

Rockschool | Ukulele 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 ukulele to meet the grade level.

These features are indicative and would not all necessarily occur to the same degree within any particular piece. 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 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

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|---|--|
| Duration | 40 secs–1 min 20 secs |
| Tempo | 60–160 bpm |
| Time signatures | Simple time signatures, i.e. 4/4, 3/4 |
| Rhythmic values | Whole, half, quarter, 8th notes and rests, occasional dotted half notes or dotted quarter notes |
| Dynamics | None, or very simple/sparse |
| Articulation | None, or very simple/sparse |
| Harmonic features & tonality | Chord types generally will not extend beyond triads, and tonality will be predominantly diatonic |
| Melodic features | Melodies will be predominantly diatonic Intervallic transitions will be stepwise or small (for example, crossing strings) |
| Physical techniques | Chord shapes will be simple and predominantly in open or first position Harmonic rate of change will be fairly slow giving time for preparation There may be basic or infrequent muting techniques required in either hand |

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 1

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|---|---|
| Duration | 50 secs – 1 min 30 secs |
| Tempo | 60-170 bpm |
| Time signatures | Simple, or basic compound time signatures, i.e. 4/4, 3 /4, 6/8 |
| Rhythmic values | As Debut, <i>plus</i> 8th notes and rests, occasional dotted 8th notes, 8th note syncopation, occasional 16th notes, and very occasional non-complex triplet groupings |
| Dynamics | Simple dynamics [P, F, MP, MF]. Subtle transitions will be very infrequent |
| Articulation | Simple/sparse, with infrequent variation |
| Harmonic features & tonality | Harmony will generally will not extend beyond triads, and tonality will be predominantly diatonic, but there may be occasional closely related non-diatonic chords, or occasional dominant 7ths |
| Melodic features | Melodies will be predominantly diatonic Intervallic transitions will be stepwise or small (for example, crossing strings) |
| Physical techniques | Chord shapes will be simple and predominantly in open or first position Melodic passages will remain on single strings, or move at a moderate tempo to an adjacent string. Simple string skipping may feature. Melodic work might be harmonised with occasional double stops Basic muting techniques may be required in either hand, and occasional simple legato techniques may appear (hammer-ons, pull-offs, slides) |

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 2

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|---|---|
| Duration | 1 min 10 secs–1 min 45 secs |
| Tempo | 60-170 bpm |
| Time signatures | 4/4 (straight or swung), 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 12/8 |
| Rhythmic values | As shown in previous grades <i>plus</i> 16th notes and rests, dotted 8th notes, syncopations, some 16th note syncopation, non-complex triplet groupings |
| Dynamics | Simple dynamics [P, F, MP, MF], crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>) |
| Articulation | Simple/sparse, with infrequent variation |
| Melodic features | Melodies will be predominantly diatonic but chromatic notes may occur |
| Harmonic features & tonality | Chord types might extend to 7ths, and tonality will be predominantly diatonic, but there may be occasional non-diatonic chords |
| Physical techniques | Chords may feature partial barre shapes, or very occasional full barre shapes Melodic passages may move at a faster rate between strings. String skipping may feature more frequently Melodic work might be harmonised with occasional 6ths or thirds There may be more frequent transitions between melodic and chordal passages Basic muting techniques may be required in either hand, and simple legato techniques may appear (hammer-ons, pull-offs, slides) |

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 3

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|---|---|
| Duration | 1 min 30 secs –2 mins |
| Tempo | 60-180 bpm |
| Time signatures | 4/4 (straight or swung), 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 12/8 |
| Rhythmic values | As shown in previous grades <i>plus</i> quarter note triplets and 16th note syncopation. There may be some variation in triplet groupings. Simpler rhythms appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work) |
| Dynamics | Simple dynamics [P, F, MP, MF], crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>), <i>sFz</i> |
| Articulation | Staccato, tenuto and/or accents may occur with some variation |
| Melodic features | Melodies will be predominantly diatonic but chromatic notes may occur |
| Harmonic features & tonality | Chord types might extend to 7ths, and tonality will be predominantly diatonic, but there may be occasional closely related non-diatonic chords |
| Physical techniques | Melodic passages might incorporate basic string skipping and position shifts Full barre shapes may be required in chordal work Harmonic rate of change is moderate but might include some more challenging sequences Rhythmic groupings may differ more frequently Muting and legato techniques might be more frequent Simple expressive/physical techniques such as spread chords may feature |
| Solo/development | Open, solo or development sections are not obligatory, but if included should not exceed 8 bars' length as a guide. |

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 4

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|---|--|
| Duration | 1 min 45 secs – 2 min 15 secs |
| Tempo | 60-180 bpm |
| Time signatures | 6/4, 4/4 (straight or swung), 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 12/8. Time signature changes may occur |
| Rhythmic values | As shown in previous grades. Simpler rhythms may appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work). There may be some variation in permutations of rhythmic groupings |
| Dynamics | [PP, MP, P, MF, F, FF], crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>) |
| Articulation & phrasing | Moderate variation in articulation and phrasing. Moderate frequency of hammer-ons, pull-offs and slides, with some repetition or extension |
| Melodic features | Intervallic transitions over an octave may occur, and some non-diatonic notes might occur |
| Harmonic features & tonality | Chords might occasionally extend beyond 7ths, and tonality may be diatonic or based in a modal key centre. Some non-diatonic chords might occur |
| Physical techniques | <p>Melodic passages can skip strings more frequently, and incorporate some position shifts</p> <p>Melodic work might be harmonised with thirds, sixths or octaves</p> <p>There may be some variation in muting and legato techniques, with moderate technical challenges</p> <p>Melody and accompaniment voicings may appear in one part</p> <p>There may be some variation in voicings and accompaniment styles within sections</p> <p>Expressive techniques such as spread chords may occur</p> <p>Campanella style melodies may occur</p> <p>Natural harmonics or special effects such as percussion may feature infrequently</p> |
| Solo/development | Open solo or development sections are not obligatory, but if included should not exceed 16 bars' length as a guide |

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 5

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|---|--|
| Duration | 2 mins – 2 mins 45 secs |
| Tempo | 60-160 bpm |
| Time signatures | 6/4, 4/4 (straight or swung), 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 12/8. There may be occasional time signature changes |
| Rhythmic values | As previous grades plus occasional 32nd notes and 16 th note triplet groupings. Simpler rhythms appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work). There may be some variation in permutations of rhythmic groupings |
| Dynamics | [PP, MP, P, MF, F, FF], crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>) |
| Articulation & phrasing | Moderate variation in articulation and phrasing. Moderate frequency of hammer-ons, pull-offs and slides, with some repetition or extension |
| Melodic features | Intervallic transitions over an octave may be regular, and melodies may feature non-diatonic notes at regular points |
| Harmonic features & tonality | Chords types might extend to 9ths, and include occasional alterations or non-diatonic chord tones |
| Physical techniques | <p>Melodic passages might incorporate moderate string skipping and position shifts</p> <p>Melodic work might be harmonised with thirds, sixths or octaves</p> <p>Melody and accompaniment voicings may appear in one part</p> <p>There may be some variation in muting and legato techniques, with moderate technical challenges</p> <p>There may be some variation in voicings and accompaniment styles within sections</p> <p>Expressive techniques such as spread chords may occur</p> <p><i>Campanella</i> style melodies may occur</p> <p>Natural harmonics may feature</p> |
| Solo/development | Open solo or development sections are not obligatory, but if included should not exceed 16 bars' length as a guide |

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 6

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|---|--|
| Duration | 2 min 15 secs–3 mins |
| Tempo | 50-200 bpm |
| Time signatures | 6/4, 4/4 (straight or swung), 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 9/8, 12/8. There may be time signature changes, or occasional irregular time signatures such as 5/4, 5/8, 7/8 etc |
| Rhythmic values | As previous grades. Permutations of rhythmic groupings may show some complexity |
| Dynamics | Any, with changes |
| Articulation & phrasing | Regular variation of articulation, including some differentiation between voices in the same part |
| Melodic features | Melodic content may be diatonic or based on modal scales, and there may be frequent chromaticism |
| Harmonic features & tonality | Chords may occasionally extend beyond 9ths, and include occasional alterations or simple substitutions. Modal interchange and temporary modulations may occur |
| Physical techniques | <p>Chordal work might involve rootless voicings, cluster voicings or extension notes</p> <p>There may be variety in voicings and accompaniment styles within sections</p> <p>Special expressive effects such as harmonics and body percussion may feature</p> <p>A range of legato and non-legato techniques may feature, presenting some advanced challenges</p> <p><i>Campanella</i> style and <i>rasgueado</i> techniques may feature</p> |
| Solo/development | Open solo or development sections are not obligatory, but if included should not exceed 16 bars' length as a guide |

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 7

| | |
|---|--|
| Duration | 2 mins 30 secs – 3 mins 30 secs |
| Tempo | 50-200 bpm |
| Time signatures | Any, with changes |
| Rhythmic values | Any, up to 32nd notes. Complex combinations beyond 16th note triplets will not be frequent, but variations may occur regularly. Simpler rhythms will appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work, faster tempos or more complex time signatures). Tuplet figures will show more complexity |
| Dynamics | Any, with changes, and including strong contrasts |
| Articulation & phrasing | Regular variation of articulation, including some differentiation between voices in the same part. Subtlety of control between legato and staccato will be required and there may be different articulations occurring simultaneously |
| Melodic features | Melodic content may be diatonic or based on modal scales, and there may be frequent chromaticism |
| Harmonic features & tonality | Chord voicings may regularly extend beyond 9ths, and include alterations/substitutions. Modal interchange may occur. Temporary modulations may occur more frequently |
| Physical techniques | <p>Voicings and accompaniment styles within sections will show depth and variety of technique</p> <p>Alternate tunings may be required</p> <p>Special expressive effects such as harmonics and body percussion may feature</p> <p>A range of legato and non-legato techniques may feature, presenting some advanced challenges</p> <p>A range of expressive techniques may feature, presenting some advanced challenges</p> <p><i>Campanella</i> style and <i>rasgueado</i> techniques may feature</p> |
| Solo/development | Open solo or development sections are not obligatory, but if included should not exceed 16 bars' length as a guide |

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 8

| | |
|---|---|
| Duration | 2 mins 30 secs – 3 mins 45 secs |
| Key | Any, with changes |
| Tempo | 50-200 bpm |
| Time signatures | Any, with changes |
| Rhythmic values | Any. Complex combinations beyond 16th note triplets may be frequent and variations may occur regularly. Simpler rhythms will appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work, faster tempos or more complex time signatures). Triplet rhythms may be complex |
| Dynamics | Any, with changes, and including strong contrasts |
| Articulation & phrasing | Regular variation of articulation, including differentiation between voices in the same part. Subtlety of control between legato and staccato will be required and there may be different articulations occurring simultaneously |
| Melodic features | Melodic content may be diatonic or based on modal scales, and there may be frequent chromaticism or challenging intervals |
| Harmonic features & tonality | Chord voicings may regularly extend beyond 9ths. Chordal voicings may be more advanced, denser and/or more frequent, differ regularly, and include alterations. Modal interchange may occur. Temporary modulations may occur frequently |
| Physical techniques | Voicings and accompaniment styles within sections will show depth and variety of technique Alternate tunings may be required Special expressive effects such as harmonics and body percussion may feature A range of legato and non-legato techniques may feature, presenting some advanced challenges A range of expressive techniques may feature, presenting some advanced challenges <i>Campanella</i> style and <i>rasgueado</i> techniques may feature |
| Solo/development | Open solo or development sections are not obligatory, but if included should not exceed 16 bars' length as a guide |