

Assessment Case Study

On the right (musical) track: Scaffolding learning via industry-style working briefs

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Course: BA in Popular Music Performance and Songwriting
Module: 4019MAPA The Digital Musician
Student Level: Undergraduate (Level 4)



AN EXAMPLE OF ASSESSMENT THAT INVOLVES...

- Formative feedback
- Peer feedback
- Assessment as learning
- An inclusive approach
- An authentic approach

AIMS

For this Level 4 module, the lecturer wanted to develop an approach to assessment which would enable students to undertake the kind of tasks that they would be likely to work on in the **music industry**. The module has a cohort of 20 students, and it was important to the lecturer that each of them could produce personalised submissions to reflect their creativity, and that the assessment would themselves provide **meaningful learning opportunities**.

ACTIONS

The lecturer devised three “**working briefs**”, or scenarios, for students to respond to by creating a musical composition. Each of the three briefs reflected a different kind of task which a professional popular musician might work on: a remix, a backing track, and a soundtrack for a TV advert.

These briefs provided the starting point for the students’ **formative assessment**. As well as the lecturer providing feedback for each submission, students were encouraged to share their work with each other and to provide their own comments on their peers’ compositions.

For their **summative assessment**, students needed to create at least two music track submissions (no more than 6 mins total). They could either draw from their formative work (via the working briefs), or try something new.

RATIONALE

Importantly, all students would be able to achieve the **same technical standards** for their compositions, as they all had a Mac Book Pro, and its Cubase digital music software, provided to them by the University. Each of the briefs provided a stimulus for students to be creative within the limits of the specified scenario. The three briefs were **progressively more challenging**, helping to scaffold the students’ learning opportunities as well as enabling them to prepare for the summative assessment.

Scaffolding was also designed in at the micro level: for the first of the briefs, where the task is to remix an existing pop song, students were provided with “stems” (distinct elements of the musical track) which they could use to create their composition. This helped to break down the assessment into a more transparent, manageable task. Furthermore, existing remixes of the track by established musicians were made available to students, providing artistic inspiration as well as (“industry”) **exemplars** of how a finished remix might sound.

Ensuring equal access to equipment, enabling creativity (and ownership) within limits, and scaffolding to make the tasks more accessible all contributed to making the assessment **inclusive in nature**.

STUDENT FEEDBACK

Students commented that they really enjoyed completing the working briefs as it gave **structure and purpose** to their work when they might have struggled with coming up with what to create. It therefore provided a starting point and had them complete work they would otherwise not thought of doing if left with a blank canvas. One student in particular commented that this was the highlight of the module.

SUSTAINABLE, SCALABLE OR TRANSFERABLE?

The approach is **sustainable** as countless students could create their own compositions within the parameters of the tasks. The approach taken is **transferable** to professional practice, as evidenced by the authentic nature of the assessment, and principles informing the its design could certainly be replicated in other creative disciplines.

MESSAGE TO PEERS

- Using existing creative output which students are **not familiar** with can be beneficial, as they don’t have preconceptions about the work. (This was the approach taken when choosing a track for the “remix” task).
- Students engaged with the **peer assessment** aspect to varying degrees. Some may need encouragement to share their work, and/or to provide comments which focus on areas for improvement rather than just highlighting the positives.

EXTRACT FROM ASSESSMENT BRIEF: see next page

EXTRACT FROM ASSESSMENT BRIEF

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Below is the information from Aula on the **Working Briefs**:

To support your development in this module you will be given a series of creative working briefs to respond to. This should provide a framework for you to work within Cubase (*Mac software*) to develop your skills. The working briefs are designed to be more involved than the week by week tasks that you will also be set (details will be given within the weekly sessions).

The weekly tasks you undertake need only be submitted to the Aula community feed. However, the working briefs will be submitted more formally as an assessment submission (although you will not be graded on these and they don't count towards your grade for the module at this stage). The working briefs are important to spend time on as for your module assessment (the portfolio) you will be choosing from these working briefs what you will carry forward to submit for the summative assessment.

There are 3 working briefs as follows:

Working brief 1: Remix / Re-arrange / Re-imagine

Using some simple 'stems' given to you from an existing pop track, you will work on a re-imagining of the track to produce something entirely new. You could take a re-mix approach or more of a cover/re-arrangement approach. It's up to you but you must make use of some parts of the stems given to you somewhere in your track. You can add your own MIDI, audio, or loop components to the track too if you wish. The track you will be working with is the 2004 pop hit "**Leave (Get Out)**" by **JoJo**.

Vocal track

Here is the isolated vocal 'stem'. You can chop this up, edit and use however you wish in your remix.

 **JoJo Leave - Vocal Stem.wav**

00:00

04:02

Guitars

I have recorded 2 separate guitar files for you to use and tried to make them as close to the original as possible.

1. The main acoustic guitar riff

 **Leave - Ac Gtr Riff.wav**

00:00

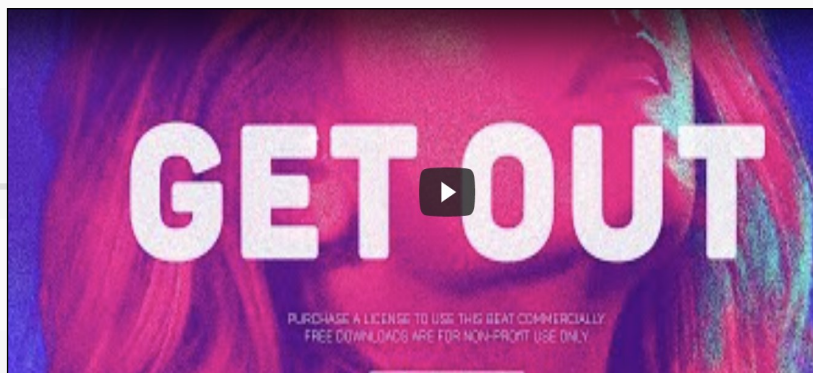
00:11

2. The guitars for the Chorus section

 **Leave_JoJo_Gtrs_Cho.mp3**

00:00

00:22



Working brief 2: Creating a backing track

You will be given the vocal stem to the well-known Alicia Keys track, 'Fallin', and you should build up a backing track to support the vocal. You may completely redesign the backing or try to replicate the original.

Working brief 3: TV advert composition

You will compose a 30 second piece of music to go with an advert for a new energy drink being launched. The brand ethos is colourful, sophisticated and aspirational. The drink is aimed at professionals in the 20s to 30s age bracket and the drink will be called 'Alacrity'.