

rockschool®

Acoustic Guitar
SYLLABUS GUIDE
2016

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Introduction

Welcome to the Rockschool Syllabus Guide for Acoustic Guitar.

This guide is designed to accompany the relevant grade book and give teachers and students clear information relating to the requirements of each graded music examination offered by Rockschool. The Rockschool website, www.rslawards.com contains further guidance relating to the practical aspects of the examinations together with audio examples to help students become familiar with the types of material used in the examinations.

We advise all entrants to read our Examination Regulations before entering for a Rockschool examination, www.rslawards.com/about-us/regulations

The value of RSL qualifications

RSL advocates an open access approach to qualifications, providing a range of syllabi, designed to accommodate a wide variety of candidates of different ages, experience and levels of achievement. RSL awards qualifications that are listed on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) in England and Northern Ireland by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual). RSL is committed to maintaining and improving its reputation for excellence by providing high quality education and training through its syllabi, examinations, music and resources.

RSL & UCAS

For students applying for work or University, many potential employers see graded music exams in a very positive way. Recognised qualifications demonstrate an ability to dedicate commitment to extra-curricular activities, providing evidence of versatility which many students find beneficial within UCAS (Universities & Colleges Admissions Service) applications and for university entrance interviews.

Our qualifications carry allocated points on the UCAS tariff. For full details relating to the allocation of points for our qualifications, please see:

www.rslawards.com/about-us/ucas-points

Period of operation

This Syllabus Guide covers Grade Examinations and Performance Certificates from February 2016.

Examination Structure

Rockschool offers two types of graded music examination; Grade Examinations and Performance Certificates. These qualifications are available at four levels, in line with Ofqual's Regulated Qualifications structure:

- **ENTRY LEVEL** (e.g. Entry 3 "Debut")
- **LEVEL 1** Grades 1, 2, 3
- **LEVEL 2** Grades 4, 5
- **LEVEL 3** Grades 6, 7, 8

Guidance for Grade Examinations

Grade Examinations are available from Debut to Grade 8 and consist of the following elements:

3 Performance Pieces (two of which may be Free Choice Pieces)	Candidates choose to play either Performance Pieces or Technical Exercises first	This accounts for 60% of the exam mark
Technical Exercises (Section A, B, C and D for Level 3 qualifications)		This accounts for 15% of the exam mark
Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation Debut–Grade 5	Candidates are given an unseen test to prepare and perform	These account for 10% of the exam marks
Quick Study Pieces Grade 6–8		
2 Ear Tests	Candidates respond to 2 aural tests. One is melodic and one is harmonic	These account for 10% of the exam marks
5 General Musicianship Questions	Candidates answer 5 questions based on one of the pieces performed	These account for 5% of the exam marks

Performance Pieces

The pieces from the grade book have been created to allow demonstration of suitable technical and performance elements appropriate for the level of qualification.

Group D requires candidates to prepare one stylistic study from the three genre group options as stipulated in the grade book. The stylistic study will be played in full and to the backing track provided, where relevant.

Technical Exercises

There are either three or four types of technical exercise, depending on the grade:

GROUP A – scales

GROUP B – arpeggios/broken chords

GROUP C – chord voicings

GROUP D – a choice of stylistic studies

Note: Group D only exists at Grades 6–8.

Groups A and B need to be played to a compulsory metronome click. The Examiner will ask for one demonstration from each group. The book can be used in the exam for Groups A and B up to and including Grade 3. From Grades 4–8, candidates must play from memory.

Group C does not require a metronome and can be played at a tempo of the candidate's choice. For Group C, candidates will be required to close their grade books or ensure the information on any electronic devices is out of view and play from memory. Note: the use of any notes or any reading from the grade book when performing Group C will impact on the marks awarded for this element.

Sight Reading

Candidates will be presented with a sight reading piece by the Examiner. Candidates have practice time allocated and the Examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For each playthrough, the backing track will begin with a count-in. During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a count-in at the beginning. The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately. Note: it is acceptable for candidates to also ask for additional playing(s) of the backing track during the practice time allocated.

Improvisation & Interpretation

Candidates will be presented with a piece from the Examiner. Candidates have practice time allocated and the Examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For each playthrough, the backing track will begin with a count-in. During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a count-in at the beginning. The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately. Note: it is acceptable for candidates to also ask for additional playing(s) of the backing track during the practice time allocated.

Quick Study Piece (QSP)

Candidates need to prepare and perform a short QSP to a backing track. The QSP is in the form of a lead sheet and includes both sight reading and improvisation requirements.

Ear Tests

Candidates need to complete two aural tests. Examples can be found in the grade book.

General Musicianship Questions

Candidates will be asked five questions, one from each of the following groups:

- One question relating to harmony
- One question relating to melody
- One question relating to rhythms
- One question relating to technical requirements
- One question relating to genre

Candidates can choose the piece on which basis the questions will be asked. It must be one of the pieces performed in the exam. The exact bars or phrases will be chosen by the Examiner.

Guidance for Performance Certificates

Performance Certificates are available from Debut to Grade 8 and consist of the following elements:

5 Performance Pieces only
(three of these can be Free Choice Pieces)

These account for 20% of the exam mark each.

Performance Pieces

The candidate plays five pieces in their preferred chosen order. There are no additional exercises in this examination.

Marking Schemes

The following table details the allocation of marks for each element of the examination across each band of attainment.

Grade Exams	Debut–Grade 8		
Element	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Performance Piece 1	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Performance Piece 2	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Performance Piece 3	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Technical Exercises	9–10 out of 15	11–12 out of 15	13+ out of 15
Ear Tests	6 out of 10	7–8 out of 10	9+ out of 10
Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation at Grades Debut–5 / Quick Study Piece at Grades 6–8	6 out of 10	7–8 out of 10	9+ out of 10
General Musicianship Questions	3 out of 5	4 out of 5	5 out of 5
Total Marks	60%+	74%+	90%+

Performance Certificates	Debut–Grade 8		
Element	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Performance Piece 1	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Performance Piece 2	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Performance Piece 3	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Performance Piece 4	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Performance Piece 5	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Total Marks	60%+	75%+	90%+

Examination Timings

The following tables detail the approximate timings for each examination:

Grade Exam	
DEBUT	15 minutes
GRADE 1	20 minutes
GRADE 2	20 minutes
GRADE 3	25 minutes
GRADE 4	25 minutes
GRADE 5	25 minutes
GRADE 6	30 minutes
GRADE 7	30 minutes
GRADE 8	30 minutes

Performance Certificate	
DEBUT	12 minutes
GRADE 1	15 minutes
GRADE 2	15 minutes
GRADE 3	18 minutes
GRADE 4	22 minutes
GRADE 5	22 minutes
GRADE 6	25 minutes
GRADE 7	25 minutes
GRADE 8	28 minutes

General Notes

At the beginning of a Grade Examination, the Examiner will ask the candidate if they wish to begin with Performance Pieces or Technical Exercises. In a Performance Certificate, candidate may present their Performance Pieces in any order of their choice.

Prior to the start of the Performance Pieces the Examiner will conduct a sound check by asking the candidate to play the first few bars of the first chosen piece. This will set the levels for the exam and will take place along to the backing track. Once the level has been established, the Examiner will then commence with the first piece in full. Note: the sound check is undertaken for the first Performance Piece only.

Candidates may perform any or all of their pieces from memory. This is not compulsory at any level and no additional marks are given for this.

With the exception of certain Technical Exercises where memory requirements apply, it is permitted to use grade books which contain notes made during the course of a candidate's study.

It is not permitted to make any notes at any time during the exam.

For General Musicianship Questions, the Examiner may use his or her version of the selected piece as the basis to ask the questions if such notes contained on the candidate's version are deemed sufficiently extensive or might assist the candidate when answering the questions.

The Examiner will not facilitate page turning for candidates. Candidates are allowed to photocopy relevant sheet music as necessary to alleviate page turns but all copied materials must be handed into the Examiner at the end of the examination.

All tempo markings are to be observed unless otherwise stated. Each piece is designed carefully to achieve a number of outcomes appropriate for the grade.

Musical Interpretation is assessed at all grades in both the Grade Exam and Performance Certificate. Rockscool encourages individual musicality, articulation, expression and use of dynamics when performing. This applies anywhere in the exam other than the technical exercises where articulation when specified must be observed. Candidates are reminded that all musical interpretation should be stylistically appropriate.

Selecting Free Choice Pieces (FCP's)

For all examinations, candidates are able to play a number of Free Choice Pieces.

Free Choice Pieces must demonstrate a comparable level of technical and musical demand to the pieces given in the set selections in the grade books which can be referred to as an indication of appropriate level.

Free choice pieces must be in a modern popular genre such as Pop; Rock; Jazz; Country; Blues; Soul; Reggae, Film and Musical Theatre. Own compositions are also acceptable. Pieces should be selected carefully to ensure that the pieces provide suitable opportunity for candidates to demonstrate the relevant assessment criteria. Candidates are reminded that if a chosen Free Choice Piece does not meet these requirements this may impact on the level of achievement possible within the examination.

All pieces must be performed to a backing track (without the examined part on the track) except in case where pieces have been selected from previous Rockschooll syllabi and do not have backing track or have been specifically arranged by Rockschooll as solo pieces.

Level	FCP Minimum Time	FCP Maximum Time
DEBUT	45 Seconds	3 minutes
GRADE 1	1 minute	3 minutes
GRADE 2	1 minute	3 minutes
GRADE 3	1.5 minutes	4 minutes
GRADE 4	2 minutes	4 minutes
GRADE 5	2 minutes	4 minutes
GRADE 6	2.5 minutes	5 minutes
GRADE 7	2.5 minutes	5 minutes
GRADE 8	3 minutes	5 minutes

Candidates are reminded that RSL examination regulations state that pieces must be performed to the exact requirements as detailed in the relevant syllabus guide. If a performance piece over runs, the examiner can halt the performance and grade material demonstrated until that point only. Candidate mark sheets in this instance will automatically be referred to the Head of Assessment at RSL and may be returned to the candidate with accompanying notes.

Free Choice Piece's must be available in fully notated sheet music. Candidates need to bring a copy of the sheet music for the examiner to refer to during the examination. It is acceptable for candidates to refer to their own duplicate copy during the performance. Candidates are reminded that both copies need to fully reflect the interpretation and intended performance of the piece. Examiners will retain all photocopied materials from the exam session.

If there is any doubt about the appropriateness of the chosen piece, please contact freechoicepieces@rslawards.com.

Instrument Specification

Candidates are reminded that it is their responsibility to select and provide an appropriate musical instrument for each syllabus to allow demonstration of the relevant stylistic and technical skills within their performance.

At all levels of examination, if any outcomes or assessed criteria cannot be demonstrated or are demonstrated less securely as a result of the equipment, this may be reflected in the marks awarded.

Debut

There are two types of exam available at Debut, either a Grade Exam or Performance Certificate. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Performance Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for both the Grade Exam and Performance Certificate. At Debut they are short, typically up to one minute in duration. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can demonstrate the required assessment criteria.

NOTE: For the Performance Certificate, the candidate plays five pieces in their preferred chosen order. There is no unprepared content.

Technical Work

At Debut there are three groups of prepared technical exercises: a) Scales, b) Arpeggios and c) Chord Voicings. These are explained in detail in the relevant grade book.

Melodic Recall

The Examiner will play two consecutive notes. Candidates will need to identify whether the last note is higher or lower than the first.

Chord Recognition

The Examiner will play a sequence of chords, each with a C root note. Candidates will need to identify which chord played was major and which chord was minor.

Supporting Tests

At Debut candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

SIGHT READING: The Examiner will provide a 4–6 bar melody in the key of C major. Candidates will be given 90 seconds to practise.

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION: The Examiner will provide a 4–6 bar chord progression in the key of C major. Candidates will be given 90 seconds to practise.

EAR TESTS: At Debut there are two ear tests. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

General Musicianship Questions

Candidates will be asked five questions related to one of their performance pieces. Please see the grade book for full details.

Please see [Appendix](#) for full explanation of assessment criteria at each level.

Grade 1

There are two types of exam available at Grade 1, either a Grade Exam or Performance Certificate. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Performance Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for both the Grade Exam and Performance Certificate. At Grade 1 they are short, typically one to one and a half minutes in duration. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can demonstrate the required assessment criteria.

NOTE: For the Performance Certificate, the candidate plays five pieces in their preferred chosen order. There is no unprepared content.

Technical Work

At Grade 1 there are three groups of prepared technical exercises: a) Scales, b) Broken Chords and c) Chord Voicings. These are explained in detail in the relevant grade book.

Melodic Recall

The Examiner will play three consecutive notes. Candidates will need to identify whether the last two notes are higher or lower in sequence.

Chord Recognition

The Examiner will play a sequence of chords, each with a C root note. Candidates will need to identify the chord quality of each chord.

Supporting Tests

At Grade 1 candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and examples of each are given in the grade book.

SIGHT READING: The Examiner will provide a 4–6 bar melody in the key of F major or G major. Candidates will be given 90 seconds to practise.

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION: The Examiner will provide a 4–6 bar chord progression in the key of F major or G major. Candidates will be given 90 seconds to practise.

EAR TESTS: At Grade 1 there are two ear tests. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

General Musicianship Questions

Candidates will be asked five questions related to one of their performance pieces. Please see the grade book for full details.

Please see [Appendix](#) for full explanation of assessment criteria at each level.

Grade 2

There are two types of exam available at Grade 2, either a Grade Exam or Performance Certificate. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Performance Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for both the Grade Exam and Performance Certificate. At Grade 2 they are becoming longer, typically one to two minutes in duration. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can demonstrate the required assessment criteria.

Technical Work

At Grade 2 there are three groups of technical work: a) Scales, b) Arpeggios and c) Chord Voicings. These are explained in detail in the relevant grade book.

Melodic Recall

The Examiner will play a 2 bar diatonic melody in the key of C major with a range up to a fourth. The first note will be the root note. Candidates will need to play the melody to the click.

Chord Recognition

The Examiner will play a sequence of chords, each with a C root note. Candidates will need to identify the chord quality of each chord.

Supporting Tests

At Grade 2 candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and examples of each are given in the grade book.

SIGHT READING: The Examiner will provide a 4–6 bar melody in the key of B_♭ major or D major. Candidates will be given 90 seconds to practise.

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION: The Examiner will provide a 4–5 bar chord progression in the key of B_♭ major or D major. Candidates will be given 90 seconds to practise.

EAR TESTS: At Grade 2 there are two ear tests. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

General Musicianship Questions

Candidates will be asked five questions related to one of their performance pieces. Please see the grade book for full details.

[Please see Appendix for full explanation of assessment criteria at each level.](#)

Grade 3

There are two types of exam available at Grade 3, either a Grade Exam or Performance Certificate. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Performance Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for both the Grade Exam and Performance Certificate. At Grade 3 they are becoming longer, typically in the region of two minutes in duration. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can demonstrate the required assessment criteria.

NOTE: For the Performance Certificate, the candidate plays five pieces in their preferred chosen order. There is no unprepared content.

Technical Work

At Grade 3 there are three groups of technical work: a) Scales, b) Arpeggios and c) Chord Voicings. These are explained in detail in the relevant grade book.

Melodic Recall

The Examiner will play a 2 bar diatonic melody in the key of C major with a range up to a fifth. The first note will be the root note. Candidates will need to play the melody to the click.

Chord Recognition

The Examiner will play a sequence of chords, each with a C root note. Candidates will need to identify the chord quality of two of the chords.

Supporting Tests

At Grade 3 candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and examples of each are given in the grade book.

SIGHT READING: The Examiner will provide a 4–8 bar melody in the key of E_b major or A major. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to practise.

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION: The Examiner will provide 4–8 bar chord progression in the key of E_b major or A major. Candidates will be given 90 seconds to practise.

EAR TESTS: At Grade 3 there are two ear tests. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

General Musicianship Questions

Candidates will be asked five questions related to one of their performance pieces. Please see the grade book for full details.

[Please see Appendix for full explanation of assessment criteria at each level.](#)

Grade 4

There are two types of exam available at Grade 4, either a Grade Exam or Performance Certificate. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Performance Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for both the Grade Exam and Performance Certificate. At Grade 4 they are typically in the region of two to two and a half minutes in duration. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can demonstrate the required assessment criteria.

NOTE: For the Performance Certificate, the candidate plays five pieces in their preferred chosen order. There is no unprepared content.

Technical Work

At Grade 4 there are three groups of technical work: a) Scales, b) Arpeggios and c) Chord Voicings. These are explained in detail in the relevant grade book.

Melodic Recall

The Examiner will play a 2 bar diatonic melody in the key of C major with a range up to a sixth. The first note will be the root note. Candidates will need to play the melody to the click.

Harmonic Recall

The Examiner will play a chord progression containing chords I, IV and V in any order or combination in the key of C major. Candidates will need to play back to a click.

Supporting Tests

At Grade 4 candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and examples of each are given in the grade book.

SIGHT READING: The Examiner will provide an 8–16 bar melody in the key of E major or A_♭ major. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to practise.

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION: The Examiner will provide an 8–16 bar chord progression in the key of E major or A_♭ major. Candidates will be given 90 seconds to practise.

EAR TESTS: At Grade 4 there are two ear tests. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

General Musicianship Questions

Candidates will be asked five questions related to one of their performance pieces. Please see the grade book for full details.

[Please see Appendix for full explanation of assessment criteria at each level.](#)

Grade 5

There are two types of exam available at Grade 5, either a Grade Exam or Performance Certificate. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Performance Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for both the Grade Exam and Performance Certificate. At Grade 5 they remain typically in the region of two to two and a half minutes in duration. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can demonstrate the required assessment criteria.

NOTE: For the Performance Certificate, the candidate plays five pieces in their preferred chosen order. There is no unprepared content.

Technical Work

At Grade 5 there are three groups of technical exercises: a) Scales, b) Arpeggios and c) Chord Voicings. These are explained in detail in the relevant grade book.

Melodic Recall

The Examiner will play a 2 bar diatonic melody in the key of C major with a range up to an octave. The first note will be the root note or a fifth. Candidates will need to play the melody to the click.

Harmonic Recall

The Examiner will play a chord progression containing chords I, II, IV, V and VI in any order or combination in the key of C major. Candidates will need to play back to a click.

Supporting Tests

At Grade 5 candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and examples of each are given in the grade book.

SIGHT READING: The Examiner will provide an 8–16 bar melody in the key of D_b major or B major. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to practise.

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION: The Examiner will provide an 8–16 bar chord progression in the key of D_b major or B major. Candidates will be given 90 seconds to practise.

EAR TESTS: At Grade 5 there are two ear tests. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

General Musicianship Questions

Candidates will be asked five questions related to one of their performance pieces. Please see the grade book for full details.

[Please see Appendix for full explanation of assessment criteria at each level.](#)

Grade 6

There are two types of exam available at Grade 6, either a Grade Exam or Performance Certificate. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Performance Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for both the Grade Exam and Performance Certificate. At Grade 6 they are longer, typically in the region of two and a half to three minutes in duration. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can demonstrate the required assessment criteria.

NOTE: For the Performance Certificate, the candidate plays five pieces in their preferred chosen order. There is no unprepared content.

Technical Work

At Grade 6 there are four groups of technical work: a) Scales, b) Arpeggios, c) Chord Voicings and d) Stylistic Studies. These are explained in detail in the relevant grade book.

Ear Tests

At Grade 6 there are two ear tests. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

Melodic Recall

The Examiner will play a 2 bar diatonic melody in the key of C major with a range up to an octave. The first note will be the root note or a fifth. Candidates will need to play the melody to the click.

Harmonic Recall

The Examiner will play a chord progression containing chords I, II, III, IV, V and VI in any order or combination in the key of C major. Candidates will need to play back to a click.

Quick Study Piece

At Grade 6 candidates will need to prepare and perform a short Quick Study Piece (QSP) to a backing track. The QSP is in the form of a lead sheet and includes both sight-reading and improvisation requirements. Candidates are able to choose from three genre group options and will be given 3 minutes to prepare. Please see the grade book for full details.

General Musicianship Questions

Candidates will be asked five questions related to one of their performance pieces. Please see the grade book for full details.

Please see [Appendix](#) for full explanation of assessment criteria at each level.

Grade 7

There are two types of exam available at Grade 7, either a Grade Exam or Performance Certificate. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Performance Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for both the Grade Exam and Performance Certificate. At Grade 7 they are longer, typically up to three minutes in duration. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can demonstrate the required assessment criteria.

NOTE: For the Performance Certificate, the candidate plays five pieces in their preferred chosen order. There is no unprepared content.

Technical Work

At Grade 7 there are four groups of technical work: a) Scales, b) Arpeggios, c) Chord Voicings, d) Stylistic Studies. These are explained in detail in the relevant grade book.

Ear Tests

At Grade 7 there are two ear tests. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

Melodic Recall

The Examiner will play a 2 bar diatonic melody in the key of C major or C minor with a range up to an octave. The first note will be the root note or a fifth. Candidates will need to play the melody to the click.

Harmonic Recall

The Examiner will play a chord progression containing any combination of chords from the C major scale including 7th chords. Candidates will need to play back to a click.

Quick Study Piece

At Grade 7 candidates will need to prepare and perform a short Quick Study Piece (QSP) to a backing track. The QSP is in the form of a lead sheet and includes both sight-reading and improvisation requirements. Candidates are able to choose from three genre group options and will be given 3 minutes to prepare. Please see the grade book for full details.

General Musicianship Questions

Candidates will be asked five questions related to one of their performance pieces. Please see the grade book for full details.

[Please see Appendix for full explanation of assessment criteria at each level.](#)

Grade 8

There are two types of exam available at Grade 8, either a Grade Exam or Performance Certificate. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Performance Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for both the Grade Exam and Performance Certificate. At Grade 8 they are longer, typically in the region of three to three and a half minutes in duration. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can demonstrate the required assessment criteria.

NOTE: For the Performance Certificate, the candidate plays five pieces in their preferred chosen order. There is no unprepared content.

Technical Work

At Grade 8 there are four groups of technical work: a) Scales, b) Arpeggios, c) Chord Voicings, d) Stylistic Studies. These are explained in detail in the relevant grade book.

Ear Tests

At Grade 8 there are two ear tests. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

Melodic Recall

The Examiner will play a 2 bar diatonic melody in the key of C major, C natural minor or C harmonic minor with a range up to an octave. The first note will be the root note, 3rd or 5th. Candidates will need to play the melody to the click.

Harmonic Recall

The Examiner will play a chord progression containing any combination of chords from the C major or C minor scale including 7th chords. Candidates will need to play back to a click.

Quick Study Piece

At Grade 8 candidates will need to prepare and perform a short Quick Study Piece (QSP) to a backing track. The QSP is in the form of a lead sheet and includes both sight-reading and improvisation requirements. Candidates are able to choose from three genre group options and will be given three minutes to prepare. Please see the grade book for full details.

General Musicianship Questions

Candidates will be asked five questions related to one of their performance pieces. Please see the grade book for full details.

[Please see Appendix for full explanation of assessment criteria at each level.](#)

Graded Assessment Criteria

Debut–Grade 3

Debut–Grade 3 Performance Pieces				
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0–11	12–14	15–17	18–20
Grade Descriptor	<p>Insecure basic techniques</p> <p>Inconsistent awareness of rhythm</p> <p>Inability to maintain pitch and/or pulse accurately</p>	<p>Generally secure basic techniques</p> <p>Awareness of rhythm some of the time</p> <p>Basic ability to play with accuracy, pitch and pulse some of the time</p>	<p>Mostly secure basic techniques</p> <p>Awareness of rhythm most of the time</p> <p>Basic ability to play with accuracy, pitch and pulse most of the time</p>	<p>Consistently secure basic techniques</p> <p>Awareness of rhythm throughout</p> <p>Basic ability to play with accuracy, pitch and pulse consistently</p>

Debut–Grade 3 Technical Exercises (Group a) Scales; b) Arpeggios; c) Chord Voicings)				
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0–8	9–10	11–12	13–15
Grade Descriptor	<p>Inability to maintain pitch, pulse or rhythm accurately</p> <p>Inability to recall musical and rhythmic phrases accurately</p>	<p>Basic ability to play with accuracy, pitch, rhythm and pulse some of the time</p> <p>Ability to recall musical and rhythmic phrases some of the time</p>	<p>Basic ability to play with accuracy, pitch, rhythm and pulse most of the time</p> <p>Ability to recall musical and rhythmic phrases most of the time</p>	<p>Basic ability to play with accuracy, pitch, rhythm and pulse consistently</p> <p>Ability to recall musical and rhythmic phrases consistently</p>

Debut–Grade 3 Ear Tests: Melodic Recall & Chord Recognition				
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0	5–6	7–8	9–10
Grade Descriptor	Incorrect responses	Generally correct responses	Mostly correct responses	Consistently correct responses

Debut–Grade 3 Supporting Tests (Sight Reading OR Improvisation/ Interpretation)				
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0–5	6	7–8	9–10
Grade Descriptor	Insecure ability to read basic notation OR Inability to improvise rhythm, harmony and melody	Generally secure ability to read basic rhythmic, harmonic and melodic notation OR Generally secure ability to improvise basic rhythm, harmony and melody	Mostly secure ability to read basic rhythmic, harmonic and melodic notation OR Mostly secure ability to improvise basic rhythm, harmony and melody	Consistently secure ability to read basic rhythmic, harmonic and melodic notation OR Consistently secure ability to improvise basic rhythm, harmony and melody

Debut–Grade 3 Supporting Tests (GMQ)				
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0–2 correct responses	3 correct responses	4 correct responses	5 correct responses

Grades 4 & 5

Grades 4 & 5 Performance Pieces				
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0–11	12–14	15–17	18–20
Grade Descriptor	Insecure physical technique Insecure expressive techniques Inconsistent use of rhythm Inability to maintain pitch and/or pulse accurately Inconsistent sync Inability to demonstrate stylistic awareness	Generally secure physical techniques Generally secure expressive techniques Secure use of rhythm some of the time Strong sense of pitch and pulse some of the time A sense of sync and security some of the time Strong stylistic awareness some of the time	Mostly secure physical techniques Mostly secure expressive techniques Secure use of rhythm most of the time Strong sense of pitch and pulse most of the time A sense of sync and security most of the time Strong stylistic awareness most of the time	Consistently secure physical techniques Consistently secure expressive techniques Secure use of rhythm throughout Strong sense of pitch and pulse throughout A sense of sync and security throughout Strong stylistic awareness throughout

Grades 4 & 5 Technical Exercises (Group a) Scales; b) Arpeggios; c) Chord Voicings				
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0–8	9–10	11–12	13–15
Grade Descriptor	<p>Inability to maintain pitch, pulse or rhythm accurately</p> <p>Inability to recall musical and rhythmic phrases accurately</p> <p>Inability to play stipulated chord voicings from memory</p>	<p>Ability to play with accuracy, pitch, rhythm and pulse some of the time</p> <p>Ability to recall musical and rhythmic phrases some of the time</p> <p>Ability to play stipulated chord voicings from memory some of the time</p>	<p>Ability to play with accuracy, pitch, rhythm and pulse most of the time</p> <p>Ability to recall musical and rhythmic phrases most of the time</p> <p>Ability to play stipulated chord voicings from memory most of the time</p>	<p>Ability to play with accuracy, pitch, rhythm and pulse consistently</p> <p>Ability to recall musical and rhythmic phrases consistently</p> <p>Ability to play stipulated chord voicings from memory consistently</p>

Grades 4 & 5 Ear Tests: Melodic Recall & Chord Recognition				
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0	5–6	7–8	9–10
Grade Descriptor	Incorrect responses	Generally correct responses	Mostly correct responses	Consistently correct responses

Grades 4 & 5 Supporting Tests (Sight Reading OR Improvisation/ Interpretation)				
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0–5	6	7–8	9–10
Grade Descriptor	<p>Insecure ability to read basic notation</p> <p>OR Inability to improvise rhythm, harmony and melody</p>	<p>Generally secure ability to read basic rhythmic, harmonic and melodic notation</p> <p>OR Generally secure ability to improvise basic rhythm, harmony and melody</p>	<p>Mostly secure ability to read basic rhythmic, harmonic and melodic notation</p> <p>OR Mostly secure ability to improvise basic rhythm, harmony and melody</p>	<p>Consistently secure ability to read basic rhythmic, harmonic and melodic notation</p> <p>OR Consistently secure ability to improvise basic rhythm, harmony and melody</p>

Grades 4 & 5 Supporting Tests (GMQ)				
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0–2 correct responses	3 correct responses	4 correct responses	5 correct responses

Grades 6–8

Grades 6–8 Performance Pieces				
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0–11	12–14	15–17	18–20
Grade Descriptor	Insecure physical techniques	Generally secure advanced physical techniques	Mostly secure advanced physical techniques	Consistently secure advanced physical techniques
	Insecure expressive techniques	Generally secure use of advanced expressive techniques	Mostly secure use of advanced expressive techniques	Secure use of advanced expressive techniques throughout
	Insecure use of rhythm	Confident use of rhythm some of the time	Confident use of rhythm most of the time	Confident use of rhythm throughout
	Inconsistent use of sync	Assured use of sync and security some of the time	Assured use of sync and security most of the time	Assured use of sync and security throughout

Grades 6–8 Technical Exercises (Group a) Scales; b) Arpeggios; c) Chord Voicings				
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0–1	2	3–4	5–6
Grade Descriptor	pitch, pulse or rhythm accurately	Ability to play with accuracy, pitch, rhythm and pulse some of the time	Ability to play with accuracy, pitch, rhythm and pulse most of the time	Ability to play with accuracy, pitch, rhythm and pulse consistently
	Inability to recall musical and rhythmic phrases accurately	Ability to recall musical and rhythmic phrases some of the time	Ability to recall musical and rhythmic phrases most of the time	Ability to recall musical and rhythmic phrases consistently
	Inability to play stipulated chord voicings from memory	Ability to play stipulated chord voicings from memory some of the time	Ability to play stipulated chord voicings from memory most of the time	Ability to play stipulated chord voicings from memory consistently

Grades 6–8 Technical Exercises: Group D: Stylistic Study				
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0–4	5–6	7–8	9
Grade Descriptor	Insecure stylistic awareness	Generally secure advanced stylistic awareness	Mostly secure advanced stylistic awareness	Consistently secure advanced stylistic awareness

Grades 6–8		Ear Tests: Melodic Recall and Chord Recognition		
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0	5–6	7–8	9–10
Grade Descriptor	Incorrect responses	Generally correct responses	Mostly correct responses	Consistently correct responses

Grades 6–8		Supporting Tests (QSP)		
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0–5	6	7–8	9–10
Grade Descriptor	Insecure ability to read notation	Generally secure ability to read advanced rhythmic, harmonic and melodic notation	Mostly secure ability to read advanced rhythmic, harmonic and melodic notation	Consistently secure ability to read advanced rhythmic, harmonic and melodic notation
	Inability to improvise rhythm, harmony and melody	Generally secure ability to improvise advanced rhythm, harmony and melody	Mostly secure ability to improvise advanced rhythm, harmony and melody	Consistently secure ability to improvise advanced rhythm, harmony and melody

Grades 6–8		Supporting Tests (GMQ)		
Attainment Band	Assessment Criteria Not Met	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Mark Range	0–2 correct responses	3 correct responses	4 correct responses	5 correct responses