should suit the rhythm of the songs being played. It could build to a crescendo or just introduce an incoming song.
Rewind/Spin Back	Considered a basic skill by AQA so evidence of it with one other basic skill proves the level of demand was at least level 2 or higher.	This is the effect produced by manually spinning a platter practise while fading out the volume so that the track which has been spun back does not begin to play and be heard again – Accurate spin backs happen at a point in a mix where they give a finale to a mix and allow the incoming track to take over, often achieved by spinning back for 1 beat on the 4 th beat of a bar so the next track begins a phrase on the 1 st beat of the next bar.	Adding a spin back is a percussive expression with a flourish, done well it signifies a climactic end to a mix and should leave the listener thrilled to hear the next track begin a phrase.
Drop- ins	Considered a basic skill by AQA so evidence of it with one other basic skill proves the level of demand was at least level 2 or higher.	Similar to stuttering but requiring much more skill as drop-ins are achieved by having a track beat-matched and playing concurrent to the audible track while using the volume fader or cross fader to play only teasing snippets of the second track – Accurate dropins should play clear sounds at a suitable volume without cutting the sound of.	Expressive drop-ins add a lot to the mix, they may be adding an additional snare hit, a part of a melody, or a vocal etc. Dynamics can be added to drop ins by altering the volume fader for each element dropped in.
EQ blending	Considered a basic skill by AQA so evidence of it with one other basic skill proves the level of demand was at least level 2 or higher.	In addition to avoiding harmonic clashes EQ can be used to add expression to a mix – Accurate EQ blending occurs on beats or in smooth intervals so as to avoid too much of any one frequency causing the overall to become muddy or complicated.	Expressive EQ blending is easily seen where two basslines do not work together and so one is cut during the fade up just to be swapped dramatically with the other before fading it down.
FX Blending	Considered a basic skill by AQA so evidence of it with one other basic skill and an additional sound source proves the level of demand was at least level 2 or higher.	FX can be used to add expression to a mix – Accurate use of FX occurs on beats or in smooth intervals.	FX are used to add expressive elements, too much FX can muddy a mix. Used well FX can add variety to a mixing still or can be used to re-work a recorded piece to the performers liking.
Baby scratches	Considered an intermediate skill by AQA so evidence of it with two basic skills shows level of demand of 3 or higher (assuming the intermediate skill included an additional sound source)	Baby scratches require one hand only and concern the manipulation of a sound to add musical elements to a mix. The sound produced should be in time and of an acceptable dynamic.	Expressive baby scratching would have chosen a sound source or sample that was harmonically suitable and of a length that fitted rhythmically with the playing track. As demand level 3 requires an additional sound source we would recommend the DJ uses a different track for their scratch and applies it over one of the two songs they are playing – It is possible to scratch with a kick drum or vocal sample from a track already being used but if this is done the DJ is only using two sound sources and would not qualify for level 3 demand unless they mixed a third track in too.
Looping	Considered an intermediate skill by AQA so evidence of it with two basic skills shows level of demand of 3 or higher (assuming the intermediate skill included an additional sound source)	Looping on digital media (Software or CDJ) involves pressing an "in" point and "out" point in a piece of music which will then repeat until released. On some technology loops can be automatically triggered by one button. Accurate loops sit well with the overall and do not clip a sample or result in timing conflicts. If loops are triggered automatically they deserve less points for accuracy than loops triggered manually.	Loops can be used expressively to extend a section of a song – eg where a mix sounds best except that one song goes to a vocal part - a loop can be added to extend the instrumental section for long enough for the mix or to avoid the vocal part altogether. An additional effect known as "loop reduce" can be used to add a crescendo effect to a mix.
hot cues	Considered an intermediate skill by AQA so evidence of it with two basic skills shows level of demand of 3 or higher (assuming the intermediate skill included an additional sound source)	hot cues are like cue points but instead of just setting a point from which to start, the hot cue functions set a point from which to start and play – thus can be used as samplers to add sounds at the touch of a button – Accurate hot cueing would be used with respect to the underlying rhythm, timbre and texture of both the playing songs and points set to the hot cue.	DJS use hot cues to jump straight to a section of a song to remove repetitive bars or return to a section to result in the DJS own structure.
a cappellas (intermediate)	To be counted as an intermediate skill if the a cappella lasts for 8 -31 bars.	This is the use of a vocal-only part as one of the sound sources – as accappellas have no beat they are more challenging to beat-match however good knowledge of the pulse underpinning the a cappella should result in the vocal fitting rhythmically. The a cappella should also fit harmonically and structurally with the overall mix.	Good use of a cappella will add vocal elements whose lyrics and feel suits the overall mix.
hot cue drumming	Considered an advanced skill by AQA so evidence of it with two basic skills and one intermediate skill shows level of demand of 4 or higher (assuming the intermediate skill included an additional sound source)	Hot cue drumming is where multiple hot cues have been set to complementing sounds and played in time to produce additional musical elements – eg KD, SN and drop or two to three different notes in an arpeggio – Accuracy is seen by choosing sounds which are melodically relevant, setting the cue points so the sounds can be heard as intended (not clipped half way through) and by playing them in time and regularly.	Hot cue drumming can be used to add a melody or drum rhythm, often applied to maintain energy in a mix during a breakdown or as an intro or middle eight composed by the DJ themselves.

Juggling	Considered an advanced skill by AQA so evidence of it with two basic skills and one intermediate skill shows level of demand of 4 or higher (assuming the intermediate skill included an additional sound source).	Using the platters with two copies of the same audio on both sides to manually loop a section or to dramatically alter the feel of a section – accurate looping should maintain the beat but may alter tempo and feel drastically.	Juggling is really a chance to show-off an advanced skill – it should be worked up to musically then can actually divert the listener into new rhythms and tempos – to really work for the listener it is best if it also leads back into the main music again afterwards.
Transforming	Considered an advanced skill by AQA so evidence of it with two basic skills and one intermediate skill shows level of demand of 4 or higher (assuming the intermediate skill included an additional sound source).	Using baby scratching in conjunction with the cross fader is a two handed syncopated technique which adds a distinctive sound only created by instrumental DJs – Accurate transforming should be in time and of suitable dynamic and timbre.	Transforming combines a relevant sound source (eg vocal or other sound) with musical manipulation of that sound to complement and enhance the backing track – effectively it is the DJs solo and should show consideration of the texture, timbre and dynamic of the sound being transformed.
Flares, Chirps, Orbits	Considered an advanced skill by AQA so evidence of it with two basic skills and one intermediate skill shows level of demand of 4 or higher (assuming the intermediate skill included an additional sound source).	Highly advanced two handed scratch techniques best considered as comparable to hammer-ons on guitar.	Really showing off if anyone gets these – specifically suited to hiphop or grime music.
a cappellas (advanced)	To be counted as an intermediate skill if the a cappella lasts for 8 -32 bars.	This is the use of a vocal-only part as one of the sound sources – as acappellas have no beat they are more challenging to beat-match however good knowledge of the pulse underpinning the a cappella should result in the vocal fitting rhythmically. The a cappella should also fit harmonically and structurally with the overall mix.	Good use of a cappella will add vocal elements whose lyrics and feel suits the overall mix.
Third Sound Source	Required for the piece to be considered level 2 or above for demand. Also using an additional sound source can be an option to achieve level 1 if no basic skills are shown.	In the spec the higher levels of demand require additional sound sources – we believe this implies that the DJ needs to show an ability to change tracks mid mix and prove they haven't just used 2 songs. Any DJ who has scratched (baby, transform or flare etc) has probably already used a third sound source unless they used a sound from one of the tracks they were mixing. As most of the advanced skills are relating to scratch techniques those who dont scratch will need to mix 4 songs in their 7 minutes and choose from adding an a cappella, hot cues, hot cue drumming or loops to achieve level 5 or 6.	For a DJ who scratches it should be fairly easy to do a 2 song mix with various musical scratch techniques from different sound sources to achieve level 5 or 6 – For those DJs who dont scratch we can still see that by a combination of for example stuttering, EQ blends, looping, hot cues and hot cue drumming using a total of four different sound sources they can still get level 6.
Fourth Sound Source	Required for the piece to be considered level 5 or 6 for demand	In the spec the higher levels of demand require additional sound sources – we believe this implies that the DJ needs to show an ability to change tracks mid mix and prove they haven't just used 2 songs. Any DJ who has scratched (baby, transform or flare etc) has probably already used a third sound source unless they used a sound from one of the tracks they were mixing. As most of the advanced skills are relating to scratch techniques those who dont scratch will need to mix 4 songs in their 7 minutes and add hot cues, hot cue drumming and loops to achieve level 5 or 6.	For a DJ who scratches it should be fairly easy to do a 2 song mix with various musical scratch techniques from different sound sources to achieve level 5 or 6 – For those DJs who dont scratch we can still see that by a combination of for example stuttering, EQ blends, looping, hot cues and hot cue drumming using a total of four different sound sources they can still get level 6.

Additional notes:

As more marks are available for accuracy and expression than for level of demand it stands to reason that it is better for a student to do a less challenging mix well than a more complicated mix badly. - Thus the planning stage of preparing what mix to play is very important in ascertaining what can be achieved well.

Each student can have multiple attempts and choose their best performance for submission (depending on the time available to their assessing teacher.)

Teachers are recommended to assess the forecasted Level of Demand and offer opportunities for students to increase their points if a simple addition will help. Eg adding a basic skill to ensure two basics are achieved in complicated sets that concentrate on advanced skills.