

# GUITAR

Syllabus Specification

2018



rockschool®

Graded Examinations in Popular Music Performance

# GUITAR

## Syllabus Specification

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**Paul Elliott:** Liberty drums, Istanbul Mehmet cymbals,  
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## Acknowledgements (continued)

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#### Special Thanks

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Mastered by Duncan Jordan  
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#### Recording and Audio Engineering (Classics 2012 Repertoire)

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Engineered, mixed and mastered by Jonas Persson, (Hal Leonard)  
Mastering and additional mixing by Duncan Jordan

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# PREFACE

## FOREWORD

Rockschool's Guitar Syllabus 2018 has been designed to build upon the ever-popular 2012 qualification, expanding upon the original compositions with arrangements of six new 'hit tunes' at each grade. This has resulted in an even broader scope for learners at all levels to engage with repertoire which has been rigorously benchmarked against academic and industry standards. Furthermore, students can gauge their progress via commensurate levels of technical exercises, prepared and unseen skills tests and questions relating to their studies at each grade.

This specification guide serves three purposes:

- To provide regulatory information surrounding the qualification
- To provide an overview of examination structure and content
- To provide content and assessment specification relevant to each graded examination

Rockschool's graded exams continue to provide a progressive mastery approach to music and an enjoyable experience for all learners.



# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Rockscool 2018–2024 syllabus for Guitar. 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](http://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 prepare for the examination.

This Syllabus Guide covers the following examinations:

- Graded Examinations Debut – Grade 8
- Performance Certificates Debut – 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 regulated in England and Northern Ireland by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), in Wales by Qualifications Wales and accredited in Scotland by the Scottish Qualifications Authority. 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](http://www.rslawards.com/about-us/ucas-points)

## Period Of Operation

This syllabus specification covers Guitar Grade Examinations and Performance Certificates from September 2018.

## Examinations

Rockscool offers **two types of graded music examination: Graded Examination & Performance Certificate.**

**Please note:** Premiere exams are only available as a performance certificate.

### GRADE EXAMINATIONS

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

PREPARED WORK	UNPREPARED WORK
3 Performance Pieces: Debut – Grade 8 Technical Exercises: Debut – Grade 8	Sight Reading: Debut – Grade 5 or Improvisation & Interpretation: Grades 1–5 Quick Study Piece: Grades 6–8 Ear Tests: Debut – Grade 8 General Musicianship Questions: Debut – Grade 8

### PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

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

PREPARED WORK
5 Performance Pieces: Premiere – Grade 8

## OVERVIEW

### Unit Overview – Graded Examinations in Popular Music Performance

QUALIFICATION TITLE	QAN	TOTAL NO. OF UNITS	GUIDED LEARNING HOURS	CREDIT	TOTAL QUALIFICATION TIME
RSL Entry Level Award in Popular Music Performance (Entry 2)	601/3895/6	1	4	0	20
RSL Entry Level Award in Popular Music Performance: Debut (Entry 3)	501/0370/2	1	8	4	40
RSL Level 1 Award in Popular Music Performance: Grade 1	501/0391/X	1	12	6	60
RSL Level 1 Award in Popular Music Performance: Grade 2	501/0646/6	1	18	9	90
RSL Level 1 Award in Popular Music Performance: Grade 3	501/0647/8	1	18	12	120
RSL Level 2 Certificate in Popular Music Performance: Grade 4	501/0389/1	1	24	15	150
RSL Level 2 Certificate in Popular Music Performance: Grade 5	501/0643/0	1	24	18	180
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Popular Music Performance: Grade 6	501/0390/8	1	36	22	220
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Popular Music Performance: Grade 7	501/0645/4	1	48	27	270
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Popular Music Performance: Grade 8	501/0648/X	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 (page 17 and onwards) 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 to enter an examination, please visit the RSL website at [www.rslawards.com](http://www.rslawards.com)

# 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
- Chords
- Stylistic Studies (Level 3 only)

### Performance Pieces

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

### Unseen Tests

- Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation
- Quick Study Piece (Level 3 only)
- General Musicianship Questions

## Assessment Timings

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

### GRADE EXAMS

- **Debut:** 15 minutes
- **Grade 1:** 20 minutes
- **Grade 2:** 20 minutes
- **Grade 3:** 23 minutes
- **Grade 4:** 25 minutes
- **Grade 5:** 25 minutes
- **Grade 6:** 30 minutes
- **Grade 7:** 30 minutes
- **Grade 8:** 30 minutes

### PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

- **Premiere:** 10 minutes
- **Debut:** 12 minutes
- **Grade 1:** 15 minutes
- **Grade 2:** 15 minutes
- **Grade 3:** 18 minutes
- **Grade 4:** 20 minutes
- **Grade 5:** 20 minutes
- **Grade 6:** 23 minutes
- **Grade 7:** 23 minutes
- **Grade 8:** 26 minutes

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

## Marking Schemes

GRADE EXAMS: DEBUT – GRADE 5			
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
Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation	6 out of 10	7–8 out of 10	9+ out of 10
Ear Tests	6 out of 10	7–8 out of 10	9+ out of 10
General Musicianship Questions	3 out of 5	4 out of 5	5 out of 5
Total Marks	60%+	74%+	90%+

GRADE EXAMS: GRADES 6–8			
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
Quick Study Piece	6 out of 10	7–8 out of 10	9+ out of 10
Ear Tests	6 out of 10	7–8 out of 10	9+ out of 10
General Musicianship Questions	3 out of 5	4 out of 5	5 out of 5
Total Marks	60%+	74%+	90%+

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES: PREMIERE 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 (Debut – 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). This 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](http://www.rslawards.com)

## 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:** Two free choice pieces (a minimum of one piece must be from the Guitar grade book)
- **Performance Certificates:** Three free choice pieces (a minimum of two pieces must be from the Guitar grade book).

*Please note:* free choice pieces are not available for the Premiere exam.

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.

**All pieces must be performed to a backing track (without the examined part on the track) except in cases where a piece has been selected from previous Rockschoo syllabi and does not have a backing track or has been specifically arranged by Rockschoo as a solo piece.**

### 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](http://www.rslawards.com)

### Equal Opportunities

RSL's Equal Opportunities policy can be found on the RSL website [www.rslawards.com](http://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](mailto:info@rslawards.com)

# 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  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

## 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.

# UNIT SPECIFICATIONS

# PREMIERE

The Premiere Guitar exam is available as a Performance Certificate only. Premiere exams are assessed in the same way as other Rockscool Performance Certificates. Please refer to the marking schemes within the preface section, and the Grading Criteria & Definitions section of this guide for further details.



## PREMIERE (PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE)

### PERFORMANCE PIECES

There is a choice of six pieces in the Let's Rock Guitar book, with an additional three ensemble pieces. Candidates should choose five out of these nine pieces to play in the examination.

Candidates are NOT permitted to submit Free Choice Pieces for the Entry Level 2 (Premiere) exam.

### NOTATION

All Performance Pieces are to be played as written. There are no requirements for improvisation.

### SETTING THE LEVEL OF THE BACKING TRACK

Before playing the first piece all the way through the examiner will make sure the volume of the backing track is correct by asking the candidate to play along to the backing track for the first few bars. Once the correct level has been agreed the examiner will begin again and conduct all five pieces. Note that this is only done for the first piece.

# DEBUT

The Debut Guitar exam is for candidates who have been learning a short time and have learnt the basic skills.

## GRADE EXAM

### PREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play three performance pieces and demonstrate a selection of Technical Exercises.

### UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to use their guitar for a simple sight-reading test, which is rhythmic reading and two ear tests that begin to develop melodic recall and rhythmic sense. The final part of the exam is a set of five simple questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These are designed to explore simple theory and instrument knowledge.

## EXAM STRUCTURE

The Debut exam lasts 15 minutes and will be taken in the following sequence:

1. Pieces or Technical Exercises: The candidate chooses to play either their pieces or their technical exercises first
2. Technical Exercises or Pieces: The candidate will perform the element not chosen above
3. Sight Reading: The candidate is given a simple and previously unseen test to practice and play
4. Ear Tests: The candidate responds to two simple tests. One is melodic and one is rhythmic
5. General Musicianship Questions: The candidate answers five questions related to a piece of their choice

## PIECES

At Debut the pieces last up to a maximum of 1 minute.

### SETTING THE LEVEL OF THE BACKING TRACK

*Before playing the first piece all the way through, the examiner will make sure the volume of the backing track is correct for the candidate by asking them to play along to the backing track for the first few bars. Once the correct level has been agreed, the examiner will begin again and conduct all three pieces. Note that this is only done for the first piece.*

## TECHNICAL WORK

At Debut there are three groups of technical work. The examiner will ask for a selection from each group, and before starting this section candidates will be asked whether they would like to play the exercises along with the click or hear a single bar of click before commencing the test.

### GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: 70 bpm

- Major: C
- Minor pentatonic: A, E

### GROUP B: CHORDS

Open position chords. Individual chords will be strummed once as directed by the examiner

- Major: A, D, C, G
- Minor: A, E

### GROUP C: RIFF

In the exam candidates will be asked to play the riff from the Grade Debut book to a backing track. The riff shown in bar 1 should be played in the same shape in bars 2–4. The root note of the pattern to be played is shown in the music in each of the subsequent three bars.

## UNSEEN TESTS

### SIGHT READING

**Tempo:** 70 bpm

At Debut candidates will be offered a previously unseen sight reading test that is in the form of a four-bar rhythm played on the lowest-sounding E string. An example is shown in the Debut grade book.

The test is made up of half and quarter notes, and will be in 4/4. The examiner will allow 90 seconds preparation and practice time and will offer the option of practising with or without a metronome. The candidate will then perform the test for the examination.

### EAR TESTS

There are two tests:

- Melodic Recall
- Rhythmic Recall

#### Melodic Recall

**Tempo:** 85bpm

The examiner will play two half notes one after the other. Candidates will tell the examiner whether the second note is higher or lower in pitch than the first note. Candidates will hear the test twice. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one-bar vocal count-in. Answers can be 'higher/lower' or 'up/down'.

#### Rhythmic Recall

**Tempo:** 80 bpm

**Key:** Low E string

The examiner will play a two-bar rhythm played to a drum backing on the lowest-sounding E string. Candidates will hear the test twice, and will then be asked to play the rhythm back. Candidates will then be asked to identify the rhythm from two examples shown. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one-bar count-in. There will be a short gap to practise. Next candidates will hear a vocal count-in and will then be required to play the rhythm to the drum backing, before identifying the rhythm from the examples shown.

## GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

In this part of the exam candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question will be asked about the candidate's instrument. For this section of the exam, candidates choose the piece on which to be tested.

### MUSIC KNOWLEDGE:

In Debut candidates will be asked to identify:

- The music stave and the TAB
- The treble clef
- Half and quarter note values

### INSTRUMENT KNOWLEDGE:

In Debut candidates will be asked to identify:

- One of the following parts of their guitar: neck, body, tuning-pegs or bridge

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

### EXAM STRUCTURE

Candidates choose to play five pieces lasting a maximum of 1 minute each. There are no other elements in the Performance Certificate examination.

### FREE CHOICE PIECES

There is an option of playing free choice pieces in the examination:

- **Grade Exam:** two free choice pieces
- **Performance Certificate:** three free choice pieces

Criteria for own free choice pieces can be found by visiting the website:

[www.rslawards.com](http://www.rslawards.com)

For any questions about the appropriateness of the chosen free choice pieces, please email [freechoicepieces@rslawards.com](mailto:freechoicepieces@rslawards.com), including a copy of the score and any audio, and a member of the Rockscool team will respond with further guidance.

# GRADE 1

The Grade 1 Guitar exam is for candidates who have been learning between six months – one year and have mastered the key basic skills.

## GRADE EXAM

### PREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play three performance pieces and demonstrate a selection of Technical Exercises.

### UNPREPARED WORK:

Candidates are required to play either a four-bar sight reading test or a four-bar Improvisation and Interpretation test. There are also two ear tests that continue to develop melodic recall and rhythmic sense and the final part of the exam is a set of five simple questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These are designed to explore theory and instrument knowledge.

## EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 1 exam lasts 20 minutes and will be taken in the following sequence:

1. Pieces or Technical Exercises: Candidates may choose to play either their pieces or their technical exercises first
2. Technical Exercises or Pieces: Candidates will perform the element not chosen above
3. Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation: Candidates are given a simple and previously unseen test to practice and play
4. Ear Tests: Candidates respond to two simple tests. One is melodic and one is rhythmic
5. General Musicianship Questions: Candidates answer five questions related to a piece of their choice

## PIECES

At Grade 1 the pieces last up to a maximum of 1 minute 15 seconds.

### SETTING THE LEVEL OF THE BACKING TRACK

Before playing the first piece all the way through, the examiner will make sure the volume of the backing track is correct for the candidate by asking them to play along to the backing track for the first few bars. Once the correct level has been agreed, the examiner will begin again and conduct all three pieces. Note that this is only done for the first piece.

## TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 1 there are three groups of technical work. The examiner will ask for a selection from each group, and before starting this section candidates will be asked whether they would like to play the exercises along with the click or hear a single bar of click before commencing the test.

### GROUP A: SCALES

**Tempo:** 70 bpm

- Major: C
- Natural minor: A
- Minor pentatonic: A, E
- Major pentatonic: G

### GROUP B: CHORDS

- Powerchords: two-note chords to be played in a continuous sequence.
- Major: A, D, E, C, G: individual chords will be strummed once as directed by the examiner.
- Minor: A, D, E individual chords will be strummed once as directed by the examiner.

### GROUP C: RIFF

**Tempo:** 70 bpm

In the exam candidates will be asked to play the riff from the Grade 1 book to a backing track. The riff shown in bar 1 should be played in the same shape in bars 2–4. The root note of the pattern to be played is shown in the music in each of the subsequent three bars

## UNSEEN TESTS

### SIGHT READING OR IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Grade 1, candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation. This is a previously unseen test. An example is shown in the Grade 1 book.

#### SIGHT READING

**Key:** A minor

**Tempo:** 70 bpm

At Grade 1 the sight reading test is in the form of a melody consisting of half and quarter notes in 4/4. The test is four bars long. The examiner will allow 90 seconds preparation and practice time and will offer the option of practising with or without a metronome. Candidates will then perform the test for the examination.

#### IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

**Key:** C major or A minor

**Tempo:** 70–80 bpm

At Grade 1, candidates have the choice of playing a lead line or rhythm (chord) line. The test is four bars long and candidates will have 30 seconds preparation time. The examiner will offer the metronome as a guide throughout this time. Candidates will then have a complete practice run through with the backing track, and then on the repeat the test will be examined.

#### EAR TESTS

There are two tests: Melodic Recall and Rhythmic Recall.

##### Melodic Recall

**Tempo:** 85 bpm

The examiner will play three notes in sequence. Candidates will tell the examiner whether the second note is higher or lower in pitch than the first note and whether the third note is higher or lower than the second. The test will be played twice. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one-bar vocal count-in. Answers can be 'higher then lower' or 'up then down' (as appropriate).

##### Rhythmic Recall

**Key:** Low E string

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

The examiner will play a two-bar rhythm played to a drum backing on the lowest-sounding E string. Candidates will hear the test twice and will then be asked to play the rhythm back. Candidates will then be asked to identify the rhythm from two examples shown to them by the examiner. The test is made up of quarter and eighth notes and quarter-note rests. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one-bar count-in. There will be a short gap to practise. Next, candidates will hear a vocal count-in and will then play the rhythm to the drum backing, before identifying the rhythm from the examples shown.

## GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

In this part of the exam candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question will be asked about their instrument. For this section of the exam candidates choose the piece about which the five questions will be asked. The examiner will ask four music knowledge questions and one instrument knowledge question.

### MUSIC KNOWLEDGE

In Grade 1, candidates will be asked to identify:

- The treble clef
- The time signature
- Whole, half, quarter and eighth note values
- The difference between a major and minor chord

### INSTRUMENT KNOWLEDGE

In Grade 1, candidates will be asked to identify:

- One of the following parts of their guitar: neck, fretboard, body, tuning-pegs, nut pickups or bridge
- One main guitar brand other than the brand they are playing
- Names of the open strings



## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

### EXAM STRUCTURE

Candidates choose to play five pieces lasting a maximum of 1 minute 15 seconds each. There are no other elements in the Performance Certificate examination.

### FREE CHOICE PIECES

There is an option of playing free choice pieces in the examination:

- **Grade Exam:** two free choice pieces
- **Performance Certificate:** three free choice pieces

Criteria for own free choice pieces can be found by visiting the website:

[www.rslawards.com](http://www.rslawards.com)

For any questions about the appropriateness of the chosen free choice pieces, please email [freechoicepieces@rslawards.com](mailto:freechoicepieces@rslawards.com), including a copy of the score and any audio, and a member of the Rockscool team will respond with further guidance.

# GRADE 2

The Grade 2 Guitar exam is for candidates who have been learning approximately one year to eighteen months and have established the key basic skills along with solid basic techniques.

## GRADE EXAM

### PREPARED WORK:

Candidates are required to play three performance pieces and demonstrate a selection of Technical Exercises.

### UNPREPARED WORK:

Candidates are required to play either a four-bar sight reading test or a four-bar Improvisation and Interpretation test. There are also two ear tests that develop melodic recall and rhythmic sense and the final part of the exam is a set of five simple questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These are designed to explore theory and instrument knowledge.

## EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 2 exam lasts 20 minutes and will be taken in the following sequence:

1. Pieces or Technical Exercises: Candidates may choose to play either their pieces or their technical exercises first
2. Technical Exercises or Pieces: Candidates will perform the element not chosen above
3. Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation: Candidates are given a simple and previously unseen test to practice and play
4. Ear Tests: Candidates respond to two simple tests. One is melodic and one is rhythmic
5. General Musicianship Questions: Candidates answer five questions related to a piece of their choice

## PIECES

At Grade 2 the pieces last up to a maximum of 1 minute 30 seconds.

### SETTING THE LEVEL OF THE BACKING TRACK

*Before playing the first piece all the way through, the examiner will make sure the volume of the backing track is correct for the candidate by asking them to play along to the backing track for the first few bars. Once the correct level has been agreed, the examiner will begin again and conduct all three pieces. Note that this is only done for the first piece.*

## TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 2 there are three groups of technical work. The examiner will ask for a selection from each group, and before starting this section candidates will be asked whether they would like to play the exercises along with the click or hear a single bar of click before commencing the test.

### GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: 80 bpm

- Major: C, G
- Natural minor: A, E
- Minor pentatonic: C, G
- Major pentatonic: C, G

### GROUP B: CHORDS

- Powerchords: three-note chords to be played in a continuous sequence.
- Major: C, F, G individual chords will be strummed once as directed by the examiner.
- Minor 7th: A, D, E individual chords will be strummed once as directed by the examiner.
- Major 7th: A, C, D individual chords will be strummed once as directed by the examiner.

### GROUP C: RIFF

Tempo: 80 bpm

In the exam candidates will be asked to play the riff from the Grade 2 book to a backing track. The riff shown in bars 1 and 2 should be played in the same shape in bars 3–8. The root note of the pattern to be played is shown in the music in each of the subsequent bars.

## UNSEEN TESTS

### SIGHT READING OR IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Grade 2, candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation. This is a previously unseen test. An example is shown in the Grade 2 book.

#### SIGHT READING

**Key:** C or G major

**Tempo:** 70 bpm

At Grade 2 the sight reading test is in the form of a melody consisting of half, quarter eighth notes and quarter-note rests in 4/4. The test is four bars long. The examiner will allow 90 seconds preparation and practice time and will offer the option of practising with or without a metronome. Candidates will then perform the test for the examination.

#### IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

**Key:** G major or E minor

**Tempo:** 80–90 bpm

At Grade 2, candidates have the choice of playing a lead line or rhythm (chord) line. The test is four bars long and candidates will have 30 seconds preparation time. The examiner will offer the metronome as a guide throughout this time. Candidates will then have a complete practice run through with the backing track and then on the repeat, the test will be examined.

#### EAR TESTS

There are two tests:, Melodic Recall and Rhythmic Recall.

##### Melodic Recall

**Key:** C Minor pentatonic

**Tempo:** 85 bpm

The examiner will play a two-bar melody with a drum backing. The first note of the melody will be the root note and the first interval will be ascending. Candidates will be required to play the melody back on their instrument. The test will be played twice. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one-bar count-in. There will be a short gap for to practise, followed by a vocal count-in after which candidates will play the melody to the drum backing.

##### Rhythmic Recall

**Key:** E string

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

The examiner will play a two-bar rhythm played to a drum backing on the lowest-sounding E string. Candidates will hear the test twice and will then be asked to play the rhythm back. Candidates will then be asked to identify the rhythm from two examples shown to them by the examiner. The test is made up of quarter and eighth notes and quarter-note rests. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one-bar count-in. There will be a short gap to practise. Next, candidates will hear a vocal count-in and will then play the rhythm to the drum backing, before identifying the rhythm from the examples shown.

## GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

In this part of the exam candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question will be asked about their instrument. For this section of the exam candidates choose the piece about which the five questions will be asked.

### MUSIC KNOWLEDGE

In Grade 2, candidates will be asked to identify:

- The pitch name of notes
- The meaning of the time signature marking
- Whole, half, quarter, eighth and 16th note values
- Rest values
- The construction of a major or minor chord

### INSTRUMENT KNOWLEDGE

In Grade 2, candidates will be asked to identify:

- One of the following parts of their guitar: neck, fretboard, body, tuning-pegs, scratch plate, nut, pickups, jack socket or bridge
- The location of the volume and tone controls on their guitar
- Names of all open strings

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

### EXAM STRUCTURE

Candidates choose to play five pieces lasting a maximum of 1 minute 30 seconds each. There are no other elements in the Performance Certificate examination.

## FREE CHOICE PIECES

There is an option of playing free choice pieces in the examination:

- **Grade Exam:** two free choice pieces
- **Performance Certificate:** three free choice pieces

Criteria for own free choice pieces can be found by visiting the website:

[www.rslawards.com](http://www.rslawards.com)

For any questions about the appropriateness of the chosen free choice pieces, please email [freechoicepieces@rslawards.com](mailto:freechoicepieces@rslawards.com), including a copy of the score and any audio, and a member of the Rockscool team will respond with further guidance.

# GRADE 3

The Grade 3 Guitar exam is for candidates who have been learning approximately eighteen months to two years and have established the basic skills, preliminary techniques and the beginnings of stylistic awareness through articulation and the introduction of solo and improvisation work.

## GRADE EXAM

### PREPARED WORK:

Candidates are required to play three performance pieces and demonstrate a selection of Technical Exercises.

### UNPREPARED WORK:

Candidates are required to play either a four-bar sight reading test or a four-bar Improvisation and Interpretation test. There are also two ear tests that develop melodic recall and rhythmic sense and the final part of the exam is a set of five questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These are designed to explore theory and instrument knowledge.

## EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 3 exam lasts 25 minutes and will be taken in the following sequence:

1. Pieces or Technical Exercises: Candidates may choose to play either their pieces or their technical exercises first
2. Technical Exercises or Pieces: Candidates will perform the element not chosen above
3. Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation: Candidates are given a simple and previously unseen test to practice and play
4. Ear Tests: Candidates respond to two simple tests. One is melodic and one is rhythmic
5. General Musicianship Questions: Candidates answer five questions related to a piece of their choice

## PIECES

At Grade 3 the pieces last up to a maximum of 2 minutes.

### SETTING THE LEVEL OF THE BACKING TRACK

*Before playing the first piece all the way through, the examiner will make sure the volume of the backing track is correct for the candidate by asking them to play along to the backing track for the first few bars. Once the correct level has been agreed, the examiner will begin again and conduct all three pieces. Note that this is only done for the first piece.*

## TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 3 there are four groups of technical work. The examiner will ask for a selection from each group, and before starting this section candidates will be asked whether they would like to play the exercises along with the click or hear a single bar of click before commencing the test.

### GROUP A: SCALES

(two octaves in quarter notes)

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

- Major: G, A, B
- Natural minor: G, A, B
- Minor pentatonic: G, A, B
- Major pentatonic: G, A, B
- Blues: G, A, B

### GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

(one octave in quarter notes)

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

- Major: G, A, B
- Minor: G, A, B

### GROUP C: CHORDS

- Major and minor barre chords: To be played in a continuous sequence
- Dominant 7th: A, C, D, E Individual chords will be strummed once and then picked (arpeggiated)

### GROUP D: RIFF

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

In the exam candidates will be asked to play the riff from the Grade 3 book to a backing track. The riff shown in bars 1 and 2 should be played in the same shape in bars 3–8. The root note of the pattern to be played is shown in the music in each of the subsequent bars.

## UNSEEN TESTS

### SIGHT READING OR IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Grade 3, candidates will be offered a choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation. This is a previously unseen test. An example is shown in the Grade 3 book.

#### SIGHT READING

**Key:** G major or A minor

**Tempo:** 75–85 bpm

At Grade 3 the sight reading test is in the form of a melody consisting of half, quarter eighth notes and quarter-note rests in 4/4. The test is four bars long. The examiner will allow 90 seconds preparation and practice time and will offer the option of practising with or without a metronome. Candidates will then perform the test for the examination.

#### IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

**Key:** G major or A minor

**Tempo:** 80–90 bpm

At Grade 3, candidates have the choice of playing a lead line or rhythm (chord) line. The test is four bars long. Candidates will have 30 seconds preparation time and the examiner will offer the metronome as a guide throughout this time. Candidates will then have a complete practice run through with the backing track and then on the repeat, the test will be examined.

### EAR TESTS

There are two tests: Melodic Recall and Rhythmic Recall.

#### Melodic Recall

**Key:** G minor pentatonic

**Tempo:** 85 bpm

The examiner will play a two-bar melody with a drum backing. The first note of the melody will be the root note and the first interval will be ascending. Candidates will be required to play the melody back on their instrument. The test will be played twice. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one-bar count-in. There will be a short gap for to practise, followed by a vocal count-in after which candidates will play the melody to the drum backing.

#### Rhythmic Recall

**Key:** E string

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

The examiner will play a two-bar rhythm played to a drum backing on the lowest-sounding E string. Candidates will hear the test twice and will then be asked to play the rhythm back. Candidates will then be asked to identify the rhythm from two examples shown to them by the examiner. The test is made up of quarter notes, eighth notes, quarter-note rests and eighth-note rests. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one-bar count-in. There will be a short gap to practise. Next, candidates will hear a vocal count-in and will then play the rhythm to the drum backing, before identifying the rhythm from the examples shown.



## GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

In this part of the exam candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question will be asked about their instrument. For this section of the exam candidates choose the piece about which the five questions will be asked.

### MUSIC KNOWLEDGE

In Grade 3, candidates will be asked to identify:

- The pitch name of notes
- The meaning of the time signature marking
- Whole, half, quarter, eighth and 16th note values
- Rest values
- The construction of a major or minor chord

### INSTRUMENT KNOWLEDGE

In Grade 3, candidates will be asked to identify:

- One of the following parts of their guitar: neck, fretboard, body, tuning-pegs, scratch plate, nut, pickups, jack socket or bridge
- The location of the volume and tone controls on their guitar
- The location of the volume/gain controls on the amp

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

### EXAM STRUCTURE

Candidates choose to play five pieces lasting a maximum of 2 minutes each. There are no other elements in the Performance Certificate examination.

### FREE CHOICE PIECES

There is an option of playing free choice pieces in the examination:

- **Grade Exam:** two free choice pieces
- **Performance Certificate:** three free choice pieces

Criteria for own free choice pieces can be found by visiting the website:

[www.rslawards.com](http://www.rslawards.com)

For any questions about the appropriateness of the chosen free choice pieces, please email [freechoicepieces@rslawards.com](mailto:freechoicepieces@rslawards.com), including a copy of the score and any audio, and a member of the Rockscool team will respond with further guidance.

# GRADE 4

The Grade 4 Guitar exam is for candidates who have been learning approximately two – two and half years and have mastered the basic skills, preliminary techniques and have acquired the beginnings of stylistic awareness. Grade 4 develops further stylistic conviction and understanding through developed solo and improvisation work and use of varied sounds.

## GRADE EXAM

### PREPARED WORK:

Candidates are required to play three performance pieces and demonstrate a selection of Technical Exercises.

### UNPREPARED WORK:

Candidates are required to play either an eight-bar sight reading test or an eight-bar Improvisation and Interpretation test. There are also two ear tests that develop descending melodic recall and rhythmic sense and the final part of the exam is a set of five questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These are designed to explore theory and instrument knowledge.

## EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 4 exam lasts 25 minutes and will be taken in the following sequence:

1. Pieces or Technical Exercises. Candidates choose to play either their pieces or their technical exercises first
2. Technical Exercises or Pieces. Candidates will perform the element not chosen above
3. Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Candidates are given a previously unseen test to practice and play
4. Ear Tests. Candidates respond to two tests. One is melodic and one is rhythmic
5. General Musicianship Questions. Candidates answer five questions related to a piece of their choice

## PIECES

At Grade 4 the pieces last up to a maximum of 2 minutes 15 seconds.

### SETTING THE LEVEL OF THE BACKING TRACK

Before playing the first piece all the way through, the examiner will make sure the volume of the backing track is correct for the candidate by asking the candidate to play along to the backing track for the first few bars.

Once the correct level has been agreed, the examiner will begin again and conduct all three pieces. Note that this is only done for the first piece.

## TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 4 there are four groups of technical work. The examiner will ask for a selection from each group, and before starting this section candidates will be asked whether they would like to play the exercises along with the click or hear a single bar of click before commencing the test.

### GROUP A: SCALES

(two octaves in eighth notes)

**Tempo:** 80 bpm

Prepared in two fingerings from the 6th string. The examiner will ask for the same scale in the two fingerings.

- **Major:** A, B, C, D
- **Natural minor:** A, B, C, D
- **Minor pentatonic:** A, B, C, D
- **Major pentatonic:** A, B, C, D
- **Blues:** A, B, C, D

### GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

(one octave in eighth notes)

**Tempo:** 80 bpm

- **Major 7th:** A, B, C, D
- **Minor 7th:** A, B, C, D
- **Dominant 7th:** A, B, C, D

### GROUP C:

#### CHORDS TO BE PREPARED ON BOTH E AND A STRINGS

Individual chords will be strummed once and then picked (arpeggiated).

- **Major 7th:** B, C, D
- **Minor 7th:** B, C, D
- **Dominant 7th:** B, C, D

### GROUP D: RIFF

**Tempo:** 100 bpm

In the exam candidates will be asked to play the riff from the Grade 4 book to a backing track. The riff shown in bars 1 and 2 should be played in the same shape in bars 3–8. The root note of the pattern to be played is shown in the music in each of the subsequent bars.

## UNSEEN TESTS

### SIGHT READING OR IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Grade 4, candidates will be offered a choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation. This is a previously unseen test and an example is shown in the Grade 4 book.

#### SIGHT READING

**Tempo:** 80–90 bpm

**Key:** D or G major, D or A minor

At Grade 4 there is an element of improvisation. This is in the form of a two-bar ending. The piece will be composed in the style of rock, funk or blues and will have chord symbols throughout. At Grade 4 the notation consists of half, quarter eighth notes and quarter and eighth-note rests in 4/4. The test is eight bars long. The examiner will allow 90 seconds preparation and practice time and will offer the option of practising with or without a metronome. Candidates will then perform the test for the examination.

#### IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

**Tempo:** 90–100 bpm

**Key:** D or G major, D or A minor

In Grade 4, the Improvisation & Interpretation test contains a small amount of sight reading. This consists of a two-bar section of rhythm (chord) notation at the beginning of the test. Candidates will be asked to play the chords in the rhythms indicated and complete the test using an improvised line made up of chords and lead lines where indicated. This is played to a backing track of eight bars. Candidates will have 30 seconds preparation time and the examiner will offer the metronome as a guide throughout this time. Candidates will then have a complete practice run through with the backing track and then on the repeat, the test will be examined.

#### EAR TESTS

There are two tests

- Melodic Recall
- Harmonic Recall

##### Melodic Recall

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

**Key:** C major pentatonic or B minor pentatonic

The examiner will play a two-bar melody with a drum backing. The first note of the melody will be the root note and the first interval will be descending. Candidates will be required to play the melody back on their instrument. The test will be played twice. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one-bar count-in. There will be a short gap for to practise, followed by a vocal count-in after which candidates will play the melody to the drum backing.

##### Harmonic Recall

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

**Key:** C major

Candidates will hear a tonic chord followed by a two-bar sequence in the key of C major played to a bass and drum backing. The sequence will be drawn from the I, IV and V chords and may occur in any combination. Candidates will be asked to play the chord sequence to the drum backing in the rhythm shown in the example from the Grade book. This rhythm will be used in all examples of this test given in the exam. Candidates will then be asked to identify the sequence they have played to the examiner. The test will be played twice.

Each time the test is played the sequence is: count-in, tonic, count-in, chords. There will be a short gap to practise after second playing. Candidates will then hear the count-in and tonic for the third time followed by a vocal count-in then must play the chords to the drum backing. Candidates should then identify the chords.

## GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

For this section of the exam candidates choose the piece about which the five questions will be asked. The examiner will ask four music knowledge questions and one instrument knowledge question.

### MUSIC KNOWLEDGE

In Grade 4, candidates will be asked to identify:

- The pitch name of notes
- The meaning of the time signature and key signature marking
- Repeat marks, first and second time bars, **D.C.**, **D.S.**, **al Coda** and **al Fine** markings
- Whole, half, quarter, eighth note, triplet eighth notes and 16th note values
- Whole, half, quarter, eighth note and 16th-note rests and rest combinations
- The construction of major, minor or dominant 7 chords
- One type of scale that can be used appropriately in the solo section of the chosen piece

### INSTRUMENT KNOWLEDGE

In Grade 4, candidates will be asked to identify:

- Any part or control on their guitar
- The function of the volume and tone controls on their guitar
- The tone settings on the amp for the chosen piece, and why these settings were chosen

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

Candidates choose to play five pieces lasting a maximum of 2 minutes 15 seconds each. There are no other elements in the Performance Certificate examination.

## FREE CHOICE PIECES

There is an option of playing free choice pieces in the examination:

- **Grade Exam:** two free choice pieces
- **Performance Certificate:** three free choice pieces

Criteria for own free choice pieces can be found by visiting the website:

[www.rslawards.com](http://www.rslawards.com)

For any questions about the appropriateness of the chosen free choice pieces, please email [freechoicepieces@rslawards.com](mailto:freechoicepieces@rslawards.com), including a copy of the score and any audio, and a member of the Rockscool team will respond with further guidance.

# GRADE 5

The Grade 5 Guitar exam is for candidates who have acquired intermediate skills and techniques, and have developed an increasing sense of stylistic conviction. This is demonstrated through instrumental techniques, increasing rhythmic complexity and convincing solo and improvisation work.



## GRADE EXAM

### PREPARED WORK:

Candidates are required to play three performance pieces and demonstrate a selection of Technical Exercises.

### UNPREPARED WORK:

Candidates are required to play either an eight-bar sight reading test or an eight-bar Improvisation and Interpretation test. There are also two ear tests that continue to develop descending melodic recall and rhythmic sense and the final part of the exam is a set of five questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These explore theory and instrument knowledge.

## EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 5 exam lasts 26 minutes and will be taken in the following structure:

1. Pieces or Technical Exercises. Candidates may choose to play either their pieces or their technical exercises first
2. Technical Exercises or Pieces. Candidates will perform the element not chosen above
3. Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation. Candidates are given a previously unseen test to practice and play
4. Ear Tests. Candidates respond to two tests. One is melodic and one is rhythmic
5. General Musicianship Questions. Candidates answer five questions related to a piece of their choice

## PIECES

At Grade 5 the pieces last up to a maximum of 2 minutes 30 seconds.

### SETTING THE LEVEL OF THE BACKING TRACK

*Before playing the first piece all the way through, the examiner will make sure the volume of the backing track is correct for the candidate by asking them to play along to the backing track for the first few bars. Once the correct level has been agreed, the examiner will begin again and conduct all three pieces. Note that this is only done for the first piece.*

## TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 5 there are four groups of technical work. The examiner will ask for a selection from each group, and before starting this section candidates will be asked whether they would like to play the exercises along with the click or hear a single bar of click before commencing the test.

### GROUP A: SCALES (TWO OCTAVES IN EIGHTH NOTES)

**Tempo:** 80 bpm

To be prepared in two positions. The first position is to be prepared on the E string from the starting notes F, G and A. The second position is to be prepared on the A string from the starting notes B, C and D. Candidates may have to make adjustments for open strings in fingerings of some scales.

- **Major:** F,G,A (6th string) B,C,D (5th string)
- **Natural minor:** F,G,A (6th string) B,C,D (5th string)
- **Minor pentatonic:** F,G,A (6th string) B,C,D (5th string)
- **Major pentatonic:** F,G,A (6th string) B,C,D (5th string)
- **Blues:** F,G,A (6th string) B,C,D (5th string)
- **Harmonic minor:** F,G,A (6th string) B,C,D (5th string)

### GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS (TWO OCTAVES IN EIGHTH NOTES)

**Tempo:** 80 bpm

- **Major:** F,G,A (6th string) B,C,D (5th string)
- **Minor:** F,G,A (6th string) B,C,D (5th string)

### GROUP C: CHORDS

Major and minor triads played in three inversions on the top three strings in the key of C. To be played in a continuous sequence.

### GROUP D: RIFF

**Tempo:** 100 bpm

In the exam candidates will be asked to play the riff from the Grade 5 book to a backing track. The riff shown in bars 1 and 2 should be played in the same shape in bars 3–8. The root note of the pattern to be played is shown in the music in each of the subsequent bars.

## UNSEEN TESTS

### SIGHT READING OR IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Grade 5, candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation. This is a previously unseen test. An example is shown in the Grade 5 book.

#### SIGHT READING

**Key:** F and G major, E and G minor

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

At Grade 5 there is an element of improvisation. This is in the form of a two-bar ending. The piece will be composed in the style of rock, funk or blues and will have chord symbols throughout. At Grade 5 the notation consists of half, quarter eighth notes and quarter note and eighth-note rests in 4/4. The test is eight bars long. The examiner will allow 90 seconds preparation and practice time and will offer the option of practising with or without a metronome. Candidates will then perform the test for the examination.

#### IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

**Key:** A or G major, E or G minor

**Tempo:** 90–100 bpm

In Grade 5, the improvisation and interpretation test contains a small amount of sight reading. This consists of a two-bar section of rhythm (chord) notation at the beginning of the test. Candidates will be asked to play the chords in the rhythm indicated and complete the test using an improvised line made up of chords and lead lines where indicated. This is played to a backing track of eight bars. Candidates will have 30 seconds preparation time and the examiner will offer the metronome as a guide throughout this time. Candidates will then have a complete practice run through with the backing track and then on the repeat, the test will be examined.

#### EAR TESTS

There are two tests:

- Melodic Recall
- Harmonic Recall

#### MELODIC RECALL

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

**Key:** D Major pentatonic or A Minor pentatonic

The examiner will play a two-bar melody with a drum backing. The first note of the melody will be the root note and the first interval will be descending. Candidates will be required to play the melody back on their instrument. The test will be played twice. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one-bar count-in. There will be a short gap for to practise, followed by a vocal count-in after which candidates will play the melody to the drum backing.

#### HARMONIC RECALL

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

**Key:** G major

Candidates will hear a tonic chord followed by a two-bar sequence in the key of G major played to a bass and drum backing. The sequence will be drawn from the I, IV, V and VI<sup>m</sup> chords and may occur in any combination. Candidates will be asked to play the chord sequence to the drum backing in the rhythm shown in the example from the grade book. This rhythm will be used in all examples of this test given in the exam. Candidates will then be asked to identify the sequence they have played to the examiner. The test will be played twice.

**Each time the test is played the sequence is:** count-in, tonic, count-in, chords. There will be a short gap to practise after second playing. Candidates will then hear the count-in and tonic for the third time followed by a vocal count-in then must play the chords to the drum backing. Candidates should then identify the chords.

## GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

In this part of the exam candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question will be asked about their instrument.

### MUSIC KNOWLEDGE

In Grade 5, candidates will be asked to identify:

- The names of pitches
- The meaning of accidentals: # (sharp), ♭ (flat) and ♮ (natural) signs
- The meaning of the time signature, key signature and swing time markings
- Repeat marks, first and second time bars, **D.C.**, **D.S.**, **al Coda** and **al Fine** markings
- Hammer-ons, pull-offs, accents and *vibrato* markings
- The construction of minor 7, major 7 or dominant 7 chords
- One type of scale that can be used appropriately in the solo section of the chosen piece

### INSTRUMENT KNOWLEDGE

In Grade 5, candidates will be asked to identify:

- Any part or control on their guitar
- The function of the volume and tone controls on their guitar
- The tone settings on the amp for the chosen piece, and why these settings were chosen

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

### EXAM STRUCTURE

Candidates choose to play five pieces lasting a maximum of 2 minutes 30 seconds each. There are no other elements in the Performance Certificate examination.

## FREE CHOICE PIECES

There is an option of playing free choice pieces in the examination:

- **Grade Exam:** two free choice pieces
- **Performance Certificate:** three free choice pieces

Criteria for own free choice pieces can be found by visiting the website:

[www.rslawards.com](http://www.rslawards.com)

For any questions about the appropriateness of the chosen free choice pieces, please email [freechoicepieces@rslawards.com](mailto:freechoicepieces@rslawards.com), including a copy of the score and any audio, and a member of the Rockscool team will respond with further guidance.

# GRADE 6

The Grade 6 Guitar exam is for candidates who have begun to develop advanced technical control and have a competent grasp of stylistic techniques. At Grade 6 this is shown through mature stylistic conviction, execution of rhythmic complexity, creative and stylistic solo and improvisation work as well as a secure sense of communication and performance.

## GRADE EXAM

### PREPARED WORK:

Candidates are required to play three performance pieces and demonstrate a selection of Technical Exercises.

### UNPREPARED WORK:

Candidates are required to play a twelve-bar Quick Study Piece. There are also two ear tests that develop more complex melodic recall and rhythmic sense and the final part of the exam is a set of five questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These explore and demonstrate theory and instrument knowledge.

## EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 6 exam lasts 30 minutes and will be taken in the following structure:

1. Pieces or Technical Exercises: Candidates may choose to play either their pieces or their technical exercises first
2. Technical Exercises or Pieces: Candidates will perform the element not chosen above
3. Quick Study Piece: Candidates are given a previously unseen test to practice and play
4. Ear Tests: Candidates respond to two tests. One is melodic and one is harmonic
5. General Musicianship Questions: Candidates answer five questions related to a piece of their choice

## PIECES

At Grade 6 the pieces last up to a maximum of 2 minutes 45 seconds.

### SETTING THE LEVEL OF THE BACKING TRACK

*Before playing the first piece all the way through, the examiner will make sure the volume of the backing track is correct for the candidate by asking them to play along to the backing track for the first few bars. Once the correct level has been agreed, the examiner will begin again and conduct all three pieces. Note that this is only done for the first piece.*

## TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 6 there are four groups of technical work. The examiner will ask for a selection from each group, and before starting this section candidates will be asked whether they would like to play the exercises along with the click or hear a single bar of click before commencing the test.

### GROUP A: SCALES/MODES

(two octaves in eighth notes)

**Tempo:** 100 bpm

#### Minor pentatonic:

All five positions to be prepared and played.

- G, B.

#### Modes:

To be prepared in two positions. The first position is to be prepared on the E string from the starting notes of G–B chromatically. The second position is to be prepared on the A string from the starting notes of C–E chromatically.

- Dorian
- Mixolydian

### GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

(two octaves, two positions in eighth notes)

**Tempo:** 100 bpm

The first position is to be prepared on the E string from the starting notes of G–B chromatically. The second position is to be prepared on the A string from the starting notes of C–E chromatically.

- Major 7th
- Minor 7th
- Dominant 7th

### GROUP C: CHORDS

Two positions. The first position is to be prepared on the E string from the starting notes of G–B chromatically. The second position is to be prepared on the A string from the starting notes of C–E chromatically. Chords should be strummed and then picked (arpeggiated).

- Minor 7<sup>b</sup>5
- Diminished

### GROUP D: STYLISTIC STUDY

Candidates will prepare a technical study from one group of styles from the list below. The choice of style will determine the style of the Quick Study Piece. Each study concentrates on two stylistic techniques.

- **Rock/Metal:** tapping and *legato*
- **Funk:** *staccato* phrasing and 16th-note strumming
- **Jazz/Latin/Blues:** string bends and double-stops

## UNSEEN TESTS

### QUICK STUDY PIECE

At Grade 6, candidates will be asked to prepare and play a short Quick Study Piece. The style of the QSP is determined by the stylistic study selected in the technical exercise section. Candidates will be shown the test and played the track with the notated parts played. Any bars that require improvisation will not be demonstrated. Candidates will then have three minutes to study the test. The backing track will be played twice more. Candidates are allowed to practise during the first run through 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 QSP is in the form of a lead sheet and it is up to candidates to create their own interpretation of the music in the parts marked for improvisation..

### EAR TESTS

There are two tests:

- Melodic Recall
- Harmonic Recall

#### Melodic Recall

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

**Key:** D major pentatonic or D minor pentatonic or G natural minor

The examiner will play a two-bar melody with a drum backing. The first note of the melody will be either the root note or fifth and the first interval will be either ascending or descending. Candidates will play the melody back on their instrument. The test will be played twice.

Each time the test is played the sequence is: count-in, root note, count-in, melody. There will be a short gap to practise after the second playing of the test. Candidates will hear the count-in and root note for the third time, followed by a vocal count-in, and will then play the melody to the bass and drum backing.

#### Harmonic Recall

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

**Key:** D major

The examiner will play a tonic chord followed by a four-bar chord sequence in the key of D major, played to a bass and drum backing. The sequence will be drawn from the I, II<sub>m</sub>, III<sub>m</sub>, IV, V and VI<sub>m</sub> chords and may occur in any combination. The test will also contain V7. Candidates will be asked to play the chord sequence to the drum backing in the rhythm shown in the Grade 6 book. This rhythm will be used in all examples of this test given in the exam. Candidates will then be asked to identify the chord sequence they have played to the examiner. The test will be played twice. Each time the test is played the sequence is: count-in, tonic, count-in, chords. There will be a short gap to practise after the second playing of the test. Candidates will hear the count-in and tonic for the third time, followed by a vocal count-in, then will play the chords to the drum backing.



## GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

In this part of the exam candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question will be asked about their instrument.

### MUSIC KNOWLEDGE

In Grade 6, candidates will be asked to identify:

- The names of pitches
- Any expressive musical marking found in the piece such as palm muting, accents, *staccato*, *legato*, *vibrato*
- Any dynamic marking found in the piece
- One type of scale that can be used appropriately in the solo section of the chosen piece and its relation to the underlying harmony of the piece

### INSTRUMENT KNOWLEDGE

The examiner will also ask candidates one question regarding their instrument.

In Grade 6, candidates will be asked to explain and demonstrate:

- Where to find the same pitch on two different strings
- The function of the volume and tone controls on their guitar
- The tone set-up required on the amp for the chosen piece
- How to achieve changes in tone in a song

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

Candidates choose to play five pieces lasting a maximum of 2 minutes 45 seconds each. There are no other elements in the Performance Certificate examination.

## FREE CHOICE PIECES

There is an option of playing free choice pieces in the examination.

- **Grade Exam:** two free choice pieces
- **Performance Certificate:** three free choice pieces

Criteria for own free choice pieces can be found by visiting the website:

[www.rslawards.com](http://www.rslawards.com)

For any questions about the appropriateness of the chosen free choice pieces, please email [freechoicepieces@rslawards.com](mailto:freechoicepieces@rslawards.com), including a copy of the score and any audio, and a member of the Rockschoo! team will respond with further guidance.

# GRADE 7

The Grade 7 Guitar exam is for candidates who have a developed and advanced technical control and a thorough grasp of extended stylistic techniques. At Grade 7 this is shown through mature stylistic conviction, execution of rhythmic complexity, mature and creative stylistic solo and improvisation work as well as a commanding sense of communication and performance.

## GRADE EXAM

### PREPARED WORK:

Candidates are required to play three performance pieces and demonstrate a selection of Technical Exercises.

### UNPREPARED WORK:

Candidates are required to play a twelve-bar Quick Study Piece. There are also two ear tests that develop complex melodic recall and rhythmic sense and the final part of the exam is a set of five questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These explore and demonstrate theory and instrument knowledge.

## EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 7 exam lasts 33 minutes and will be taken in the following sequence:

1. Pieces or Technical Exercises: Candidates may choose to play either their pieces or their technical exercises first
2. Technical Exercises or Pieces: Candidates will perform the element not chosen above
3. Quick Study Piece: Candidates are given a previously unseen test to practice and play
4. Ear Tests: Candidates respond to two tests. One is melodic and one is harmonic
5. General Musicianship Questions: Candidates answer five questions related to a piece of their choice

## PIECES

At Grade 7 the pieces last up to a maximum of 3 minutes 10 seconds.

### SETTING THE LEVEL OF THE BACKING TRACK

*Before playing the first piece all the way through, the examiner will make sure the volume of the backing track is correct for the candidate by asking them to play along to the backing track for the first few bars. Once the correct level has been agreed, the examiner will begin again and conduct all three pieces. Note that this is only done for the first piece.*

## TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 7 there are four groups of technical work. The examiner will ask for a selection from each group, and before starting this section candidates will be asked whether they would like to play the exercises along with the click or hear a single bar of click before commencing the test.

### GROUP A: SCALES/MODES (TWO OCTAVES IN EIGHTH NOTES)

**Tempo:** 100BPM

To be prepared in two positions. The first position is to be prepared on the E string from the starting notes of G–B chromatically. The second position is to be prepared on the A string from the starting notes of C–E chromatically.

- Lydian
- Phrygian
- Jazz Melodic Minor

### GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS (ONE OCTAVE IN EIGHTH NOTES)

**Tempo:** 100BPM

To be prepared in two positions. The first position is to be prepared on the E string from the starting notes of G–B chromatically. The second position is to be prepared on the A string from the starting notes of C–E chromatically.

- Major 9th
- Minor 9th
- Dominant 9th

### GROUP C: CHORDS

To be prepared in two positions. The first position is to be prepared on the E string from the starting notes of G–B chromatically. The second position is to be prepared on the A string from the starting notes of C–E chromatically. Chords should be strummed and then picked (arpeggiated).

- Major 9th
- Minor 9th
- Dominant 9th

### GROUP D: STYLISTIC STUDY

Candidates will prepare a technical study from one group of styles from the list below. The choice of style will determine the style of the Quick Study Piece. Each study concentrates on two stylistic techniques.

- **Rock/Metal:** pinch harmonics and natural harmonics
- **Funk:** chord embellishments and double-stops
- **Jazz/Latin/Blues:** crossing strings and octaves

## UNSEEN TESTS

### QUICK STUDY PIECE

At Grade 7, candidates will be asked to prepare and play a short Quick Study Piece. The style of the QSP is determined by the stylistic study selected in the technical exercise section. Candidates will be shown the test and played the track with the notated parts played. Any bars that require improvisation will not be demonstrated. Candidates will then have three minutes to study the test. The backing track will be played twice more. Candidates are allowed to practise during the first run through 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 QSP is in the form of a lead sheet and it is up to candidates to create their own interpretation of the music in the parts marked for improvisation.

### EAR TESTS

There are two tests

- Melodic Recall
- Harmonic Recall

#### Melodic Recall

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

**Key:** A major pentatonic or C minor pentatonic or A natural minor

The first note of the melody will be either the root note or fifth and the first interval will be either ascending or descending. Candidates will hear the test twice and will then be required to play back the melody on their instrument.

Each time the test is played the sequence is: count-in, root note, count-in, melody. There will be a short gap to practise after the second playing of the test. Candidates will hear the count-in and root note for the third time followed by a vocal count-in and will then play the melody to the bass and drum backing.

#### Harmonic Recall

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

**Key:** A major

The examiner will play a tonic chord followed by a four-bar chord sequence in the key of A major played to a bass and drum backing. The sequence will be drawn from the I, II<sub>m</sub>, III<sub>m</sub>, IV, V and VI<sub>m</sub> chords and may occur in any combination. The test may also contain II<sub>m</sub>7, III<sub>m</sub>7 and VI<sub>m</sub>7. Candidates will be asked to play the chord sequence to the drum backing in the rhythm shown in the Grade 7 book. This rhythm will be used in all examples of this test given in the exam. Candidates will then be asked to identify the chord sequence they have played to the examiner. Candidates will hear the test twice.

Each time the test is played the sequence is: count-in, tonic, count-in, chords. There will be a short gap to practise after the second playing of the test. Candidates will hear the count-in and tonic for the third time, followed by a vocal count-in, after which they will be required to play the chords to the drum backing.

## GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

In this part of the exam candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question will be asked about their instrument.

### MUSIC KNOWLEDGE

In Grade 7, candidates will be asked to identify:

- The names of pitches
- Any expressive musical marking found in the piece such as palm muting, accents, *staccato*, *legato*, *vibrato*
- Any dynamic marking found in the piece
- One type of scale that can be used appropriately in the solo section of the chosen piece and its relation to the underlying harmony of the piece

### INSTRUMENT KNOWLEDGE

The examiner will also ask candidates one question regarding their instrument. In Grade 7, candidates will be asked to explain and demonstrate:

- Where to find the same pitch on two different strings
- The function of the volume and tone controls on their guitar
- The set up on the amp for the tone required for the chosen piece
- How to achieve changes in tone in a song

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

Candidates choose to play five pieces lasting a maximum of 3 minutes 10 seconds each. There are no other elements in the Performance Certificate examination.

## FREE CHOICE PIECES

There is an option of playing free choice pieces in the examination:

- **Grade Exam:** two free choice pieces
- **Performance Certificate:** three free choice pieces

Criteria for own free choice pieces can be found by visiting the website:

[www.rslawards.com](http://www.rslawards.com)

For any questions about the appropriateness of the chosen free choice pieces, please email [freechoicepieces@rslawards.com](mailto:freechoicepieces@rslawards.com), including a copy of the score and any audio, and a member of the Rockscool team will respond with further guidance.

# GRADE 8

The Grade 8 Guitar exam is for candidates who have mastered advanced technical control and have a thorough grasp of extended stylistic techniques. At Grade 8 this is shown through mature stylistic conviction, consummate execution of rhythmic complexity, mature and creative stylistic solo and improvisation work as well as a commanding sense of communication and performance.



## GRADE EXAM

### PREPARED WORK:

Candidates are required to play three performance pieces and demonstrate a selection of Technical Exercises.

### UNPREPARED WORK:

Candidates are required to play a twelve-bar Quick Study Piece. There are also two ear tests that develop advanced melodic recall and rhythmic sense and the final part of the exam is a set of five questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These explore and demonstrate theory and instrument knowledge.

## EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 8 exam lasts 33 minutes and will be taken in the following structure:

### PIECES OR TECHNICAL EXERCISES:

The candidate chooses to play either their pieces or their technical exercises first:

1. Pieces or Technical Exercises: Candidates may choose to play either their pieces or their technical exercises first
2. Technical Exercises or Pieces: Candidates will perform the element not chosen above
3. Quick Study Piece: Candidates are given a previously unseen test to practice and play
4. Ear Tests: Candidates respond to two tests. One is melodic and one is harmonic
5. General Musicianship Questions: Candidates answer five questions related to a piece of their choice

## PIECES

At Grade 8 the pieces last up to a maximum of 3 minutes 45 seconds.

### SETTING THE LEVEL OF THE BACKING TRACK

*Before playing the first piece all the way through, the examiner will make sure the volume of the backing track is correct for the candidate by asking them to play along to the backing track for the first few bars. Once the correct level has been agreed, the examiner will begin again and conduct all three pieces. Note that this is only done for the first piece.*

## TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 8 there are four groups of technical work. The examiner will ask for a selection from each group, and before starting this section candidates will be asked whether they would like to play the exercises along with the click or hear a single bar of click before commencing the test.

### GROUP A: SCALES/MODES

(two octaves in eighth notes)

**Tempo:** 100 bpm

To be prepared in two positions. The first position is to be prepared on the E string from the starting notes of G–B chromatically. The second position is to be prepared on the A string from the starting notes of C–E chromatically.

- Whole Tone
- Diminished
- Altered

### GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

(one octave in eighth notes)

**Tempo:** 100 bpm

To be prepared in two positions. The first position is to be prepared on the E string from the starting notes of G–B chromatically. The second position is to be prepared on the A string from the starting notes of C–E chromatically.

- Dominant 7<sup>#</sup>5
- Dominant 7<sup>b</sup>5
- Minor 7<sup>b</sup>5
- Dominant 7<sup>#</sup>9
- Dominant 7<sup>b</sup>9
- Diminished

### GROUP C: CHORDS

To be prepared in two positions. The first position is to be prepared on the E string from the starting notes of G–B chromatically. The second position is to be prepared on the A string from the starting notes of C–E chromatically. Chords should be strummed and then picked (arpeggiated).

- Dominant 7<sup>#</sup>5
- Dominant 7<sup>b</sup>5
- Dominant 7<sup>#</sup>9
- Dominant 7<sup>b</sup>9

### GROUP D: STYLISTIC STUDY

Candidates will prepare a technical study from one group of styles from the list below. The choice of style will determine the style of the Quick Study Piece. Each study concentrates on two stylistic techniques.

- **Rock/Metal:** crossing strings and alternate picking
- **Funk:** chord embellishments and muted strings
- **Jazz/Latin/Blues:** *legato* phrasing and alternate picking

## UNSEEN TESTS

### QUICK STUDY PIECE

At Grade 8, candidates will be asked to prepare and play a short Quick Study Piece. The style of the QSP is determined by the stylistic study selected in the technical exercise section. Candidates will be shown the test and played the track with the notated parts played. Any bars that require improvisation will not be demonstrated. Candidates will then have three minutes to study the test. The backing track will be played twice more. Candidates are allowed to practise during the first run through 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 QSP is in the form of a lead sheet and it is up to candidates to create their own interpretation of the music in the parts marked for improvisation.

### EAR TESTS

There are two tests:

- Melodic Recall
- Harmonic Recall

#### Melodic recall

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

**Key:** E major pentatonic or F minor pentatonic or B natural minor

The first note of the melody will be either the root, third or fifth note and the first interval will be either ascending or descending. Candidates will hear the test twice before playing the melody back on their instrument.

Each time the test is played the sequence is: count-in, root note, count-in, melody. There will be a short gap to practise after the second playing of the test. Candidates will hear the count-in and root note for the third time, followed by a vocal count-in, and will then be required to play the melody to the bass and drum backing.

#### Harmonic recall

**Tempo:** 90 bpm

**Key:** E major

The examiner will play you a tonic chord followed by a four-bar chord sequence in the key of E major played to a bass and drum backing. The sequence will be drawn from the I, II<sub>m</sub>, III<sub>m</sub>, IV, V and VI<sub>m</sub> chords and may occur in any combination. The test may also contain I<sub>m</sub>aj7 and IV<sub>m</sub>aj7. Candidates will be asked to play the chord sequence to the drum backing in the rhythm shown in the Grade 8 book. This rhythm will be used in all examples of this test given in the exam. Candidates will then be asked to identify the chord sequence they have played to the examiner. The test will be played twice.

Each time the test is played the sequence is: count-in, tonic, count-in, chords. There will be a short gap to practise after the second playing of the test. Candidates will hear the count-in and tonic for the third time, followed by a vocal count-in, then will be required to play the chords to the drum backing.

## GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

In this part of the exam candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question will be asked about their instrument.

### MUSIC KNOWLEDGE

In Grade 8, candidates will be asked to identify:

- The names of pitches
- Any expressive musical marking found in the piece such as palm muting, accents, *staccato*, *legato*, *vibrato*
- Any dynamic marking found in the piece
- One type of scale that can be used appropriately in the solo section of the chosen piece and its relation to the underlying harmony of the piece

### INSTRUMENT KNOWLEDGE

The examiner will also ask candidates one question regarding their instrument. In Grade 8, candidates will be asked to explain and demonstrate:

- Where to find the same pitch on two different strings
- The function of the volume and tone controls on their guitar
- The set up on the amp for the tone required for the chosen piece
- How to achieve changes in tone in a song

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

Candidates choose to play five pieces lasting a maximum of 3 minutes 45 seconds each. There are no other elements in the Performance Certificate examination.

## FREE CHOICE PIECES

There is an option of playing free choice pieces in the examination.

- **Grade Exam:** two free choice pieces
- **Performance Certificate:** three free choice pieces

Criteria for own free choice pieces can be found by visiting the website:

[www.rslawards.com](http://www.rslawards.com)

For any questions about the appropriateness of the chosen free choice pieces, please email [freechoicepieces@rslawards.com](mailto:freechoicepieces@rslawards.com), including a copy of the score and any audio, and a member of the Rockschoo! team will respond with further guidance.

## REVISION HISTORY

### 29 May 2019

- Examination timings clarified for Performance Certificates in Assessment Overview

### 15 Nov 2019

- (p.83) *Grade 8 > Unseen Tests > Ear Tests > Harmonic Recall*. Key has been changed from "A major" to "E major"

### 27 Apr 2020

- The grading criteria tables for each unit have been removed, and replaced with one unified table within the preface section. The replacement tables include streamlined criteria each of which comprises clarified wording in a unified format, along with definitions of terms used. This is to facilitate digital mark sheet assessment whilst maintaining the recognition of knowledge skills and understanding attained at each grade level.

### 5 May 2020

- Grading criteria tables updated to include clarification of descriptors at 'Below Pass 1' band of attainment.

### 7th July 2020

- Premiere Grade (Entry Level 2) assessment information added to the Preface and Unit Specifications.

### 17 Sep 2020

- (p.67) *Unseen Tests > Ear Tests > Harmonic recall*

The text "The examiner will play you a tonic chord followed by a four-bar chord sequence in the key of A major" has been changed to "The examiner will play you a tonic chord followed by a four-bar chord sequence in the key of E major".