

# Rockschool | Electric Guitar Syllabus | Free Choice Piece Guidance

***For general information about Free Choice Pieces please see:***

***<https://www.rslawards.com/free-choice-pieces/>***

The following guidelines outline features that would normally be found within a free choice selection for electric guitar to meet the grade level.

These features are indicative and would not all necessarily occur to the same degree within any particular song. Standards can be measured by making a balanced judgement regarding various musical elements based on these guidelines. If in any doubt, please consult the pieces in the grade book for a guide.

It is not a prerequisite for free choice pieces to be approved by RSL Head Office, as the examiner will make a judgement about the suitability of the piece in the exam. However, if you are unsure about the eligibility of your piece(s) you can seek approval which incurs a fee of £10 per piece. Please email [info@rslawards.com](mailto:info@rslawards.com) with details of the proposed piece(s) (including a copy of the sheet music) and the grade / instrument you intend to enter for. A full reply will be given no later than 4 weeks after payment of the approval fee, which will be facilitated via an online link that we will e-mail to you.

## FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Debut

<b>Duration</b>	45 secs – 3 mins
<b>Expressive techniques</b>	The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate basic control of legato/staccato
<b>Rhythm skills</b>	Whole, half, quarter, eighth notes; whole, half and quarter note rests
<b>Physical techniques</b>	The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• movement between chords and single notes</li><li>• use of pick or first two fingers of the picking hand</li><li>• basic damping techniques</li></ul>
<b>Instrument compass</b>	Pieces should contain a prevalence of open and first positions with some movement up to the third fret

## FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 1

<b>Duration</b>	1 – 3 mins
<b>Expressive techniques</b>	The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate basic control of legato/staccato
<b>Rhythm skills</b>	The piece should include a mixture of whole, half, quarter and eighth notes, dotted quarter notes and associated rests
<b>Physical techniques</b>	The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• movement between chords and single notes</li><li>• use of pick or first two fingers of the picking hand</li><li>• basic damping techniques</li></ul>
<b>Instrument compass</b>	Pieces should contain a prevalence of open and first positions with some movement up to the third fret

## FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 2

<b>Duration</b>	1 – 3 mins
<b>Expressive techniques</b>	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• basic control of legato/staccato</li><li>• a range of dynamics: p, mf, f</li></ul> <p>Other techniques may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• hammer-ons</li><li>• pull-offs</li></ul>
<b>Rhythm skills</b>	<p>The piece should include a mixture of whole, half, quarter, and eighth notes, as well as dotted quarter notes and associated rests</p>
<b>Physical techniques</b>	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• use of pick or first two fingers of picking hand</li><li>• basic damping techniques</li><li>• ability to move between chords and single notes</li><li>• use of double stops</li></ul>
<b>Instrument compass</b>	<p>Pieces should contain a prevalence of open and first positions with some movement up to the third fret</p>

## FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 3

<b>Duration</b>	1 min 30 secs – 4 mins
<b>Expressive techniques</b>	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• control of legato/staccato</li> <li>• a range of dynamics (p, mf, f)</li> </ul> <p>Other techniques might include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hammer-ons</li> <li>• pull-offs</li> <li>• use of controlled bends</li> </ul>
<b>Rhythm skills</b>	<p>The piece should include a mixture of whole, half, quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes, as well as dotted eighth notes and associated rests</p> <p>Some use of syncopation</p>
<b>Physical techniques</b>	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use of pick or first two fingers of picking hand</li> <li>• picking hand damping techniques</li> <li>• ability to move between chords and single notes</li> </ul> <p>Other techniques may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• alternative picking</li> <li>• use of double stops on adjacent strings</li> <li>• barre chords</li> </ul>
<b>Instrument compass</b>	Emphasis on open and first positions, with some movement up to 5th position
<b>Solo section</b>	<p>The piece should include solo passages of at least 8 bars</p> <p>Use of blues and pentatonic scales</p>

## FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 4

<b>Duration</b>	2 – 4 mins
<b>Expressive techniques</b>	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• control of legato/staccato</li><li>• a range of dynamics (p, mf, f)</li></ul> <p>Other techniques might include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• slides</li><li>• accented notes</li><li>• trills</li><li>• hammer-ons</li><li>• pull-offs</li><li>• use of controlled bends</li></ul>
<b>Rhythm skills</b>	<p>The piece should include a mixture of whole, half, quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes, as well as dotted half, quarter and eighth notes and associated rests</p> <p>Some use of syncopation</p>
<b>Physical techniques</b>	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• use of pick and fingers of the picking hand</li><li>• ability to move between chords and single notes</li><li>• picking hand damping techniques</li><li>• fretting hand damping techniques</li><li>• alternative picking</li><li>• use of double stops on adjacent strings</li><li>• barre chords</li></ul>
<b>Instrument compass</b>	First to fifth positions
<b>Solo section</b>	<p>The piece should include solo passages of at least 12 bars</p> <p>Use of blues and pentatonic scales</p>

## FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 5

<b>Duration</b>	2 – 4 mins
<b>Expressive techniques</b>	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• control of legato, including fretting hand legato, and staccato</li> <li>• a range of dynamics (p, mf, f)</li> </ul> <p>Other techniques might include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• slides</li> <li>• accented notes</li> <li>• trills</li> <li>• hammer-ons</li> <li>• pull-offs</li> <li>• use of controlled bends</li> </ul>
<b>Rhythm skills</b>	<p>The piece should include a mixture of whole, half, quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes, as well as dotted half, quarter and eighth notes, quarter note triplets and associated rests, with some passages using sustained eighth and sixteenth note combinations</p> <p>Tied whole notes, Syncopated eighth and sixteenth notes</p>
<b>Physical techniques</b>	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use of pick and fingers of the picking hand</li> <li>• ability to move between chords and single notes</li> <li>• picking hand damping techniques</li> <li>• fretting hand damping techniques</li> <li>• alternative picking</li> <li>• use of double stops on adjacent strings</li> <li>• barre chords</li> </ul>
<b>Instrument compass</b>	Up to 10th position
<b>Solo section</b>	<p>The piece should include solo passages of at least 12 bars</p> <p>Use of blues and pentatonic scales</p>

## FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 6

<b>Duration</b>	2 min 30 secs – 5 mins
<b>Expressive techniques</b>	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• control of legato, including fretting hand legato, and staccato</li> <li>• a range of dynamics (p – f)</li> </ul> <p>Other techniques might include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• slides</li> <li>• accented notes</li> <li>• trills</li> <li>• hammer-ons</li> <li>• pull-offs</li> <li>• use of controlled bends</li> <li>• natural and false harmonics</li> </ul>
<b>Rhythm skills</b>	<p>The piece should include a mixture of whole, half, quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes; dotted half, quarter and eighth notes; quarter, eighth and sixteenth note triplets and associated rests; with some passages using sustained eighth and sixteenth note combinations</p> <p>Tied whole notes</p> <p>Syncopated and/or swung eighth and sixteenth notes</p> <p>Time signature variations including 3/4, 5/4, 6/4 and 7/8</p>
<b>Physical techniques</b>	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use of pick and fingers of the picking hand</li> <li>• ability to move between chords and single notes</li> <li>• picking hand damping techniques</li> <li>• fretting hand damping techniques</li> <li>• alternative picking</li> <li>• use of double stops on non-adjacent strings</li> <li>• barre chords</li> </ul>
<b>Instrument compass</b>	Up to 15th position
<b>Solo section</b>	<p>The piece should include solo passages of at least 16 bars</p> <p>Use of blues and pentatonic scales</p>



## FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 7

<b>Duration</b>	3 – 5 mins
<b>Expressive techniques</b>	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• control of legato, including fretting hand legato, and staccato</li> <li>• a range of dynamics (pp – ff)</li> </ul> <p>Other techniques might include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• slides</li> <li>• accented notes</li> <li>• trills</li> <li>• hammer-ons</li> <li>• pull-offs</li> <li>• use of controlled bends</li> <li>• natural and false harmonics</li> </ul>
<b>Rhythm skills</b>	<p>The piece should include a mixture of whole, half, quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes; dotted half, quarter and eighth notes; quarter, eighth and sixteenth note triplets and associated rests; with some passages using sustained eighth and sixteenth note combinations</p> <p>Tied whole notes</p> <p>Syncopated and/or swung eighth and sixteenth notes</p> <p>Time signature variations including 3/4, 5/4, 6/4 and 7/8</p>
<b>Physical techniques</b>	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use of pick and fingers of the picking hand</li> <li>• ability to move between chords and single notes</li> <li>• picking hand damping techniques</li> <li>• fretting hand damping techniques</li> <li>• alternative picking</li> <li>• use of double stops on non-adjacent strings</li> <li>• barre chords</li> </ul>
<b>Instrument compass</b>	Up to 15th position
<b>Solo section</b>	<p>The piece should include solo passages of at least 16 bars</p> <p>Use of blues and pentatonic scales</p>

## FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 8

<b>Duration</b>	3 – 5 mins
<b>Expressive techniques</b>	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• control of legato, including fretting hand legato, and staccato</li> <li>• a range of dynamics (pp – ff)</li> </ul> <p>Other techniques might include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• slides</li> <li>• accented notes</li> <li>• trills</li> <li>• hammer-ons</li> <li>• pull-offs</li> <li>• use of controlled bends</li> <li>• natural and false harmonics</li> </ul>
<b>Rhythm skills</b>	<p>The piece should include a mixture of whole, half, quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes; dotted half, quarter and eighth notes; quarter, eighth and sixteenth note triplets and associated rests; with some passages using sustained eighth and sixteenth note combinations</p> <p>Tied whole notes</p> <p>Syncopated and/or swung eighth and sixteenth notes</p> <p>Time signature variations including 3/4, 5/4, 6/4 and 7/8</p>
<b>Physical techniques</b>	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use of pick and fingers of the picking hand</li> <li>• ability to move between chords and single notes</li> <li>• picking hand damping techniques</li> <li>• fretting hand damping techniques</li> <li>• alternative picking</li> <li>• use of double stops on non-adjacent strings</li> <li>• barre chords</li> <li>• string tapping</li> </ul>
<b>Instrument compass</b>	Any fret on the fingerboard
<b>Solo section</b>	<p>The piece should include solo passages of at least 16 bars</p> <p>Use of blues and pentatonic scales</p>