

# DIGITAL MEDIA IN THE MUSIC CLASSROOM

Digital media is an increasingly important part of a teacher's arsenal to excite and engage students in music lessons. *Digital Media In The Classroom* presents a wide variety of practical, creative ideas and activities that you can dip in and out of to spice up your lessons.

This chapter looks at Virtual Learning Environments and how they can be best set up and utilised, exploring online video and audio options to add depth to learning, using VLE to organise a busy department, for discussion forums, quizzes and other digital tools.



# VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

In recent years, the Virtual Learning Environment (or VLE) has become a permanent fixture in schools across the country. Although almost all schools have one, the extent to which they are used varies, from those where the VLE is central to everyday life to schools where it's there in the background but isn't given much attention. What's common among teachers in most schools, though, is that niggling feeling that they ought to be making more use of it than they are. It's similar to having an underused gym membership: you know that it's there and you know that you'll benefit if you go regularly, but long, busy days at school have a habit of getting in the way of good intentions!

Throughout this book, we've started to explore the huge selection of online and digital-media resources that are valuable to a music teacher. A key issue is how to share and make these resources available to students in a way that's safe and convenient. You might have created the world's best Spotify playlist, podcast or revision video, but if students aren't able to find it quickly when they need it, this presents a barrier to the learning. In many cases, the VLE is the natural place to pull these resources together, allowing you to create an engaging and interactive learning hub for your students.

A common way of using the VLE is simply to upload a few PowerPoint files and Word documents from lessons. While this approach is certainly better than not putting any materials online at all, it doesn't allow you to use the VLE to its full potential.

Imagine, for a moment, that you're a 15-year-old GCSE music student. You live in a world of Xbox, YouTube, Facebook and instant messaging. How likely is it that you're going to be motivated to spend time in the evening reading through PowerPoint files from a lesson on the VLE? How much more likely is it that you'd be willing to log on to watch a video from today's lesson of your friends explaining

key concepts, and then contribute to a discussion forum, summing up what you learnt during the lesson?

Like any resource, the VLE is most powerful when it's thoughtfully integrated into classroom practice and woven into schemes of work or projects. Alongside VLEs often comes the phrase 'extending learning beyond the classroom'. This is only possible if some thought has been put into exactly *how* the learning is going to be extended, and this chapter presents some ideas for ensuring VLE usage is meaningful and focused.

Although the VLE is primarily a learning tool, it also has the potential to free up your time and to make a music department run more smoothly. This impacts on the learning indirectly, as it allows for music staff to focus more time on doing what's important: teaching music. Alongside the learning ideas, this chapter also discusses ways in which you can start to free up your time in this way.

It's worth noting that many of the ideas contained in this chapter will work just as well using a blog, and the reverse is also true of the 'blogs' chapter on pages 85–94 (which also covers some of the privacy issues that need to be tackled when using a blog in place of a VLE). As discussed in the introduction, cross-over is to be expected when working with internet-based resources; there are so many ways to achieve the same outcome using different tools. The key is for you to pick the ideas and technologies that suit you and your students best.

There's a large variety of VLE products on the market, so this chapter doesn't go into the specifics of how to achieve tasks on different platforms (online video guides haven't been provided to accompany this chapter for the same reason). However, although VLEs are all slightly different, there's always a common set of core items on the menu; whichever VLE your school uses, you'll be able to try out the ideas presented in this chapter.

Because many schools view the VLE as an important resource, you should be able to access in-house training, help and support in getting started and implementing your ideas. If this help is available to you, it's well worth seeking it out and taking advantage of it.

## CREATING AN ENGAGING HUB

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You recognise good learning when you see it and you know what makes a good music lesson. Engagement, interaction, variety and the excitement of music-

making are all key features of effective and enjoyable musical learning. However, this doesn't only apply to the classroom. Learning is learning, whether it's taking place in a classroom, a practice room or online. The same thought that goes into the planning of a great lesson also needs to go into the planning of a great online learning space, and the aim of this chapter is to show you how to create an engaging online learning hub, quickly and easily, using a VLE.

### SETTING UP LEARNING SPACES

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First, you'll need to decide how you'd like your spaces in the VLE to be organised. This depends on how you work as a department and how your learning is structured. In many cases, a simple structure with a space for each year group will work well, with different sections within each year group for the various projects or units of work that students undertake.

It can be tempting to begin by creating a vast structure of spaces, but it's definitely best to take it steady. Pick one class or year group, create a space for them, and work on integrating it into your lessons. Once you're confident, you can then move forward with creating further spaces. It's much better to slowly build up a collection of populated and well thought out online spaces than to have a vast network of empty ones.

### EMBEDDING LEARNING CONTENT

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Embedding is a feature that's cropping up more and more across the internet. It's essentially the action of creating a small window on a web (or VLE) page, through which a piece of content from another website is displayed. When sites allow their content to be embedded, they provide a short piece of code that tells your VLE how big the window should be and where it should link to. YouTube, for example, allows for its videos to be embedded in any other site, and provides an embed code underneath each video for this purpose.

Crucially, this allows for all sorts of exciting online content to be drawn together into a VLE page, from videos and audio to interactive composition tools. Many of the tools that have been explored elsewhere in this book are capable of being embedded into a VLE, and at this point it's worth recapping a few that are of particular use in creating an engaging VLE space, along with some practical ideas for how they can be used to enhance the learning.



## CLASSROOM IDEA

### ONLINE VIDEO

YouTube, along with other major video-sharing sites, allows for the vast majority of their videos to be embedded. This opens up an entire world of learning content that can be pulled directly through to pages on your VLE, providing students with a highly visual and engaging means of learning.

- Create a page for a specific performance project, and upload resources that allow students to continue making progress at home. Video scores (either created by you or sourced from YouTube) can be provided alongside lyric sheets and scores, allowing students to learn in the way that best suits them. This encourages students to learn independently, selecting the resources that they find most useful (whether it's a score, tab sheet or video). This is a particularly useful method for teachers who are undertaking the Musical Futures approach.
- YouTube is also awash with performances and cover versions of songs that musicians from across the world have uploaded. Within a VLE page it's possible to embed these side by side, allowing students to compare and contrast the performances, and gain inspiration for their own compositions and arrangements. Adding a simple vote, survey or discussion forum (see pages 80–81) is a great way of focusing their thoughts and allowing them to interact with the content you've embedded.
- YouTube also contains thousands of videos that explain specific musical and instrumental techniques, such as the circle of 5ths or violin harmonics. Embedding these videos into a VLE allows you to carefully curate a set of engaging video resources that students can use to learn independently.



## CLASSROOM IDEA

### ONLINE AUDIO

Any tracks that have been uploaded to NUMU can easily be embedded into a VLE. This allows for students' own work from lessons to be pulled through to a space on your VLE, which helps to give the students ownership of the learning space you've created. Regularly uploading content from lessons is the best way to ensure that students visit their VLE space frequently.

Embedding audio in this way, combined with a simple VLE voting tool, is a great way of implementing the competition idea from pages 30–32.

NUMU also offers an embeddable widget that automatically pulls through the latest tracks uploaded to a school's NUMU space. This is helpful in ensuring that your VLE space is regularly updated with little effort on your part. It's also possible to embed this on the school's main website, which is a great way of highlighting the music-making happening across the school to a wider community.

Although it's often possible to upload audio directly to a VLE, it's usually preferable to use the embedding approach (via NUMU) as it kills two birds with one stone: it makes the music available to a wider audience, at the same time as neatly pulling it through to the more private VLE space. This combination of public and private sharing is a real engagement booster for students: suddenly the work from their music lessons has a global audience, as well as being featured in a private space where more focused, teacher-led learning can happen.

### ONLINE WEB TOOLS

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Many small interactive music tools (such as iNudge, mentioned on pages 95–96) can be directly embedded into a VLE page. This gives students an opportunity to create music from your VLE space, allowing them to interact with the page each time they visit.



## CLASSROOM IDEA

### ORGANISE A BUSY DEPARTMENT

With numerous peripatetic lessons, rehearsals and concerts taking place in addition to classroom teaching, music departments are typically the busiest in the school. You will be well aware of the thought and effort that's needed to keep a department running smoothly, and often a department noticeboard is the main point of call for students and visiting teachers.

However, the humble department noticeboard does have its limitations, the main one being that it can only be viewed (and added to) by somebody standing in front of it. This means that parents aren't able to look at it regularly, and that visiting teachers can only update it while they're in school.

A VLE solution, on the other hand, has none of these limitations. Students and parents are able to access it from home, meaning fewer missed lessons due to forgotten lesson times or misplaced instruments. On most VLEs, it's possible to give visiting teachers the ability to edit and update schedules from home.

Having an online departmental calendar that's constantly updated is also a good way of using a VLE to help keep things running smoothly. Most VLEs allow for multiple calendars to be created, and this can be a particularly useful feature as it allows you to create different calendars for different audiences. For example, you could create one calendar that only shows events relevant to parents. Another calendar could be created for peripatetic teachers, providing them with a single port of call for arranging rehearsals and booking rooms.



## CLASSROOM IDEA

### COORDINATE SCHOOL PRODUCTIONS

School productions, while being one of the most rewarding aspects of the job for many teachers, are also one of the most stressful. Coordinating musicians, actors, set designers, sound mixers and lighting operators through a busy timetable of rehearsals can be a daunting task.

By creating an online space that's a one-stop shop for all of those involved in a production, you can use it to coordinate all of the performers, rehearsals and

tasks, helping things to run more smoothly and reducing some of the stress for the teachers involved.

The following tips will help you to create an online space that keeps things in check when it's school-production season:

- Add a clear rehearsal schedule, and make sure everyone knows that this is the definitive version they need to refer to. This makes it easier for teachers to update, without having to maintain a number of schedules posted on different notice boards.
- Add any resources that performers might need, such as scripts, lyric sheets and audio recordings that will help them in their preparation. This also helps to ensure that students turn up to rehearsals with everything they need.
- As the rehearsals progress, the ideas on pages 12–13 can be adapted to help students measure their progress leading towards the final performance. Uploading an MP3 recording or video performance from a rehearsal (having checked with the publisher that this is acceptable under their copyright terms), along with a little feedback and details of what students need to practise before the next rehearsal, can be a great way of ensuring focused progress and getting the best from performers.
- A countdown that shows the number of weeks to the final performance can be a good reminder for students (and staff). This can be manually updated weekly, but for the more technically minded there are a number of free, automatic countdown timers on the internet that can be embedded into a VLE page.



## CLASSROOM IDEA

### COVER WORK

With a lot of coursework and content to get through, you may often be left feeling anxious that students will slip behind when you can't make it into school. Rather than relying on the member of staff covering the lesson to relay work to your students, you could use the VLE to leave personal messages for your students, outlining exactly what they're expected to work on during the lesson.

The brave could even leave a video message for students, allowing you to be there virtually to introduce the lesson and explain to students what they're to do during the time available. By combining this approach with the ideas from the 'digital video' chapter on pages 11–28, you could also provide video learning materials (such as a video score) for students to make use of during the lesson.



In addition, you could upload a bank of cover-lesson resources to your VLE that colleagues and cover staff could use in the case of unexpected absence, allowing you to provide students with meaningful activities to complete. This works best when it's a collaborative effort, with teachers from across a department uploading cover ideas that relate to specific topics or year groups. Over time, this can become a valuable and comprehensive resource for such situations.

Your cover-lesson bank could contain, for example:

- Printable sheets that can be used by cover staff as a basis for lessons.
- Listening activities with links to online resources such as YouTube videos. When combined with the quiz tools that most VLEs feature, this can be a great way of allowing cover teachers to lead discussions and assess students' knowledge.
- Step-by-step mini projects that are designed to last for a single lesson, which non-specialist teachers can confidently lead, complete with any required resources that can be immediately downloaded or played.
- Embedded web tools (such as those covered on pages 95–99); these can be very helpful for cover lessons, as they're intuitive to use and allow students to create music from within a web browser. If a computer room is available, this can form a self-contained activity that requires no external resources.



### CLASSROOM IDEA

#### DISCUSSION FORUMS

Online learning is so much more engaging when students are able to contribute themselves. All VLEs have a function that allows for students to contribute safely to discussions, and this can be a great way of allowing students to demonstrate and discuss their learning. The ability to communicate effectively and respectfully online is becoming an important life and career skill, and discussion forums are a key way in which knowledge is shared and developed online.

- Add a discussion forum to the class page of an examination group (GCSE for instance), which students can use to raise any issues or questions that they have during the course. As well as your input, students should also be encouraged to help each other out, which allows them to demonstrate their knowledge by explaining concepts to others. If a student requests help, you could even ask another student who you know has grasped the concept to explain it on the discussion forum.

- Create a discussion forum that allows students to have an input into the topics, styles and pieces studied at points throughout the year. This works especially well where class performances are used as part of a Musical Futures approach, as students can discuss the pieces they'd like to perform (with musical justifications to support their suggestions). Allowing students to have a voice in this way can help to increase their engagement.

### TIPS FOR DISCUSSION FORUMS

You'll need to browse the forum regularly, just to check that everything is ticking along nicely. In the classroom, the teacher's voice is an important part of the learning and it's the same online. Your contributions, questions and observations will be welcomed by students, and will help to keep the conversation flowing. It's usually possible for you to set up an email alert that lets you know when new submissions have been added, making it easier to keep track of them and to know when students have requested help.

If any behaviour issues do crop up, deal with them quickly and robustly. If swearing or bullying takes place in a school discussion forum, for instance, it should be treated in the same way as it would if it happened in a lesson. Many schools that use discussion forums find that any initial issues quickly subside if they're dealt with swiftly in the first instance.



### CLASSROOM IDEA

#### SURVEYS AND QUIZZES

These are a quick and easy feature to use in a VLE space. They allow students to demonstrate their knowledge in slightly different ways: both present a series of questions, but while the quiz gives immediate feedback, the survey simply allows students to vote on a topic or send a response for you to mark.

- At the end of a unit of work or as a homework task, ask students to complete a simple multiple-choice quiz that runs through some of the key musical terms which have been covered.
- Alongside a piece of audio that contains some unidentified cadences, add a quiz that lets students guess the cadence. This is an effective and engaging task, and quick for you to create when armed with an MP3 recorder and a piano (see pages 36–37).

- Before a revision session, use a survey to allow students to vote on the content that they'd most like to be covered.



### CLASSROOM IDEA

#### INTEGRATE YOUR SCHEMES OF WORK

For a VLE to make a significant impact on students' learning, it must be woven into what's happening in the classroom. Rather than being an add-on, it should be seen as an integral part of teaching and learning. The best way of doing this is to ensure that schemes of work and departmental plans give teachers clear opportunities to extend learning using online tools and the VLE.

A good place to start is by sitting down with one unit of work or project and deciding if there are any natural opportunities to integrate online tools in a meaningful way. As VLEs are typically accessed by students at home, homework is a natural place to start integrating the VLE into a scheme of work. Setting students specific homework that works in conjunction with digital media can be a valuable way of extending their learning. Ideas from across the book are well-suited to this, but as a reminder here are a few key homework ideas:

- Embed video footage of a class performance, and ask students to contribute in some way (for example by leaving a detailed comment in a discussion forum).
- Add a listening task, either by embedding a YouTube clip or linking to a Spotify track, and ask students to leave a comment that answers a specific homework question related to the track.
- At the end of a lesson or topic, assign each student a key term and ask them to add their own explanation of it to the VLE.
- Upload students' compositions as embedded audio files and ask students to leave comments outlining what they like about each one, along with some possible areas for development (using musical terminology and justifications).

The idea of flipping the classroom from page 16 (where learning content is presented online for students to cover before a lesson) is also an interesting way of using a VLE. It allows students to learn content in their own time and then apply this knowledge in lessons. The case study on pages 92–94 outlines how a music department has found this approach very successful.

## TIPS FOR VLE USE

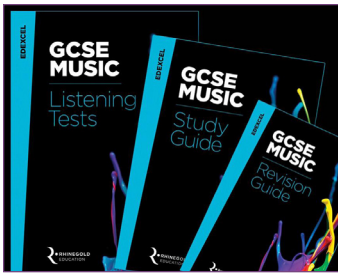
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It's worth reiterating: do make use of any help, support and training that's available to you at your school. If you need some training or you're not sure how to use a certain function, approach your school technicians – they will usually be able to point you in the right direction. The online resources that accompany this chapter on the book website will also help to get you started.

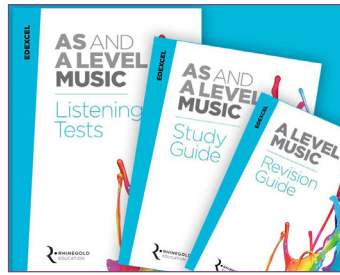
For departments that decide to use their VLE to help organise matters, it's important to switch exclusively to the online system from day one. Although it may seem like a good idea to maintain a paper system while making the transition, this often leads to people simply ignoring the online version and continuing as they've always done. A decisive and well-publicised switch to the VLE version is the best way to ensure that the change sticks and brings about a reduced workload for your department.

## Other relevant titles from Rhinegold Education and BlitzBooks

### Edexcel

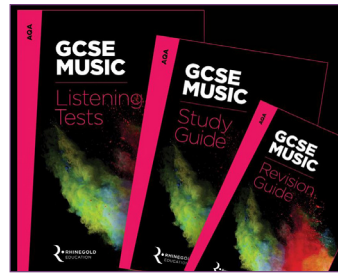


Edexcel GCSE Music  
Exam Pack  
**RHG925**

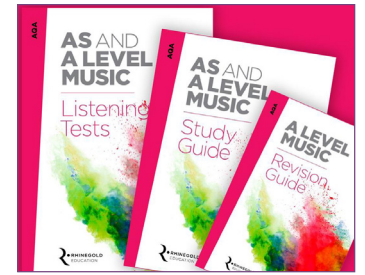


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### AQA

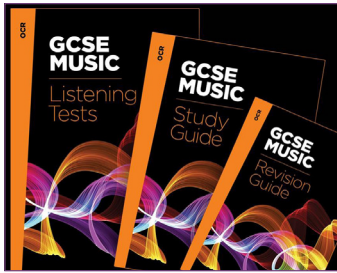


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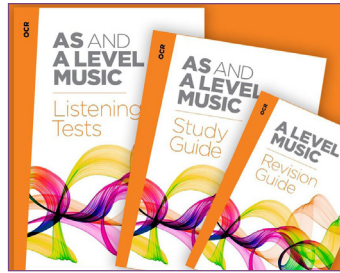


AQA A Level Music  
Exam Pack  
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### OCR

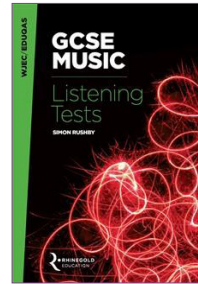


OCR GCSE  
Exam pack  
**RHG947**

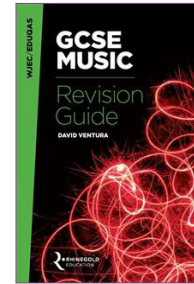


OCR A Level Music  
Exam Pack  
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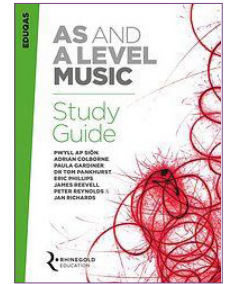
### Eduqas



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Listening Tests  
**RHG437**

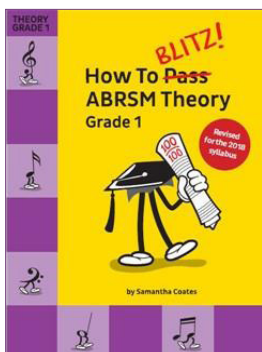


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GCSE Music  
Revision Guide  
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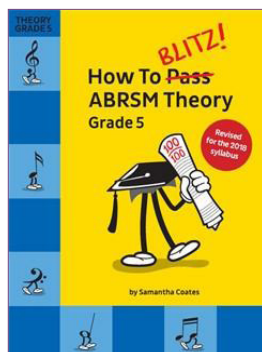


Eduqas AS And A  
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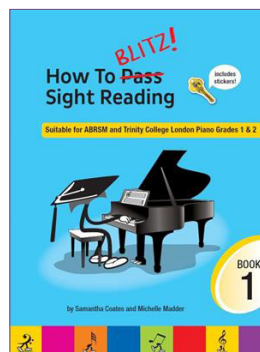
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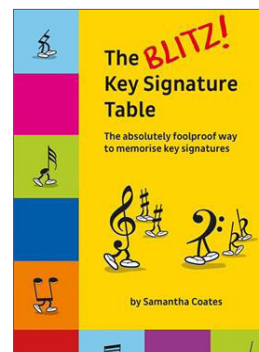
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