

# **Free Choice Pieces**

## **Guide to selecting pieces and studies of a suitable standard**

### **Keyboard**

The expected technical difficulty of pieces 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 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 which are significantly easier (technically) than the technical exercises would not be suitable.

The scale requirements for each grade demonstrate the type of ‘keys’ that would be suitable per grade. Pieces which do not cover keys of similar complexity 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.

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** – Understanding of semibreves, minims, crotchets and tied notes. Some dotted note rhythms are welcomed in the playing of familiar melodies. The ability to play simple repertoire may be viewed as only right hand (treble clef) if the melody is more animated and diverse. If a piece is both hands together it would be elementary with both hands in one position, or an exchange of hands, repetitive with minimal movement required. Single hand melodies may be presented in the keys of C, F and G with minimal movement for accidentals.

• **Pre Grade Higher** – At this level the technical expectations would be of a more diverse melody if presented on just the right hand (treble clef) or an ability to play with both hands together, with position changes and movements minimal. The keys of C, F and G would be expected if movements basic.

**Pieces:** at this level will include elements of the above and be very basic and short in length. (often approx. 8-16 bars). If a hands together piece is chosen at Pre Grade Introductory the music would be elementary in one position ie: Melody in one hand, single notes or 2 note chords in the other and no change of position. At Pre Grade Higher there will be 3 note chords and some limited independent working of hands and simple position changes. If a piece is chosen featuring treble clef right hand only or an exchange of hands, the intervals, movements and values expected would be more diverse.

**Musicality/expression, expectations:** There is very basic expectation of expression at this level. Avoidance of awkwardness musically is sufficient. Awkwardness may include hesitant playing or shortened values.

## Level 1 – Grades 1-3

- **Grade 1** – Independence of hands is limited to chord playing or single notes plus a melody. If a single hand or exchange of hands melody is chosen the movements expected would be more diverse and rhythms developed. Values of semiquavers, tied notes, dotted rhythms and appropriate “swing” markings would be expected to present the character of a single hand melody. There is a technical requirement to demonstrate confidence with rhythmic patterns utilising basic note values at a variety of tempi. The keys of G, D and F would be expected. Elementary work in the key of C would require diversity of rhythms and movements for this grade to be stated.
- **Grade 2** – At this grade the expectation is for the introduction of independence of hands. If a “Hands together” piece is chosen the expectation of more varied movement and confidence within the keys of C, F, G, D and A. A demonstration of confidence with rhythmic patterns utilising basic note values and dotted notes at a variety of tempi would be the requirement for a piece featuring both hands on both clefs. If a right hand solo melody is featured, the diversity of movement, key signature, rhythms and values more complex to meet the requirements of this grade. A demonstration of confidence featuring rhythmic patterns utilising basic note values and dotted notes at a variety of tempi.
- **Grade 3** – More complex coordination expectations are the requirement here. There is an expectation to demonstrate an ability to bring out a single part with confidence, rhythmic patterns utilising compound time signatures at a variety of tempi. For single line playing the expectation is of a wider range of key and time signatures.

**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 touch and clear articulation including attention to some subtlety of articulation including staccato, tenuto and accents for example. They should show the ability to play fluently at an appropriate tempo with a developing sense of shape and line. Players should also display a basic level of dynamic range and operation of their instrument to achieve this in the duration of the piece.

**Musicality/expression, expectations:** There is basic expectation of expression at this level. Performances should avoid awkwardness musically such as inappropriate emphasis of notes which distorts the phrasing or line in the operation of any function of their chosen instrument. The use of some basic dynamic contrast is expected at this level such as piano/forte. 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 a developing awareness of articulation and phrasing at this level including such elements as correct basic legato/detached notes in appropriate places, Although performances should show an increasing awareness of articulation moving from grades 1-3 such as the use of staccato, tenuto and accents, more detailed use of these will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this level. Key sensitivity becomes an issue for grade 3 and the expectations here are of a confident musical performance. An instrument that permits this would be of welcome assistance.

## **Level 2 – Grades 4-5**

- **Grade 4** – Greater dexterity required in scalar passages, possibility of 2 parts in one hand. Ornaments and more complex chords. Comfortable with rhythmic patterns including utilising dotted quaver rhythms at a variety of tempi. Keys using three sharps or flats are expected and a wide demonstration of values and rhythms. If a solo line is presented the expectation here is of passages demonstrating confident improvisations within convincing harmonic relationships.

- **Grade 5** – A developed and diverse presentation of rhythmic patterns including utilising a variety of semi-quavers at a variety of tempi.

**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 display a strong, clear delivery of dynamics with developed and nuanced articulation. (Staccato, tenuto and accents for example)

**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 basic understanding of phrasing at this level. Key sensitivity is a desirable feature at this grade as is pedalling and instrument operation during the performance of a piece.