



Piano & Keys 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 piano & keys 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.

At least one of the grade book selections must be a 'keys arrangement' piece. If substituting a 'keys arrangement' piece, candidates must show a comparable level of programming/sound manipulation.

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Debut

Duration	40 secs – 1 min 20 secs
Key	C major / A minor
Tempo	60-130 bpm
Time Signatures	4/4, 3/4
Rhythmic values	8th notes and rests, occasional dotted quarter notes
Dynamics	None, or very simple/sparse
Articulation & phrasing	None, or very simple/sparse
Melodic features	Mainly stepwise movement or small intervallic transitions
Harmonic features	Occasional two-note chords in one hand (three-note chords will be between both hands)
Rhythmic features	Non-complex rhythmic groupings
Keyboard features (keys syllabus only)	Single patch settings with basic variety of sounds [e.g. electric piano, organ, pad] Basic layering of sounds (eg. piano/pad)

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 1

Duration	50 secs – 1 min 30 secs
Key	One sharp or one flat, or no sharps or flats but accidentals may occur within the piece
Tempo	60-140 bpm
Time Signatures	4/4, 3/4, 6/8
Rhythmic values	8th notes and rests, dotted 8th notes and syncopations, occasional 16th notes, occasional non-complex triplet groupings
Dynamics	Simple dynamics [P, F]
Articulation & phrasing	Simple changes in articulation and phrasing, occasional slurs and simple occasional use of staccato and accented articulation may occur.
Melodic features	Mainly stepwise movement or small intervallic transitions – overall tessitura generally not greater than an octave
Harmonic features	Two-note chords in one hand, occasional three-note chords, four-note chords will generally be spread across both hands
Rhythmic features	Rhythms will be simple; simultaneously differing patterns will be limited
Keyboard features (keys syllabus only)	Single patch settings with basic variety of sounds [e.g. electric piano, organ, pad] Basic layering of sounds (eg. piano/pad)

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 2

Duration	1 min 10 secs – 1 min 45 secs
Key	Two sharps or flats (or fewer, but accidentals may occur within the piece)
Tempo	60-140 bpm
Time Signatures	4/4, 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 9/8, 12/8
Rhythmic values	16th notes and rests, dotted 8th notes and syncopations, occasional 16th note syncopation, non-complex triplet groupings. Simpler rhythms appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work)
Dynamics	Simple dynamics [P, F, MP, MF], crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & phrasing	Frequent changes in articulation and phrasing, slurs and simple use of staccato/accented articulation may occur.
Melodic features	Greater intervallic transitions and more frequent accidentals may occur
Harmonic features	Two-note chords in one hand, occasional three-note chords, four-note chords will generally be spread across both hands
Rhythmic features	Rhythmic groupings may differ more frequently between hands
Keyboard features (keys syllabus only)	Single patch settings with basic variety of sounds [e.g. electric piano, organ, pad] Basic layering of sounds (eg. piano/pad)

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 3

Duration	1 min 30 secs – 2 mins
Key	Three sharps or flats (or fewer, but accidentals may occur within the piece)
Tempo	60-150 bpm
Time Signatures	4/4, 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 9/8, 12/8
Rhythmic values	16th notes and rests in more complex groupings, 16th note syncopation, more frequent triplet groupings. Simpler rhythms appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work)
Dynamics	[P, F, MP, MF], crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & phrasing	Articulation and phrasing will have variety and may differ between hands at simultaneous points
Melodic features	Greater intervallic transitions may appear spanning over an octave, and more frequent accidentals may occur
Harmonic features	Four note chords may appear in either hand
Rhythmic features	Rhythmic groupings may differ more frequently between hands or occur simultaneously
Other features	Melody and accompaniment voicings may appear in one hand; musical passages may spread between both hands
Keyboard features (keys syllabus only)	Single patch settings with basic variety of sounds [e.g. electric piano, organ, pad] Basic layering of sounds (eg. piano/pad)

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 4

Duration	1 min 45 secs – 2 min 15 secs
Key	Four sharps or flats (or fewer, but accidentals may occur within the piece) There may be very occasional, simple key changes
Tempo	60-150 bpm
Time Signatures	4/4, 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 9/8, 12/8. There may be very infrequent, simple time signature changes
Rhythmic values	16th notes and rests in more complex groupings, occasional 32nd notes, 16th note syncopation. Simpler rhythms appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work)
Dynamics	[P, F, MP, MF], crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & phrasing	Articulation and phrasing will have variety and may differ between hands at simultaneous points
Melodic features	Intervallic transitions may span over an octave and frequent accidentals may occur
Harmonic features	Five note chords may appear in either hand, and partial chords may be combined with melodic elements
Rhythmic features	Rhythmic groupings may differ more frequently between hands or occur simultaneously
Other features	Variety in voicings and accompaniment styles within sections
Keyboard features (keys syllabus only)	Patch settings will include layers and splits Sound manipulation may include applying effects [eg. vibrato/rotary effect]

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 5

Duration	2 mins – 2 mins 45 secs
Key	Five sharps or flats (or fewer, but accidentals may occur within the piece) There may be occasional key centre changes
Tempo	60-160 bpm
Time Signatures	4/4, 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 9/8, 12/8. There may be occasional time signature changes
Rhythmic values	16th notes and rests in more complex groupings, occasional 32nd notes, 16th note syncopation. Simpler rhythms appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work)
Dynamics	[P, F, MP, MF], crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & phrasing	Articulation and phrasing will have variety and may differ between hands at simultaneous points. More subtlety of control between legato and staccato will likely be required
Melodic features	Intervallic transitions over an octave may be regular, and frequent accidentals may occur
Harmonic features	Five note chords may appear in either hand, and partial chords may be combined with melodic elements. Chordal cluster voicings may be more advanced or more frequent
Rhythmic features	Rhythmic groupings may differ frequently between hands and occur simultaneously; faster note values may be more repetitive/continuous
Other features	Variety in voicings and accompaniment styles within sections
Keyboard features (keys syllabus only)	Patch settings will include layers and splits Sound manipulation may include applying effects [eg. vibrato/rotary effect]

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 6

Duration	2 min 15 secs–3 mins
Key	Six sharps or flats (or fewer, but accidentals may occur within the piece) There may be key centre changes
Tempo	50-200 bpm
Time Signatures	4/4, 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 9/8, 12/8. There may be more regular time signature changes, or occasional irregular time signatures
Rhythmic values	16th notes and rests in more complex groupings, 16th note triplets, 32nd notes and frequent syncopation may occur. Simpler rhythms will appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work)
Dynamics	[P, F, MP, MF], crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & phrasing	Articulation and phrasing will have variety and may differ between hands at simultaneous points.
Melodic features	Notated solos may feature. Intervallic passages and transitions may exceed an octave
Harmonic features	Five note chords may appear in either hand, and partial chords may be combined with melodic elements. Chordal cluster voicings may be more advanced, denser and/or more frequent
Rhythmic features	Rhythmic groupings may differ frequently between hands and occur simultaneously; faster note values may be more repetitive/continuous
Other features	Variety in voicings and accompaniment styles within sections
Keyboard features (keys syllabus only)	Patch settings will include multiple layers and splits, and switching to alternative settings in performance Sound manipulation may include applying effects, pitch wheel, modulation

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 7

Duration	2 mins 30 secs – 3 mins 30 secs
Key	Seven sharps or flats (or fewer, but accidentals may occur within the piece) There may be more frequent key centre changes
Tempo	50-200 bpm
Time Signatures	Any, with changes
Rhythmic values	Any, up to 32nd notes. Complex combinations beyond 16th note triplets will not be frequent, but variations may occur regularly. Simpler rhythms will appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work, faster tempos or more complex time signatures)
Dynamics	Any, with changes, and including strong contrasts
Articulation & phrasing	Articulation and phrasing will have variety and may differ between hands at simultaneous points. Subtlety of control between legato and staccato will be required
Melodic features	Developing notated solos may feature. Intervallic passages and transitions may frequently exceed an octave.
Harmonic features	Five note chords may appear in either hand, and partial chords may be combined with melodic elements. Chordal cluster voicings may be more advanced, denser and/or more frequent
Rhythmic features	Rhythmic groupings may differ frequently between hands and occur simultaneously; faster note values will be more repetitive/continuous and combine in both hands
Other features	Voicings and accompaniment styles within sections will show advanced depth and variety of technique
Keyboard features (keys syllabus only)	Patch settings will include multiple layers and splits, and switching to alternative settings in performance Sound manipulation may include applying effects, pitch wheel, modulation

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 8

Duration	2 mins 30 secs – 3 mins 45 secs
Key	Any, with changes
Tempo	50-200 bpm
Time Signatures	Any, with changes
Rhythmic values	Any. Complex combinations beyond 16th note triplets may be frequent and variations may occur regularly. Simpler rhythms will appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work, faster tempos or more complex time signatures)
Dynamics	Any, with changes, and including strong contrasts
Articulation & phrasing	Articulation and phrasing will have wide variety and may differ between hands at simultaneous points throughout. Subtlety of control between legato and staccato will be required
Melodic features	Advanced notated solos may feature. Intervallic passages and transitions may frequently exceed an octave.
Harmonic features	Five note chords may appear in either hand, and partial chords may be combined with melodic elements. Chordal voicings may be more advanced, denser and/or more frequent, and differ regularly
Rhythmic features	Rhythmic groupings may differ frequently between hands and occur simultaneously; faster note values will be more repetitive/continuous and combine in both hands
Other features	Voicings and accompaniment styles within sections will show advanced depth and variety of technique
Keyboard features (keys syllabus only)	Patch settings will include multiple layers and splits, and switching to alternative settings in performance Sound manipulation may include applying effects, pitch wheel, modulation