

Pop Music Vocals: a guide to song alterations

Sometimes, you'll need to shorten a song to keep your performance within the time limits for your grade. That's totally fine but cuts need to be made carefully in order to make sure your piece still sounds musical. Here's how to do it:

1. Choose the right place to cut

Look for natural points in the music where a cut would make sense, such as:

- The end of a verse or chorus
- A repeated section you can skip
- A bridge or instrumental that can be removed without affecting the overall shape
- Avoid cutting mid-phrase or mid-word — it should feel like the song still flows naturally.

2. Make sure it still works musically

After you make a cut, listen back. Ask yourself:

- Does the song still have a clear beginning, middle, and end?
- Does it still build and finish in a satisfying way?
- Are any transitions smooth and not jarring?
- It's good to test this with your teacher or someone else who knows the piece.

3. Edit the backing track (if needed)

You've got two options:

- Edit the audio file in a music editing program (e.g. GarageBand, Audacity, BandLab) to reflect your cut.
- Pause or stop the track manually at the right moment if editing isn't possible. Just make sure it's rehearsed and clean! (This will usually only work when cutting the final section of a song).

4. Practise the new version

Once you've made the cut:

- Rehearse with the edited or cued up backing track or live accompaniment
- Get used to the new structure so it feels natural and confident
- Don't rush — musicality is more important than speed! Cutting a section out of a song is generally more advisable than increasing the tempo to make it shorter.

Final Checklist

1. Is your programme within the time limit?
2. Does the cut feel smooth and natural?
3. Is your backing track edited cleanly?
4. Does the music and lyrics presented to the examiner accurately reflect the performance, including any changes made?