

Free Choice Pieces
Guide to selecting pieces and studies of a suitable standard
Guitar

The expected technical difficulty of pieces and studies for Free Choice Repertoire will align to the general requirements of the technical exercises for each grade. Teachers wishing to select suitable Free Choice pieces and studies should therefore look at our technical exercises for each instrument at each grade to establish whether pieces reflect the range of technical demands demonstrated by the exercises. Pieces and studies which are significantly easier (technically) than the technical exercises would not be suitable.

The scale requirements for each grade demonstrate the ‘range’ and ‘keys’ that would be suitable per grade. Pieces which do not cover a large part of this range (in particular the less common guitar keys or fretting hand positions) would be unlikely to be suitable Free Choice Pieces.

The range of rhythms suitable for each grade can be judged by viewing the ‘Reading Skills’ on the MTB Exams syllabuses (additional resources pages). Pieces or studies should demonstrate a rhythmic complexity equivalent to the Reading skills for that grade. The rhythms do not necessarily have to be the same but should demonstrate equivalent complexity and development.

An outline of the appropriate technical and expressive expectations at each grade are listed below. Pieces would not be expected to include all of these but should include a selection of them. If you are unsure whether your free choice pieces or studies meet our criteria, we recommend that you use our optional Approval Service. This service requires you to provide an image of the music along with the following information: instrument, grade, title, composer and the book

in which it is published, if applicable, along with a short description of why you believe it meets the required standard. We are currently offering this service for free.

Entry Level - Pre Grades

Technical expectations

- Pre Grade Introductory – open string notes, fretting hand on primary fingers, understanding of semibreves, minims, crotchets and tied notes. An ability to move across strings with accuracy and confidence.
- Pre Grade Higher – Establish confidence within the first position including fourth finger fretting hand use. Quavers, Ability to move between open chords, triads and single notes. Fretting notes for their full value to create legato.

Pieces: at this level will include elements of the above and be very basic and short in length. (often approx. 8-16 bars). At Pre Grade Introductory a fully focused stylistically aware tone is not expected but players will be expected to display full and clear notes without fret buzzing or abrupt movements as well as an ability to play fluently at a steady tempo with a basic sense of line. If chordal accompaniment is presented, then each note of the chord should be distinct. It is expected that at this level abbreviated “beginner” chords would be chosen and this is perfectly acceptable.

Musicality/expression, expectations: There is very basic expectation of expression at this level. Avoidance of awkwardness musically is sufficient. Awkwardness may

include abrupt movements and shortened values and inappropriately aggressive “strumming.” The use of dynamic contrast will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this level.

Level 1 – Grades 1-3

- Grade 1 – The diatonic chords in the keys of C, G, D. Some moveable shapes if not full barre chords, “power chords” an acceptable substitution. Comfortable with rhythmic patterns utilising basic note values at a variety of tempi. Single notes and lines in a first position context and use of all fretting hand fingers welcomed.
- Grade 2 – The diatonic chords in the keys of C, G, D, A, E. Fretting hand barre over two or three strings. Comfortable with rhythmic patterns utilising basic note values and dotted notes at a variety of tempi. Single note lines in first position with ascending ligado (hammering on) and descending ligado (pull offs) to an open string note.
- Grade 3 – Extended knowledge of keys or accidentals in both the first position and closed positions. Full barre chords and moveable positions in the context of moderate tempos. Comfortable with rhythmic patterns utilising compound time signatures at a variety of tempi. Abbreviated chords should not be presented at this grade.

Pieces: at this level will include elements of the above at each grade and will be basic and relatively short in length (often approx. 16-32 bars). Players will be expected to display a clear focused sound and clear articulation including attention to some subtlety of articulation including staccato and accents for example. They should show the ability to play fluently at

an appropriate tempo with a developing sense of shape and line including ligado and “bending strings” to an accurate, stylistically aware pitch. Players should also display a good basic level of fretting control, stamina and dynamic range. The concept of a stylistically aware tone should be introduced at this grade with the character of the piece given convincingly.

Musicality/expression, expectations: There is basic expectation of expression at this level. Performances should avoid awkwardness musically such as inappropriate emphasis of notes or excessive string motions which distorts the phrasing or line. The use of some basic dynamic contrast is expected at this level such as piano/forte to present solo/chordal accompaniment contrasts. More detailed dynamic contrast such as crescendo and diminuendo etc. is appropriate by grade 3 and will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this level. Similarly, performances should display an awareness of articulation and phrasing at this level. Although performances should show an increasing awareness of articulation moving from grades 1-3 such as the use of staccato and accents, more detailed use of these will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this level.

Level 2 – Grades 4-5

- Grade 4– Knowledge of keys or accidentals with multiple flats and sharps and the performance of both pentatonic and melodic scale patterns. Movements between chords and single lines fluent. Rhythm work detailed, developed and stylistically aware.
- Grade 5– Knowledge of a wide range of keys

with multiple flats and sharps and the performance of both harmonic and melodic scale patterns across the fingerboard in multiple positions. Display a developing range of technical ability beyond that of grade 4 through the technical exercises for this grade. For example, greater use of string bending to a stylistic pitch, pre-bending/ release and articulate ligado work. At this level it is expected that players will express a level of convincing stylistic awareness in all areas for the presentation of tone.

Pieces: at this level will include elements of the above at each grade and will be straightforward and of moderate length (often approx. 32-64 bars). Players will be expected to demonstrate dynamics and clear articulation including paying full attention to the subtlety of articulation including staccato and accents for example. They should show the ability to play fluently and at an appropriate tempo with an established sense of shape and line. Players should also display a good level of dynamic range and clarity of articulation. It is not expected that a piece chosen could demonstrate all the features of guitar articulation. However, a piece chosen must be a convincing showcase for a variety of well developed expressive physical techniques in various positions on the guitar.

Musicality/expression, expectations: There is an expectation of a developing degree of expression at this level. Performances should include use of straightforward dynamic contrast including piano or pianissimo/forte or fortissimo/crescendo/diminuendo/rallentando/accelerando etc. More detailed dynamic contrast such as staccato accents/semi staccato and a detailed understanding of phrasing etc. will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this

level. Similarly, performances should display correct articulation and phrasing at this level.

Level 3 – Grades 6-8

- Grade 6- Knowledge of keys or accidentals with multiple flats and sharps and the performance of harmonic, melodic and whole tone scale patterns in various positions for the entire fingerboard. Technical expertise will need to be demonstrated in a range of techniques taken within the context of full and developed stylistic awareness for both the presentation of tone and harmonic relationships. Comfortable with rhythmic patterns including swung rhythms at a variety of tempi.
- Grade 7– Knowledge of a wide range of keys with multiple flats and sharps and the performance of a wide range of scale patterns. throughout the full range and positions on the guitar fingerboard. Display a developing range of technical ability beyond that of grade 6 through the technical exercises for this grade. For example, an increased tempo for articulation and more developed harmonic relationships for single line expressions of the style and character of a piece. Comfortable with rhythmic patterns including syncopation, ties and triplets at a variety of tempi.
- Grade 8 - Knowledge of all keys and positions with multiple flats and sharps and the performance of a wide range of scale patterns including chromatically throughout the fingerboard. Display a developing range of technical ability beyond that of grade 7 through the technical exercises for this grade. For example, rapid chromatic passages showcasing a wide range of advanced and expressive physical techniques.

Comfortable with complex rhythmic patterns including changing time signatures, irregular time signatures, irregular subdivisions of beats at a variety of tempi.

Pieces: at this level will include elements of the above at each grade and will be complex and full length showcase concert items often 1 to 2 pages or more in length. Players will be expected to display a strong, clear, focused, refined and nuanced sound at all dynamics and in all ranges with a variety of tone colours as appropriate to the demands of the style. Full and convincing stylistic awareness for both the harmonic relationships and tone is expected.

Musicality/expression, expectations: There is an expectation of a wide range of expression at this level. Performances should include use of a full range of dynamic contrast from pianissimo to fortissimo and utilising crescendo/diminuendo/rallentando/accelerando to enhance the performance and create contrast and interest as appropriate etc. There is an expectation of an understanding of the complex stylistic demands of music.