



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University



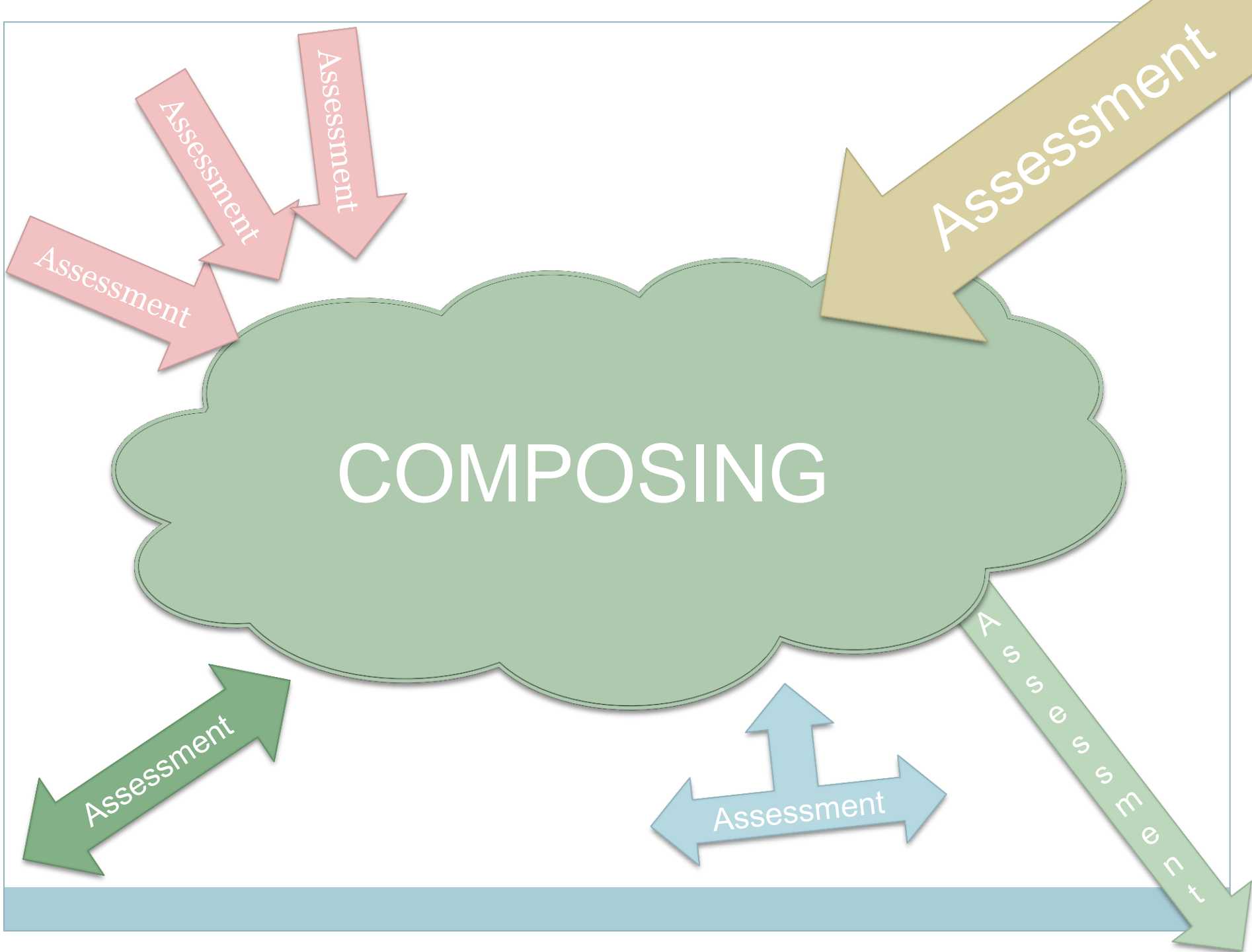
Does the assessment of composing limit creativity?

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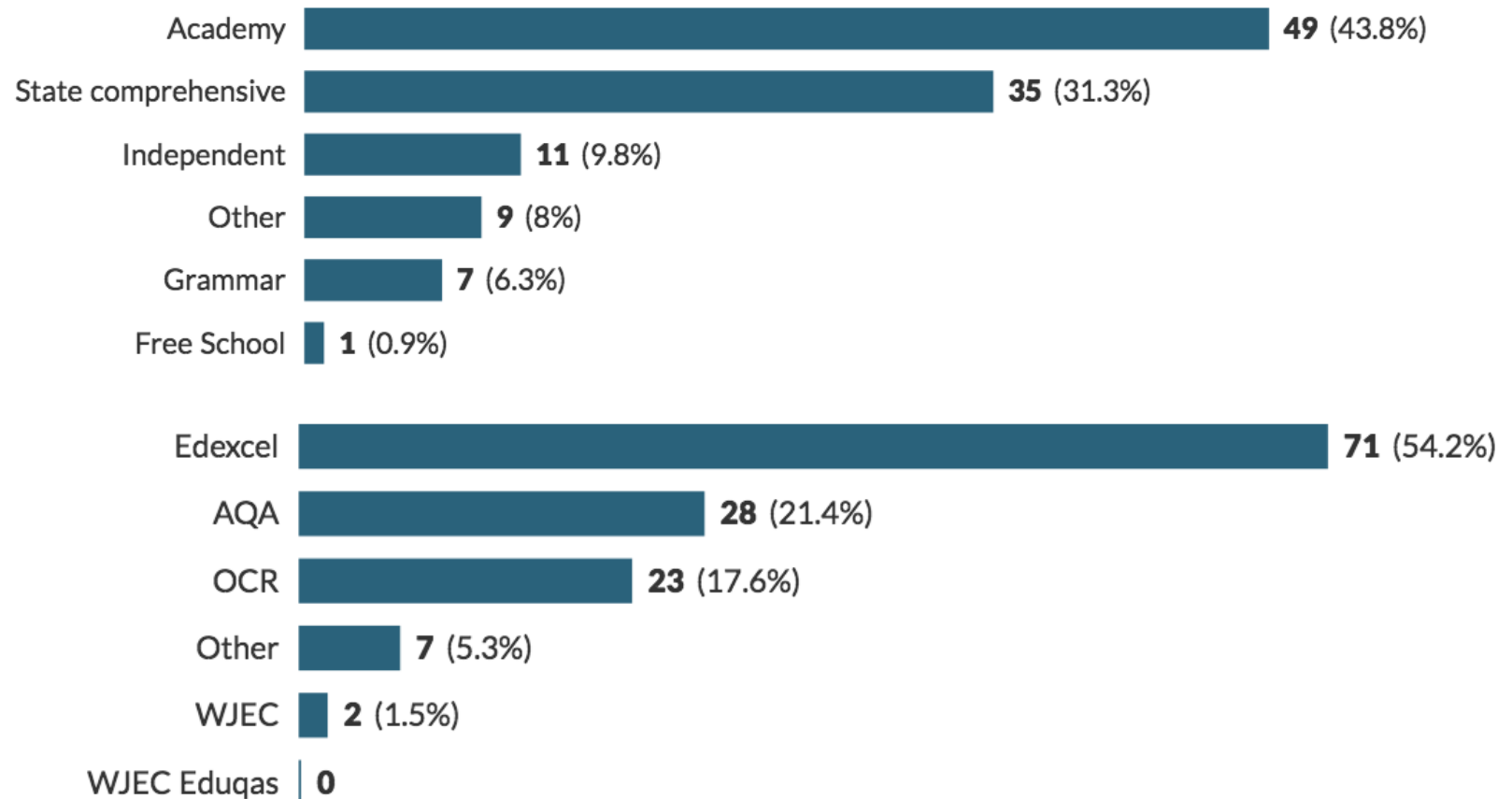




Survey

KS4 71 Survey responses
9 Telephone interviews

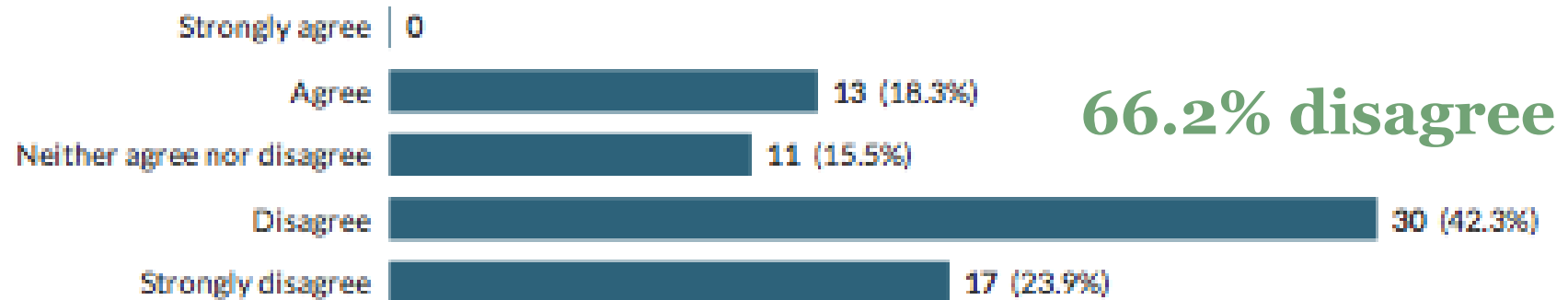
KS5 112 Survey responses
10 Telephone interviews



Have you ever been surprised by an examination grade for any of your pupils for composition:

90.1% Yes

The assessment requirements are clear and easy to understand what is required of the student:



I am confident at being able to accurately predict the grades my pupils will get:

59.2% disagree



If the assessment of composing is
unpredictable & unreliable what are
the possible implications for
teachers and their students?



*"So who is
accountable
for these
grades and
ultimately the
teacher is"*

*"It reflects
poorly on me"*

Accountability

*"I was told I must be rubbish
because of my wrong
predictions – deemed as
unfit for purpose"*

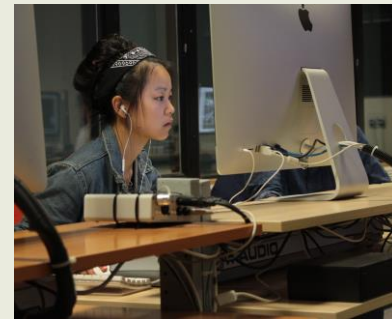
*"I just don't have
that much
confidence,
almost fearful"*

Teaching to the Test



“Teachers are under **pressure** to secure good examination results...I have learned how to help students select genre and approaches which suits their aim of decent results rather than indulging in a pure **creative** process”

“Grades being moved considerably lead to very much to, teaching to the test...everything the student does is being referred back to the specification and to **outguess** what will work”



Finding a Formula



“Because that has produced good result I kind of try to steer students down the same path of **similar types** of composition at a similar level”

“I will make kids **copy/model** their work explicitly on what a grade A looks like rather than let them be creative”



Teaching to the Test

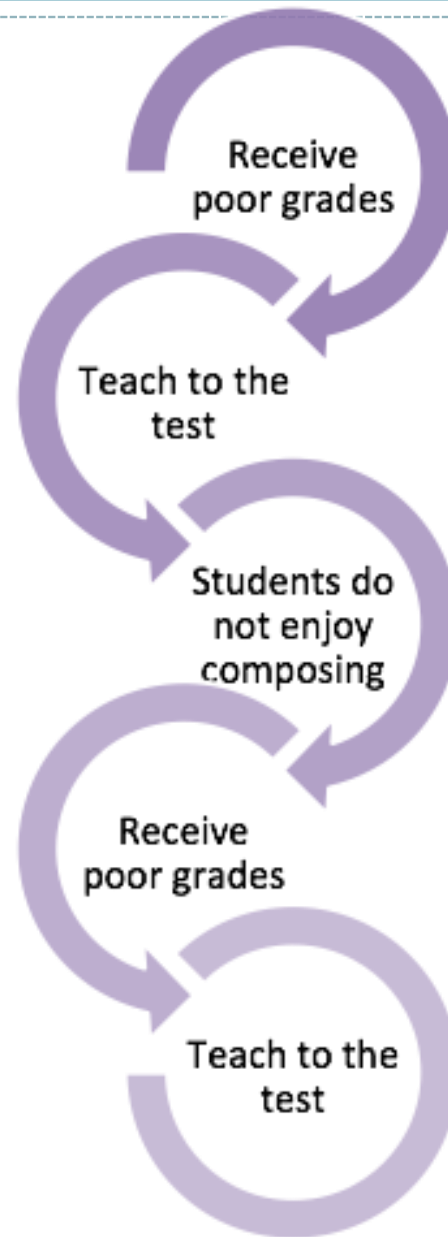


‘students and teachers find that they learn how to write a good **examination piece** rather than what it might be to be a more freethinking composer.’ (Francis, 2012)

‘the examination system...through its inevitable interest in what is measurable, it can lead to a **one-size-fits-all** approach’ (Francis, 2012)

‘**examination composing** inhibits students’ creativity’
(Fautley & Savage, 2011)

“if you get unexpected marks and then you go towards the mark scheme even more, and that can lower them [the marks] even more. It could turn into a spiral effect of trying to out-guess the examination.”



Marking Criteria – Interpretations

AQA:

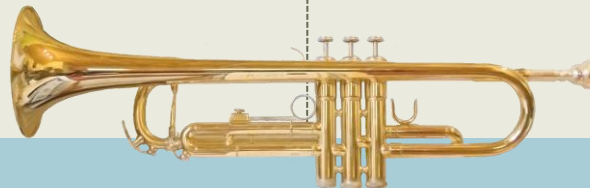
- 30-26: **imaginative** creation of musical ideas

OCR

- 13–15 marks: **Inventive** and wholly idiomatic use of instruments.
- 10–12 marks: Mostly **idiomatic** use of instruments.

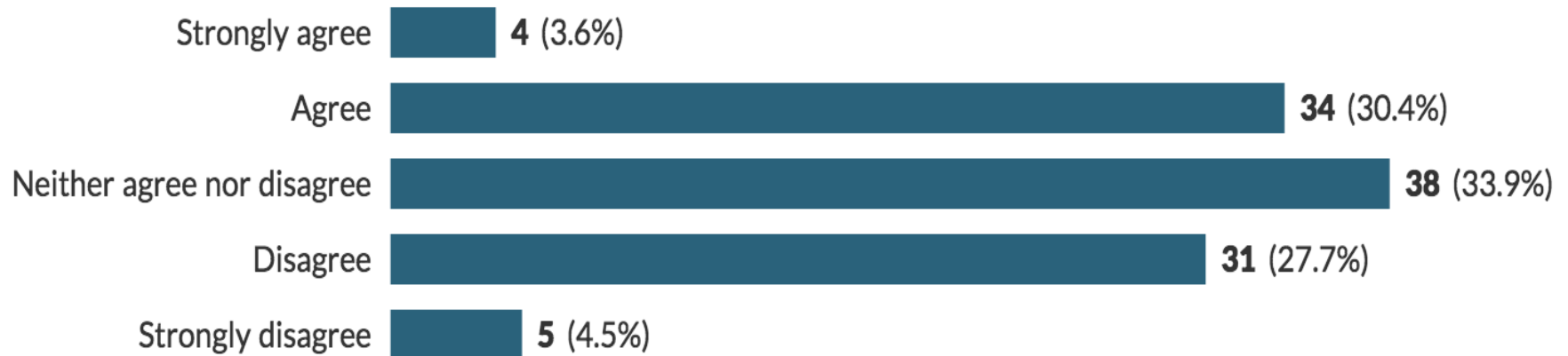
Edexcel:

- Excellent: **imaginative** use of ideas and conventions
 - Good: **good** use of standard conventions
- Excellent: The melody lines display **style** and **character**.
- Excellent: structure and form is **interesting**



Creativity in Composing

Students are recognised and rewarded for their creative musical responses in the assessment



PLAYING SAFE

“We felt like we were taking a **risk** by encouraging him [A-level student] to do what maybe might not tick everyone's boxes. The thought was quite

“colleagues the **members**' type exercise...they in order to full

Warning!
Creativity Ahead

“Sometimes the the

“Original - it
seen S

EFFECT ON STUDENTS:

- **Confidence:** “It's put some very able, potentially fantastic composers right off...I think we might have actually lost some genuinely great musicians through the examination system.”
- **Independent Learning:** “I do sometimes feel the kids are just waiting for me to tell them to modulate”
“I have students ask what formula they need to apply to get an A*”
- **Perceptions:** “The prescribed nature of the tasks limits more able students so they do not get a real understanding of what composition truly is”

Risk Taking

‘Real’ composing practice

Exploratory/Creative

Process driven

Risk taking

Student-led

Enjoyment

Reliable marking

Clear criteria

Used for support

Steps by step

Technical ‘tools’ and skills

Unreliable marking

Subjective

Unclear learning goals

Students need support

‘Wooly’ marking criteria

Teacher job at risk

Students futures

Limit creativity

Focus on product

Limits decision making

**Focus on what is easily
assessable**

Teacher-led

Focus on isolated skills



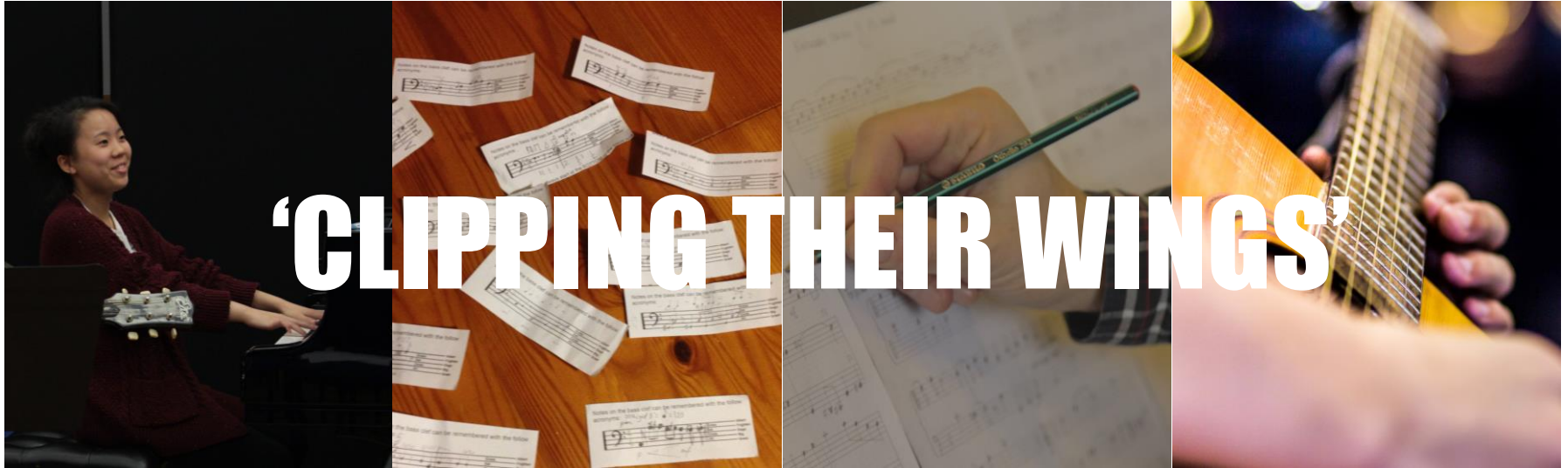
‘So how do we
assess
composing?’

‘Assessment is not an
exact Science, and we
must stop presenting it as
such’ (Gipps, 1994)

‘in efforts to increase reliability, it
is all too easy to fall back upon
**things which are easily
assessable**, which, whilst
probably reliable, are not
necessarily valid in measuring
aspects of musical leavening.’
(Fautley, 2010)

*‘...formal assessment has
hindered and distorted work
in the secondary classroom
through laying too much
emphasis on what is **easily
examinable**, regardless of its
relevance as musical
experience.’ (Aspin 1986)*

How does the examination limit creativity?



Reduce Risk
Taking

From
students & in
teaching

Formulaic
Approaches

Closed step
by step
tasks

Assess the
easily
assessable

Counting
techniques &
pastiche. Notation
focus

Reduce
collaboration
& practical

Less peer support
Focus on
individual.

Considerations



- Does the examination influence **what** and **how** students compose?
- Does the examination preference a certain type of composing process? Who is this benefiting?
- Are we trying to fit all students in the same 'box'?
- What are we preparing students for with the examination?
- What should come first - rules or creativity?
- Is what is easily assessable is being prioritised?
- Is it too risking for teachers to allow students freedom to be 'creative'?



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Thank You!

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