

3. Piano Syllabus 2021 & 2022

This is Section 3 from the full Qualification Specification that can be found at www.abrsm.org/piano

Introducing the syllabus

A number of significant changes have been made in the 2021 & 2022 Piano Syllabus:

- Initial Grade is introduced; this pre-Grade 1 exam has the same format as Grades 1–8 and is assessed using the same marking criteria
- The repertoire lists *and* scale requirements at Grades 1–8 are completely refreshed
- There is a greater choice of repertoire than ever before, with 10 pieces per list (30 pieces per grade) and a breadth of musical styles
- The lists are now defined by musical characteristics rather than by period of composition, encouraging candidates to play a balanced selection of pieces and demonstrate a range of skills
- A duet option is offered at Grades Initial–3
- The new scale requirements focus on technical development and progression, achieved through a realistic and manageable assessment load

Some key exam information has also been updated or clarified, including the table of sight-reading parameters.

The Sight-reading and Aural test requirements for Grades 1–8 stay the same as the preceding syllabus. All other requirements have been revised.

Grades Initial–8: requirements and information

This syllabus is valid from 1 January 2021 until 31 December 2022.

This section provides a summary of the most important points that teachers and candidates need to know when taking ABRSM graded Piano exams. Further details, as well as administrative information about the exams, are given in ABRSM's Exam Regulations (available at www.abrsm.org/examregulations) which should be read before making an exam booking.

Instruments

ABRSM Public Venues provide a piano suitable for exam purposes. The piano will be upright or grand. Practice before the exam cannot be arranged, but examiners will recognise that the instrument may be one that candidates are unfamiliar with. When exams are held at Private Visits (i.e. premises provided and overseen by the Visit Organiser and visited by the examiner), a suitable piano must be provided. A digital piano may be used, provided it has a clearly recognisable piano tone, a touch-sensitive keyboard with full-size weighted keys, and an action, compass and facilities that match those of a conventional acoustic piano, including a sustaining pedal.

Before beginning the exam: Candidates are welcome to adjust the piano stool height (the examiner will be happy to help with this if necessary) and to play a few notes to try out and get used to the piano.

Pieces

Musicians learn to play an instrument to explore and perform repertoire, which is why pieces are at the core of the exam – candidates are asked to present three at each grade. The syllabus repertoire is organised into three lists which explore different traditions and styles, dating from the Renaissance period to the present day.

Choosing one piece from each list gives candidates the opportunity to play a balanced selection and demonstrate a range of skills. In this syllabus, the pieces are broadly grouped into lists by the characteristics of the music:

- List A pieces are generally faster moving and require technical agility
- List B pieces are more lyrical and invite expressive playing
- List C pieces reflect a wide variety of musical traditions, styles and characters.

At Grades Initial–3, there are opportunities to play duets. This is an activity that often occurs in lessons for beginners and helps build a strong sense of musical awareness as well as secure rhythm and pulse.

We hope that by offering this variety in the syllabus, candidates will find inspiring music that they enjoy learning and performing.

Programme planning: Candidates must choose one piece from each of the three lists (A, B and C)*. In the exam, they should inform the examiner which pieces they are performing, and they are welcome to use the form on page 58 for this purpose.

Every effort has been made to feature a broad range of repertoire to suit and appeal to candidates of different ages, backgrounds and interests. Certain pieces may not be suitable for every candidate for technical reasons, e.g. hand size, or effects that cannot be realised on a digital piano. Other pieces may not be suitable because of wider context (historical, cultural, subject matter, lyrics if an arrangement of a song, etc.). Pieces should be carefully considered for their appropriateness to each individual, which may need consultation between teachers and parents/guardians. Teachers and parents/guardians should also exercise caution when allowing younger candidates to research pieces online: www.nspcc.org.uk/onlinesafety.

Duets: At Grades Initial–3, candidates may perform a duet for *one* of their pieces. These pieces are marked **DUET** in the repertoire list and the part the candidate should play is also specified – **primo part** if the upper part and **secondo part** if the lower part.

Candidates must provide their own duet partner, who can only be in the exam room while playing. The duet partner may be the candidate's teacher (examiners will not play duets with candidates). Recorded duet parts are not allowed.

Exam music & editions: Wherever the syllabus includes an arrangement or transcription (appearing as 'arr.' or 'trans.' in the repertoire lists), the edition listed in the syllabus must be used in the exam. For all other pieces, editions are listed for guidance only and candidates may use any edition of their choice. This includes editions that are downloaded. Information on sourcing exam music is given on page 13.

Interpreting the score: Printed editorial suggestions such as fingering, metronome marks, realisation of ornaments, etc. do not need to be strictly observed. Whether the piece contains musical indications or not, candidates are encouraged to interpret the score in a musical and

stylistic way. Examiners' marking will be determined by how control of pitch, time, tone, shape and performance contributes to the overall musical outcome.

Pedalling: Examiners will take into account the use and control of pedalling, and its effect on tone and shape. They will be assessing the overall musical outcome, rather than whether or not any printed pedal indications are played as written (these may therefore be adapted or omitted, as appropriate). Pieces that are heavily reliant on pedalling (whether marked in the music or not) for their full musical effect should be avoided if appropriate pedalling cannot be managed.

For duets, the secondo player (lower part) is expected to take responsibility for any pedalling.

Hand stretch: Candidates should choose the most suitable pieces for their hand size from the repertoire lists. If necessary, they may occasionally adapt the music by 'spreading' chords or omitting notes at wide stretches, provided the result is musically satisfactory.

Repeats: Unless the syllabus specifies differently, all da capo and dal segno indications should be followed but other repeats (including first-time bars) should not be played unless they are very short (i.e. a few bars).

Ossias: Where an ossia (alternative musical line or note) occurs in the music, candidates may play either option unless the syllabus specifies differently.

Performing from memory: Candidates may perform any of their pieces from memory; if doing so, they must make sure that a copy of the music is available for the examiner to refer to. No extra marks are awarded for playing from memory.

Page-turns: Examiners will be understanding if a page-turn causes a lack of continuity during a piece, and this will not affect the marking. Candidates may use an extra copy of the music or a photocopy of a section of the piece (but see 'Photocopies' below) to help with page-turns. Candidates at Grades 6–8 may bring a page-turner to the exam if there is no solution to a particularly awkward page-turn (prior permission is not required; the turner may be the candidate's teacher). Examiners are unable to help with page-turning.

Photocopies & downloads: Performing from unauthorised photocopies (or other kinds of copies) or illegal downloads of copyright editions is not allowed. ABRSM may withhold the exam result where we have evidence of an illegal copy (or copies) being used. In the UK, copies may be used in certain limited circumstances – for full details, see the MPA's *Code of Fair Practice* at www.mpaonline.org.uk. In all other cases, application should be made to the copyright holder before any copy is made, and evidence of permission should be brought to the exam.

Sourcing exam music: Exam music is available from music retailers and online, including at the ABRSM music shop: www.abrsm.org/shop. Every effort has been made to make sure that the publications listed will be available for the duration of the syllabus. We advise candidates to get their music well before the exam in case items are not kept in stock by retailers. Non-exam related questions about the music (e.g. editorial, availability) should be addressed to the relevant publisher: contact details are listed at www.abrsm.org/publishers.

Scales and arpeggios

Playing scales and arpeggios is important for building strong technical skills such as reliable finger movement, hand position, co-ordination and keyboard fluency. It also helps to develop pitch and interval awareness, familiarity with keys and their related patterns, and control of tone. This leads to greater confidence and security when sight-reading, learning new pieces and performing – from a score or from memory, as a solo musician or with others.

Memory: All requirements should be played from memory.

Range: Candidates are free to start at any octave, provided the required ranges are covered. For ‘hands together’ requirements, the hands should be one octave apart, unless otherwise indicated. All requirements should ascend and descend according to the specified range (and pattern).

Rhythm: All requirements should be played in even notes.

Patterns: Arpeggios and dominant sevenths are required in root position only, except where otherwise indicated. All dominant sevenths should finish by resolving on the tonic. Scales in thirds or a third apart should begin with the tonic as the lower note, while scales in sixths or a sixth apart should begin with the tonic as the upper note.

Articulation: All requirements should be prepared legato, unless the syllabus specifies staccato (or both).

Peddalling: All requirements should be played without pedalling.

Fingering: Candidates may use any fingering that produces a successful musical outcome.

In the exam: Initial Grade candidates will generally be asked to play all five requirements, in listed order. Examiners will specify which hand to use for each of the scales and arpeggios.

At Grades 1–8, examiners will usually ask for at least one of each scale/arpeggio (etc.) type. Where applicable, they will ask for majors followed by minors within each type and will also ask to hear a balance of hand requirements and/or articulations across the requests as a whole. When asking for requirements, examiners will specify:

- the key (including minor form – harmonic *or* melodic – in the Grade 6–8 scales) or the starting note(s)
- left hand *or* right hand (for hands-separately requirements)
- the articulation (where chosen by the examiner)

Supporting publications: Books of the requirements are published by ABRSM. Purchasing these books is not a requirement.

Speed: The following speeds are given as a general guide:

Grade/Speed *									
	Initial	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Scales (including contrary-motion, chromatic & whole-tone)	♩ = 54	♩ = 60	♩ = 66	♩ = 80	♩ = 100	♩ = 60	♩ = 72	♩ = 80	♩ = 88
Arpeggios (including dominant & diminished 7ths)	♩ = 52	♩ = 58	♩ = 63	♩ = 72	♩ = 80	♩ = 44	♩ = 50	♩ = 56	♩ = 66
Scales a 3rd apart / a 6th apart (including chromatic)								♩ = 60	♩ = 60
Legato scales in 3rds								♩ = 46	♩ = 52
Staccato scales in 3rds / in 6ths								♩ = 54	♩ = 54

* All speeds relate to the rhythmic grouping 

Sight-reading

Sight-reading is a valuable skill with many benefits. Learning to sight-read helps to develop quick recognition of keys, tonality and common rhythm patterns. Strong sight-reading skills make learning new pieces quicker and easier, and also help when making music with others, so that playing in an ensemble becomes more rewarding and enjoyable.

About the test: Candidates will be asked to play a short unaccompanied piece of music which they have not seen before. They will be given half a minute to look through and, if they wish, try out all or any part of the test before they are asked to play it for assessment.

Parameters: The table on page 17 shows the elements that are introduced at each grade.

Fingering: Any fingering shown on the test is for guidance only. Candidates are welcome to use any fingering that produces a successful musical outcome.

Supporting publications: For practice purposes, sample sight-reading tests are published by ABRSM. Purchasing these books is not a requirement.

Blind or partially-sighted candidates: Blind or partially-sighted candidates may choose an alternative test (Braille memory *or* Aural repetition) in place of the standard test, if requested at the time of booking the exam. Further information is available at www.abrsm.org/specificneeds.

Aural tests

Listening lies at the heart of music-making and the ability to hear how music works helps with all aspects of musical development. Aural skills help with gauging the sound and balance of playing, keeping in time and playing with a sense of rhythm and pulse. These skills also help to develop a sense of pitch, musical memory and the ability to spot mistakes.







About the test: Full details of the Aural-test requirements are given on pages 36–43.

Supporting publications: For practice purposes, sample Aural tests are published by ABRSM. Examples of the tests are given in *Specimen Aural Tests* and *Aural Training in Practice*. Purchasing these books is not a requirement.

Deaf or hearing-impaired candidates: Deaf or hearing-impaired candidates may choose alternative tests in place of the standard tests, if requested at the time of booking the exam. Further information, including the syllabus for the alternative tests, is available at www.abrsm.org/specificneeds.

Sight-reading parameters

The table below shows the elements that are introduced at each grade. These parameters are presented cumulatively, i.e. once introduced they apply for all later grades (gradually progressing in difficulty). See also page 16.

	Length (bars)	Time	Keys	Hand position	Other features that may be included
Initial	4	4/4	C major D minor	Each hand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • playing separately • in 5-finger position (tonic to dominant) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •  •  • legato phrases, staccato • <i>f</i> and <i>p</i>
	6	2/4			
Grade 1		3/4	G, F majors A minor	any 5-finger position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • occasional accidentals (within minor keys only) •  •  • slurs, accents • <i>mf</i> and <i>mp</i> • <i>cresc.</i> and <i>dim.</i> hairpins
Grade 2			D major E, G minors	playing together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •  • tied notes • <i>pp</i>
Grade 3	up to 8	3/8	A, B \flat , E \flat majors B minor	outside 5-finger position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-note chords in either hand • ; simple semiquaver patterns • γ
Grade 4	c. 8	6/8			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anacrusis • chromatic notes • pause signs • tenuto
Grade 5	c. 8–12		E, A \flat majors F \sharp , C minors		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4-part chords (2 notes max. in either hand) • simple syncopation • slowing of tempo at end • <i>ff</i>
Grade 6	c. 12–16	9/8 5/8 5/4	C \sharp , F minors		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • triplet rhythms • clef changes • use of right pedal
Grade 7	c. 16–20	7/8 7/4			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tempo changes • 8va sign • use of una corda pedal
Grade 8	c. 1 page	12/8	B, D \flat majors		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-part chords in either hand • spread chords • simple ornaments • acceleration of tempo

Aural test requirements

Included in all Graded Exams in Music Performance*

Listening lies at the heart of all good music-making. Developing aural awareness is fundamental to musical training because having a ‘musical ear’ impacts on all aspects of musicianship. Singing, both silently in the head and out loud, is one of the best ways to develop the ‘musical ear’. It connects the internal imagining of sound, the ‘inner ear’, with the external creation of it, without the necessity of mechanically having to ‘find the note’ on an instrument (important though that connection is). By integrating aural activities in imaginative ways in the lesson, preparation for the aural tests within an exam will be a natural extension of what is already an essential part of the learning experience.

In the exam

Aural tests are an integral part of all Graded Exams in Music Performance.

The tests are given by the examiner from the piano. For any test that requires a sung response, pitch rather than vocal quality is being assessed. The examiner will be happy to adapt to the vocal range of the candidate, whose responses may be sung to any vowel (or consonant followed by a vowel), hummed or whistled (and at a different octave, if appropriate).

The information on pages 37–43 sets out the tasks that candidates will be asked to complete in the exam.

Assessment

Some tests allow for a second attempt or for an additional playing by the examiner, if necessary. The examiner will also be ready to prompt, where helpful, although this may affect the assessment.

Marks are not awarded for each individual test or deducted for mistakes; instead they reflect the candidate’s overall response in this section. The marking criteria for the Aural tests are given on page 50.

Supporting publications

For practice purposes, sample Aural tests are published by ABRSM. Examples of the tests for Grades Initial–8 are given in *Specimen Aural Tests*. More examples for Grades 1–8 are given in *Aural Training in Practice*. Purchasing these books is not a requirement.

Deaf or hearing-impaired candidates

Deaf or hearing-impaired candidates may choose alternative tests in place of the standard tests, if requested at the time of booking the exam. Further information, including the syllabus for the alternative tests, is available at www.abrsm.org/specificneeds.