

RSL CLASSICAL

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 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. 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**](mailto: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

Component*	Parameters
Duration †	Up to one page, 50 secs – 2 minutes
Key(s)	C major, A minor, G major
Position	Open and first position
Rhythmic values	Semibreves, minims, crotchets, quavers, associated rests. Occasional simple dotted rhythms may appear
Time signatures	4/4, 3/4, 2/4, c
Dynamics	F, MF, MP, P
Expressive techniques & articulation	Simple/sparse
Harmonic/textural features	Separated bass and melody (tirando)
Melodic features	Single-line melodies (apoyando)
Rhythmic features	Basic rhythms, simple groupings
Technical features	Single-line melodies (played apoyando) Separated bass and melody playing (tirando)

* All components are cumulative. See previous grades.

† Please note: pagination may be extended for duets or scores containing more than one part, tablature etc.

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 1

Component*	Parameters
Duration †	Up to one page, 1 min 10 secs – 2 mins 30 secs
Key(s)	E minor Occasional accidentals
Position	Open and first position, occasional second position
Rhythmic values	Dotted crotchets (dotted quarter notes), simple ties
Time signatures	6/8, 12/8, ϕ
Dynamics	F, MF, MP, P, <, >
Expressive techniques & articulation	Simple/sparse
Harmonic/textural features	Bass and melodic notes played together Chords with up to two fingers on the fingerboard, very occasional three-fingered basic chords
Melodic features	Occasional accidentals Small intervallic transitions, simple string crossing
Rhythmic features	Simple syncopation
Technical features	Bass and melodic notes played together Mainly open string bass notes in two-part texture Fingered bass notes Natural harmonics Simple spread chords with picking hand across six strings

* All components are cumulative. See previous grades.

† Please note: pagination may be extended for duets or scores containing more than one part, tablature etc.

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 2

Component*	Parameters
Duration †	Up to one page, 1 min 20 secs – 2 mins 40 secs
Key(s)	D major, D minor More frequent accidentals
Position	Second position, use of 4th finger
Rhythmic values	Semiquavers (16th notes), dotted quavers (dotted 8th notes)
Time signatures	As previous grades
Dynamics	FF, SFZ
Expressive techniques & articulation	Staccato, slurs, accents
Harmonic/textural features	Developing rhythms between bass notes and melody lines Chords with up to three fingers on the fingerboard
Melodic features	More frequent accidentals More frequent string crossing
Rhythmic features	Simple syncopation Fermata
Technical features	<i>Ponticello, sul tasto</i>

* All components are cumulative. See previous grades.

† Please note: pagination may be extended for duets or scores containing more than one part, tablature etc.

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 3

Component*	Parameters
Duration †	Up to two pages, 1 min 40 secs –2 mins 50 secs
Key(s)	Bb major, G minor, A major
Position	3rd position up to 5th position
Rhythmic values	Quaver (8th note) triplets
Time signatures	9/8, 3/8 Simple and/or infrequent changes
Dynamics	PP, <i>cresc. poco a poco</i>
Expressive techniques & articulation	As previous grades
Harmonic/textural features	Four-note chords Melody and accompanying chord tones using <i>im a</i> combined with basslines (<i>p</i>)
Melodic features	More frequent accidentals More frequent string crossing at faster tempo
Rhythmic features	More frequent syncopation Fermata
Technical features	Glissando Muted notes Vibrato Simple percussive passages (using body of guitar) Spread chords Linking melody notes with one finger on the same string

* All components are cumulative. See previous grades.

† Please note: pagination may be extended for duets or scores containing more than one part, tablature etc.

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 4

Component*	Parameters
Duration †	Up to two pages, 1 min 45 secs – 3 mins
Key(s)	E major
Position	5th position up to 7th position, occasional movement to 9th position
Rhythmic values	Semiquaver (16th note) triplets
Time signatures	As previous grades, with more changes
Dynamics	As previous grades, with more changes
Expressive techniques & articulation	As previous grades
Harmonic/textural features	Developing textures using <i>p i m a</i>
Melodic features	Larger intervallic transitions on one string Melodic lines may be split across strings to facilitate position shifts
Rhythmic features	More frequent syncopation Fermata
Technical features	Occasional partial barre Pizzicato Spread chords from high to low strings Rasgueado Tambora More developed legato technique Occasional half barre

* All components are cumulative. See previous grades.

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Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 5

Component*	Parameters
Duration †	Up to two pages, 2 mins – 3 mins 15 secs
Key(s)	As previous grades
Position	7th position, up to 9th position
Rhythmic values	Demisemiquavers (32nd notes)
Time signatures	As previous grades
Dynamics	As previous grades, frequent changes and nuances
Expressive techniques & articulation	Ornamentation, more frequent and developed use of slurs Changes in expression and timbre
Harmonic/textural features	Three-part texture
Melodic features	Occasional improvisation/development passages Some chromaticism
Rhythmic features	Cross-rhythms and frequent syncopation
Technical features	Dropped D tuning Simple campanella Improvisation/development passages Half barre, very occasional full barre Occasional/simple artificial harmonics Nuanced transitions from sul pont. to sul tasto and vice versa

* All components are cumulative. See previous grades.

† Please note: pagination may be extended for duets or scores containing more than one part, tablature etc.

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 6

Component*	Parameters
Duration †	Up to two pages, 2 mins – 3 mins 30 secs
Key(s)	As previous grades
Position	All positions, more frequent changes
Rhythmic values	As previous grades
Time signatures	As previous grades, hemiola, irregular time signatures
Dynamics	Any
Expressive techniques & articulation	Wider changes in stylistic expression and timbre
Harmonic/textural features	Advanced chords, extensions, advanced texture
Melodic features	Large intervallic leaps, advanced treatment of melody with position shifts Chromaticism Improvisation over more advanced harmonic changes
Rhythmic features	Cross-rhythms and frequent syncopation
Technical features	Artificial harmonics with bass accompaniment

* All components are cumulative. See previous grades.

† Please note: pagination may be extended for duets or scores containing more than one part, tablature etc.

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 7

Component*	Parameters
Duration †	Up to three pages, 2mins 30secs –4 mins
Key(s)	Eb major, Ab major, relative minors
Position	All positions, more frequent changes and more emphasis on higher position work
Rhythmic values	Any
Time signatures	As previous grades, more complex time signatures and changes
Dynamics	Any
Expressive techniques & articulation	Wider contrasts in expression and timbre, with advanced stylistic features
Harmonic/textural features	Advanced extended and non-diatonic harmony
Melodic features	Melodic improvisation over advanced harmonic changes Regularly occurring chromaticism Arpeggios spanning considerable range
Rhythmic features	Cross-rhythms and frequent syncopation
Technical features	Increasing variety of technical demands Increasing frequency of full barre

* All components are cumulative. See previous grades.

† Please note: pagination may be extended for duets or scores containing more than one part, tablature etc.

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 8

Component*	Parameters
Duration †	Up to four pages, 3 mins – 4 mins 30 secs
Key(s)	Any key
Position	As previous grades
Rhythmic values	Any
Time signatures	Any simple, compound or complex time signatures and combinations
Dynamics	Any
Expressive techniques & articulation	As previous grades
Harmonic/textural features	As previous grades
Melodic features	Advanced melodic improvisation at fast tempo Cadenza Frequent chromaticism Arpeggios spanning full range of instrument
Rhythmic features	Advanced stylistic syncopation and rhythmic groupings
Technical features	Frequent variety of advanced technical components Advanced use of full barre Bartok <i>pizzicato</i>

* All components are cumulative. See previous grades.

† Please note: pagination may be extended for duets or scores containing more than one part, tablature etc.