

Rockschool | Drums Syllabus | Free Choice Piece Guidance

For general information about Free Choice Pieces please see:

<https://www.rslawards.com/free-choice-pieces/>

The following guidelines outline features that would normally be found within a free choice selection for drums to meet the grade level.

These features are indicative and would not all necessarily occur to the same degree within any particular song. Standards can be measured by making a balanced judgement regarding various musical elements based on these guidelines. If in any doubt, please consult the pieces in the grade book for a guide.

It is not a prerequisite for free choice pieces to be approved by RSL Head Office, as the examiner will make a judgement about the suitability of the piece in the exam. However, if you are unsure about the eligibility of your piece(s) you can seek approval which incurs a fee of £10 per piece. Please email info@rslawards.com with details of the proposed piece(s) (including a copy of the sheet music) and the grade / instrument you intend to enter for. A full reply will be given no later than 4 weeks after payment of the approval fee, which will be facilitated via an online link that we will e-mail to you.

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Debut

Duration	45 secs – 3 mins
Expressive techniques	The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate simple fills
Rhythm skills	Dependent on tempo: whole, half, quarter, 8th notes; whole, half and quarter note rests
Physical techniques	The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate hand and foot co-ordination
Instrument compass	Open and closed hi-hat; snare; kick drum; crash cymbal; ride cymbal

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 1

Duration	1 – 3 mins
Expressive techniques	The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate simple fills
Rhythm skills	The piece should include a mixture of whole, half, quarter, dotted quarter and eighth notes and associated rests
Physical techniques	The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate independent hand and foot co-ordination
Instrument compass	Open and closed hi-hat; snare; kick drum; crash cymbal; ride cymbal

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 2

Duration	1 – 3 mins
Expressive techniques	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• simple fills• some dynamic range (p-f)• accented notes
Rhythm skills	<p>The piece should include a mixture of quarter, eighth, and triplet eighth notes and associated rests</p>
Physical techniques	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate independent hand and foot co-ordination</p>
Instrument compass	<p>Open and closed hi-hat; snare; kick drum; crash cymbal; ride cymbal; floor tom; high tom; medium tom</p>

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 3

Duration	1 min 30 secs – 4 mins
Expressive techniques	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• accented notes• a wide dynamic range (pp-ff) <p>Other techniques might include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• flams• rimshots• use of rudiments
Rhythm skills	The piece should include a mixture of quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes, triplet eighths and triplet sixteenths and associated rests
Physical Techniques	The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate independent hand and foot co-ordination
Instrument compass	Open and closed hi-hat; snare; kick drum; crash cymbal; ride cymbal; floor tom; high tom; medium tom

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 4

Duration	2 – 4 mins
Expressive techniques	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• use of accented notes• a wide dynamic range (pp-ff)• accented notes <p>Other techniques might include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• simple fills• flams• rimshots• use of rudiments
Rhythm skills	<p>The piece should include a mixture of quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes, dotted eighth notes, eighth and sixteenth note combinations, triplet eighths and sixteenths, and associated rests</p> <p>2/4 and 3/4 time signatures</p>
Physical techniques	<p>The piece must enable the candidate to demonstrate independent hand and foot co-ordination</p>
Instrument compass	<p>Open and closed hi-hat; snare; kick drum; crash cymbal; ride cymbal; floor tom; high tom; medium tom</p>
Fills and ad libs	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate fills of at least one bar in length</p> <p>The piece might also contain groove development and ad libs for at least 8 bars</p>

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 5

Duration	2 – 4 mins
Expressive techniques	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• accented notes• a wide dynamic range (pp-ff) <p>Other techniques might include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• flams• rimshots• ghost notes• grace notes• extended use of rudiments in fills
Rhythm skills	<p>The piece should contain a mixture of quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes; dotted eighth notes; eighth and sixteenth note combinations; triplet eighth and sixteenth notes and associated rests</p> <p>Swing feel</p> <p>2/4 and 3/4 time signatures; other time signature variations</p>
Physical techniques	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate independent hand and foot co-ordination</p>
Instrument compass	<p>Open and closed hi-hat; snare; kick drum; crash cymbal; ride cymbal; floor tom; high tom; medium tom</p>
Fills and ad libs	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate sixteenth note fills of at least one bar in length</p> <p>The piece might also contain groove development for 8 bars and ad libs for at least 16 bars</p>

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 6

Duration	2 min 30 secs – 5 mins
Expressive techniques	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• accented notes• a wide dynamic range (pp-ff) <p>Other techniques might include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• flams• rimshots• ghost notes• grace notes• extended use of rudiments in fills
Rhythm skills	<p>The piece should contain a mixture of quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes; dotted eighth notes; eighth and sixteenth note combinations; triplet eighth and sixteenth notes; triplet sixteenth notes on hi-hat; and associated rests</p> <p>Swing feel</p> <p>2/4 and 3/4 time signatures; other time signature variations</p>
Physical techniques	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate independent hand and foot co-ordination</p>
Instrument compass	<p>Open and closed hi hat; hi hat foot; snare; kick drum; crash cymbal; ride cymbal; floor tom; high tom; medium tom; rimshot; soft mallets; hot rods</p>
Fills and ad libs	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate sixteenth note fills</p> <p>The piece might also contain extended groove development and/or ad libs</p>

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 7

Duration	3 – 5 mins
Expressive techniques	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• accented notes• a wide dynamic range (pp-ff) <p>Other techniques might include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• flams• rimshots• ghost notes• grace notes• extended use of rudiments in fills
Rhythm skills	<p>The piece should contain a mixture of quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes; dotted eighth notes; eighth and sixteenth note combinations; triplet eighth and sixteenth notes; triplet sixteenth notes on hi-hat; and associated rests</p> <p>Swing feel</p> <p>2/4 and 3/4 time signatures; other time signature variations</p>
Physical techniques	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate independent hand and foot co-ordination</p>
Fills and ad libs	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate sixteenth note fills</p> <p>The piece might also contain extended groove development and/or ad libs</p>

Duration	3 – 5 mins
Expressive techniques	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accented notes • a wide dynamic range (pp-ff) <p>Other techniques might include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flams • rimshots • ghost notes • grace notes • extended use of rudiments in fills
Rhythm skills	<p>The piece should contain a mixture of quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes; dotted eighth notes; eighth and sixteenth note combinations; triplet eighth and sixteenth notes; triplet sixteenth notes on hi-hat; and associated rests</p> <p>Swing feel</p> <p>2/4 and 3/4 time signatures; other time signature variations</p>
Physical techniques	The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate independent hand and foot co-ordination
Instrument compass	Open and closed hi hat; hi hat foot; snare; kick drum; crash cymbal; ride cymbal; floor tom; high tom; medium tom; rimshot; soft mallets; hot rods
Fills and ad libs	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate advanced fills including use of rolls</p> <p>The piece might also contain extended groove development and/or ad libs</p>