

MUSIC PERFORMANCE GRADES



second edition - valid for exams from 6 September 2021

Entry Level Award in Music Performance (Entry 3)
Level 1 Award in Music Performance
Level 2 Certificate in Music Performance
Level 3 Certificate in Music Performance

8 March 2023

Qualification Specification: Performance Grades

Contents

Changes in this edition	3
1. Introduction	4
About ABRSM	4
About this qualification specification	5
About our Music Performance qualifications	5
Regulation and UCAS points (UK)	7
Regulation (Europe)	9
Regulation (Rest of world)	9
2. Performance Grades	10
Syllabuses	10
Exam Regulations	10
Malpractice and maladministration	10
Entry requirements	11
Exam venues	11
Exam booking	11
Access (for candidates with specific needs)	11
Exam content	11
How the exam works	12
Special consideration	12
3. Performance Grades syllabus	13
Introducing the qualification	13
Performance Grades: requirements and information	13
4. Assessment, marking & infringements	14
Assessment objectives	14
Mark allocation	16
Result categories	16
Synoptic assessment	16
Awarding	16
Infringements	17
Marking criteria	17

5. After the exam	22
Results	22
Appeals and feedback	22
6. Other assessments	23
Practical Grades	23
Music Theory	24
Practical Musicianship	25
ARSM	26
DipABRSM, LRSM, FRSM	27

/// Changes in this edition

This second edition, first published July 2021, includes several significant changes and updates.

- Initial Grade is now available for Piano and bowed strings and we have added all relevant information and updated existing text as necessary [Sections 1–4]
- We have included information about our Special Consideration policy [Section 2]
- We have made a change to the own-choice piece/song requirements to allow unpublished repertoire, including candidates' own compositions [Section 3]
- We have changed our policy on the use of the same piece(s)/song(s) in more than one exam; this is now allowed [Section 3]
- We have provided additional guidance for the performance as a whole component of the exam [Sections 3 & 4]
- We have included clarification that a recording may not be submitted for a qualification more than once [Section 4]
- We have provided information on syllabus infringements, and how those are managed [Section 4]

A range of updates have also been made to the text, in particular in the Section 3s, to further clarify the existing requirements and information, based on queries and feedback received since the Performance Grades qualification was launched in summer 2020.

This document was updated in November 2021 to correct the Qualification Number for the Initial Grade exam [p. 8]

This August 2022 version has been issued to reflect changes to accompaniment requirements; we now permit recorded accompaniment in Performance Grade exams [Section 3]

From 8 March 2023, Performance Grade candidates should provide their programme information online when uploading their video. It is no longer necessary to show a written programme form to camera. All other recording requirements remain the same [Section 3: *Preparing for the exam*].

1. Introduction

About ABRSM

At ABRSM we aim to support learners and teachers in every way we can. One way we do this is through the provision of high quality and respected music qualifications. These exams provide clear goals, reliable and consistent marking, and guidance for future learning. They are a tried and tested way to inspire musical achievement and, with backing from four Royal Schools of Music in the UK, are valued and trusted around the world.

We offer a comprehensive portfolio of qualifications and assessments for a range of instruments (including singing) and genres, as well as for Music Theory and Practical Musicianship. Our syllabuses are based on core musical skills – listening, performing, reading, writing, musical knowledge and understanding, and improvising. Together these skills give learners a good foundation for their musical development and a range of different musical activities.

Taking an exam is an exciting challenge with many benefits for learners. There's the boost to motivation which comes from working towards an exam. There's an opportunity to discover and perform some fantastic music and to build new skills. And there's the sense of achievement which comes from successfully reaching a musical goal.

We do everything we can to make the exam experience positive and rewarding. We work closely with specialists, teachers and examiners to provide syllabuses of the highest quality with a wide variety of pieces and songs to choose from. We train our friendly, expert examiners to ensure that all candidates are rewarded and recognised for their musical achievements during the assessment. Using our clear, easy-to-understand marking criteria examiners can assess all candidates reliably, objectively and consistently. Finally, candidates receive a mark form containing valuable feedback, with a celebratory certificate for everyone who passes.

Whether you're a learner or teacher, we hope our syllabuses inspire and support your music learning or teaching. We wish you every success for your musical journey!

Our mission

ABRSM's mission is to inspire musical achievement. We do this in partnership with four Royal Schools of Music: Royal Academy of Music, Royal College of Music, Royal Northern College of Music and Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

We are passionate about music, its value as an art form and the importance of music education. We believe that being involved with music gives people unique, positive experiences with life-long benefits.

Through our world-leading assessments, books and resources we provide people worldwide with the tools they need to teach, learn, make and enjoy music. Our scholarships, donations, sponsorship and partnerships create opportunities for people of all ages to discover music and fulfil their potential. Everything we do is designed to support learners and teachers on their musical journey.

Who we are

We are the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), a company registered in England and Wales (company registration number 1926395) and a registered charity (charity registration number 292182). Our registered office is at 4 London Wall Place, London EC2Y 5AU.

Find out more at www.abrsm.org.

About this qualification specification

What it covers

This specification provides all the relevant requirements and information teachers, candidates, parents and organisations need in order to prepare for the following qualifications in the subjects and grades covered in Section 3:

- ABRSM Entry Level Award in Music Performance (Initial Grade) (Entry 3)
- ABRSM Level 1 Award in Music Performance (Grades 1, 2 and 3)
- ABRSM Level 2 Certificate in Music Performance (Grades 4 and 5)
- ABRSM Level 3 Certificate in Music Performance (Grades 6, 7 and 8)

It also provides information on how the exams will be assessed, their learning outcomes, and regulated qualification details.

Further details, as well as administrative information about the exams, are given in ABRSM's Exam Regulations (www.abrsm.org/examregulations) which should be read before making an exam booking.

Document structure

This specification contains six sections. Sections 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 apply to all subjects (instruments) included in the Music Performance suite of graded exams. Section 3 is the syllabus, which contains requirements and repertoire lists specific to individual subjects. The syllabuses (Section 3s) for all subjects can be found at www.abrsm.org/performancegrades.

Validity of this specification

This specification is valid from 6 September 2021. The repertoire lists contained within each instrumental/singing syllabus (Section 3) have specific validity periods, confirmed in the respective syllabus.

We may update this specification from time to time, but we will not make changes to the relevant syllabus (Section 3) during its period of validity, other than in exceptional circumstances. In such cases, advance notice of any changes will be posted on our website, as will advance notice of any planned syllabus refreshes. The latest version of this specification will be available from www.abrsm.org/performancegrades.

About our Music Performance qualifications

Qualification objectives

Our Music Performance qualifications are designed for learners to demonstrate a combination of key performance-related skills such as instrumental (or singing) technique and control, musical interpretation, communication, and delivery. Each grade is progressive and represents a new challenge for the learner, providing motivation and structure to hone and refine their performance skills.

Exams allow learners to receive formal recognition of the level of mastery they have achieved, and feedback to support their learning journey. Music Performance qualifications further allow learners to be rewarded and recognised for their skills in delivering a whole performance, communicating musically over a sustained programme.

Who the qualifications are for

These qualifications are intended for learners who are interested in developing their performance skills holistically. Candidates may be entered at any age, but those entering for Grades 6 to 8 must fulfil the prerequisite detailed on page 11.

Every effort has been made to feature a broad range of repertoire to suit and appeal to candidates of different ages, backgrounds and interests. In order to provide flexibility when creating a musical programme, candidates are also able to include one piece/song of their own choice (of an appropriate standard).

We are committed to providing fair access to our assessments by putting in place access arrangements and reasonable adjustments for candidates with specific needs. Music Performance qualifications include no requirements for candidates to respond to an examiner or to any previously unseen/unheard music. They can be taken at a time, and at a location, to suit the candidate. In these respects, they may be more accessible and appealing than our Practical Music qualifications.

Structure

Each Music Performance qualification has been carefully designed to assess synoptically the underpinning knowledge and understanding required for music performance. At all grades, these creative skills are presented through the technical control of an instrument, interpretation of repertoire, and the delivery and successful communication of a sustained programme of music. Collectively, these skills enable candidates to progress to higher grades and other qualifications in the creative arts sector.

Candidates are required to perform a programme of four pieces/songs, three from set repertoire lists and one that is their own choice. For certain instruments and grades, the own choice piece can be performed on a related instrument. Each piece/song is equally weighted in marks and an additional mark is awarded for the performance as a whole.

Progression route

ABRSM Music Performance qualifications are available from Grade 1 to Grade 8, and in some subjects from Initial Grade. Each grade progresses from the previous in their level of demand. The syllabuses that form Section 3 of this specification detail the subjects covered and the grades available for each. It is not a requirement for any candidate to complete one grade before moving on to the next although there is a prerequisite for entering a Grade 6, 7 or 8 exam (see page 7).

This new suite of Music Performance qualifications embeds from the earliest grades the importance of understanding how a performance is delivered to best reflect the technique and character of the performer.

Music Performance candidates may, during their learning journey, wish to focus on their all-round musical skills and progress across to our Practical Music suite of qualifications. These long-standing qualifications are designed for learners to demonstrate a combination of performance and other all-round musical skills and knowledge. Each grade is progressive and represents a new challenge for the learner, providing motivation and structure to develop and hone their musical skills. Practical Music qualifications further allow learners to be rewarded and recognised for their skills in performing pieces/songs as well as technique, notation, listening and musical perception.

The nature of both sets of qualifications makes them an ideal platform from which to progress to ABRSM's diploma offer, beginning with the performance-only ARSM. ARSM gives candidates

greater flexibility and responsibility in programme building as well as providing further opportunity to develop performance technique and interpretative skills while extending their repertoire.

After ARSM, learners may wish to progress to higher level diplomas, provided by ABRSM or other awarding organisations. For these types of qualifications, candidates typically demonstrate their performance skills, as well as their musical knowledge and understanding, through a combination of live and written or spoken components.

We are currently reviewing the diploma exams we offer and changes may be made during the lifetime of this specification. Please refer to www.abrsm.org/diplomas for up-to-date information.

Prerequisite

We believe that a thorough understanding of the elements of music is essential for a full and satisfying performance at the higher grades. Our Music Theory graded exams assess candidates on their ability to identify, use and manipulate musical symbols, to study extracts and to answer questions about the elements of music. We also offer Practical Musicianship exams where, in developing their musicianship skills, candidates gain the understanding as well as the expressive and interpretive skills needed to master the musical language of the repertoire they are learning. A pass at ABRSM Grade 5 or above is required in either Music Theory, Practical Musicianship or any Practical Music solo Jazz instrument before learners can enter for a Grade 6, 7 or 8 Music Performance or Practical Music exam.

Regulation and UCAS points (UK)

Our regulators

ABRSM Music Performance, Practical Music and Music Theory grades, and higher-level qualifications (diplomas) are regulated in the UK by:

- Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)
- Qualifications Wales
- Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA Regulation)

For further information, see www.abrsm.org/regulation.

The Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)

All our regulated qualifications can be found on the RQF. There are nine qualification levels in the framework, labelled in order of difficulty from Entry Level to Level 8. For further information, visit <https://register.ofqual.gov.uk>.

Entry to higher education

In the UK, ABRSM's Grades 6 to 8 in Music Performance and Practical Music can contribute towards entry into higher education through the allocation of UCAS points; the table below shows the UCAS Tariff value of these grades. For further information visit www.ucas.com.

Qualification	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Grade 6	8	10	12
Grade 7	12	14	16
Grade 8	18	24	30

Regulated qualification details

Qualification titles

The table below shows the regulated titles and qualification numbers of our Music Performance qualifications. Further information can be found at <https://register.ofqual.gov.uk>.

Qualification Number	Qualification Title
610/0064/1	ABRSM Entry Level Award in Music Performance (Initial Grade) (Entry 3)
603/5993/6	ABRSM Level 1 Award in Music Performance (Grade 1)
603/5994/8	ABRSM Level 1 Award in Music Performance (Grade 2)
603/5995/X	ABRSM Level 1 Award in Music Performance (Grade 3)
603/5996/1	ABRSM Level 2 Certificate in Music Performance (Grade 4)
603/5997/3	ABRSM Level 2 Certificate in Music Performance (Grade 5)
603/5998/5	ABRSM Level 3 Certificate in Music Performance (Grade 6)
603/5999/7	ABRSM Level 3 Certificate in Music Performance (Grade 7)
603/6000/8	ABRSM Level 3 Certificate in Music Performance (Grade 8)

Qualification size

The table below describes the size of the Music Performance qualifications by showing the amount of time that a candidate would typically need to spend preparing for them:

- Under the guidance of a teacher (Guided Learning Hours);
- Under the guidance of a teacher and time spent preparing independently (Total Qualification Time);

and:

- The assigned credit value (which denotes the size of the qualification).

Qualification	Guided Learning Hours* (GLH)	Total Qualification Time* (TQT)	Credits
Initial Grade	8	40	4
Grade 1	12	60	6
Grade 2	18	90	9
Grade 3	18	120	12
Grade 4	24	150	15
Grade 5	24	180	18
Grade 6	36	220	22
Grade 7	48	270	27
Grade 8	54	320	32

* The Guided Learning Hours and Total Qualification Time are estimates of the average amount of time that it might take a candidate to prepare for these qualifications, and should be used as guidance only; it is recognised that there will be variance dependent on each individual's level of experience and ability.

Regulation (Europe)

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is an overarching framework that links the qualifications of different countries together and allows for comparison and translation. The EQF has eight levels across which qualifications can be mapped. The levels do not correspond directly with the UK's Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF), although they are similar.

The table below shows the level of each of ABRSM's Music Performance qualifications on the RQF and the EQF.

Qualification	RQF Level	EQF Level
Initial Grade	Entry Level (Level 3)	Level 1
Grade 1		
Grade 2	Level 1	Level 2
Grade 3		
Grade 4		
Grade 5	Level 2	Level 3
Grade 6		
Grade 7	Level 3	Level 4
Grade 8		

Regulation (Rest of world)

Information on how ABRSM exams are recognised in individual countries can be found at www.abrsm.org/regulation.

Qualification title referencing

The qualifications covered by this specification are:

- ABRSM Entry Level Award in Music Performance (Initial Grade) (Entry 3)
- ABRSM Level 1 Award in Music Performance (Grades 1, 2 and 3)
- ABRSM Level 2 Certificate in Music Performance (Grades 4 and 5)
- ABRSM Level 3 Certificate in Music Performance (Grades 6, 7 and 8)

For ease of reading, 'Performance Grade(s)' is used in place of the full qualification titles throughout the remainder of this document. Similarly, when referring to our other, long-standing, suite of graded practical exams, 'Practical Grade(s)' is used in place of the full qualification titles.

2. Performance Grades

Syllabuses

When preparing for an exam, it is important to read the relevant syllabus, which makes up Section 3 of this specification. Syllabuses (Section 3s) for each Performance Grades subject (instrument) are available at www.abrsm.org/performancegrades.

Syllabus repertoire validity

The repertoire lists for each subject are updated periodically. Validity periods vary from subject to subject and are confirmed in the relevant syllabus (Section 3). The current repertoire lists for each subject are available at www.abrsm.org/performancegrades.

Syllabus amendments

Any updates to the syllabus – e.g. changes to publication details or other minor corrections or clarifications – will be posted at www.abrsm.org/syllabuscorrections.

Syllabus repertoire overlap

In the first year of any revised Performance Grades syllabus repertoire lists, we offer an overlap period where candidates may choose repertoire from the preceding lists. Information on the length of the overlap period is given at www.abrsm.org/overlap.

The next syllabus

Advance notice of any planned changes to syllabus repertoire lists will be posted at www.abrsm.org/syllabusupdates.

Exam Regulations

When preparing for an exam, it is important to read ABRSM's Exam Regulations, which set out the rules for completing the exams listed in this specification. This information is available at www.abrsm.org/examregulations.

Malpractice and maladministration

We are committed to inspiring achievement in music. Our qualifications are used by thousands of people to support their music learning or teaching. Many people also use them when applying to study at further and higher education institutions. It is therefore vital that our qualifications remain a valuable and reliable measure of a candidate's skills and knowledge. We take any form of malpractice or maladministration very seriously.

- **Malpractice** is defined as any act that compromises or is an attempt to compromise the assessment process, the integrity of any qualification or the validity of a result or certificate. This also includes any act that damages our reputation or credibility as an awarding organisation.
- **Maladministration** is defined as any act that breaches the regulations through a mismanagement of administrative processes, particularly where such a breach could compromise the integrity of a qualification or assessment.

Applicants and candidates must follow the requirements set out in this specification, Exam Regulations and all other ABRSM policies about the delivery of our exams. In cases where applicants or candidates have committed malpractice, a sanction or penalty may be given. Further information about our Malpractice and Maladministration Policy can be found at www.abrsm.org/policies.

Entry requirements

There is a maximum of nine grades of Performance Grade exams. Candidates may be entered for any grade at any age. They do not need to have taken any earlier grade(s) in the same subject. To enter for a Grade 6, 7 or 8 exam, candidates must already have passed one of the following:

- ABRSM Grade 5 (or above) in Music Theory
- ABRSM Grade 5 (or above) in Practical Musicianship
- ABRSM Grade 5 in any Practical Grades solo Jazz instrument

For full details, including a list of accepted alternatives, see www.abrsm.org/prerequisite.

Exam venues

Performance Grades are taken at a venue of the candidate's/Applicant's choosing. This can be the candidate's school, their teacher's studio, or any other location where appropriate space, instruments and equipment are available (including a suitable piano or audio equipment for any accompaniments). The venue can also be the candidate's home.

Exam booking

Details of exam dates, fees and how to book an exam are available at www.abrsm.org/exambooking.

Access (for candidates with specific needs)

We are committed to providing fair access to our assessments, for candidates with specific needs, by putting in place access arrangements and reasonable adjustments. Guidelines for candidates with specific needs are available at www.abrsm.org/specificneeds. Where a candidate's needs are not covered by the guidelines, each case is considered individually.

Performance Grades include no supporting tests, or any requirement for candidates to respond to an examiner or any previously unseen/unheard music. Additional time for the performance itself is therefore not applicable. However, we offer candidates with a range of specific needs the option of taking rest breaks during their performance as required.

While we are not able to make allowances in the marking for candidates with specific needs, we are always happy to pass on relevant information to the examiner in order that they are aware of candidates' particular circumstances.

Please contact our Access Co-ordinator (accesscoordinator@abrsm.ac.uk) before booking an exam with the relevant details.

Exam content

Performance Grades consist of five components – four Pieces/Songs and an assessment of the performance as a whole. Information on how marks are allocated is given on page 16.

How the exam works

Performance Grades are currently offered as digital exams – candidates' performances are video recorded and submitted to ABRSM for assessment. The candidate/Applicant is responsible for organising a suitable venue and any equipment needed to run the exam (e.g. music stand, recording device).

The repertoire must be performed and recorded in one continuous take and the recording must not be paused at any point during that take. Candidates should show the opening of their own-choice piece/song, as well as verbally introduce themselves and their repertoire to camera before beginning their performance. Examiners will start assessing candidates from the point at which they start to perform their repertoire and may stop listening to the recording if the performance goes over the time limit.

Where candidates are under 18, the recording process must be overseen by a Responsible Adult who must be aged 18 or over, and may be the Applicant, teacher or parent/carer.

Detailed instructions on how to record and submit the exam are given in the Guidance for Music Performance Grades document available at www.abrsm.org/performancegrades.

Special consideration

Special consideration is given to candidates who suffer temporary illness, injury or indisposition, or adverse circumstances at or near the time of the assessment. This will not result in an adjustment to marks and will not change the assessment criteria applied by the examiner for the exam. Please refer to our Special Consideration Policy at www.abrsm.org/policies.

3. Performance Grades syllabus

Introducing the qualification

Performance Grades, introduced by ABRSM in 2020, run alongside and provide an alternative pathway to our long-standing Practical Grades. They allow learners to focus on and showcase their performance skills if that is their preference. This additional suite of qualifications has been designed to allow learners to play to their strengths and interests and still have their level of achievement formally recognised with a regulated qualification that attracts UCAS points (in the UK) at Grades 6 to 8. Performance Grades are accessible exams given their sole focus on performance, without the assessment of any supporting tests. Instead they encourage the selection of appropriate repertoire to be delivered in a sustained performance, even at the earliest levels.

Musicians learn to play an instrument to explore and perform repertoire, which is why pieces/songs, and the way they can be combined to create a convincing and sustained performance, are the focus of the exam. For Performance Grades, candidates are asked to present four pieces/songs at each grade.

ABRSM Performance Grades draw on the same repertoire set for our Practical Grades. This syllabus repertoire is organised into lists, which explore different traditions and styles, dating from the Renaissance period to the present day. Choosing repertoire from different lists gives candidates the opportunity to perform a balanced selection and demonstrate a range of skills.

Since Performance Grades focus on performance alone, the choice of repertoire is important, and attention should be given to the way pieces/songs are contrasted, the order in which they are presented, and the different moods and characters they inhabit. This will enable candidates to demonstrate their ability to deliver a coherent and convincing performance event, not just a series of individual pieces/songs. Credit for this is given through the performance as a whole assessment criteria that are applied (see page 17).

Performance Grades: requirements and information

Individual Performance Grades syllabuses (i.e. Section 3s), with relevant requirements and information, are available at www.abrsm.org/performancegrades for the following subjects:

- Piano
- Bowed Strings – Violin, Viola, Cello, Double Bass
- Woodwind – Descant Recorder, Treble Recorder, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, Soprano Saxophone, Alto Saxophone, Tenor Saxophone, Baritone Saxophone
- Brass – Horn, Trumpet, B♭ Cornet, E♭ Soprano Cornet, Flugelhorn, E♭ Horn, Trombone, Bass Trombone, Baritone, Euphonium, Tuba
- Percussion – Snare Drum, Timpani, Tuned Percussion, Percussion (Combined)
- Guitar
- Harp – Harp (Pedal), Harp (Non-Pedal)
- Harpsichord
- Organ
- Singing
- Singing for Musical Theatre

4. Assessment, marking & infringements

Assessment objectives

The following tables describe the level of knowledge and skills required of candidates taking Performance Grades. They also show the assessment objectives and corresponding marking criteria that examiners use to assess the performances at each level. The full marking criteria used by examiners are available on pages 18-19.

Initial Grade (RQF Entry Level 3)

Assessment objectives	Marking criteria
Learners will:	Learners can:
Apply musical skill, knowledge and understanding to performances of basic pieces/songs in a mixture of styles. 80%	Perform basic pieces/songs with: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reliable pitch and intonation• Stable rhythm at a suitable tempo• Reliable tonal control and awareness• Musical shape and detail• Communication of character and style
Demonstrate skills in musical communication, interpretation and delivery by applying them with a degree of consistency across the whole programme. 20%	Perform a short programme of basic pieces/songs with: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Projection and involvement• Performance awareness and control• Stylistic realisation• Awareness and control of textures and ensemble• Technical control and instrument management

Grades 1 to 3 (RQF Level 1)

Assessment objectives	Marking criteria
Learners will:	Learners can:
Apply musical skill, knowledge and understanding to performances of elementary pieces/songs in a mixture of styles. 80%	Perform elementary pieces/songs with: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reliable pitch and intonation• Stable rhythm at a suitable tempo• Reliable tonal control and awareness• Musical shape and detail• Communication of character and style
Demonstrate skills in musical communication, interpretation and delivery by applying them with a degree of consistency across the whole programme. 20%	Perform a short programme of elementary pieces/songs with: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Projection and involvement• Performance awareness and control• Stylistic realisation• Awareness and control of textures and ensemble• Technical control and instrument management

Grades 4 & 5 (RQF Level 2)

Assessment objectives	Marking criteria
Learners will:	Learners can:
Apply musical skill, knowledge and understanding to performances of intermediate pieces/songs in a mixture of styles. 80%	Perform intermediate pieces/songs with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliable pitch and intonation • Stable rhythm at a suitable tempo • Reliable tonal control and awareness • Musical shape and detail • Communication of character and style
Demonstrate skills in musical communication, interpretation and delivery by applying them with a degree of consistency across the whole programme. 20%	Perform a moderately-long programme of intermediate pieces/songs with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projection and involvement • Performance awareness and control • Stylistic realisation • Awareness and control of textures and ensemble • Technical control and instrument management

Grades 6 to 8 (RQF Level 3)

Assessment objectives	Marking criteria
Learners will:	Learners can:
Apply musical skill, knowledge and understanding to performances of advanced pieces/songs in a mixture of styles. 80%	Perform advanced pieces/songs with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliable pitch and intonation • Stable rhythm at a suitable tempo • Reliable tonal control and awareness • Musical shape and detail • Communication of character and style
Demonstrate skills in musical communication, interpretation and delivery by applying them with a degree of consistency across the whole programme. 20%	Perform an extensive programme of advanced pieces/songs with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projection and involvement • Performance awareness and control • Stylistic realisation • Awareness and control of textures and ensemble • Technical control and instrument management

Mark allocation

Marks are allocated for each component of the assessment, as shown in the table below:

Component	Maximum marks	% of total mark
Piece/Song 1	30	20%
Piece/Song 2	30	20%
Piece/Song 3	30	20%
Piece/Song 4	30	20%
Performance as a whole	30	20%
Total	150	100%

Result categories

The result categories for Performance Grades are set as follows. A Pass in each component of the assessment is not required to pass overall.

Result category	Mark band
Distinction	130-150
Merit	120-129
Pass	100-119
Below Pass	50-99

Synoptic assessment

Synoptic assessment is a form of assessment that requires candidates to demonstrate that they can identify and effectively use a selection of skills, techniques, concepts and knowledge to carry out a key task. Performance Grades allow candidates to demonstrate their ability to draw together different skills, knowledge and understanding – theory, notation, instrument control, listening skills, creative interpretation – and apply these collectively during the performance of a sustained programme of music.

Awarding

An examiner's assessment of a piece or song will be based on the performance given at that time towards the qualification for which the candidate has been entered. Prior performances of the same pieces or songs will not be taken into account for the qualification, nor will marking appeals be accepted on that basis. The transfer of marks, at any grade, between Performance Grades and Practical Grades is not permitted.

A recording can only be submitted as evidence for any qualification once. It cannot be re-used for the same or a different qualification at any point in time. If a previously submitted video is uploaded as evidence a second time, this will be discounted and the candidate disqualified from that second assessment.

Infringements

It is important that candidates, and those preparing them for exams, read and follow the exam requirements as set out in the relevant Performance Grades syllabus. If the exam requirements are not met in any way, this could lead to a warning, mark deduction or disqualification, at ABRSM's discretion. Examples of infringements include:

- Offering an inappropriate standard of own-choice piece/song.
- Presenting an own-choice piece/song that is too short or a programme that is too long.
- Presenting a programme containing fewer than four pieces/songs or with fewer than three pieces/songs from the ABRSM repertoire lists for the grade.
- Presenting syllabus-listed repertoire, but not as specified (e.g. incorrect number of movements).
- Taking an unpermitted break.
- Submitting a video of the performance that has not been made in one single take or that has been edited in some other way.

The above list is not exhaustive.

Action is typically taken as follows:

- Warnings, in the form of written correspondence, are applied to minor infringements (e.g. wrong combination of pieces/songs from the lists). Repeat cases in subsequent exams may result in more severe action being taken.
- Mark deductions from a component of the exam are applied to more serious cases (e.g. an own-choice piece/song of an inappropriate standard) and may range from three marks to the full marks available for the component.
- Disqualification is applied to cases where requirements are not fulfilled in a fundamental way (e.g. none of the pieces/songs performed have been selected from the ABRSM repertoire lists for the grade or the recording has been edited in some way).

Examiners report infringements to ABRSM who investigate and decide what action is to be taken. It should be noted that infringements identified in exams may delay the release of the exam result.

ABRSM's decision on any infringement is final. Prior acceptance of an infringement without penalty does not set a precedent and appeals will not be accepted on this basis.

Marking criteria

The tables on pages 18–19 show the marking criteria used by examiners for Performance Grades. Each piece/song is marked out of 30 using the first set of criteria. After the full programme has been completed, a mark out of 30 is awarded for the performance as a whole using the second set of criteria. Additional guidance on how to interpret the performance as a whole criteria is provided on page 20.

Examiners mark up or down from the pass mark for each component by balancing the extent to which the qualities and skills listed in the criteria are demonstrated and contribute towards the overall musical outcome.

Marking criteria

Grades Initial to 8	Criteria for each of the pieces/songs presented				
	<i>Pitch</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Tone</i>	<i>Shape</i>	<i>Performance</i>
Distinction 27-30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Highly accurate notes and intonation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fluent, with flexibility where appropriate ● Rhythmic character well conveyed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Well projected ● Sensitive use of tonal qualities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expressive, idiomatic musical shaping and detail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assured ● Fully committed ● Vivid communication of character and style
Merit 24-26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Largely accurate notes and intonation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sustained, effective tempo ● Good sense of rhythm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mainly controlled and consistent ● Good tonal awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clear musical shaping, well-realised detail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Positive ● Carrying musical conviction ● Character and style communicated
Pass 20-23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Generally correct notes ● Sufficiently reliable intonation to maintain tonality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Suitable tempo ● Generally stable pulse ● Overall rhythmic accuracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Generally reliable ● Adequate tonal awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some realisation of musical shape and/or detail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Generally secure, prompt recovery from slips ● Some musical involvement
Below Pass 17-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Frequent note errors ● Insufficiently reliable intonation to maintain tonality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unsuitable and/or uncontrolled tempo ● Irregular pulse ● Inaccurate rhythm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Uneven and/or unreliable ● Inadequate tonal awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Musical shape and detail insufficiently conveyed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Insecure, inadequate recovery from slips ● Insufficient musical involvement
13-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Largely inaccurate notes and/or intonation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Erratic tempo and/or pulse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Serious lack of tonal control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Musical shape and detail largely unrealised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lacking continuity ● No musical involvement
10-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Highly inaccurate notes and/or intonation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Incoherent tempo and/or pulse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No tonal control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No shape or detail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unable to continue for more than a short section
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No work offered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No work offered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No work offered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No work offered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No work offered

Grades	Criteria for the performance as a whole		
Initial to 8	<i>Communication</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Delivery</i>
Distinction 27-30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consistently well-projected and involved, showing strong performance commitment and conviction ● Effective sequence and pacing of chosen programme; consistently good performance awareness and control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consistently effective stylistic characterisation; interpretative demands of the programme well met ● Consistently good awareness and control of textures and ensemble, with effective blending and balancing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consistently assured and controlled; technical challenges of the programme well met ● Consistently effective instrument management, fully responsive to the performance situation
Merit 24-26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mainly well-projected and involved, showing positive performance commitment ● Largely effective sequence and pacing of chosen programme; mainly good performance awareness and control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mostly effective stylistic realisation; interpretative demands of the programme largely well met ● Mainly good awareness and control of textures and ensemble, with appropriate blending and balancing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Effectively controlled; most technical challenges of the programme well met ● Mostly effective instrument management, mainly responsive to the performance situation
Pass 20-23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Projection and involvement sufficient to maintain an overall sense of performance ● Sequence and pacing of chosen programme shows adequate performance awareness and control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sufficient stylistic realisation to meet the interpretative demands of the programme ● Adequate awareness and control of textures and ensemble, with sufficient blending and balancing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Generally controlled; technical challenges of the programme securely met overall ● Sufficiently reliable instrument management to meet the demands of the performance situation
Below Pass 15-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Insufficient projection or sense of involvement to maintain a sense of performance ● Sequence and/or pacing of chosen programme shows inadequate performance awareness or control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stylistic realisation not equal to the interpretative demands of the programme ● Insufficient awareness or control of textures and ensemble, and/or unsuitable blending and balancing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consistency of control insufficient to meet the technical challenges of the programme ● Insufficiently reliable instrument management to meet the demands of the performance situation
10-14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sense of performance largely absent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stylistic realisation and/or control of textures and ensemble largely absent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Very insecure technical control and/or instrument management

Performance as a whole – additional guidance

Successful candidates at all levels should be able to deliver performances that are broadly consistent across the entire programme of selected music. Repertoire choices need to be made that allow communication of personal involvement and musical characterisation, interpretation of musical elements, and effective technical control of the instrument or voice. Candidates should also be aware of the ensemble skills needed whilst performing with an accompanist or duet partner, and have the stamina to maintain and deliver a reliable performance.

Within three key areas of **Communication (C)**, **Interpretation (I)** and **Delivery (D)**, candidates need to show a broad range of musical and technical skills, which demonstrate their overall flair for performance throughout a continuous programme of music.

Initial Grade to Grade 3 (RQF Entry Level 3 & Level 1)

- C** Candidates project a sense of musical communication, purpose and personal involvement throughout a programme of basic repertoire. They demonstrate an elementary level of awareness of the performance context, both during and between the four chosen pieces/songs. Through the course of a short programme, candidates show commitment to performance and are able to create a sense of musical occasion.
- I** Candidates convey character and mood appropriate to each of the chosen pieces/songs, through an elementary understanding of musical detail and style. They show awareness of musical roles within simple textures and highlight points of similarity and difference. They are also able to blend and balance straightforward musical elements, demonstrating ensemble awareness where appropriate.
- D** Candidates have sufficient control of their instrument/voice to meet and respond to the technical challenges of basic repertoire with conviction. They have the focus and stamina to maintain technical assurance consistently through a short programme, from the first note to the last.

Grades 4 & 5 (RQF Level 2)

- C** Candidates project a sense of musical communication, purpose and personal involvement throughout a programme of intermediate repertoire. They demonstrate a developing awareness of the performance context, both during and between the four chosen pieces/songs. Through the course of a programme of moderate duration, candidates show commitment to performance and are able to create a sense of musical occasion.
- I** Candidates convey character and mood appropriate to each of the chosen pieces/songs, through a developing understanding of musical detail and style. They show awareness of differences in texture, timbre, articulation and mood, blending and balancing diverse musical elements as appropriate, and demonstrate ensemble awareness when accompanied.
- D** Candidates have sufficient control of their instrument/voice to meet and respond to the technical challenges of intermediate repertoire with conviction. They have the focus and stamina to maintain technical assurance consistently through a programme of moderate duration, from the first note to the last.

Grades 6 to 8 (RQF Level 3)

- C** Candidates project a sense of musical communication, purpose and personal involvement throughout a programme of advanced repertoire. They demonstrate sophisticated awareness of the performance context, both during and between the four chosen pieces/songs. Through the course of an extensive programme of music, candidates show commitment to performance and create a sense of musical occasion.
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- I** Candidates convey the different character and mood appropriate to each of the chosen pieces/songs, through effective realisation of musical detail and sophisticated understanding of style. They show awareness of musical roles within complex textures, blending and balancing complex musical elements as appropriate, and demonstrate ensemble awareness when accompanied.
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- D** Candidates have the command and control of their instrument/voice in order to meet and respond to the technical challenges of advanced repertoire with conviction. They demonstrate the focus and stamina to maintain technical assurance consistently through an extensive programme, from the first note to the last.
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5. After the exam

Results

All candidates receive a copy of their mark form; successful candidates also receive a certificate that shows the qualification title as well as the subject and level that they have been examined in. We aim to release results for Performance Grades in line with the schedules on our website at www.abrsm.org/results; however, some results may take longer. Examiners will not issue or discuss a candidate's result; the mark form (and certificate for successful candidates) will be issued by ABRSM after the exam. Unless otherwise requested at the time of booking, mark forms and certificates are issued to the applicant, whose responsibility it is to pass them on to candidates.

Appeals and feedback

Appeals

If a candidate has received an unexpected exam result, this can be appealed by requesting a Results Review. This process allows us to revisit the marks awarded by an examiner and, subject to the outcome of the review, may result in a mark amendment.

Feedback

In addition to a Results Review, we also welcome feedback about other matters, such as the overall exam experience or the mark form. All feedback is logged and plays a valuable part in our commitment to continuous improvement and quality assurance procedures.

For further information on our processes and deadlines for appealing a result, or submitting feedback, please visit www.abrsm.org/send-exam-feedback.

6. Other assessments

ABRSM offers a range of other practical assessments for instrumentalists and singers:

- Music Medals
- Prep Test
- Practical Grades (including Jazz for selected instruments)
- Performance Assessment
- Ensembles
- Choral Singing
- diplomas

Full information is available at www.abrsm.org/exams.

Practical Grades

ABRSM Practical Grades are our long-standing qualifications that test all-round musical skills. They are available from Initial Grade to Grade 8 (nine grades). Candidates may be entered for any grade at any age and do not need to have taken any earlier grade(s) in the same subject. Full information is available at www.abrsm.org/exams and in the qualification specification, available at www.abrsm.org/specifications.

About Practical Grades

Each Practical Grade has been carefully designed to test all-round musical skills – technique, notation, listening and musical perception – as well as knowledge, understanding and creativity. These creative skills are demonstrated through the playing/singing of repertoire and completing supporting tests. Collectively, these skills enable candidates to progress to higher grades, further education, employment and other qualifications in the creative arts sector.

The exams are made up of six components:

- three Pieces/Songs – selected by candidates from set lists and played/sung as separate items
- technical work – Scales and arpeggios/Unaccompanied song/Studies, as required for the individual subject
- Sight-reading* (Quick Study for Jazz subjects)
- Aural tests

The exams are held as face-to-face assessments and are led by an examiner. Examiners ask for a selection of the technical work in the exam. Candidates can prepare for the Sight-reading and Aural test components, based on published parameters and sample materials, but they will not have seen or heard the tests given in the exam before.

Marks for each component are differently weighted and are awarded to each component individually.

Those entering for a Grade 6, 7 or 8 Practical Grades exam must first have passed ABRSM Grade 5 (or above) in Music Theory, Practical Musicianship or a Practical Grades solo Jazz instrument; for full details, including a list of accepted alternatives, see www.abrsm.org/prerequisite.

* This component includes a transposition test for Horn, Trumpet & Organ at Grades 6 to 8, and a figured bass realisation test for Harpsichord

Music Theory

ABRSM Music Theory exams are available for Grades 1 to 8. Candidates may be entered for any grade at any age and do not need to have taken any earlier grade(s). Further information is available at www.abrsm.org/theory and the qualification specification (including the full syllabus) is available at www.abrsm.org/specifications.

About Music Theory

Developing musical literacy forms a key part of a rounded education for performers, composers and listeners of all kinds. Understanding how written symbols relate to the elements of music, and having the skills to interpret and translate them into sounds, empowers us to communicate and experience music in a meaningful way.

ABRSM's Music Theory grades give learners:

- a knowledge of the notation of western music, including commonly used signs and terminology
- an understanding of fundamental musical elements such as intervals, keys, scales and chords
- an ability to apply theoretical knowledge and understanding to score analysis
- skills in harmonic completion of extracts and melody writing (at Grades 6 to 8).

Candidates are assessed on their ability to identify, use and manipulate musical symbols, to study extracts and to answer questions about the elements of music according to the parameters detailed in the full syllabus at www.abrsm.org/theory.

The exams are available as online assessments at Grades 1 to 5 and paper-based assessments at Grades 6 to 8.

Grade 5 as a prerequisite

We believe that a thorough understanding of the elements of music is essential for a full and satisfying performance at the higher grades.

It is therefore an ABRSM requirement that candidates must provide evidence of a pass at ABRSM Grade 5 or above in Music Theory, Practical Musicianship or a Practical Grades solo Jazz instrument before they can enter for a Grade 6, 7 or 8 Practical Grades or Performance Grades exam.

Practical Musicianship

ABRSM Practical Musicianship exams are available for Grades 1 to 8 and are open to singers and instrumentalists. Candidates may be entered for any grade at any age and do not need to have taken any earlier grade(s). The full syllabus is available at www.abrsm.org/practicalmusicianship.

About Practical Musicianship

Musicianship is a broad concept that covers a complex range of musical abilities. For the purposes of this syllabus, it is loosely defined as the ability to 'think in sound'. This occurs when a musician is able to produce music which they perceive internally and in the imagination, whether through playing by ear, singing, reading from notation, or through improvisation.

ABRSM's Practical Musicianship grades encourage learners to develop their ability to 'think in sound' and perform spontaneously. While Performance Grades and Practical Grades focus on aspects of performance and/or supporting tests that are prepared in detail in advance, here the playing (or singing) is in response to immediate challenges and stimuli, presented both aurally and via notation.

The exams also cover the following key skills:

- the ability to internalise music and to reproduce it
- interpreting written music with a minimum of preparation
- exploring the possibilities inherent in a short motif
- the ability to detect differences between what is heard and what is written.

In developing their musicianship skills, learners will be gaining the understanding as well as the expressive and interpretative skills needed to master the musical language of the repertoire they are learning.

Grade 5 as a prerequisite

We believe that a thorough understanding of the elements of music is essential for a full and satisfying performance at the higher grades.

It is therefore an ABRSM requirement that candidates must provide evidence of a pass at ABRSM Grade 5 or above in Practical Musicianship, Music Theory or a Practical Grades solo Jazz instrument before they can enter for a Grade 6, 7 or 8 Practical Grades or Performance Grades exam.

ARSM

The ARSM diploma is available to instrumentalists and singers of any age. It is the first of our diploma qualifications and provides musicians with an opportunity to develop their performance technique and interpretative skills, while focusing on programme building and extending their repertoire.

Key features

- Candidates present a balanced and varied programme, as follows:
 - the programme lasts 30 minutes
 - at least 20 minutes of the music is chosen from the repertoire list
 - the remaining programme time may be made up of own-choice repertoire, of Grade 8 standard or above
- There are no additional supporting tests or other requirements
- There are two assessment methods available:
 - face-to-face – held at the same venues and during the same time periods as ABRSM's Practical Grades
 - digital – a video recorded performance submitted to ABRSM for assessment
- ARSM is a letter-bearing qualification. Candidates awarded the diploma can use the letters ARSM (Associate of the Royal Schools of Music) after their name.

Those entering for an ARSM diploma must first have passed ABRSM Grade 8 (or a listed alternative). Full details of the exam and entry requirements are available at www.abrsm.org/arsmdiploma and the qualification specification is available at www.abrsm.org/specifications.

We update our syllabuses from time to time. Advance notice of any changes will be given at www.abrsm.org/syllabusupdates. Please refer to the website for the most recent version of the ARSM syllabus.

DipABRSM, LRSM, FRSM (Music Performance)

These diplomas are available to instrumentalists and singers of any age. Through a combination of live and written components, candidates demonstrate their performance, communication and research skills, as well as their musical knowledge and understanding. Each diploma serves as a stepping stone to the next level.

Key features

- Candidates:
 - present a recital programme
 - submit programme notes (DipABRSM & LRSM) or a written submission (FRSM)
 - undertake a viva voce, with questions covering the recital, programme notes/written submission as well as other aspects of performance
 - perform a short piece of unaccompanied and previously unseen music after five minutes' preparation time (quick study)
- These diploma exams take place at specific venues and times of the year
- Each diploma is a letter-bearing qualification. Candidates awarded a diploma can use the letters DipABRSM (Diploma of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music), LRSM (Licentiate of the Royal Schools of Music) or FRSM (Fellowship of the Royal Schools of Music) after their name as appropriate.

Those entering for one of these diplomas must fulfil a specific ABRSM prerequisite (or a listed alternative). Full details of the exam and entry requirements are available at www.abrsm.org/diplomas and the qualification specification is available at www.abrsm.org/specifications.

We update our syllabuses from time to time. Advance notice of any changes will be given at www.abrsm.org/syllabusupdates. Please refer to the website for the most recent versions of the diploma syllabuses.

Further diploma exams

DipABRSM, LRSM and FRSM diplomas are also available for Instrumental/Vocal Teaching and Music Direction. Full details are available at www.abrsm.org/diplomas.

We are currently reviewing the diploma exams we offer and changes may be made during the lifetime of this specification. Please refer to www.abrsm.org/diplomas for up-to-date information.