

VOCALS – Level 4

Overview

Candidates are free to choose their vocal repertoire from any popular genre*. RSL recognises that some contemporary styles would not necessarily stretch candidates' techniques to the required Level 4. Therefore, in addition to pre-existing works/styles which meet the criteria in original form, candidates are encouraged to arrange, compose, transcribe or embellish pre-existing material to bring up to a level equating to Level 4, in accordance with the criteria set out below.

* Popular genres would in general terms exclude any works that were *predominantly classical in approach*. There are of course some popular works which draw on classical influence, e.g. musical theatre. These would still be regarded as fit for purpose in the popular genre, and therefore suitable for presentation in the RSL diplomas.

All repertoire presented needs to be fully notated.

Candidates are also advised to research Grade 8 pieces/free choice piece criteria on which to graduate to Level 4 content. Presentation of Grade 8 material at Level 4 is acceptable but would not be sufficient in content unless enhanced.

For additional context, it is worth noting Level 4 equates in standard to the first year of a Music Performance Degree course.

Repertoire Components

There are three components to the performance criteria at Level 4. They are all compulsory.

Advanced Technical Criteria

Candidates are required to perform for **11-15 minutes** in order to demonstrate the advanced technical skills and requirements below. Any number of pieces can be performed so long they remain within this time range. The skills do not need to be demonstrated in each piece, so long as they are demonstrated overall.

Advanced Development Criteria

Candidates are required to perform two additional pieces, each **3-5 minutes long**, to include extended line development for a *minimum of 24 bars* within each piece.

Advanced Solo Criteria

Candidates are required to perform one further piece, **3-5 minutes long**, to include a solo for a *minimum of 24 bars*.

Criteria Requirements

The following requirements are compulsory when compiling a Level 4 Vocals programme:

- 1) Demonstration of a range up to two octaves.
- 2) Clear variation in key throughout the whole programme. (Some songs can remain in the same key).
- 3) A minimum of two different key changes during pieces i.e. within the same piece.
- 4) A minimum of three different time signatures across the programme including both simple and compound.
- 5) Numerous varied, mixed and an obviously diverse range of subdivisions incorporating regular syncopation and complex rhythmic values up to sixteenths and triplet sixteenths and associated rests.
- 6) Advanced melodic and stylistic use of extreme ranges in upper and lower registers.
- 7) Mastery of full extent of the voice, including accurate pitching, smooth bridging between upper and lower vocal ranges, well-balanced blending of tone qualities, consistent and stylistically appropriate tone across the registers.
- 8) Use of the microphone throughout the performance.

Within this compulsory framework, candidates must demonstrate and include *where stylistically appropriate* a predominance of the following elements:

- Belting/Edge, Twang, Distortion/Overdrive
- Consistency in breath and tone support of all phrasing
- Lowering larynx, soft palate and raising the tongue, flattening the tongue.
- Varying tone qualities e.g. breathy, deep resonance, mellow, piercing, high shrill notes.
- Extent/variations of tone/effect to accommodate stylistic demands.
- Accumulated/extended use of elementary techniques, (e.g. Vibrato, use of sustained notes and short/snappy values (legato / staccato).
- Awareness/demonstration of different timbre
- Ornaments including trills, runs, grace notes.
- Glissandos (slides), bending notes, use of melisma.
- ‘Scoop-ins’ and ‘fall-offs’
- Aspirate vowels
- Articulation of consonants: attack and decay, glottal stop

- Large intervallic leaps, both ascending and descending up to a 9th plus chromatic steps.
- Use of sequences, riffs, ostinato, melodic patterns
- Phrasing, use of accents and dynamic colour to demonstrate clear phrasing shape.
- Wide dynamic range: ppp-fff, including numerous changes over the programme.
- Use of Rubato/Colla Voce

- Accuracy and innate details on diction and lyrical content.
- Clear connection with the story of the song
- Conveyance and communication of mood
- Portrayal of emotion, word painting and body language.
- Advanced and consistent microphone use, demonstrating dynamic range, projection and colouring

It would be acceptable to focus on a small number of criteria or a single technique in a single piece, but obvious demonstration of a wide combination of the criteria shown is required over the course of the whole programme.

Additional techniques/devices not listed would also be acceptable, but need to be in addition to the above.

Backing Track and Performing Unaccompanied

Technical

Candidates must perform the technical pieces to a backing track. Own accompaniment/unaccompanied or a cappella pieces would be acceptable instead of the backing track, up to five minutes maximum.

Development

Candidates must perform both development pieces, including the development part itself within the pieces, to a backing track.

Solo

Candidates must perform the solo piece to a backing track. The solo part itself must be performed a cappella.

Development and Soloing

- The remainder of the piece does not need to be Level 4. This maximises the repertoire choice/theme possibilities, and offers the opportunity for contrast/space on which to develop, shape and intensify the personalised content. All such content can be prepared in advance, but needs to be individually constructed.
- The development and solo parts would need to be in keeping with the style of the pieces chosen and will require heightened rhythmic awareness, absolute accuracy and a very high degree of appropriate/stylistic communication of any simpler material.
- Candidates are free to choose where to place the development and solo parts. However, in all cases, it needs to be a continuous number of bars, not a number of smaller bars, which in total add up to the stipulated total number.
- For the development section, candidates need to re-work the top line melody as an interpretation. This must be performed to backing track.
- The solo part can be presented in any way and format the candidate chooses, but must be performed a cappella (i.e. with no instrumental accompaniment). It also needs to include a predominance of three part harmony vocals. In this regard:
 - It is acceptable for candidates to record themselves in order to produce the three part harmony arrangement.
 - The use of a recorded click is acceptable for time reference.
 - Use of live or pre-recorded loop pedals would be acceptable.

Tempo

There are no tempo requirements stipulated. Decisions related to speed need to ensure stylistic and musical appropriateness in achieving the criteria above at Level 4.