



Bass Guitar Syllabus

Free Choice Piece Guidance

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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 bass guitar to meet the grade level.

These features are indicative and would not all necessarily occur to the same degree within any particular piece. Standards can be measured by making a balanced judgement regarding various musical elements based on these guidelines.

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 with details of the proposed piece(s) (including a copy of the sheet music) and the grade / instrument you intend to enter for.

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Debut

Duration	45 secs – 3 mins
Expressive Techniques	The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate basic control of legato/staccato
Rhythm Skills	Dependent on tempo: whole, half, quarter, eighth notes and rests; occasional dotted half notes or dotted quarter notes
Physical techniques	Basic left and right hand co-ordination Use of two fingers of the picking hand as required Basic damping techniques

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 1

Duration	1 – 3 mins
Expressive techniques	The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate basic control of legato/staccato
Rhythm skills	The piece should include a mixture of whole, half, quarter and eighth notes
Physical techniques	Basic left and right hand co-ordination Use of two fingers of the picking hand as required Basic damping techniques

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 2

Duration	1 min 10 secs – 1 min 45 secs
Expressive techniques	Control of legato/staccato A basic range of dynamics: p, mf, f
Rhythm skills	The piece should include a mixture of whole, half, quarter, and eighth notes, as well as dotted half, quarter and eighth notes and associated rests
Physical techniques	Competent left and right hand co-ordination Use of two fingers of picking hand as required Competent damping technique

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"> Control of legato/staccato Dynamic range of pp-ff <p>Other techniques might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fretting hand vibrato Hammer on and pull off Accented notes Simple slides
Rhythm skills	<p>The piece should include a mixture of whole, half, quarter, and eighth notes, as well as dotted half, quarter and eighth notes, including some use of syncopated eighth and sixteenth note feels</p>
Physical techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Melodic passages can incorporate basic string skipping and position shifts. Melodic work might be occasionally harmonised with thirds, sixths or octaves Harmonic rate of change is moderate but can include some more challenging sequences Rhythmic groupings may differ more frequently Muting and legato techniques might be more frequent or pose some increasing but moderate challenges

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"> Control of legato/staccato A dynamic range of pp-ff Accented notes <p>Other techniques might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simple slides Fretting hand vibrato Hammer on and pull offs Slapped notes Pulled notes
Rhythm skills	<p>The piece should include a mixture of whole, half, quarter, and eighth notes, as well as dotted half, quarter and eighth notes, with some more advanced use of eighth and sixteenth note syncopations</p>
Physical techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Melodic passages can skip strings more frequently, and incorporate more frequent position shifts Melodic work might be harmonised with thirds, sixths or octaves Rhythmic groupings may differ more frequently Muting and legato techniques might be more frequent or pose some increasing challenges Melody and accompaniment voicings may appear in one part Variety in voicings and accompaniment styles within sections Capo may be used

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"> Secure control of legato/staccato Phrasing Dynamic range of pp-ff Slides Fretting hand vibrato Hammer ons and pull offs Slap style / pop style bass with and without muted notes
Rhythm skills	<p>The piece should include a mixture of whole, half, quarter, eighth notes, as well as dotted half, quarter and eighth notes, and eighth and sixteenth note syncopations</p>
Physical techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Left and right hand co-ordination Picking hand damping Alternate picking Double stops on adjacent strings Damping for percussive effects Smooth string crossing when playing sixths, sevenths and octaves

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"> Secure control of legato/staccato Phrasing Dynamic range of ppp-fff Accented notes Slurs and trills using hammer ons and pull offs using open strings Tone manipulation using picking hand
Rhythm skills	<p>The piece should contain note values in almost any combination but have a considerable amount of sixteenth notes, dotted note combinations and triplets of all varieties</p>
Physical techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly developed left and right hand co-ordination Highly developed damping techniques Highly developed slap style using fretted notes with pulls and muted notes Accurate use of two, three or four fingers of picking hand as required Effective string jumping Double stops (3rds, 5ths, 6ths, 8ves and 10ths) Hammer ons and pull offs, slides, cross-string hammers, thumb pops and index and middle finger slaps (at least half of these) Tapping techniques including single string, double stops Use of harmonics
Solo/development	<p>The piece should include solo passages using any mode(s) as appropriate moving by step and leap over a suitably wide range</p>

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 7

Duration	3 – 5 mins
Expressive techniques	<p>Accomplished control of legato/staccato</p> <p>Phrasing</p> <p>Dynamic range of ppp-fff</p> <p>Accented notes</p> <p>Slurs and trills by hammer ons and pull offs using open strings</p> <p>Tone manipulation using picking hand</p>
Rhythm skills	<p>Note values in almost any combination but with a considerable amount of sixteenth notes, dotted note combinations and triplets of all varieties</p> <p>Sophisticated syncopated and contrapuntal rhythms in a wide range of styles including walking and rhythmically independent bass lines, and chord / melody</p>
Physical techniques	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate:</p> <p>Highly developed left and right hand co-ordination</p> <p>Highly developed damping techniques</p> <p>Highly developed slap style using fretted notes with pulls and muted notes</p> <p>Accurate use of two, three or four fingers of picking hand as required</p> <p>Other techniques might include:</p> <p>Effective string jumping</p> <p>Double stops (3rds, 5ths, 6ths, 8ves and 10ths)</p> <p>Hammer ons and pull offs, slides, cross-string hammers, thumb pops and index and middle finger slaps (at least half of these)</p> <p>Tapping techniques including single string, double stops</p> <p>Use of harmonics</p>
Solo/development	<p>The piece should include solo passages using any mode(s) as appropriate moving by step and leap over a suitably wide range</p>

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 8

Duration	3 – 5 mins
Expressive techniques	<p>Accomplished control of legato/staccato</p> <p>Phrasing</p> <p>Dynamic range of ppp-fff</p> <p>Accented notes</p> <p>Slurs and trills by hammer ons and pull offs using open strings: minor and major, and 2nds and minor 3rds</p> <p>Tone manipulation using picking hand</p>
Rhythm skills	<p>Note values in almost any combination but have a considerable amount of sixteenth notes, dotted note combinations and triplets of all varieties</p> <p>Sophisticated syncopated and contrapuntal rhythms in a wide range of styles including walking and rhythmically independent bass lines, and chord / melody</p>
Physical techniques	<p>The piece should enable the candidate to demonstrate:</p> <p>Advanced left and right hand techniques</p> <p>Advanced damping techniques</p> <p>Use of two, three or four fingers of picking hand as required</p> <p>Co-ordination in a slap percussive style</p> <p>Other techniques might include:</p> <p>Double stops (3rds, 5ths, 6ths, 8ves and 10ths)</p> <p>Triple stops (triads inversions etc, voicings of 7th chords)</p> <p>Thumb and muting techniques</p> <p>Fretted hand damping for dead notes</p> <p>Smooth string crossing when playing 6ths, 7ths and 8ves and extended intervals</p> <p>Advanced slap & pop techniques using open strings and stopped notes, 7ths, 8ves and 10ths</p> <p>Right and left hand dead notes and damping</p> <p>Hammer ons and pull offs, slides, cross-string hammers, thumb pops and index and middle finger slaps (at least half of these)</p>
Solo/ development	<p>The piece should include solo passages using any mode(s) as appropriate moving by step and leap over a suitably wide range</p>