

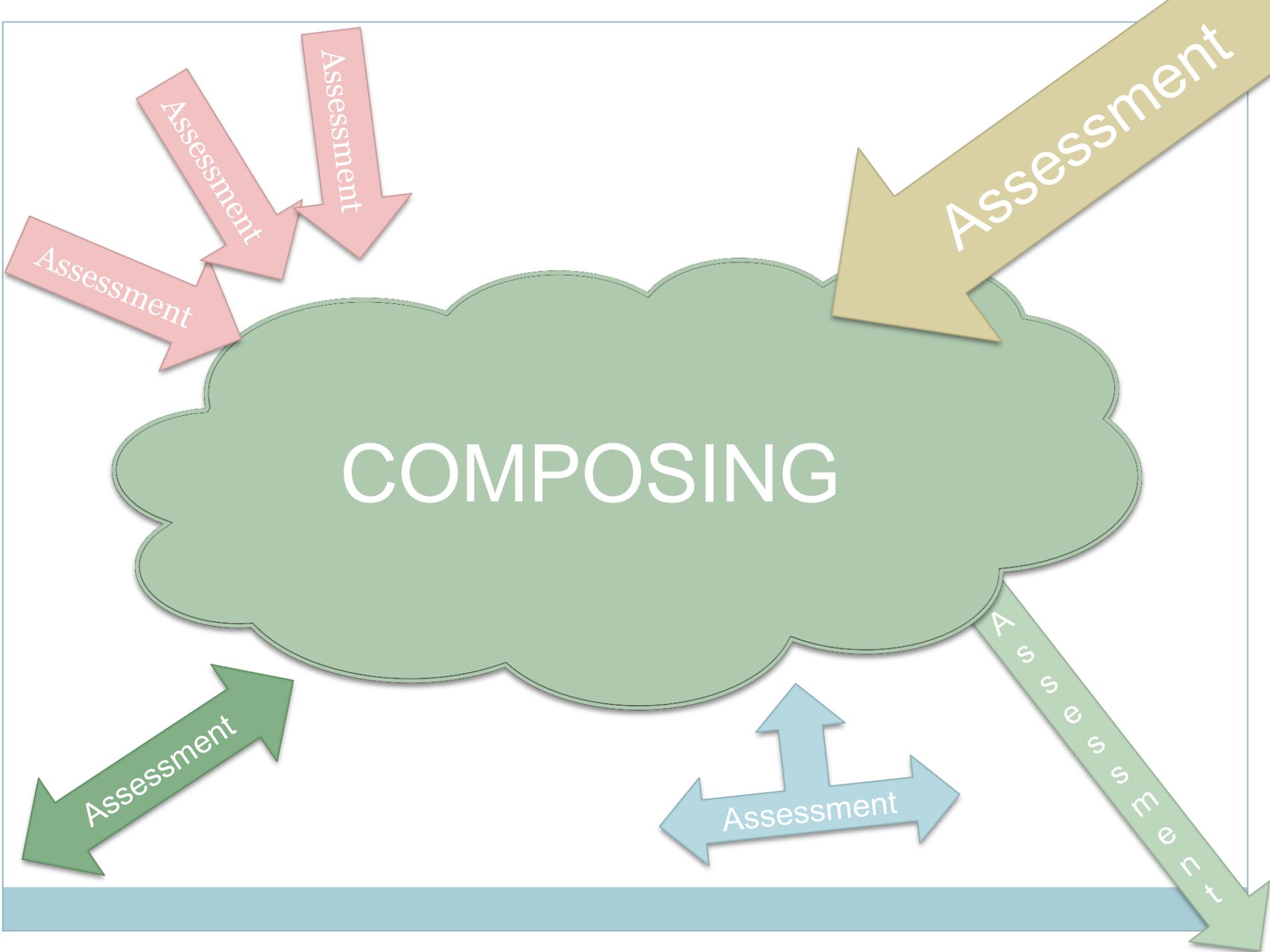
Does the assessment of composing limit creativity?

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COMPOSING

Assessment

Assessment

Assessment

Assessment

Assessment

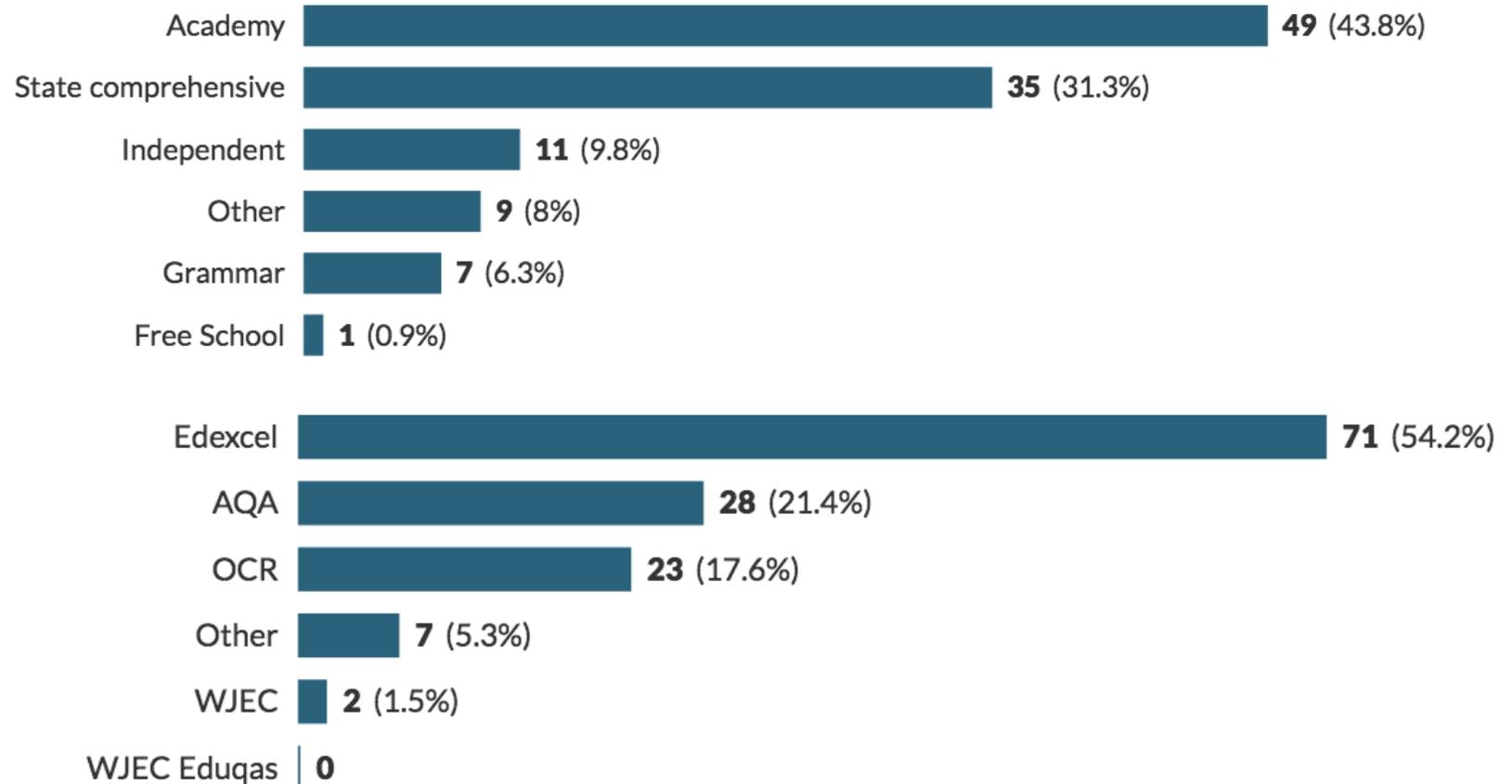
Assessment

Assessment

Survey

KS4 71 Survey responses
9 Telephone interviews

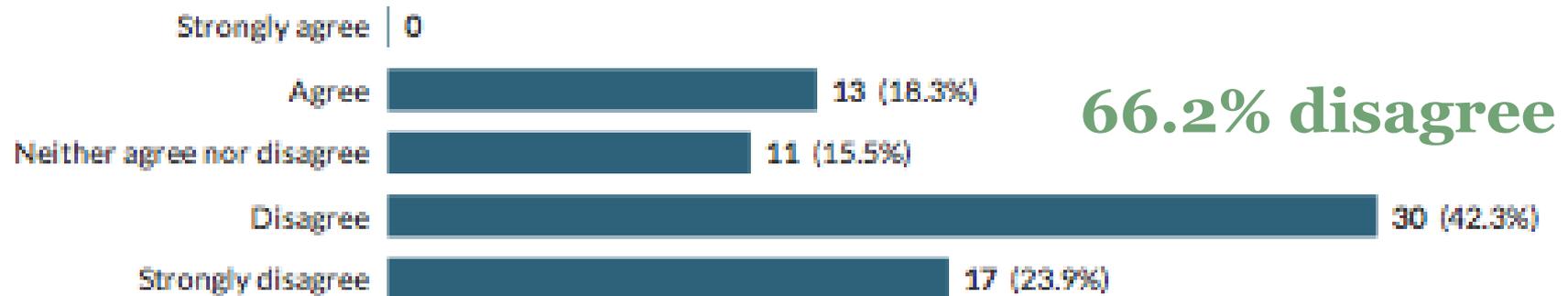
KS5 112 Survey responses
10 Telephone interviews



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

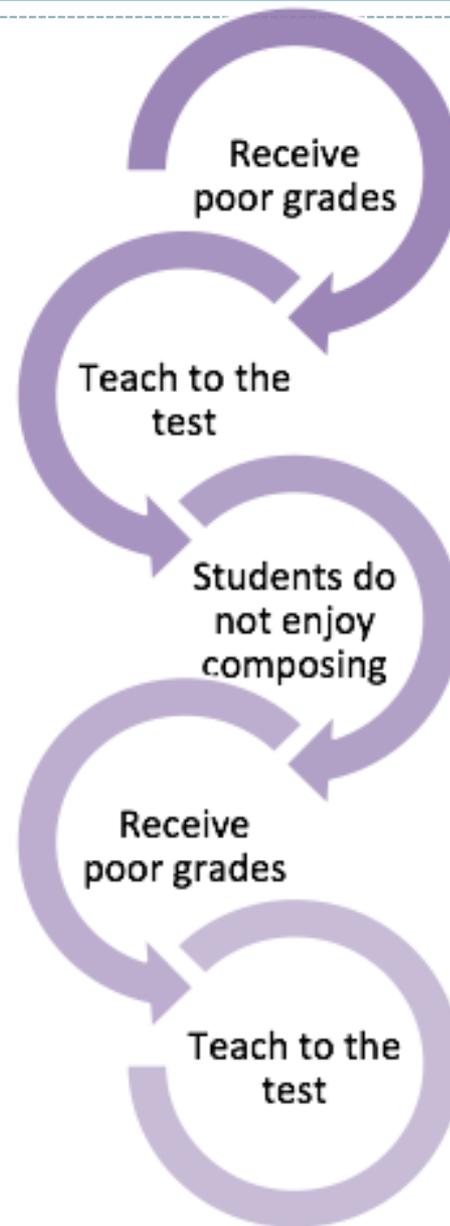


‘students and teachers find that they learn how to write a good **examination piece** rather than what it might be to be a more freethinking composer.’ (Francis, 2012)

‘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:

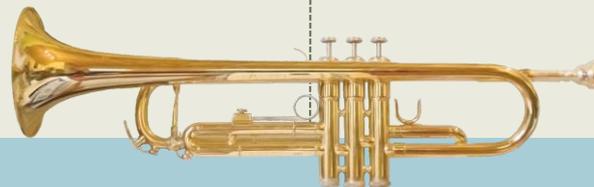
- 30-26: **imaginative** creation of musical ideas

OCR

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

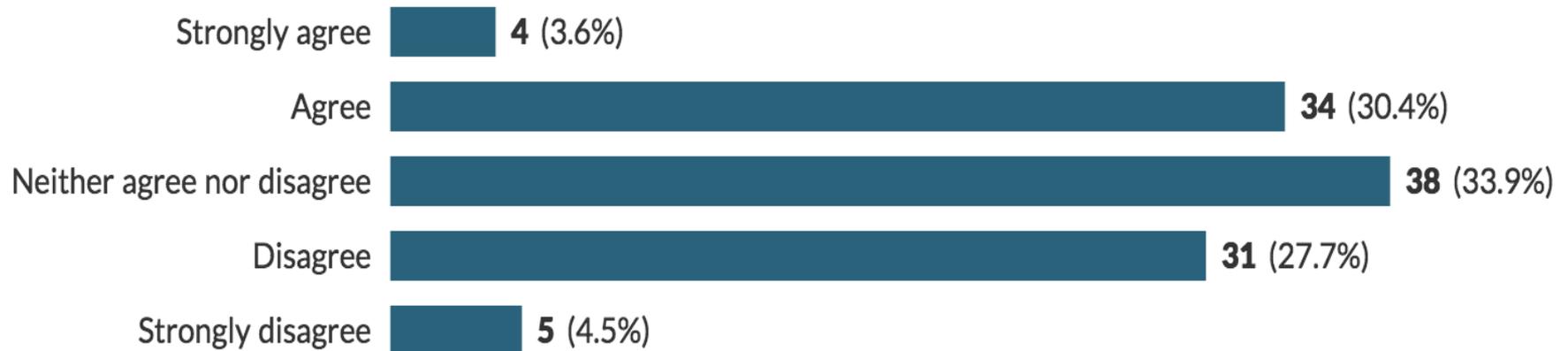
Edexcel:

- 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 that maybe might not tick everyone's boxes. My thought was quite

“colleagues that do **members'** type exercise...they do it in order to fulfil

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

Unreliable marking
Subjective
Unclear learning goals
Students need support
'Wooly' marking criteria
Teacher job at risk
Students futures

Reliable marking
Clear criteria
Used for support
Steps by step
Technical 'tools' and skills

Limit creativity
Focus on product
Limits decision making
Focus on what is easily assessable
Teacher-led
Focus on isolated skills

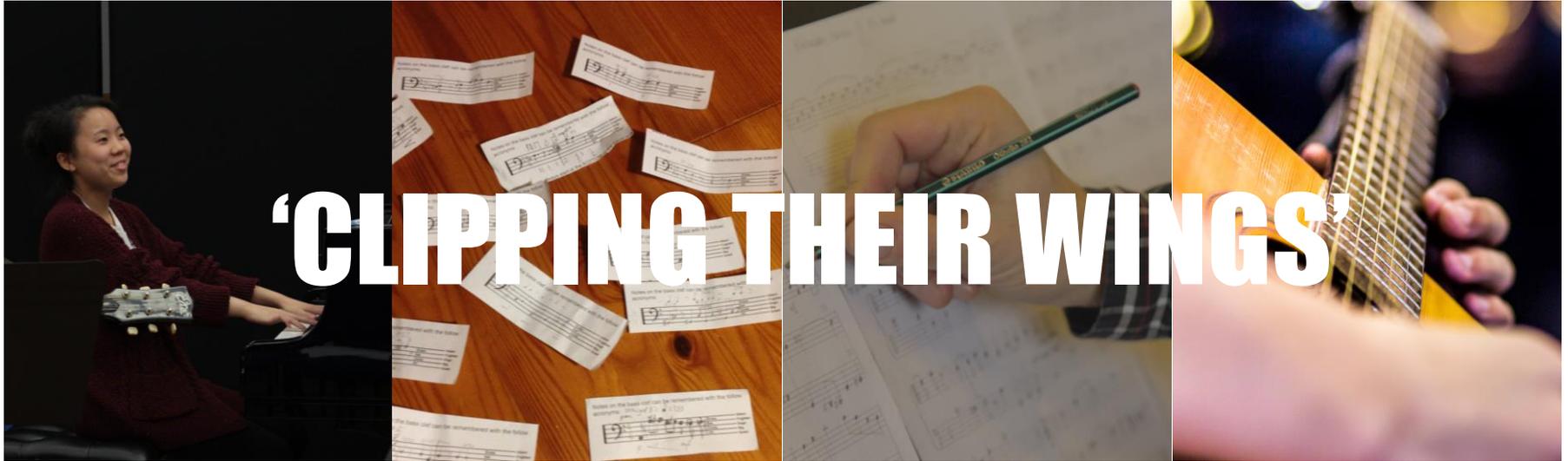
‘So how do we
assess
composing?’

‘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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