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ALTO SAX

SYLLABUS SPECIFICATION 2023

GRADE 1 – GRADE 8



Awarding the
Contemporary Arts



ALTO SAX

SYLLABUS SPECIFICATION

2023 Edition

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See [Revision History](#) at back of book
for further information

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Syllabus

Syllabus Director (2025 Update): Dr Fern-Chantele Carter

Syllabus devised by Jono Harrison and Nathan Theodoulou

Syllabus Consultants: Sarah Hards, Ashley Hards, Simon Allen, Tom Griffiths, Kieran McLeod and Simon Troup

Repertoire arrangements: Charlotte Glasson, Vijay Prakash, Mark Nightingale, Barnaby Dickinson, Denys Baptiste,

Byron Wallen, Simon Allen, Trevor Mires, Tom Griffiths, Kieran McLeod, Nathan Theodoulou and Jono Harrison

Technical Studies composed by Simon Allen (saxophone), Tom Griffiths (trumpet) and Kieran McLeod (trombone).

Supporting tests written by Ashley Hards, Sarah Hards, Carolyne Quayyum and Jono Harrison

Publishing

Music preparation, editing and engraving by Jono Harrison and Simon Troup

Book layout by Simon and Jennie Troup of Digital Music Art

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Audio

Produced by Jono Harrison

Engineered by Jono Harrison and Tris Ellis

Recorded at Livingston Studios, London.

Additional Programming by Jono Harrison and Rory Harvey

Supporting Tests audio produced and recorded by Calum Harrison

Musicians

Trumpet: James Davison, George Hogg, Alex Maynard, Jack Courtney, Tom Griffiths

Trombone: Trevor Mires, Vijay Prakash, Kieran McLeod, Guo Pengyuan

Saxophones: Simon Allen, George Millard, David Robinson, John Shenoy, Julian Siegel, Tom Richards

Guitars: Nat Martin, Jono Harrison, Rory Harvey and Nathan Theodoulou

Bass: Andy Robertson, Jono Harrison and Rory Harvey

Drums and percussion: Pete Riley

Piano and keyboards: Jono Harrison

Vocals: Katy Virgoe

Executive producers

Tim Bennett-Hart, Norton York

Distribution

Exclusive distributors: Hal Leonard

Contacting Rockscool

www.rslawards.com

Telephone: +44 (0)345 460 4747

Email: info@rslawards.com

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PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Rockscool 2023 syllabus for Alto Sax. This syllabus guide is designed to give teachers, learners and candidates practical information on the graded examinations run by Rockscool.

The Rockscool website www.rslawards.com has detailed information on all aspects of our examinations, including examination regulations, detailed marking schemes and assessment criteria as well as notated and audio examples to help you prepare for the examination.

This Syllabus Guide covers the following examinations:

- Graded Examinations Grade 1 to Grade 8
- Graded Certificates Grade 1 to Grade 8
- Performance Certificates Grade 1 to Grade 8

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 qualifications 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 at Level 3 (Grades 6–8) carry allocated points on the UCAS tariff. For full details relating to the allocation of UCAS points please see: www.rslawards.com/about-us/ucas-points

Period Of Operation

This syllabus specification covers Alto Sax Grade Examinations, Graded Certificates and Performance Certificates from September 2023.

Examinations

Rockscool offers three types of graded music examination: Graded Examination, Graded Certificate & Performance Certificate

Grade Examinations

Grade Examinations are available from Grade 1 – Grade 8 and consist of the following elements:

Prepared Work	Unprepared Work
▪ 3 Performance Pieces: Grade 1 to Grade 8 ▪ Technical Exercises: Grade 1 to Grade 8	▪ Sight Reading Or Improvisation & Interpretation: Grade 1 to Grade 5 ▪ Quick Study Pieces: Grades 6–8 ▪ Ear Tests: Grade 1 to Grade 8 ▪ General Musicianship Questions: Grade 1 to Grade 8

Graded Certificates

Graded Certificates are available from Grade 1 – Grade 8 and consist of the following elements:

Prepared Work
▪ 3 Performance Pieces: Grade 1 to Grade 8 ▪ Technical Exercises: Grade 1 to Grade 8

Performance Certificates

Performance Certificates are available from Grade 1 – Grade 8 and consist of the following:

Prepared Work
▪ 5 Performance Pieces: Grade 1 to Grade 8

OVERVIEW

Unit Overview – Graded Examinations in Popular Music Performance

QUALIFICATION TITLE	QAN	TOTAL NO. OF UNITS	GUIDED LEARNING HOURS	CREDIT	TOTAL
RSL Level 1 Award in Graded Examination in Music Performance - Grade 1	501/0391/X	1	12	6	60
RSL Level 1 Award in Graded Examination in Music Performance - Grade 2	501/0646/6	1	18	9	90
RSL Level 1 Award in Graded Examination in Music Performance - Grade 3	501/0647/8	1	18	12	120
RSL Level 2 Certificate in Graded Examination in Music Performance - Grade 4	501/0389/1	1	24	15	150
RSL Level 2 Certificate in Graded Examination in Music Performance - Grade 5	501/0643/0	1	24	18	180
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Graded Examination in Music Performance - Grade 6	501/0390/8	1	36	22	220
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Graded Examination in Music Performance - Grade 7	501/0645/4	1	48	27	270
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Graded Examination in Music Performance - Grade 8	501/0648/X	1	54	32	320

Unit Overview – Graded Certificates in Popular Music Performance

QUALIFICATION TITLE	QAN	TOTAL NO. OF UNITS	GUIDED LEARNING HOURS	CREDIT	TOTAL
RSL Level 1 Award in Graded Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 1	610/4761/2	1	12	6	60
RSL Level 1 Award in Graded Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 2	610/4762/4	1	18	9	90
RSL Level 1 Award in Graded Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 3	610/4763/6	1	18	12	120
RSL Level 2 Certificate in Graded Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 4	610/4764/8	1	24	15	150
RSL Level 2 Certificate in Graded Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 5	610/4765/X	1	24	18	180
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Graded Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 6	610/4766/1	1	36	22	220
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Graded Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 7	610/4767/3	1	48	27	270
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Graded Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 8	610/4768/5	1	54	32	320

Unit Overview – Performance Certificates in Popular Music Performance

QUALIFICATION TITLE	QAN	TOTAL NO. OF UNITS	GUIDED LEARNING HOURS	CREDIT	TOTAL
RSL Level 1 Award in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 1	610/4771/5	1	12	6	60
RSL Level 1 Award in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 2	610/4772/7	1	18	9	90
RSL Level 1 Award in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 3	610/4773/9	1	18	12	120
RSL Level 2 Certificate in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 4	610/4774/0	1	24	15	150
RSL Level 2 Certificate in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 5	610/4775/2	1	24	18	180
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 6	610/4776/4	1	36	22	220
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 7	610/4777/6	1	48	27	270
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 8	610/4778/8	1	54	32	320

ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

Assessment	
Form of Assessment	All assessments are carried out by external examiners. Candidates are required to carry out a combination of practical tasks and underpinning theoretical assessment.
Unit Format	Unit specifications contain the title, unit code, credit level, credit value, learning outcomes, assessment criteria, grade descriptor, and types of evidence required for the unit.
Bands of Assessment	There are four bands of assessment (distinction, merit, pass and unclassified) for the qualification as a whole.
Quality Assurance	Quality Assurance ensures that all assessments are carried out to the same standard by objective sampling and re-assessment of candidates' work. A team of external examiners is appointed, trained and standardised by RSL.

QUALIFICATION SUMMARY

Aims & Broad Objectives

The aim of popular music performance qualifications is to provide a flexible, progressive mastery approach to the knowledge, skills and understanding required for popular music performance.

RSL's graded qualifications motivate and encourage candidates of all ages and levels through a system of progressive mastery, enabling candidates to develop and enhance skills, knowledge and understanding in a safe and consistent way. The qualifications are beneficial for candidates wishing to progress at their own pace through smaller steps of achievement.

These qualifications are suitable for candidates in the Under 16, 16+, 16–18, 19+ age groups.

Progression

Graded qualifications provide a flexible progression route for candidates. They are a positive means of determining progress and enable candidates to learn the necessary techniques to gain entry to FE and HE courses. Graded qualifications operate according to a well-established methodology of 'progressive mastery'. They allow candidates to be tested in discrete stages in the development of a wide range of skills. They tend to be more rigorous than other types of exams and for that reason industry is confident that achievement at the highest level gained by candidates of graded qualifications will have the skills necessary to work in other areas of the business.

Qualification Structure

A graded qualification consists of a range of both practical and knowledge-based elements which are based on detailed requirements outlined in the relevant syllabus. Therefore, requirements for each grade will be set out in detail in the Unit Specifications below and the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for each unit will require knowledge, skills and understanding of these syllabus requirements to be demonstrated at the grade entered.

Entry Requirements

There are no entry requirements for these qualifications. However, candidates should be aware that the content at the higher grades will require a level of knowledge and understanding covered in previous qualifications.

For further details on exam dates and fees and to apply for your music performance grades please visit the RSL website at: www.rslawards.com

Learning Outcomes

Performance Certificate

Learners will be able to:

- Perform music in a range of musical styles

Graded Certificate

Learners will be able to:

- Perform music in a range of musical styles
- Demonstrate technical ability on an instrument/voice through responding to set technical demands

Graded Exam

Learners will be able to:

- Perform music in a range of musical styles
- Demonstrate technical ability on an instrument/voice through responding to an unseen selection of set technical demands
- Demonstrate musical understanding through a range of an unseen selection of set tests

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

Assessment Methodology

The graded examinations in Popular Music Performance are assessed via an examination. The examination is divided into the following sections:

Technical tests covering knowledge of:

- Scales
- Arpeggios
- Technical Studies

Performance Pieces

- Three Performance pieces (two pieces can be 'Free Choice Pieces')

Unseen Tests

- Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation tests (Grade 1 – Grade 5)
- Quick Study Pieces (Grades 6–8)
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

Exam Structure

Each type of exam (Grade Exam, Graded Certificate, Performance Certificate) is comprised of different combinations of the above. Grade Exams contain all sections, Graded Certificates contain Technical Exercises and Performance Pieces, and Performance Certificates only contain Performance Pieces.

Assessment Timings

Examination timings for the graded examinations in Popular Music Performance are as follows:

Grade Exams

- Grade 1: 20 minutes
- Grade 2: 20 minutes
- Grade 3: 25 minutes
- Grade 4: 27 minutes
- Grade 5: 27 minutes
- Grade 6: 32 minutes
- Grade 7: 32 minutes
- Grade 8: 32 minutes

Performance Certificates

- Grade 1: 20 minutes
- Grade 2: 20 minutes
- Grade 3: 25 minutes
- Grade 4: 25 minutes
- Grade 5: 25 minutes
- Grade 6: 27 minutes
- Grade 7: 27 minutes
- Grade 8: 30 minutes

All Graded Certificates are taken as Recorded Digital Exams and thus do not have specific timings assigned.

All assessment of these qualifications is external and is undertaken by RSL Examiners.

MARKING SCHEMES

Grade Exams: Grade 1 to 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 (Grade 1 – Grade 5)	6 out of 10	7–8 out of 10	9+ out of 10
Quick Study Piece (Grades 6–8)			
General Musicianship Questions	3 out of 5	4 out of 5	5 out of 5
Total Marks	60%	74%	90%

Graded Certificates: Grade 1 to 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
Total Marks	60%	74%	90%

Performance Certificates: Grade 1 to 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 Structure

The examination structure for the grade examinations is shown below:

1. Pieces or technical exercises
2. Technical exercises or pieces
3. Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation (Grade 1 – Grade 5);
Quick Study Piece (Grades 6–8)
4. Ear Tests
5. General Musicianship Questions

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, candidates 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 alongside 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.

Note: 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.

Expectations of Knowledge, Skills and Understanding

The graded examination system is one based on the principle of 'progressive mastery': each step in the exam chain demonstrates learning, progression and skills in incremental steps. Successful learning is characterised by a mastery of the fundamentals of the skills demanded in each grade.

Learners will be able to complete a set of practical tasks and be tested on their underpinning knowledge (the complexity and variety of tasks are determined by which qualification is being attempted), which allows them to demonstrate popular music performance knowledge, skills and understanding relevant to the grade. These technical skills set a firm platform for further technical and creative development by the learner.

Quality Assurance

All RSL examinations and graded qualifications are standardised according to the processes and procedures laid down by RSL.

CANDIDATE ACCESS AND REGISTRATION

Access and Registration

The qualifications will:

- be available to everyone who is capable of reaching the required standards
- be free from any barriers that restrict access and progression
- offer equal opportunities for all wishing to access the qualifications

At the point of application, RSL will ensure that all candidates are fully informed about the requirements and demands of the qualification.

Candidates may enter online for any of the qualifications at various points in the calendar year in territories throughout the world. Dates will be published on the website at www.rslawards.com

Please Note: Candidates may not perform pieces in their exam that they have previously performed for an RSL Assessment. This includes re-sits of their exams.

Recommended Prior Learning

Learners are not required to have any prior learning for these qualifications. However, learners should ensure that they are aware of the requirements and expectations of each grade prior to entering for an assessment.

FURTHER INFORMATION & CONTACT

Guidance on Free Choice Pieces

For all examinations, candidates are able to play a number of free choice pieces:

- Grade Examinations and Graded Certificates: Two free choice pieces (a minimum of one piece must be from the Alto Sax grade book)
- Performance Certificates: Three free choice pieces (a minimum of two pieces must be from the Alto Sax grade book)

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 they 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.

Free Choice Pieces can be performed to a backing track (without the examined part on the track), or as a solo piece (without backing track).

PREFACE

Complaints & Appeals

All procedural complaints and appeals, including malpractice and requests for reasonable adjustments/special considerations, can be found on the RSL website www.rslawards.com

Equal Opportunities

RSL's Equal Opportunities policy can be found on the RSL website www.rslawards.com

Contacts for Help & Support

All correspondence should be directed to:

RSL

Harlequin House
Ground Floor
7 High Street
Teddington
Middlesex
TW11 8EE

Or info@rslawards.com

ROCKSCHOOL CONTEMPORARY ALTO SAX EXAMINATIONS

EXAMINATIONS OVERVIEW

Rockschool offers three types of graded music examination; Grade Examinations, Graded Certificates and Performance Certificates.

Grade Examinations

Alto Sax Grade Examinations are available from Grade 1 to Grade 8 and consist of the following elements:

- Three Performance Pieces: Grade 1 to Grade 8
- Technical Exercises: Grade 1 to Grade 8
- Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation: Grade 1 to Grade 5
- Quick Study Pieces: Grade 6 to Grade 8
- General Musicianship Questions: Grade 1 to Grade 8

These elements fall into two categories:

- Prepared work: This consists of three Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises
- Unprepared work: This consists of Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation (Grade 1 to Grade 8)

Graded Certificates

Alto Sax Graded Certificates are available from Grade 1 to Grade 8 and consist of the following elements:

- Three Performance Pieces: Grade 1 to Grade 8
- Technical Exercises: Grade 1 to Grade 8

Performance Certificates

Alto Sax Performance Certificates are available from Grade 1 to Grade 8 and consist of the following elements:

- Five Performance Pieces

EXAMINATION STRUCTURE

The examination structure for the Grade Examination is shown below:

Grade 1 to Grade 8

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises *
- Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation (Grade 1 to Grade 5); Quick Study Piece (Grades 6–8)
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

EXAMINATION TIMINGS

Grade Exams

- Grade 1: 20 minutes
- Grade 2: 20 minutes
- Grade 3: 25 minutes
- Grade 4: 27 minutes
- Grade 5: 27 minutes
- Grade 6: 32 minutes
- Grade 7: 32 minutes
- Grade 8: 32 minutes

Performance Certificates

- Grade 1: 20 minutes
- Grade 2: 20 minutes
- Grade 3: 25 minutes
- Grade 4: 25 minutes
- Grade 5: 25 minutes
- Grade 6: 27 minutes
- Grade 7: 27 minutes
- Grade 8: 30 minutes

All Graded Certificates are taken as Recorded Digital Exams and thus do not have specific exam timings

All assessment of these qualifications is external and is undertaken by RSL Examiners.

GENERAL NOTES

The following general notes apply to Grade Exams, Graded Certificates and Performance Certificates:

Free Choice Pieces

For all alto sax grades, candidates are able to play a number of free choice pieces in the examination:

- Grade Examinations and Graded Certificates: Two Free Choice Pieces (at least one piece must be from the grade book)
- Performance Certificates: Three Free Choice Pieces (at least two pieces must be from the grade book)

Visit www.rslawards.com for grade specific Free Choice Criteria and wider requirements which need to be observed in full to be eligible for use in the exam. Prior approval is not required but any deviation/simplification/omissions from any aspect of the criteria or requirements may be reflected in the marks awarded.

Free Choice Pieces can be performed to a backing track (without the examined part on the track), or as a solo piece (without backing track).

If there is any doubt or questions about the appropriateness of the chosen piece, it would be acceptable to email it to info@rslawards.com and a member of the Rockscool team will advise.

Adaptation and Personalisation of Pieces

Candidates should perform pieces as notated, except where they choose to embellish or rework any sections (NB. this does not apply to technical exercises or unseen tests which must be performed exactly as written). In these instances, as well as where there are performance indications to *ad lib.*, *improvise*, *develop*, etc., candidates will be marked on their ability to present the personalised material in a stylistically appropriate way, commensurate with the grade level. All performances will be expected to have a clear basis in the notated material.

Notation

Use of Transposition:

Unless otherwise specified, all pitches and key signatures reference written pitch, not concert pitch. While it does not form part of the examination, candidates are recommended to develop a working knowledge of the transposition of their instruments commensurate with the grade they are studying toward.

GRADING CRITERIA & DEFINITIONS

GRADED EXAMINATIONS

Performance Pieces					
Bands of Attainment / Mark Range					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	18–20	15–17	12–14	6–11	0–5
Command of Instrument	Consistently clear production of sound and even tone quality throughout	Mostly clear production of sound and even tone quality overall	Some clear production of sound and generally even tone quality	Sound produced is unclear with uneven quality of tone produced	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Sync or Pulse	Performance consistently synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance mostly synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance sometimes synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance not synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse not maintained	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout. Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time.	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall. Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time.	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time.	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure not evidenced.	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Style & Expression	Consistently convincing projection of the music.	Mostly convincing projection of the music.	Some convincing projection of the music.	Music not projected convincingly	No attempt and/or incomplete performance

Technical Exercises					
Bands of Attainment / Mark Range					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	13–15	11–12	9–10	4–8	0–3
Command of Instrument	Consistently clear production of sound and even tone quality throughout	Mostly clear production of sound and even tone quality overall	Some clear production of sound and generally even tone quality	Sound produced is unclear with uneven quality of tone produced	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Sync or Pulse	Performance consistently synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance mostly synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance sometimes synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance not synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse not maintained	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout. Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time.	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall. Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time.	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time.	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure not evidenced.	No attempt and/or incomplete performance

Sight Reading / Improvisation & Interpretation / Quick Study Piece

Bands of Attainment / Mark Range					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	9–10	7–8	6	3–5	0–2
Command of Instrument	Consistently clear production of sound and even tone quality throughout	Mostly clear production of sound and even tone quality overall	Some clear production of sound and generally even tone quality	Sound produced is unclear with uneven quality of tone produced	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Sync or Pulse	Performance consistently synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance mostly synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance sometimes synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance not synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse not maintained	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout. Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time.	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall. Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time.	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time.	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure not evidenced.	No attempt and/or incomplete performance

Ear Tests

Bands of Attainment / Mark Range					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	9–10	7–8	6	3–5	0–2
Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout. Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time.	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall. Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time.	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time.	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure not evidenced.	No attempt and/or incomplete performance

General Musicianship Questions (GMQs)

Bands of Attainment / Mark Range					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	5 correct responses	4 correct responses	3 correct responses	2 correct responses	0–1 correct responses

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

Performance Pieces					
Bands of Attainment / Mark Range					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	18–20	15–17	12–14	6–11	0–5
Command of Instrument	Consistently clear production of sound and even tone quality throughout	Mostly clear production of sound and even tone quality overall	Some clear production of sound and generally even tone quality	Sound produced is unclear with uneven quality of tone produced	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Sync or Pulse	Performance consistently synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance mostly synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance sometimes synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance not synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse not maintained	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout.	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall.	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated.	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated.	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
	Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time.	Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time.	Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time.	Understanding of musical structure not evidenced.	
Style & Expression	Consistently convincing projection of the music.	Mostly convincing projection of the music.	Some convincing projection of the music.	Music not projected convincingly	No attempt and/or incomplete performance

GRADED CERTIFICATES

Performance Pieces					
Bands of Attainment / Mark Range					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	18–20	15–17	12–14	6–11	0–5
Command of Instrument	Consistently clear production of sound and even tone quality throughout	Mostly clear production of sound and even tone quality overall	Some clear production of sound and generally even tone quality	Sound produced is unclear with uneven quality of tone produced	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Sync or Pulse	Performance consistently synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance mostly synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance sometimes synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance not synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse not maintained	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout.	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall.	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated.	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated.	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
	Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time.	Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time.	Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time.	Understanding of musical structure not evidenced.	
Style & Expression	Consistently convincing projection of the music.	Mostly convincing projection of the music.	Some convincing projection of the music.	Music not projected convincingly	No attempt and/or incomplete performance

Technical Exercises					
Bands of Attainment / Mark Range					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	13–15	11–12	9–10	4–8	0–3
Command of Instrument	Consistently clear production of sound and even tone quality throughout	Mostly clear production of sound and even tone quality overall	Some clear production of sound and generally even tone quality	Sound produced is unclear with uneven quality of tone produced	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Sync or Pulse	Performance consistently synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance mostly synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance sometimes synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance not synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse not maintained	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout.	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall.	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated.	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated.	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
	Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time.	Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time.	Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time.	Understanding of musical structure not evidenced.	

DEFINITIONS

DEFINITIONS	
Command of Instrument	The quality of the sound produced from the instrument, including the consistency of sound/tone, control of sound/tone commensurate with grade.
Sync or Pulse	Alignment of the performance to backing track, metronome or applied to a solo performance, observing notation markings. For unaccompanied pieces candidates should maintain a secure internal pulse and adjust the pulse where instructed within the music.
Accuracy & Understanding	Representing the written notation accurately, except by instruction through performance notes, or interpreting the written part with equivalent skills demonstrated. Secure understanding of musical structure evidenced through transitions of phrases, bars and sections.
Style & Expression	An expressive and commanding performance of the notated material dictated by the demands of the performance piece.

GRADE 1

The Grade 1 Alto Sax exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for six months to one year. They have mastered the key basic debut level skills and have since acquired greater use of technique, rhythms, co-ordination and musical understanding. There is also an opportunity to build on basic improvisation.

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

GRADE EXAM | GRADE 1

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and a Technical Study).

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete **either** a Sight Reading **or** an Improvisation & Interpretation test, **and** two Ear Tests (which develop Melodic and Rhythmic recall).

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 1 exam lasts 20 minutes and is taken in the following order:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*
- Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 1 there are three groups of technical work: scales, arpeggios and a technical study.

All scales and arpeggios need to be played in straight feel, prepared with tongued and slurred articulation, in the rhythms, keys, octaves and tempos shown in the grade book. Candidates may use their book during the exam for all groups.

Groups A & B need to be played to a click. The examiner will play the click at the given tempo and candidates should begin to play after four clicks.

Group C is played without click.

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is ♩=50.

- G major scale, 1 octave
- G dorian mode, 1 octave
- G minor pentatonic scale, 1 octave

Group B: Arpeggios

The tempo for this group is ♩=50.

- G major arpeggio, 1 octave
- G minor arpeggio, 1 octave

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, you will be required to perform your choice of one of the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.
- Study 2: Modes and stylistic techniques.
- Study 3: Intervals and intonation.

SUPPORTING TESTS

Section 1 | Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation

In this section, candidates can choose between a Sight Reading test or an Improvisation & Interpretation test. The examiner will ask which the candidate has chosen before then showing the test. Once the candidate has chosen, they cannot change their mind.

Sight Reading

In the Sight Reading test, the examiner will give the candidate a melody to be played to a metronome click.

- 4 bars duration
- In the key of G major
- At a tempo of ♩=100
- In f time
- Based on half notes (minims), quarter notes (crotchets) and associated rests.

The examiner will show the candidate the notation, and the candidate will have 90 seconds to prepare. The candidate may ask for a metronome click at the start of, or throughout the candidates practise time. After the 90 seconds practise time, the examiner will play the candidate the click track again, and the candidate will be required to perform the test.

Improvisation & Interpretation

In the Improvisation & Interpretation test, the examiner will give the candidate a 5-bar chord progression in the key of G major or G minor. The candidate will first be given 90 seconds to prepare, after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is for the candidate to practise and the second time is for the candidate to perform the final version for the exam. For each playthrough, the backing track will begin with a one bar count-in. The tempo is ♩=95.

During the preparation time, the candidate will be given the choice of a metronome click throughout or a one bar 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.

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 2 | Ear Tests

In this section, candidates are tested on their melodic and rhythmic recall skills.

Test 1 | Melodic Recall

The examiner will play the candidate two consecutive notes. The candidate will need to identify whether the last note is higher or lower than the first. The candidate will hear the test twice, each time with a one bar count-in. The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

Test 2 | Rhythmic Recall

The examiner will play the candidate a two-bar rhythm on the note 'G'. The candidate will hear the test twice. The candidate will then hear a one bar count-in, after which the candidate will be required to play back the rhythm on their instrument on the same note, to a drum backing. The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 3 | General Musicianship Questions

The final part of the exam is the General Musicianship Questions (GMQs) section, where the examiner will ask five questions drawn from the topics listed below. For the notation section, the examiner will ask the candidate to choose a piece they've played in the exam.

Notation

The candidate may be asked to identify the following on the score:

- You may be asked to identify the following on your score:
- The treble clef or time signature
- Note pitch names
- Half note (minim), quarter note (crotchet) or eighth note (quaver) values
- The tempo marking

The candidate's Instrument

The candidate may be asked to identify one of the following parts of their instrument:

- Bell
- Mouthpiece
- Keys

Music Theory

The candidate may be asked to describe the construction of a major or minor triad.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE | GRADE 1

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play five performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

The Grade 1 Performance Certificate lasts 20 minutes

GRADED CERTIFICATE | GRADE 1

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and Technical Studies). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 1 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's discretion

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 1 there are three groups of technical work: scales, arpeggios and a technical study. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

All scales and arpeggios need to be played in straight feel, prepared with tongued and slurred articulation, in the rhythms, keys, octaves and tempos shown in the grade book. Candidates may use their book during the exam for all groups.

Groups A & B need to be played to a click. Candidates should begin to play after four clicks.

Group C is played without click.

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is ♩=50.

- G major scale, 1 octave
- G dorian mode, 1 octave
- G minor pentatonic scale, 1 octave

Group B: Arpeggios

The tempo for this group is ♩=50.

- G major arpeggio, 1 octave
- G minor arpeggio, 1 octave

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, you will be required to perform all of the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.
- Study 2: Modes and stylistic techniques.
- Study 3: Intervals and intonation.

GRADE 2

The Grade 2 Alto Sax exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for one year to eighteen months. They have mastered the key basic skills up to Grade 1 and since acquired greater use of technique, rhythms, co-ordination and musical understanding. There is also the continuing opportunity to develop improvisation skills.

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

GRADE EXAM | GRADE 2

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and a Technical Study).

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete **either** a Sight Reading **or** an Improvisation & Interpretation test, **and** two Ear Tests (which continue to develop Melodic and Rhythmic recall).

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 2 exam lasts 20 minutes and is taken in the following order:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*
- Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 2 there are three groups of technical work: scales, arpeggios and a technical study.

All scales and arpeggios need to be played in straight feel, prepared with tongued and slurred articulation, in the rhythms, keys, octaves and tempos shown in the grade book. Candidates may use their book during the exam for all groups.

Group C is played as indicated below

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is ♩=55.

- D major scale, 2 octaves
- D dorian mode, 2 octaves
- D minor pentatonic scale, 2 octaves

Group B: Arpeggios

The tempo for this group is ♩=55.

- D major arpeggio, 2 octaves
- D minor arpeggio, 2 octaves

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, the candidate will be required to perform their choice of one of the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.
- Study 2: Modes and stylistic techniques.
- Study 3: Intervals and intonation.

SUPPORTING TESTS

Section 1 | Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation

In this section, candidates can choose between a Sight Reading test or an Improvisation & Interpretation test. The examiner will ask which the candidate has chosen before then showing the test. Once the candidate has chosen, they cannot change their mind.

Sight Reading

The test will be:

- 6 bars duration
- In the key of D major or B minor
- At a tempo of $\text{♩} = 100$
- In $\frac{4}{4}$ time
- Based on half notes (minims), quarter notes (crotchets), eighth notes and associated rests.

The examiner will show the candidate the notation, and the candidate will have 90 seconds to prepare.

The candidate may ask for a metronome click at the start of, or throughout their practise time. After the 90 seconds practise time, the examiner will play the candidate the click track again, and they will be required to perform the test.

Improvisation & Interpretation

In the Improvisation & Interpretation test, the examiner will give the candidate a 5-bar chord progression in the key of D major or D minor. The candidate will first be given 90 seconds to prepare, after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is for the candidate to practise and the second time is for the candidate to perform the final version for the exam. For each playthrough, the backing track will begin with a one bar count-in. The tempo is $\text{♩} = 95$.

During the preparation time, the candidate will be given the choice of a metronome click throughout or a one bar 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.

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 2 | Ear Tests

In this section, candidates are tested on their melodic and rhythmic recall skills.

Test 1 | Melodic Recall

The examiner will play the candidate a two-bar melody with a drum backing using the D major scale. The first note of the melody will be the root note and the first interval will be ascending. The candidate will play the melody back on their instrument.

The candidate will hear the melody twice. Each time the melody is played it is preceded by a vocal count-in. There will then be a short gap for the candidate to practise. After the third vocal count-in (signifying the assessed part of the test) the candidate should play the melody along to the drum backing. The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

Test 2 | Rhythmic Recall

The examiner will play the candidate a two-bar rhythm on the note 'D'. The candidate will hear the test twice. The candidate will then hear a one bar count-in, after which they will be required to play back the rhythm on their instrument on the same note, to a drum backing. The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 3 | General Musicianship Questions

The final part of the exam is the General Musicianship Questions (GMQs) section, where the examiner will ask five questions drawn from the topics listed below. For the notation section, the examiner will ask the candidate to choose a piece they've played in the exam.

Notation

The candidate may be asked to:

- Explain the meaning of the time signature
- Identify note pitch names including accidentals, or identify the key signature
- Identify rhythm values found in the piece drawn from the following: half note (minim), dotted half-note (dotted minim), quarter note (crotchet) or eighth note (quaver) and associated rests
- Identify the tempo marking or genre of the piece

The Candidate's Instrument

The candidate may be asked to identify one of the following parts of their instrument:

- Keys
- Ligature
- Reed

Music Theory

The candidate may be asked to describe the construction of a dominant seventh chord.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE | GRADE 2

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play five performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

The Grade 2 Performance Certificate lasts 20 minutes

GRADED CERTIFICATE | GRADE 2

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and Technical Studies). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 2 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's discretion

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 2 there are three groups of technical work: scales, arpeggios and a technical study. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

All scales and arpeggios need to be played in straight feel, prepared with tongued and slurred articulation, in the rhythms, keys, octaves and tempos shown in the grade book. Candidates may use their book during the exam for all groups.

Group C is played as indicated below

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is ♩=55.

- D major scale, 2 octaves
- D dorian mode, 2 octaves
- D minor pentatonic scale, 2 octaves

Group B: Arpeggios

The tempo for this group is ♩=55.

- D major arpeggio, 2 octaves
- D minor arpeggio, 2 octaves

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, the candidate will be required to perform all of the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.
- Study 2: Modes and stylistic techniques.
- Study 3: Intervals and intonation.

GRADE 3

The Grade 3 Alto Sax exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for eighteen months to two years and who are ready to consolidate their final stage as a beginner player. They have mastered the key skills up to Grade 2 and since acquired greater use of technique, rhythms, co-ordination and musical understanding. Improvisation phrasing is now confident and articulate and candidates have started to develop the beginnings of stylistic awareness.

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

GRADE EXAM | GRADE 3

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and a Technical Study).

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete **either** a Sight Reading **or** an Improvisation & Interpretation test, **and** two Ear Tests (which continue to develop Melodic and Rhythmic recall).

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 3 exam lasts 25 minutes and is taken in the following order:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*
- Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 3 there are three groups of technical work: scales, arpeggios and a technical study.

In this part of the exam, the examiner will ask for a selection of scales (Group A) and arpeggios (Group B) drawn from the lists below. All scales and arpeggios should be prepared with tongued and slurred articulation. The examiner will announce the key, scale or arpeggio type and articulation for each example. Where shown, you may choose the type of minor scale (natural, harmonic or melodic).

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is $\text{♩} = 60$.

- B $\flat$ major scale, 1 octave
- A major scale, to the 12th
- A dorian mode, to the 12th
- A minor pentatonic scale, to the 12th
- A blues scale, to the 12th
- G chromatic scale, 1 octave

Group B: Arpeggios

The tempo for this group is $\text{♩} = 60$.

- B $\flat$ major arpeggio, 1 octave
- A major arpeggio, 1 octave
- B $\flat$ minor arpeggio, 1 octave
- A minor arpeggio, 1 octave

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, you will be required to perform your choice of one of the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.
- Study 2: Modes and stylistic techniques.
- Study 3: Intervals and intonation.

SUPPORTING TESTS

Section 1 | Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation

In this section, candidates can choose between a Sight Reading test or an Improvisation & Interpretation test. The examiner will ask which the candidate has chosen before then showing the test. Once the candidate has chosen, they cannot change their mind.

Sight Reading

In the Sight Reading test, the examiner will give the candidate a melody to be played to a metronome click.

The test will be:

- 8 bars duration
- In the key of A major or A minor
- In $\frac{4}{4}$ or $\frac{8}{8}$ time
- Based on half notes (minims), dotted half-notes (dotted minims), quarter notes (crotchets), dotted quarter-notes (dotted crotchets), eighth notes and associated rests.

The examiner will show the candidate the notation, and they will have 90 seconds to prepare. The candidate may ask for a metronome click at the start of, or throughout their practise time. After the 90 seconds practise time, the examiner will play the candidate the click track again, and they will be required to perform the test.

Improvisation & Interpretation

In the Improvisation & Interpretation test, the examiner will give the candidate an 8-bar chord progression in the key of A major or A minor. The candidate will first be given 90 seconds to prepare, after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is for the candidate to practise and the second time is for them to perform the final version for the exam. For each playthrough, the backing track will begin with a one bar count-in. The tempo is $\text{♩} = 95$.

During the preparation time, the candidate will be given the choice of a metronome click throughout or a one bar 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.

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 2 | Ear Tests

In this section, candidates are tested on their melodic and rhythmic recall skills.

Test 1 | Melodic Recall

The examiner will play the candidate a two-bar melody with a drum backing using the A major scale. The first note of the melody will be the root note. The candidate will play the melody back on their instrument.

The candidate will hear the melody twice. Each time the melody is played it is preceded by a vocal count-in. There will then be a short gap for the candidate to practise. After the third vocal count-in (signifying the assessed part of the test) the candidate should play the melody along to the drum backing. The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

Test 2 | Rhythmic Recall

The examiner will play the candidate a two-bar rhythm on the note 'A'. The candidate will hear the test twice. The candidate will then hear a one bar count-in, after which they will be required to play back the rhythm on their instrument on the same note, to a drum backing. The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 3 | General Musicianship Questions

The final part of the exam is the General Musicianship Questions (GMQs) section, where the examiner will ask five questions drawn from the topics listed below. For the notation section, the examiner will ask the candidate to choose a piece they've played in the exam.

Notation

The candidate may be asked to:

- Explain the meaning of the key signature
- Explain the meaning of the tempo marking
- Identify note pitch names including accidentals, or identify rhythm values found in the piece drawn from the following: half note (minim), dotted half-note (dotted minim), quarter note (crotchet), dotted quarter-note (dotted crotchet), eighth note (quaver), sixteenth note (semiquaver) and associated rests
- Identify the tempo marking or genre of the piece

The candidate's Instrument

The candidate may be asked to explain how manipulation of the mouthpiece affects the overall tuning of the alto sax.

Music Theory

The candidate may be asked to describe the construction of a minor seventh chord or a major seventh chord.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE | GRADE 3

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play five performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

The Grade 3 Performance Certificate lasts 25 minutes.

GRADED CERTIFICATE | GRADE 3

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and Technical Studies). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 3 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's discretion

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 3 there are three groups of technical work: scales, arpeggios and a technical study. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

All scales and arpeggios should be prepared with tongued and slurred articulation.

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is $\text{♩} = 60$.

- B $\flat$ major scale, 1 octave
- A major scale, to the 12th
- A dorian mode, to the 12th
- A minor pentatonic scale, to the 12th
- A blues scale, to the 12th
- G chromatic scale, 1 octave

Group B: Arpeggios

The tempo for this group is $\text{♩} = 60$.

- B $\flat$ major arpeggio, 1 octave
- A major arpeggio, 1 octave
- B $\flat$ minor arpeggio, 1 octave
- A minor arpeggio, 1 octave

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, you will be required to perform all of the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.
- Study 2: Modes and stylistic techniques.
- Study 3: Intervals and intonation.

GRADE 4

The Grade 4 Alto Sax exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for two to three years and who are ready for intermediate level playing. They have mastered the key skills up to Grade 3 and since acquired greater use of technique, more complex rhythms, co-ordination and musical understanding. Candidates will be developing a sense of expression and continuing to broaden their stylistic awareness, and there is also the opportunity to improvise which will be growing in assurance and articulation.

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

GRADE EXAM | GRADE 4

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and a Technical Study).

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete **either** a Sight Reading **or** an Improvisation & Interpretation test, **and** two Ear Tests (which continue to develop melodic recall and begin to develop harmonic recall).

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 4 exam lasts 27 minutes and is taken in the following order:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*
- Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request

TECHNICAL WORK

In this part of the exam, the examiner will ask for a selection of scales (Group A) and arpeggios (Group B) drawn from the lists below. All scales and arpeggios should be prepared with tongued, slurred and off-beat quaver swing tonguing. The examiner will announce the key, scale or arpeggio type and articulation for each example. Where shown, the candidate may choose the type of minor scale (natural, harmonic or melodic).

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is ♩=70.

- C major scale, 2 octaves
- G major scale, to the 12th
- C dorian mode, 2 octaves
- G dorian mode, to the 12th
- C minor pentatonic scale, 2 octaves
- G minor pentatonic scale, to the 12th
- C mixolydian mode, 2 octaves
- G mixolydian mode, to the 12th
- C blues scale, 2 octaves
- G blues scale, to the 12th
- C chromatic scale, 2 octaves

Group B: Arpeggios

- The tempo for this group is ♩=60.
- D major 7th arpeggio, 1 octave
- D minor 7th arpeggio, 1 octave
- D dominant 7th arpeggio, 1 octave
- G major 7th arpeggio, 1 octave
- G minor 7th arpeggio, 1 octave
- G dominant 7th arpeggio, 1 octave

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, the candidate will be required to perform their choice of one of the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.
- Study 2: Modes and stylistic techniques.
- Study 3: Intervals and intonation.

SUPPORTING TESTS

Section 1 | Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation

In this section, candidates can choose between a Sight Reading test or an Improvisation & Interpretation test. The examiner will ask which the candidate has chosen before then showing the test. Once the candidate has chosen, they cannot change their mind.

Sight Reading

In the Sight Reading test, the examiner will give the candidate a short piece to be played to a backing track. At this grade, there will be two bars where the candidate will need to improvise melodies to complement the surrounding notated melody during their performance. Chord symbols are shown as guidance for the two bars of improvisation.

The test will be:

- 8 bars duration
- In the key of G major or G minor
- Melodies are predominantly diatonic with occasional accidentals
- In $\frac{4}{4}$ or $\frac{8}{8}$ time

The candidate will first be given 90 seconds to prepare, after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is for the candidate to practise and the second time is for them to perform the final version for the exam. For each playthrough, the backing track will begin with a one-bar count-in.

During the preparation time, they will be given the choice of a metronome click throughout or a one bar 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.

Improvisation & Interpretation

In the Improvisation & Interpretation test, the examiner will give the candidate a 12-bar lead sheet, over which they will be required to improvise a melody on their instrument. Two bars within the test will contain notated melody which the candidate must perform as written during their performance.

The candidate will first be given 90 seconds to prepare, after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is for the candidate to practise and the second time is for them to perform the final version for the exam. For each playthrough, the backing track will begin with a one-bar count-in.

During the preparation time, they will be given the choice of a metronome click throughout or a one bar 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.

The test will be:

- In the key of G major or G minor
- 12 bars duration, of which 2 bars containing notated melody are to be played as written, and the remaining 10 bars are to be improvised
- Predominantly diatonic, but may contain occasional non-diatonic harmony and accidentals
- In $\frac{4}{4}$ time, with a straight or swung eighth-note (swung quaver) feel
- At a tempo of $\text{♩} = 95-105$

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 2 | Ear Tests

In this section, candidates are tested on their melodic and rhythmic recall skills.

Test 1 | Melodic Recall

The examiner will play the candidate a two-bar melody with a drum backing using the G major or G minor scale. The first note of the melody will be the root note. The candidate will play the melody back on their instrument.

The test begins with a reference root note. The melody will then be played twice. Each time the melody is played it is preceded by a vocal count-in. There will then be a short gap for the candidate to practise. After the third vocal count-in (signifying the assessed part of the test) the candidate should play the melody along to the drum backing. The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

Test 2 | Harmonic Recall

The examiner will play the candidate a four-bar chord sequence in the key of C major, drawn from chords I, IV and V. The test contains one chord per bar, and the first chord will be the root chord. The candidate will be asked to identify the chord sequence.

The test begins with a reference root note. The chord sequence will then be played twice. Each time the chord sequence is played, it is preceded by a vocal count-in. After the second playthrough, the examiner will ask the candidate to state the chord sequence. The candidate may use chord names (C major, G major etc.) or numerals (I, V etc.). The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 3 | General Musicianship Questions

The final part of the exam is the General Musicianship Questions (GMQs) section, where the examiner will ask five questions drawn from the topics listed below. For the notation section, the examiner will ask the candidate to choose a piece they've played in the exam.

Notation

The candidate may be asked to:

- Explain the meaning of the time signature or key signature
- Explain the meaning of the tempo marking or any dynamic marking found on the score
- Identify note pitch names (including accidentals) or identify rhythm values found in piece – half note (minim), dotted half-note (dotted minim), quarter note (crotchet), dotted quarter-note (dotted crotchet), eighth note (quaver), sixteenth note (semiquaver), eighth-note triplets (quaver triplets), and their associated rests.
- Explain the meaning of any articulation or expression mark found on the score

The Candidate's Chosen Piece

The candidate may be asked to give one example of a musical feature of the piece which is representative of the genre, e.g. rhythmic features, harmonic features, tempo, feel *etc.*

Music Theory

The candidate may be asked to describe the construction of a diminished or augmented triad.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE | GRADE 4

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play five performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

The Grade 4 Performance Certificate lasts 25 minutes.

GRADED CERTIFICATE | GRADE 4

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and Technical Studies). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 4 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's discretion

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 4 there are three groups of technical work: scales, arpeggios and a technical study. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

All scales and arpeggios should be prepared with tongued, slurred and off-beat quaver swing tonguing.

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is ♩=70.

- C major scale, 2 octaves
- G major scale, to the 12th
- C dorian mode, 2 octaves
- G dorian mode, to the 12th
- C minor pentatonic scale, 2 octaves
- G minor pentatonic scale, to the 12th
- C mixolydian mode, 2 octaves
- G mixolydian mode, to the 12th
- C blues scale, 2 octaves
- G blues scale, to the 12th
- C chromatic scale, 2 octaves

Group B: Arpeggios

- The tempo for this group is ♩=60.
- D major 7th arpeggio, 1 octave
- D minor 7th arpeggio, 1 octave
- D dominant 7th arpeggio, 1 octave
- G major 7th arpeggio, 1 octave
- G minor 7th arpeggio, 1 octave
- G dominant 7th arpeggio, 1 octave

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, the candidate will be required to perform all of the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.
- Study 2: Modes and stylistic techniques.
- Study 3: Intervals and intonation.

GRADE 5

The Grade 5 Alto Sax exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for three years or more and who have fully consolidated their intermediate level playing. They have mastered the key skills up to Grade 4 and since acquired a greater use of appropriate technique, more complex rhythms, coordination and musical understanding. Candidates will have developed a good sense of expression, have a strong grasp of stylistic awareness, and there is also the opportunity to improvise which is now individual, assured, accurate and expressive.

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

GRADE EXAM | GRADE 5

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and a Technical Study).

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete **either** a Sight Reading **or** an Improvisation & Interpretation test, **and** two Ear Tests (which continue to develop melodic and harmonic recall).

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 5 exam lasts 27 minutes and is taken in the following order:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*
- Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request

TECHNICAL WORK

In this part of the exam, the examiner will ask for a selection of scales (Group A) and arpeggios (Group B) drawn from the lists below. All scales and arpeggios should be prepared with tongued, slurred and off-beat quaver swing tonguing. The examiner will announce the key, scale or arpeggio type and articulation for each example. Where shown, the candidate may choose the type of minor scale (natural, harmonic or melodic).

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is ♩=80.

- E major scale, two octaves
- F major scale, to the 12th
- E dorian mode, two octaves
- F dorian mode, to the 12th
- E mixolydian mode, two octaves
- F mixolydian mode, to the 12th
- E minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- F minor pentatonic scale, to the 12th
- E blues scale, two octaves
- F blues scale, to the 12th
- E chromatic scale, two octaves

Group B: Arpeggios

The tempo for this group is ♩=70.

- E major 7th arpeggio, two octaves
- F major 7th arpeggio, to the 12th
- E minor 7th arpeggio, two octaves
- F minor 7th arpeggio, to the 12th
- E dominant 7th arpeggio, two octaves
- F dominant 7th arpeggio, to the 12th
- E diminished 7th arpeggio, two octaves
- F diminished 7th arpeggio, to the 12th

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, the candidate will be required to perform their choice of one of the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.
- Study 2: Modes and stylistic techniques.
- Study 3: Intervals and intonation.

SUPPORTING TESTS

Section 1 | Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation

In this section, candidates can choose between a Sight Reading test or an Improvisation & Interpretation test. The examiner will ask which the candidate has chosen before then showing the test. Once the candidate has chosen, they cannot change their mind.

Sight Reading

In the Sight Reading test, the examiner will give the candidate a short piece to be played to a backing track. At this grade, there will be four bars where the candidate will need to improvise melodies to complement the surrounding notated melody during their performance. Chord symbols are shown as guidance for the four bars of improvisation.

The test will be:

- 12 bars duration
- In the key of E major, E minor, F major or F minor
- Melodies are predominantly diatonic – there may be occasional accidentals
- In $\frac{4}{4}$, $\frac{6}{8}$ or $\frac{12}{8}$ time

The candidate will first be given 90 seconds to prepare, after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is for the candidate to practise and the second time is for them to perform the final version for the exam. For each playthrough, the backing track will begin with a one-bar count-in.

During the preparation time, the candidate will be given the choice of a metronome click throughout or a one bar 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.

Improvisation & Interpretation

In the Improvisation & Interpretation test, the examiner will give the candidate a 12-bar lead sheet, over which they will be required to improvise a melody on their instrument. Four bars within the test will contain notated melody which the candidate must perform as written during their performance.

The candidate will first be given 90 seconds to prepare, after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is for the candidate to practise and the second time is for them to perform the final version for the exam. For each playthrough, the backing track will begin with a one-bar count-in.

During the preparation time, the candidate will be given the choice of a metronome click throughout or a one bar 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.

The test will be:

- In the key of E major, C# minor, F major and D minor.
- 12 bars duration, of which 4 bars containing notated melody are to be played as written, and the remaining 8 bars are to be improvised
- Predominantly diatonic, but may contain occasional non-diatonic harmony and accidentals
- In $\frac{4}{4}$ time, with a straight or swung eighth-note (swung quaver) feel
- A maximum tempo of $\text{♩} = 115$

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 2 | Ear Tests

In this section, candidates are tested on their melodic and rhythmic recall skills.

Test 1 | Melodic Recall

The examiner will play the candidate a two-bar melody with a drum backing using the E major or E minor scale. The first note of the melody will be the root note. The candidate will play the melody back on their instrument.

The test begins with a reference root note. The melody will then be played twice. Each time the melody is played it is preceded by a vocal count-in. There will then be a short gap for the candidate to practise. After the third vocal count-in (signifying the assessed part of the test) the candidate should play the melody along to the drum backing. The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

Test 2 | Harmonic Recall

The examiner will play the candidate a two-bar chord sequence in the key of C major, drawn from chords I, II^m, IV, V and VI^m. The test contains two chords per bar, and the first chord will be the root chord. The candidate will be asked to identify the chord sequence.

The test begins with a reference root note. The chord sequence will then be played twice. Each time the chord sequence is played, it is preceded by a vocal count-in. After the second playthrough, the examiner will ask the candidate to state the chord sequence. The candidate may use chord names (C major, G major etc.) or numerals (I, V etc.). The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 3 | General Musicianship Questions

The final part of the exam is the General Musicianship Questions (GMQs) section, where the examiner will ask five questions drawn from the topics listed below. For the notation section, the examiner will ask the candidate to choose a piece they've played in the exam.

Notation

The candidate may be asked to:

- Explain the meaning of the time signature or key signature
- Explain the meaning of the tempo marking or any dynamic marking found on the score
- Identify any note pitch name(s) or rhythm value(s) found on the score
- Explain the meaning of any articulation or expression mark found on the score

The Candidate's Chosen Piece

The candidate may be asked to give one example of a musical feature of the piece which is representative of the genre, e.g. rhythmic features, harmonic features, tempo, feel *etc.*

Music Theory

The candidate may be asked to describe the construction of a diminished 7 chord or a minor 7^b5 chord.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE | GRADE 5

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play five performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

The Grade 5 Performance Certificate lasts 25 minutes.

GRADED CERTIFICATE | GRADE 5

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and Technical Studies). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 5 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's discretion

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 5 there are three groups of technical work: scales, arpeggios and a technical study. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

All scales and arpeggios should be prepared with tongued, slurred and off-beat quaver swing tonguing.

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is ♩=80.

- E major scale, two octaves
- F major scale, to the 12th
- E dorian mode, two octaves
- F dorian mode, to the 12th
- E mixolydian mode, two octaves
- F mixolydian mode, to the 12th
- E minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- F minor pentatonic scale, to the 12th
- E blues scale, two octaves
- F blues scale, to the 12th
- E chromatic scale, two octaves

Group B: Arpeggios

The tempo for this group is ♩=70.

- E major 7th arpeggio, two octaves
- F major 7th arpeggio, to the 12th
- E minor 7th arpeggio, two octaves
- F minor 7th arpeggio, to the 12th
- E dominant 7th arpeggio, two octaves
- F dominant 7th arpeggio, to the 12th
- E diminished 7th arpeggio, two octaves
- F diminished 7th arpeggio, to the 12th

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, the candidate will be required to perform all of the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.
- Study 2: Modes and stylistic techniques.
- Study 3: Intervals and intonation.

GRADE 6

The Grade 6 Alto Sax exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for three years or more and who have fully consolidated their intermediate level playing. They have mastered the key skills up to Grade 5 and since acquired a greater use of appropriate technique, more complex rhythms, coordination and musical understanding. Candidates will have developed a good sense of expression, have a strong grasp of stylistic awareness, and there is also the opportunity to improvise which is now individual, assured, accurate and expressive.

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

GRADE EXAM | GRADE 6

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and a Technical Study).

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete a Quick Study Piece, and two Ear Tests (which continue to develop melodic and harmonic recall).

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 6 exam lasts 32 minutes and is taken in the following order:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*
- Quick Study Piece
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request

TECHNICAL WORK

In this part of the exam, the examiner will ask for a selection of scales (Group A) and arpeggios (Group B) drawn from the lists below. All scales and arpeggios should be prepared with **tongued, slurred** and **off-beat quaver swing** tonguing. The examiner will announce the key, scale or arpeggio type and articulation for each example.

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is ♩=90.

- G major scale, to the 12th
- A major scale, to the 12th
- D dorian mode, two octaves
- B^b dorian mode, two octaves
- D minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- B^b minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- D mixolydian mode, two octaves
- B^b mixolydian mode, two octaves
- D blues scale, two octaves
- B^b blues scale, two octaves
- D chromatic scale, two octaves
- B^b chromatic scale, two octaves
- F[#] phrygian dominant, one octave
- D phrygian dominant, one octave
- G major exercise in broken thirds, to the 12th

Group B: Arpeggios

The tempo for this group is ♩=80.

- G major 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- G minor 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- G dominant 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- D diminished 7 arpeggio, two octaves
- B^b diminished 7 arpeggio, two octaves

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, the candidate will be required to perform their choice of one of the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.
- Study 2: Modes and stylistic techniques.
- Study 3: Intervals and intonation.

SUPPORTING TESTS

Section 1 | Quick Study Piece

At this grade the candidate will be asked to prepare and play a Quick Study Piece (QSP). Candidates will be required to sight-read a section of notation and improvise melodies over a chord sequence. An example QSP is provided in the grade book, however, the examiner will give the candidate a different version in the exam.

The candidate will be shown the test and played the track with the notated parts played. Any bars that require improvisation will not be demonstrated. The candidate will then have three minutes to study the test with the option of a click track. The backing track will be played twice more. The candidate will be allowed to practise during the first playing of the backing track, with the notated parts now absent, before playing it to the examiner on the second playing of the backing track.

The piece will contain 8 bars of sight reading and 8–10 bars of improvisation, and will be written in a contemporary music genre such as:

- Rock
- Pop
- Blues
- Soul
- R&B

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 2 | Ear Tests

In this section, candidates are tested on their melodic and rhythmic recall skills.

Test 1 | Melodic Recall

The examiner will play the candidate a two-bar melody with a drum backing using the B mixolydian mode or B dorian mode. The first note of the melody will be the root note. The candidate will play the melody back on their instrument.

The test begins with a reference root note. The melody will then be played twice. Each time the melody is played it is preceded by a vocal count-in. There will then be a short gap for the candidate to practise. After the third vocal count-in (signifying the assessed part of the test) the candidate should play the melody along to the drum backing. The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

Test 2 | Harmonic Recall

The examiner will play the candidate a two-bar chord sequence in the key of C major, drawn from chords I maj⁷, II m⁷, IV maj⁷, V⁷ and VI m⁷. The test contains two chords per bar, and the first chord will be the root chord. The candidate will be asked to identify the chord sequence.

The test begins with a reference root note. The chord sequence will then be played twice. Each time the chord sequence is played, it is preceded by a vocal count-in. After the second playthrough, the examiner will ask the candidate to state the chord sequence. The candidate may use chord names (C major⁷, G⁷ etc.) or numerals (I major⁷, V⁷ etc.). The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 3 | General Musicianship Questions

The final part of the exam is the General Musicianship Questions (GMQs) section, where the examiner will ask five questions drawn from the topics listed below. For the notation section, the examiner will ask the candidate to choose a piece they've played in the exam.

Notation

The candidate may be asked to explain the meaning of a number of features found on your score, drawn from the following:

- time signature
- key signature
- tempo marking
- repeat symbols
- navigation (**D.S.**, **D.C.**, **Coda** etc.)
- articulation/expression indications and symbols
- dynamic indications
- special effects indications and symbols

The candidate may also be asked to:

- identify the pitch of any note(s) found on your score
- identify the rhythmic value of any note(s) or rest(s) found on your score

Genre

The candidate may be asked to give one example of a musical feature of the piece which is representative of its genre, for example:

- rhythmic features
- harmonic features
- melodic features
- tempo
- feel/groove

Music Theory

The candidate may be asked to describe the construction of one of the following chord types:

- major⁹
- minor⁹
- dominant⁹

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE | GRADE 6

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play five performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

The Grade 6 Performance Certificate lasts 27 minutes.

GRADED CERTIFICATE | GRADE 6

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and Technical Studies). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 6 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's discretion

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 6 there are three groups of technical work: scales, arpeggios and a technical study. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

All scales and arpeggios should be prepared with **tongued**, **slurred** and **off-beat quaver swing** tonguing.

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is $\text{♩} = 90$.

- G major scale, to the 12th
- A major scale, to the 12th
- D dorian mode, two octaves
- B $\flat$ dorian mode, two octaves
- D minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- B $\flat$ minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- D mixolydian mode, two octaves
- B $\flat$ mixolydian mode, two octaves
- D blues scale, two octaves
- B $\flat$ blues scale, two octaves
- D chromatic scale, two octaves
- B $\flat$ chromatic scale, two octaves
- F $\sharp$ phrygian dominant, one octave
- D phrygian dominant, one octave
- G major exercise in broken thirds, to the 12th

Group B: Arpeggios

The tempo for this group is $\text{♩} = 80$.

- G major 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- G minor 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- G dominant 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- D diminished 7 arpeggio, two octaves
- B $\flat$ diminished 7 arpeggio, two octaves

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, the candidate will be required to perform all of the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.
- Study 2: Modes and stylistic techniques.
- Study 3: Intervals and intonation.

GRADE 7

The Grade 7 Alto Sax exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for three years or more and who have fully consolidated their intermediate level playing. They have mastered the key skills up to Grade 6 and since acquired a greater use of appropriate technique, more complex rhythms, coordination and musical understanding. Candidates will have developed a good sense of expression, have a strong grasp of stylistic awareness, and there is also the opportunity to improvise which is now individual, assured, accurate and expressive.

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

GRADE EXAM | GRADE 7

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and a Technical Study).

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete a Quick Study Piece, and two Ear Tests (which continue to develop melodic and harmonic recall).

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 7 exam lasts 32 minutes and is taken in the following order:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*
- Quick Study Piece
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request

TECHNICAL WORK

In this part of the exam, the examiner will ask for a selection of scales (Group A) and arpeggios (Group B) drawn from the lists below. All scales and arpeggios should be prepared with **tongued, slurred** and **off-beat quaver swing** tonguing. The examiner will announce the key, scale or arpeggio type and articulation for each example.

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is ♩=110.

- A^b major scale, to the 12th
- C dorian mode, two octaves
- E^b dorian mode, two octaves
- B dorian mode, two octaves
- C minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- E^b minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- B minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- C mixolydian mode, two octaves
- E^b mixolydian mode, two octaves
- B mixolydian mode, two octaves
- C blues scale, two octaves
- E^b blues scale, two octaves
- B blues scale, two octaves
- C chromatic scale, two octaves
- E^b chromatic scale, two octaves
- B chromatic scale, two octaves
- F phrygian dominant scale, one octave
- C phrygian dominant scale, one octave
- D major exercise in broken thirds, two octaves

Group B: Arpeggios

The tempo for this group is ♩=100.

- A^b major 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- A^b minor 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- A^b dominant 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- C diminished 7 arpeggio, two octaves
- B diminished 7 arpeggio, two octaves

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, the candidate will be required to perform their choice of one of the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.
- Study 2: Intervals and intonation.
- Study 3: Modes and stylistic techniques.

SUPPORTING TESTS

Section 1 | Quick Study Piece

At this grade the candidate will be asked to prepare and play a Quick Study Piece (QSP). Candidates will be required to sight-read a section of notation and improvise melodies over a chord sequence. An example QSP is provided in the grade book, however, the examiner will give the candidate a different version in the exam.

The candidate will be shown the test and played the track with the notated parts played. Any bars that require improvisation will not be demonstrated. The candidate will then have three minutes to study the test with the option of a click track. The backing track will be played twice more. The candidate will be allowed to practise during the first playing of the backing track, with the notated parts now absent, before playing it to the examiner on the second playing of the backing track.

The piece will contain 8–12 bars of sight reading and 8–12 bars of improvisation, and will be written in a contemporary music genre such as:

- Rock
- Pop
- Blues
- Soul
- R&B

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 2 | Ear Tests

In this section, candidates are tested on their melodic and rhythmic recall skills.

Test 1 | Melodic Recall

The examiner will play the candidate a two-bar melody with a drum backing using the E^b mixolydian mode or B^b dorian mode. The first note of the melody will be the root note. The candidate will play the melody back on their instrument.

The test begins with a reference root note. The melody will then be played twice. Each time the melody is played it is preceded by a vocal count-in. There will then be a short gap for the candidate to practise. After the third vocal count-in (signifying the assessed part of the test) the candidate should play the melody along to the drum backing. The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

Test 2 | Harmonic Recall

The examiner will play the candidate a two-bar chord sequence in the key of C major, drawn from any diatonic chords, including sevenths. The test contains two chords per bar. The candidate will be asked to identify the chord sequence.

The test begins with a reference root note. The chord sequence will then be played twice. Each time the chord sequence is played, it is preceded by a vocal count-in. After the second playthrough, the examiner will ask the candidate to state the chord sequence. The candidate may use chord names (C major⁷, G⁷ etc.) or numerals (I major⁷, V⁷ etc.). The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 3 | General Musicianship Questions

The final part of the exam is the General Musicianship Questions (GMQs) section, where the examiner will ask five questions drawn from the topics listed below. For the notation section, the examiner will ask the candidate to choose a piece they've played in the exam.

Notation

The candidate may be asked to explain the meaning of a number of features found on your score, drawn from the following:

- time signature
- key signature
- tempo marking
- repeat symbols
- navigation (**D.S.**, **D.C.**, **Coda** etc.)
- articulation/expression indications and symbols
- dynamic indications
- special effects indications and symbols

The candidate may also be asked to:

- identify the pitch of any note(s) found on your score
- identify the rhythmic value of any note(s) or rest(s) found on your score

Genre

The candidate may be asked to give one example of a musical feature of the piece which is representative of its genre, for example:

- rhythmic features
- harmonic features
- melodic features
- tempo
- feel/groove

Music Theory

The candidate may be asked to describe the construction of one of the following chord types:

- dominant^{7b9}
- dominant^{7#9}

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE | GRADE 7

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play five performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

The Grade 7 Performance Certificate lasts 27 minutes.

GRADED CERTIFICATE | GRADE 7

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and Technical Studies). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 7 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's discretion

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 7 there are three groups of technical work: scales, arpeggios and a technical study. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

All scales and arpeggios should be prepared with **tongued**, **slurred** and **off-beat quaver swing** tonguing.

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is ♩=110.

- A^b major scale, to the 12th
- C dorian mode, two octaves
- E^b dorian mode, two octaves
- B dorian mode, two octaves
- C minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- E^b minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- B minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- C mixolydian mode, two octaves
- E^b mixolydian mode, two octaves
- B mixolydian mode, two octaves
- C blues scale, two octaves
- E^b blues scale, two octaves
- B blues scale, two octaves
- C chromatic scale, two octaves
- E^b chromatic scale, two octaves
- B chromatic scale, two octaves
- F phrygian dominant scale, one octave
- C phrygian dominant scale, one octave
- D major exercise in broken thirds, two octaves

Group B: Arpeggios

The tempo for this group is ♩=100.

- A^b major 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- A^b minor 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- A^b dominant 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- C diminished 7 arpeggio, two octaves
- B diminished 7 arpeggio, two octaves

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, the candidate will be required to perform all of the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.
- Study 2: Intervals and intonation.
- Study 3: Modes and stylistic techniques.

GRADE 8

The Grade 8 Alto Sax exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for three years or more and who have fully consolidated their intermediate level playing. They have mastered the key skills up to Grade 7 and since acquired a greater use of appropriate technique, more complex rhythms, coordination and musical understanding. Candidates will have developed a good sense of expression, have a strong grasp of stylistic awareness, and there is also the opportunity to improvise which is now individual, assured, accurate and expressive.

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

GRADE EXAM | GRADE 8

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and a Technical Study).

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete a Quick Study Piece, and two Ear Tests (which continue to develop melodic and harmonic recall).

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 8 exam lasts 32 minutes and is taken in the following order:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*
- Quick Study Piece
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request

TECHNICAL WORK

In this part of the exam, the examiner will ask for a selection of scales (Group A) and arpeggios (Group B) drawn from the lists below. All scales and arpeggios should be prepared with **tongued, slurred** and **off-beat quaver swing** tonguing. The examiner will announce the key, scale or arpeggio type and articulation for each example.

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is ♩=125.

- D major scale, to the 12th
- B $\flat$ major scale, to the 12th
- E $\flat$ major scale, to the 12th
- F $\sharp$ dorian mode, to the 12th
- C $\sharp$ minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- E minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- C $\sharp$ mixolydian mode, two octaves
- E mixolydian mode, two octaves
- C $\sharp$ blues scale, two octaves
- E blues scale, two octaves
- C $\sharp$ chromatic scale, two octaves
- E chromatic scale, two octaves
- C $\sharp$ phrygian dominant scale, one octave
- G $\sharp$ phrygian dominant scale, one octave
- E $\flat$ major exercise in broken thirds, two octaves
- B $\flat$ major exercise in broken thirds, two octaves

Group B: Arpeggios

The tempo for this group is ♩=110.

- D major 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- B $\flat$ major 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- E $\flat$ major 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- D minor 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- B $\flat$ minor 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- E $\flat$ minor 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- D dominant 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- B $\flat$ dominant 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- E $\flat$ dominant 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- C $\sharp$ diminished 7 arpeggio, two octaves

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, the candidate will be required to perform their choice of one of the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Intervals and intonation.
- Study 2: Modes and stylistic techniques.
- Study 3: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.

SUPPORTING TESTS

Section 1 | Quick Study Piece

At this grade the candidate will be asked to prepare and play a Quick Study Piece (QSP). Candidates will be required to sight-read a section of notation and improvise melodies over a chord sequence. An example QSP is provided in the grade book, however, the examiner will give the candidate a different version in the exam.

The candidate will be shown the test and played the track with the notated parts played. Any bars that require improvisation will not be demonstrated. The candidate will then have three minutes to study the test with the option of a click track. The backing track will be played twice more. The candidate will be allowed to practise during the first playing of the backing track, with the notated parts now absent, before playing it to the examiner on the second playing of the backing track.

The piece will contain up to 12 bars of sight reading and up to 16 bars of improvisation, and will be written in a contemporary music genre such as:

- Rock
- Pop
- Blues
- Soul
- Jazz
- Funk
- R&B

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 2 | Ear Tests

In this section, candidates are tested on their melodic and rhythmic recall skills.

Test 1 | Melodic Recall

The examiner will play the candidate a two-bar melody with a drum backing, containing notes drawn from **both** the F# blues scale **and** the F# dorian mode. The first note of the melody will be the root note. The candidate will play the melody back on their instrument.

The test begins with a reference root note. The melody will then be played twice. Each time the melody is played it is preceded by a vocal count-in. There will then be a short gap for the candidate to practise. After the third vocal count-in (signifying the assessed part of the test) the candidate should play the melody along to the drum backing. The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

Test 2 | Harmonic Recall

The examiner will play you a two-bar chord sequence in the key of C major or C minor, drawn from any diatonic chords, including sevenths. The test contains two chords per bar. You will be asked to identify the chord sequence.

The test begins with a reference root note. The chord sequence will then be played twice. Each time the chord sequence is played, it is preceded by a vocal count-in. After the second playthrough, the examiner will ask the candidate to state the chord sequence. The candidate may use chord names (C major⁷, G⁷ etc.) or numerals (I major⁷, V⁷ etc.). The tempo is ♩=95.

Example audio is available in the downloadable files provided with the grade book.

SUPPORTING TESTS | CONTINUED

Section 3 | General Musicianship Questions

The final part of the exam is the General Musicianship Questions (GMQs) section, where the examiner will ask five questions drawn from the topics listed below. For the notation section, the examiner will ask the candidate to choose a piece they've played in the exam.

Notation

The candidate may be asked to explain the meaning of a number of features found on your score, drawn from the following:

- time signature
- key signature
- tempo marking
- repeat symbols
- navigation (**D.S.**, **D.C.**, **Coda** etc.)
- articulation/expression indications and symbols
- dynamic indications
- special effects indications and symbols

The candidate may also be asked to:

- identify the pitch of any note(s) found on your score
- identify the rhythmic value of any note(s) or rest(s) found on your score

Genre

The candidate may be asked to give one example of a musical feature of the piece which is representative of its genre, for example:

- rhythmic features
- harmonic features
- melodic features
- tempo
- feel/groove

Music Theory

The candidate may be asked to describe the construction of one of the following chord types:

- dominant^{9#11}

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE | GRADE 8

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play five performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

The Grade 8 Performance Certificate lasts 30 minutes.

GRADED CERTIFICATE | GRADE 8

EXAM OVERVIEW

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios and Technical Studies). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 8 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

* These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's discretion

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 8 there are three groups of technical work: scales, arpeggios and a technical study. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

All scales and arpeggios should be prepared with **tongued**, **slurred** and **off-beat quaver swing** tonguing.

Group A: Scales

The tempo for this group is $\text{♩} = 125$.

- D major scale, to the 12th
- B $\flat$ major scale, to the 12th
- E $\flat$ major scale, to the 12th
- F $\sharp$ dorian mode, to the 12th
- C $\sharp$ minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- E minor pentatonic scale, two octaves
- C $\sharp$ mixolydian mode, two octaves
- E mixolydian mode, two octaves
- C $\sharp$ blues scale, two octaves
- E blues scale, two octaves
- C $\sharp$ chromatic scale, two octaves
- E chromatic scale, two octaves
- C $\sharp$ phrygian dominant scale, one octave
- G $\sharp$ phrygian dominant scale, one octave
- E $\flat$ major exercise in broken thirds, two octaves
- B $\flat$ major exercise in broken thirds, two octaves

Group B: Arpeggios

The tempo for this group is $\text{♩} = 110$.

- D major 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- B $\flat$ major 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- E $\flat$ major 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- D minor 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- B $\flat$ minor 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- E $\flat$ minor 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- D dominant 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- B $\flat$ dominant 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- E $\flat$ dominant 7 arpeggio, to the 12th
- C $\sharp$ diminished 7 arpeggio, two octaves

Group C: Technical Study

In this group, the candidate will be required to perform all the technical studies shown below.

- Study 1: Intervals and intonation.
- Study 2: Modes and stylistic techniques.
- Study 3: Dynamics, articulation and phrasing.

REVISION HISTORY

REVISION HISTORY

6 Nov 2023

Initial document release.

31 Mar 2025

Added information about the Graded Certificate exam type and qualification. Updated QANs to reflect this addition.

(p.14) Added guidance on selection of performance pieces stipulating that candidates may not be assessed on the same performance pieces more than once

9 May 2025

Syllabus cover updated