

RSL CLASSICAL

Violin Syllabus

Free Choice Piece Guidance

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For general information about Free Choice Pieces please see:

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The following guidelines outline features that would normally be found within a free choice selection for violin 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

Duration	40 secs – 1 min 20 secs
Key	C major, G major, D major, A major
Tempo	60–140 bpm
Time signatures	4/4, 3/4, 2/4
Dynamics	Basic dynamics (F, P, MF, MP), with infrequent changes
Articulation & phrasing	Occasional articulations, e.g. an accent on the final note of the piece
Rhythmic features	Non-complex rhythmic groupings, avoiding string crossing during faster patterns
Technical elements	First position only, limited string crossing, simple bowing patterns, pizzicato limited to open strings or on a repeated single pitch

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 1

Duration	50 secs – 1 min 30 secs
Key	C major, G major, D major, A major, relative minors
Tempo	60–140 bpm
Time signatures	4/4, 3/4, 2/4, 6/8
Dynamics	F, P, MF, MP, FF, PP , crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & phrasing	Simple use of articulations; may include staccato, tenuto, slurs, accents
Rhythmic features	Basic repetitive patterns, may contain simple syncopation
Technical elements	First position only, some string crossing, basic legato bowing, pizzicato limited to open strings or on a repeated single pitch

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 2

Duration	1 min 10 secs – 1 min 45 secs
Key	As previous grades, plus F major, Bb major; relative minors
Tempo	60–140 bpm
Time signatures	4/4, 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 9/8, 12/8
Dynamics	F, P, MF, MP, FF, PP , crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & phrasing	Staccato, tenuto, slurs, accents, simple ornamentation (e.g. mordent)
Rhythmic features	May include dotted rhythms, occasional syncopation and non-complex triplet groupings. Simpler rhythmic patterns may appear in conjunction with other features (e.g. string crossing, articulations, more complex bowing patterns).
Technical elements	First position only, some mid-phrase legato string-crossing. Phrasing and articulations requiring increased bow control, coordination and more varied bowspeed for nuanced phrasing. Faster passages requiring quicker left-hand finger work.

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 3

Duration	1 min 30 secs – 2 mins
Key	As previous grades, plus E major, Eb major, Ab major; relative minors
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.
Dynamics	F, P, MF, MP, FF, PP, crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & phrasing	Staccato, tenuto, slurs, accents, may include some ornamentation (e.g. grace notes, mordents, turns)
Rhythmic features	May include dotted rhythms, syncopation, triplet groupings. Simpler rhythms may appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. string crossing, varying articulations, more complex bowing patterns).
Technical elements	First, second and third position, perhaps some simple chromatic position slides, faster string crossing passages. More bow and tone control required, may include occasional natural harmonics, basic glissandos and pizzicato.

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 4

Duration	1 min 45 secs – 2 mins 15 secs
Key	As previous grades, plus B major; relative minors
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.
Dynamics	F, P, MF, MP, FF, PP , crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & phrasing	More complex combinations of nuanced articulation and ornamentation, e.g. alternating between staccato and accented staccato notes
Rhythmic features	Likely to include more complex rhythmic patterns and syncopation. Simpler rhythms appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. faster tempos, string crossing, varying articulations, more complex bowing patterns). Simpler rhythmic patterns may appear in conjunction with other features (e.g. string crossing, articulations, more complex bowing patterns).
Technical elements	First–fourth position, likely to include chromaticism and accidentals requiring accurate finger placement, possible passages of double-stopping. Increasing complexity with bow speed, vibrato, dynamic variations and string crossing. May include natural harmonics, glissando, more complex use of pizzicato speed and techniques such as marcato, pizzicato, left-hand pizzicato and pizzicato chords.

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 5

Duration	2 mins – 2 mins 45 secs
Key	As previous grades, plus Db major; relative minors
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, or odd time signatures depending on the complexity of the music.
Dynamics	F, P, MF, MP, FF, PP , crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & phrasing	More complex combinations of nuanced articulation, ornamentation and phrasing, e.g. alternating between staccato and accented staccato notes, long pianissimo trills
Rhythmic features	Likely to include more complex rhythmic patterns and syncopation. Simpler rhythmic patterns may appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. string crossing, more complex bowing patterns).
Technical elements	First–fifth position, more complex/faster position changes including shifts across strings, chromaticism and/or range of accidentals requiring accurate finger placement. Greater expressive tonal range, vibrato, and bow control required, more challenging string crossing passages and likely use of double-stopping. Possible use of harmonics, glissando, more complex use of pizzicato speed and techniques such as marcato, pizzicato and pizzicato chords.

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 6

Duration	2 mins 15 secs – 3 mins
Key	As previous grades, plus F# major; relative minors
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 odd time signatures depending on the complexity of the music.
Dynamics	Any, with changes, including strong contrasts
Articulation & phrasing	More complex combinations of nuanced articulation, ornamentation and phrasing, e.g. alternating between staccato and accented staccato notes, long pianissimo trills
Rhythmic features	Likely to include more complex rhythmic patterns and syncopation. Faster and more rhythmically complex passages will require left-hand dexterity and greater bow control.
Other features	More complex inter-relationship with the accompaniment part, requiring greater musical awareness and ensemble skills
Technical elements	More complex position changes including shifting across strings, chromaticism and/or range of accidentals requiring accurate finger placement. Greater tone range, expressive and nuanced vibrato and bow control required, more challenging, faster string crossing passages and likely use of double-stopping. Possible use of harmonics, glissando, more complex use of pizzicato, perhaps fast changes between arco/ pizzicato.

Free Choice Piece Guidelines | Grade 7

Duration	2 mins 30 secs – 3 mins 30 secs
Key	Any, with changes
Tempo	50–200 bpm
Time signatures	Any, with changes
Dynamics	Any, with changes, including strong contrasts
Articulation & phrasing	Complex and subtle combinations of nuanced articulation, ornamentation and phrasing
Rhythmic features	Likely to include complex combinations, variations and changes in conjunction with other elements such as rubato, position shifts, articulations, double-stopping and chords. Possible cross-rhythms with accompaniment part.
Other features	More complex inter-relationship with the accompaniment part, requiring greater musical awareness and ensemble skills. Cadenzas may feature.
Technical elements	More complex position changes including shifting across strings, chromaticism and/or range of accidentals requiring accurate finger placement. Greater tone range, expressive and nuanced vibrato and bow control required, more challenging, faster string crossing passages and likely use of double-stopping. Possible use of harmonics, glissando, more complex use of pizzicato, perhaps fast changes between arco/ pizzicato.

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
Dynamics	Any, with changes, including strong contrasts
Articulation & phrasing	Complex and subtle combinations of nuanced articulation, ornamentation and phrasing
Rhythmic features	Any. Complex combinations, variations and changes in conjunction with other elements such as rubato, position shifts, articulations, double-stopping and chords. Possible cross-rhythms with accompaniment part.
Other features	More complex inter-relationship with the accompaniment part, requiring greater musical awareness and ensemble skills. Cadenzas may feature.
Technical elements	More complex position changes including shifting across strings, chromaticism and/or range of accidentals requiring accurate finger placement. Greater tonal range, expressive and nuanced vibrato and bow control required, more challenging, faster string crossing passages and likely use of double-stopping. Possible use of harmonics, glissando, more complex use of pizzicato, perhaps fast changes between arco/ pizzicato.