

# Chapter 28

## Creating Authentic Assessments for Online Music Courses: Mapping a Learning Task

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### ABSTRACT

*The need for identifying authentic assessments, or learning tasks, in online music courses is becoming integral as the rate of online music course offerings has been exponentially increasing. Supportive research also suggests that instructors teaching in higher education may require a paradigm shift in their pedagogical approach as they develop social-constructivist based authentic assessments for music subjects taught in an online environment. To assist with the understanding of both why and how to generate authentic assessment for a Bachelor's-level online music course, the chapter explores the nature of authentic assessment for music and Koh's Criteria for Authenticity in Authentic Assessment. Finally, to provide a practical exemplar of how online discussions can be used as an authentic learning tool in the online music class, an online discussion task for a songwriting class is identified and examined through the lens of Koh's characteristics.*

### INTRODUCTION

The need for identifying authentic assessments, or learning tasks, in online music courses is becoming essential as the rate of online music course offerings has exponentially increased since 2012 (Johnson, 2017b). Supportive research (Johnson, 2017a) also suggests that professors teaching in higher education may require a paradigm shift in their pedagogical approach in order to effectively integrate social-constructivist based authentic assessments for teaching music online. To assist with the understanding of both why and how to generate authentic assessment for a Bachelor's-level online music course contextualized

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for songwriting students, the literature provided here explores the nature of authentic assessment for music, and highlights Koh's (2017) *Criteria for Authenticity in Authentic Assessment*. Finally, to provide a practical exemplar of how online discussions can be used as an authentic learning tool in the online music course, an online discussion task for a songwriting class is identified and examined through the lens of Koh's (2017) characteristics.

## **BACKGROUND**

Understanding how students learn to read and perform music is fundamental to developing well-structured learning content and scaffolded learning activities. In the case of the online discussion explored here, students are completing activities that are scaffolded to teach them how to listen for musical features, identify them, and then explore how they relate to past styles of popular music. With the knowledge of how music learning occurs, instructors can become better equipped to develop objectives, course deliverables, and evaluations effective in meaningful music performance outcomes. The following sections on learning music at the post-secondary level explore the influences on how students learn music, the importance of addressing praxial music learning and constructivism when designing online music courses, and the bridging of classroom learning to practical skill.

### **Influences for Developing Music Understanding and Skill**

Music was recognized as a developmental skill in knowledge acquisition in early writings of ancient philosophers. For example, Macrobius' Commentary on the *Dream of Scipio* and Plato's *Timaeus* contains references to the important connection of music to the mind and body. Cognition was viewed to have strong links to music. More specifically, Plato's *Republic* references music training as a "more potent instrument than any other" (Plato, 1970, p. 401) as it can directly impact one's action. Further support for the important association of cognition and learning, Rose and Meyer (2002), posit that the recognition, affective, and strategic networks of the brain assist in our understanding of learning the "what," "why," and "how" of learning tasks and actions. The science of learning music and general learning pathways are no longer philosophical ideals.

Knowing how we learn music and how we create knowledge can provide a stronger understanding for designing online music courses. For example, research by Halpern and Zatorre (1999) suggests that right hemisphere function is integral for perception and image-based tasks (e.g., reading music for performance). Furthermore, scholarship on brain research has explored the human aspect of music processing to identify brain areas that can be activated by particular musical tasks (Peretz, 1990). From these points of research, we can understand that designs for music learning need to have context-appropriate visual images, active music listening, and musical tasks woven into the online music course area.

Through the psychological perspective, Maslow (1943) identified five different hierarchical levels of motivation. Maslow's motivation hierarchy supports online learning research in motivation - the hierarchical levels two through five; individual feelings of security, forming relationships, and experiencing feelings of accomplishment display clear connections. Various researchers (Lin, Young, Chan, & Chen, 2005; Dabbagh & Bannan-Ritland, 2005; Wilging & Johnson, 2004; Tyler-Smith, 2006) have contributed studies that connect online learning design with student motivation in online learning. Heeding Hebert's

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