



**A guide to the *Viva Voce*
requirements of ABRSM's
Diploma Exams**

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The *Viva Voce* - Guidance and Information for Diploma candidates

The Purpose of the *Viva Voce*

The *Viva Voce* is an important mode of assessment, providing an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge, approach and understandings with the examiners. In all cases it is used to reassure examiners that the candidate is the author of all submissions made for the Diploma and examiners are asked to comment specifically on this point in their reports. It is to be hoped that examiners will be able to reach such a judgement in the normal course of events. However, if examiners perceive a significant discrepancy between the level of authority communicated by the submission and the candidate's performance in the *Viva Voce* (after allowing for the fact that candidates may be nervous, and that some candidates are better at writing than they are at spoken discourse), then it may be necessary to probe deeper. Candidates who have had improper levels of assistance with their submission will usually be unable to express a clear view on the main sources used in their investigation, or to expand on key issues contained in the work they have submitted.

In the Performing Diplomas the *Viva Voce* is also an opportunity for you to discuss your approach to putting together and matching the demands of the programme.

The Conduct of the *Viva Voce*

Viva Voce exams vary in duration, content and style, according to the subject under examination. The following general guidelines apply to all subject-lines.

- (i) The tone and manner of *Viva Voce* exams is as relaxed as possible and every effort is made to put candidates at ease. The opening questions are informal, progressing to topics on which candidates are likely to be knowledgeable, then on to more challenging questions.
- (ii) All questions are clearly and directly expressed and phrased so that they can elicit genuine answers. Some will be open-ended, others will be more direct.
- (iii) Candidates are not penalized if they ask for clarification of a question.
- (iv) Examiners are not concerned by short periods of silence if candidates are considering their answers.
- (v) Candidates may opt not to answer a question because, for example, they feel they might expose an area of fundamental ignorance. If this happens, examiners will assist the candidate with a number of helpful prompts. Examiners will form a judgement as to whether a candidate's incapacity to offer an answer to a particular question or series of questions is a significant factor in the assessment of the candidate's overall performance in the exam.
- (vi) Examiners may invite candidates to expand upon or clarify a particular point raised. Demonstrations can take place at any point in the exam. Examiners will invite candidates to indicate when they would like to perform, and demonstrations can be given at any time upon the candidate's initiative or the examiner's request. It is perfectly permissible for candidates to demonstrate a particular feature by performing it rather than describing it verbally, if this is appropriate.
- (vii) At the end of the exam candidates are given time to say something (if they so wish) which emphasizes the value of their work.

How the *Viva Voce* affects the overall mark

Programme Notes and Written Submissions are drawn into *Viva Voce* discussions. With the exception of Programme Notes (which are reviewed during the exam) these requirements are assessed before the exam and given a guideline mark according to ABRSM's criteria.

In the case of FRSM Written Submissions for Performers, the guideline mark contributes to the overall *Viva Voce* mark. Because in these cases the *Viva Voce* covers others areas in addition to these submissions, the guideline mark may be adjusted or confirmed on the basis of the candidates responses in the *Viva Voce*.

Viva Voce: Performing Diplomas

Topics that the *Viva Voce* will cover

The *Viva Voce* will cover the recital, the Programme Notes or Written Submission and other aspects of performing as indicated below. Candidates should expect a greater breadth and depth of questioning at successively higher levels.

DipABRSM in Performing

At DipABRSM level you can expect questions on:

- Basic biographical information about each composer.
- Context: each work in the life and compositional output of the composer and in the general musical trends of the era with details of commission if any, process of composition and first performance.
- Musical language and form of each work. The place of the work in the context of the instrument itself: developments, idiom, core repertoire and technical demands.
- Your interpretation of the items including aspects of style, technique and ensemble.

LRSM in Performing

At LRSM level you can expect questions on each programme item in the context of:

- the general musical trends of the era.
- detailed biographical information about the composer.
- the compositional output of the composer including details of commission.
- process of composition and performers closely associated with it when it was written.
- its general relevance in the history of western music.
- the instrument itself (as appropriate): developments, idiom, technical demands, design history, leading makers, major developments in technical approach, the most important exponents and their influence on performing conventions now in common usage, the developing role of the instrument in either solo or chamber or orchestral music and the associated repertoire (dependent upon specialism).
- its musical language and form with reference to influences on the composer, individuality and typicality (personal and contemporary).
- the particular challenges facing the performer.
- your interpretation of the items including all aspects of style, technique and ensemble.
- the core recorded performances of the items where applicable.

FRSM in Performing

At FRSM level you can expect questions on each programme item in the context of:

- the life and compositional output of the composer and his significant contemporaries.
- its place in the development of musical language and use of structure: degree of innovation and personal style as opposed to conformity with contemporary trends and received/traditional style - an evaluation of the level of success achieved.
- the instrument itself (as appropriate): developments, idiom, technical demands, compositional sympathy (all understood in terms of, and in relation to, the core repertoire of the instrument), design history, leading makers, major developments in technical approach, the core didactic material, the most important exponents and their influence on performing conventions now in common usage, the developing role of the instrument in either solo or chamber or orchestral music

(dependent upon 2/3 specialism).

- the editorial apparatus (the logic and consistency of approach and the faithfulness to the original source) and any alternatively viable solutions.
- the particular challenges facing the performer in terms of demands on technique, musicianship and performance practice and how these can be effectively addressed.
- the core recorded performances of the items where applicable.

How the *Viva Voce* is marked

	DipABRSM	LRSM	FRSM
19-25 Distinction Excellent. Candidate has demonstrated exemplary standards in most areas examined.	Outstanding communication skills. A commanding knowledge of the instrument, its idiom and repertoire. Mastery of the issues raised in the Programme Notes.	Outstanding communication skills. A commanding knowledge of the instrument, its idiom and repertoire. Mastery of the issues raised in the Programme Notes.	Outstanding communication skills. A commanding knowledge of the instrument, its idiom and repertoire. Mastery of the issues raised in the Written Submission.
16-18 A high pass Very good. Candidate has demonstrated commendable standards in most areas examined and may have shown excellence in some.	Impressive communication skills. A comprehensive knowledge of the instrument, its idiom and repertoire. A firm grasp of the issues raised in the Programme Notes.	Impressive communication skills. A comprehensive knowledge of the instrument, its idiom and repertoire. A firm grasp of the issues raised in the Programme Notes.	10-18 Pass Impressive communication skills. A commanding knowledge of the instrument, its idiom and repertoire. A full understanding of the issues raised in the Written Submission.
13-15 A clear pass Good. Candidate has demonstrated a good overall standard in most areas examined.	Good communication skills. A sound working knowledge of the instrument, its idiom and repertoire. A broad grasp of the issues raised in the Programme Notes.	Good communication skills. A sound working knowledge of the instrument, its idiom and repertoire. A broad grasp of the issues raised in the Programme Notes.	
10-12 Pass Candidate has shown competence in most areas examined and has satisfied the requirements for the award.	Competent communication skills. A broad working knowledge of the instrument, its idiom and repertoire. A grasp of the issues raised in the Programme Notes.	Competent communication skills. A broad working knowledge of the instrument, its idiom and repertoire. A grasp of the issues raised in the Programme Notes.	
0-9 Fail Candidate has not satisfied the basic requirements for the award.	Weak communication skills. Patchy knowledge of the instrument, its idiom and repertoire. Unconvincing grasp of the issues raised in the Programme Notes.	Weak communication skills. Patchy knowledge of the instrument, its idiom and repertoire. Unconvincing grasp of the issues raised in the Programme Notes.	Insufficient communication skills. Insufficient knowledge of the instrument, its idiom and repertoire. Unconvincing grasp of the issues raised in the Written Submission.