Texture results from the way voices and/or instruments are combined in music.

Board of Studies NSW 1999, Music 1 Stage 6 Preliminary and HSC Courses, Sydney, NSW

This chapter will help you to discuss texture in terms of:

• the layers of sound and their function
• the roles of instruments and/or voices.

After completing this chapter, check that you understand and can apply the following:

☐ layers of sound
☐ the function of each layer of sound
☐ the roles of instruments and/or voices in each layer of sound.
**Texture** results from the way voices and/or instruments are combined in music. It is therefore concerned with the treatment of musical lines in a piece of music. A musical line is called a *layer* and texture refers to the combination of these layers, producing either a thin or a thick texture. For example, if we hear a solo violinist playing and then hear an entire orchestra with its many harmonic and rhythmic layers, the music has changed from a thin texture to a thick texture.

The mind map below shows the concept of texture linked to three main areas. Although layers make up both the density and the type of texture, they are separated in this mind map, as these are the three main aspects of texture that should be looked at when analysing a piece of music.

**LAYERS**

To analyse the texture of a piece of music, we first need to decipher the types of layers that are present in it and then consider how the composer has treated each layer. It can be relatively easy to identify the particular voices or instruments that characterise a layer, but to analyse texture it is important to identify what these layers are doing. Most of the time, each layer is contributing to the music in a different way.

In this section, we discuss how to identify the number of layers, the role of each layer and how the layers relate to one another in the music.

**Number of layers**

Listening to some music, it is easy to be overwhelmed by all of the performing media that you hear. But if you listen carefully, the layers in the music will emerge. When you think you have picked out the number of layers in the piece of music, separate them into the following categories:

- single melodic line
- melody with accompaniment
- more than one melodic line
- countermelody
- non-melodic/harmonic lines (e.g. rhythm section or percussion).

Examples of some of these can be heard in the sound bites (see also some examples of scores on page 94). You may come across all of these options in a piece of music, so try to specify which layer you are discussing by naming the instrument and stating where in the music it occurs.
Example of a single melodic line (from ‘Amazing Grace’)

Melody of ‘Amazing Grace’, piano accompaniment

Largo assai

They loathed to drink of the river, He turned their waters into blood; they

One melodic line followed by another line (horizontal melodic lines); excerpt from George Frideric Handel’s ‘Israel in Egypt’
Role of layers

In most music, there are instruments that have a melodic role, others that have a harmonic role and still others with a rhythmic role. When analysing texture, we label the layers according to which of these roles they perform.

In a standard rock band, the lead singer and lead guitarist usually fill the melodic roles, the rhythm guitarist, backing vocals, keyboard player and bass guitarist fill the harmonic role, and the drum kit and often the bass guitar fill the rhythmic role.

Melodic role

A layer with a **melodic role** usually leads the piece of music, providing the main melody. Our ears are drawn to this melodic layer.

A melodic role can provide:
- the main melody
- the main melody in unison
- the main melody in octaves
- the main melody, with the melody in harmony (e.g. 3rds)
- imitation of the main melody across different instruments
- a countermelody.

**HSC TIP**

In an exam response, make sure you specify which layer you are discussing and where it occurs.
In the score example on pages 97–9, the trumpets and tenor saxophone perform the melodic role.

**Harmonic role**
A layer with a harmonic role provides the harmony through a bass line, chords or a drone (a sustained note).

- A harmonic role can provide:
  - a bass line (e.g. a walking bass)
  - a constant chordal accompaniment
  - a drone.

  In the score example on pages 97–9, the trombones, baritone saxophone, piano, electric guitar and bass guitar perform the harmonic role.

**Rhythmic role**
A layer with a rhythmic role can provide a pulse or possibly an ostinato or riff. A rhythmic role can be non-pitched (e.g. the drum kit) or pitched (e.g. a bass guitar riff).

It is also important to understand that a layer may have combined roles. For example, a rhythm guitar and a bass guitar can have both harmonic and rhythmic roles in a piece of music.

- A rhythmic role can provide:
  - a basic pulse
  - an ostinato
  - a rhythmic interest (either as accompaniment or to take over the main part of a piece of music).

  In the score example on pages 97–9, the drums perform the main rhythmic role.

**Tone colour role**
An instrument may be chosen to provide a particular emotional impact. For example, a trumpet can create a majestic feel in a piece of music.

It is important to note that while many composers use instrumental layers to fill melodic, harmonic and rhythmic roles, there are a few exceptions. For example, placing a cymbal crash at a climax in a piece of music provides a tonal contrast, but this does not really fall into the category of a melodic, harmonic or rhythmic role.

- A tone colour role can:
  - emphasise the musical style, as well as appropriate emotional impact
  - emphasise the melody
  - provide contrast
  - provide unity.
CHAPTER 5 Texture

Hip (excerpt)

W. Cornell Jnr, A. Robertson, D. Wilkins

Up Tempo Swing ($\hat{=} 210$)

Trumpet 1
Trumpet 2
Trombone 1
Trombone 2
Tenor sax
Baritone sax
Piano
Electric guitar
Electric bass
Drum set

Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Trom. 1
Trom. 2
T.Sx.
T.Sx.
Pno.
Pno.
E. Grt.
E. Grt.
E. B.
E. B.
D.S.

CD TRACK 14
Relation of layers to one another

Analysing a layer on its own is important to an understanding of texture. But to give the layer context, we must try to compare it with other layers — that is, to analyse the relationship of the layers to one another. If we look at a score, we can analyse how the layers relate to one another both horizontally and vertically (see page 100).

It can be useful to draw a diagram as a form of graphic notation. The following is an example (see also page 110).

A graphically notated representation of ‘Secret Life of Plants’ by Stevie Wonder

More specifically, vertical texture could take the form of block chords or an orchestra playing a cadence using the entire group of instruments. Horizontal texture could take the form of one melody following another.

A cadence is a sequence of chords forming a musical ending. These chords are named perfect, imperfect, plagal and interrupted.
An example of a score that shows a vertical relationship between layers (bars 1–4) and a horizontal relationship (bars 5–10) (from Mozart’s ‘Eine Kleine Nachtmusik’)

In an Aural Skills examination, you can try to decipher the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic relationships between the layers. The example of an orchestral score opposite shows how the melodic layer (flutes), the harmonic layer (strings) and the rhythmic layer (snare drum) relate to each other.
A score extract showing relationships between melodic, harmonic and rhythmic layers (from 'Bolero' by Maurice Ravel)
**CONCEPT CHECK >> LAYERS**

1. Listen to the sound bites and classify each as involving one of the following:
   (a) single melodic line
   (b) melody with chords
   (c) more than one melodic line
   (d) a countermelody.

2. Listen to the sound bites then copy and complete the following table, naming the main instrument in each sound bite and whether the instrument has a melodic, rhythmic or harmonic role.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound bite</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOUND BITE 5.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept check — Role 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUND BITE 5.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept check — Role 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUND BITE 5.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept check — Role 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Listen to the sound bite and discuss the relationship of the layers to one another.

**DENSITY**

Density refers to the ‘thickness’ of sound created by layers in a piece of music.

**Describing the density**

When describing density, identify the thickness in the texture overall and then in the specific sections of the piece of music. *Thick* and *thin* are general terms to describe texture density. Within these two broad categories some alternative terms can be used, and there are other musical aspects that can affect texture density. It is important to note that ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ are relative terms. As with many concepts in music, when describing this aspect, they need to be given a context within the piece of music.

**Thick density**

There are many alternative terms that may be suitable to describe a thick texture in a piece of music. These alternatives include:

- heavy
- dense
- rich
- solid
- bass heavy
- loud volume
- many instruments
- solid chords
- few musical rests
- thick-sounding instruments (e.g. the tuba).
Thin density

Alternative terms to describe a thin texture in a piece of music include:
- light
- transparent
- sparse
- few layers
- soft volume
- thin-sounding instruments (e.g. the piccolo)
- many musical rests
- no harmony
- broken chord accompaniment.

Overture to The Marriage of Figaro (excerpt)

K. 492

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
An example of a score that shows the texture progressing from thin in bars 8–11 to thick in bars 12–18 (excerpt from ‘The Marriage of Figaro’ by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart)
Density of texture in music

CONCEPT CHECK

1. Name three alternative terms to describe a ‘thick’ texture.
2. Name three alternative terms to describe a ‘thin’ texture.
3. Listen to the sound bites. Copy the table below and circle the relevant term for each sound bite.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound bites</th>
<th>Texture density</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOUND BITE 5.16</td>
<td>Thick/thin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept check — Texture 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUND BITE 5.17</td>
<td>Thick/thin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept check — Texture 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUND BITE 5.18</td>
<td>Thick/thin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept check — Texture 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TYPE

The way the layers are put together in a piece of music forms its texture. Like many other features in music, aspects of texture develop over time and a type of texture can be related to a particular style of music.

The main types of texture are described as **monophonic**, **homophonic**, **polyphonic** and **heterophonic**.

- Monophonic texture refers to a single melodic line.
- Homophonic texture refers to a single melodic line and a harmony (accompaniment).
- Polyphonic texture is created when two or more melodic lines are played or sung simultaneously.
- In a heterophonic texture, two or more lines are played or sung at the same time, with different variations of the same melody.

Heterophony is heard mainly in music outside Western traditional music, but it is generally relatively rare. It may also be embedded within the other three types of texture (see page 108 for further explanation).
Texture types may be related to various musical styles as well. Monophonic and polyphonic textures, although rare in Western music, are common features in non-Western traditions, such as Indonesian gamelan and traditional African music.

(a) Monophonic
(b) Homophonic
(c) Polyphonic
(d) Heterophonic

Types of texture. Monophonic, homophonic and polyphonic textures are the three main types; heterophonic texture is rarer.

**Monophonic**

Monophonic means ‘of one layer’, from the Greek *monos*, meaning ‘alone’ or ‘one’, and *phon*, meaning ‘sound’. Monophonic signifies that only one line of music is heard at a time.

It is important to note that monophonic need not apply to only one instrument or voice. A monophonic texture does not necessarily mean that the music is simple.

*Unison* refers to two or more performers playing or singing at the same pitch. They might also be playing or singing an octave or octaves apart.

**HSC TIP**

Monophonic, homophonic, polyphonic and heterophonic are terms that should be used only after you have drawn your own conclusions from gathering information on the texture or from a diagram you have drawn to gather this information from the piece of music.

**HSC TIP**

Listen for a single melodic line rather than one instrument or voice. A monophonic texture does not necessarily mean that the music is simple.

Monophonic texture was popular in church music of the Medieval period, although it may be heard in all styles of music. The two sound bites are typical examples of monophonic texture, one from the Medieval period and one from mainstream music.
Homophonic texture is the most common texture type heard in music. With a melodic layer and a harmonic layer, it is the texture on which most music is based. When analysing a piece of music, listen for a homophonic texture before you try to identify a monophonic or polyphonic texture type.

A homophonic texture contains melody and harmony. This should not be confused with the numbers of instruments. If there is a melody and a harmony, then the texture type is homophonic.

Homophonic texture can also be heard in much SATB choral music, where the main melody is usually carried by one voice, with the other voices providing the harmony.

Examples of a homophonic texture include:
- a singer with accompaniment (most commonly with a piano or guitar providing chordal accompaniment)
- a solo instrumentalist, with an ensemble or orchestra providing the accompaniment — for example:
  - a violinist and an orchestra or a string orchestra
  - a rock group with a guitar soloist, with the other group members (e.g. rhythm and bass guitars, and drums) accompanying
  - a jazz band with a saxophone soloist, with the other band instruments (e.g. bass, keyboard, drums) accompanying.

An example of homophonic texture in music (from ‘The Way You Look Tonight’ by Jerome Kern)
It is interesting to note that certain instruments, such as the piano accordion and the bagpipes, can provide their own homophonic texture. Each single instrument can provide accompaniment (in the form of a drone or chords) while the melody is played on the keyboard (accordion) or through the pipes (bagpipes).

**Polyphonic**

Poly derives from a Greek word meaning ‘many’. A polyphonic texture is one in which the layers are intertwined and mixed. This does not necessarily result in a ‘mess’ of sound, although it can. Another clear sign of a polyphonic texture is that it is difficult to anticipate where the piece will end, as usually no particular layer leads the piece.

In the case of a fugue, which is a common example of polyphonic texture, the ‘subject’ is the driving force, with other musical lines maintaining it. With this type of texture, each layer competes for the listener’s attention. In polyphony each melody can exist on its own, and all are of equal importance and interest. An example is shown opposite.

In the chapter on pitch (see chapter 2, page 31), we learnt about countermelodies. Polyphonic texture is the treatment of many countermelodies simultaneously. The polyphonic texture type originated in the Renaissance period, when each (usually vocal) part had a melody. The melodies of all parts were performed at the same time, yet all fitted together harmonically.

This use of the term polyphonic should not be confused with its use in relation to mobile phone ringtones, where it simply means many instrumental layers that sound like real instruments. Ringtones are actually homophonic in texture type, as other textures would not suit today’s ears.

A polyphonic type of texture may be:

- a piece of music with independent instrumental and/or vocal lines, such as in
  - canons, rounds or fugues
  - some pieces from the Baroque musical era
  - sections of a large ensemble work, orchestra or band
- homophonic textures that develop into polyphonic textures, such as in
  - mainstream music when the singer adds vocal licks above an existing accompaniment that is melodically based
  - countermelodies.

**Heterophonic**

A heterophonic texture is one in which the same melody is performed at the same time by more than one instrument or voice, but with different variations of the same melody.

This texture is most common to cultures of the Middle East, China, Indonesia, Ireland and certain parts of Africa. In cultures where heterophony grew, it was mainly due to improvisation. Consider a Greek village tavern where a solo violinist is playing a traditional melody, and then a clarinettist casually joins in, playing the same melody but embellishing it. The result is a heterophonic texture. In this context we can understand how this texture type grew.
An example of a score showing polyphonic texture (from ‘Missa Da Pacem — Kyrie’ by Josquin Desprez)
Heterophonic texture is rarer in Western music than monophonic, homophonic or polyphonic, and may or may not be heard as a texture by itself. Heterophonic texture may be combined with any of the other three main texture types; for example, a homophonic texture and a heterophonic texture may be combined in one piece of music. In Turkish music, you may hear a heterophonic texture by itself.

A heterophonic type of texture may be:
- a melody played by two instruments (e.g. violin and clarinet), with one instrument embellishing the main melody with ornaments that are characteristic of that instrument
- music outside the Western tradition in which the main melody is doubled by an instrument(s) or voice(s) with embellishments
- a fugue
- Indonesian gamelan.

**CONCEPT CHECK >> TEXTURE TYPES**

Listen to each sound bite and identify whether the texture type is monophonic, homophonic, polyphonic or heterophonic.

**GRAPHIC NOTATION**

Composers started using graphic notation around the beginning of the twentieth century, and it plays a significant part in the Music 1 course. As we saw in chapter 1 (page 11), graphic notation is a useful tool for your HSC Aural Skills exam as it helps you to express your answer in a visual way. However, in relation to texture, we think of graphic notation as a diagrammatic way of mapping out the layers in a piece of music. By drawing and referring back to a diagram, you may be able to draw conclusions regarding the texture of a piece of music. It is an effective way to analyse the layers, density and type of texture of the particular excerpt you are studying. The following is an example of such a diagram.

![Diagram of Peter Sheridan's 'It's Five Minutes to Twelve']

A diagram showing graphic notation of Peter Sheridan's 'It's Five Minutes to Twelve'
Mind maps are a way of visualising information. This mind map shows the features of the concept of texture that can be applied to any listening piece. It is a useful revision tool for the HSC Aural Skills examination.

**HSC TIP** Mind maps are a useful revision tool for the HSC Aural Skills exam.
LISTENING ACTIVITIES

1. Copy and label the blank mind map below from your understanding of what you have learnt in this chapter. Put the relevant words you have learnt on the branches provided.

2. Your teacher will play a listening excerpt.
   (a) Using the mind map that you labelled in question 1, circle what you hear.
   (b) Collate what you have heard and, on a separate piece of paper, answer the following question based on the same listening: ‘Discuss the use of texture overall in the excerpt’.

3. Apply the knowledge learned in this chapter by finding a piece of music and analysing all aspects of texture.

4. Find:
   (a) a piece of music that has a thick texture
   (b) a piece of music that is monophonic
   (c) a piece of music that uses a heterophonic texture.

5. Class performance. Log on to www.jacplus.com.au and access the Bobby McFerrin weblink for this chapter.
   (a) Find out how Bobby McFerrin arranged the voices in each layer of the song ‘Don’t Worry, Be Happy!’ by following the instructions and listening to each layer singly then together.
(b) In groups of seven, use the score for the seven layers to perform the song ‘Don’t Worry, Be Happy!’ Bring in each layer one at a time, allowing four bars of performance before the next one enters.
(c) Listen again to the composition built up in the performance by Bobby McFerrin and compare your performance with his.

6. **Music technology.** Using sequencing software — for example, ‘Acid Music Studio’ by Sonic Foundry (a free downloadable template is available on the internet) — create a composition in any style for which you have the loops. Your composition should have various types of texture and layers. Describe your composition to the class in terms of layers and the movement of the layers within the piece of music.

7. **Score reading and listening.** Listen to the excerpt your teacher will play while following the score excerpt on pages 114–18. Answer the following questions in relation to the excerpt.
(a) How many layers are seen and heard in the excerpt provided?
(b) What is the role of the oboes and clarinets when this layer enters?
(c) Explain the relationship between the double bass, cello and viola, and the violin parts.
(d) Name and describe the density in bars 1–8.
(e) Name the types of texture used in the excerpt (monophonic, homophonic, polyphonic) and explain (in bar numbers) where these texture types are heard.
(f) Comment on the use of texture overall and the effectiveness of this for the listener.

8. Listen to the excerpt your teacher will play and answer in extended point form the following questions related to texture.

**Layers**
(a) Identify the layers in this excerpt.
(b) Label each layer as:
   • single melodic line
   • melody with accompaniment
   • more than one melodic line
   • countermelody
   • non-melodic/harmonic lines (e.g. rhythm section/percussion).
(c) What is the role of each layer (melodic, harmonic or rhythmic)?
(d) Describe the relationship between each layer.

**Density**
(e) Describe the density of the texture.

**Type**
(f) Label the type of texture used in the piece of music. Comment on the overall type(s) of texture, as well as on particular sections of the piece of music.

**Diagram**
(g) Demonstrate visually your understanding of texture in this piece by drawing a diagram to represent the layers heard in the music.

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**HSC Tip** You may be asked a question on ‘layers’. Here you are being asked about the concept of texture and need to interpret the question to fit this concept.
Symphony No. 8 in B minor (‘Unfinished Symphony’)
First Movement (excerpt)

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
Excerpt from Franz Schubert’s ‘Unfinished Symphony’
An excerpt (2 minutes 12 seconds) from ‘Tobias’ by Darren Percival will be played SIX times for you to answer this question.

**Time:**  
- First playing: short pause  
- Second playing: 30-second pause  
- Third playing: 1-minute pause  
- Fourth playing: 1-minute pause  
- Fifth playing: 2-minute pause  
- Sixth playing: 2-minute pause

Discuss the use of texture in this excerpt.

**Past Exam Questions**

- Identify the layers of sound, and describe how they are used. (2003 and 2007)  

*Board of Studies NSW, HSC Music 1 Aural Skills Examinations*