

3. Bowed Strings Practical Grades Syllabus from 2024

Introducing the syllabus

There are new set pieces in the Bowed Strings Practical Grades Syllabus from 2024.

- The repertoire lists have been refreshed rather than fully revised and include a mixture of new and retained pieces
- There is a greater choice of repertoire than before, with extended lists featuring music by a more diverse range of composers.

The Scales and arpeggios, Sight-reading and Aural test requirements stay the same as the preceding syllabus.

Some key exam information has also been updated or clarified, including in the wider Qualification Specification.

Practical Grades: requirements and information

This syllabus is valid from 1 January 2024 until further notice.

This section provides a summary of the most important points that teachers and candidates need to know when taking ABRSM Practical Grades for Bowed Strings. Further details, as well as administrative information about the exams, are given in ABRSM's Exam Regulations (available at www.abrsm.org/examregulations) which should be read before booking an exam.

Instruments

Candidates are required to perform on acoustic instruments (electric instruments are not allowed). Any size of instrument may be used; Viola candidates may play on a violin strung as a viola. Examiners apply the marking criteria (which include the assessment of pitch, tone and musical shaping) to assess musical outcomes without reference to the specific attributes of the instrument.

Pieces

Musicians learn to play an instrument to explore and perform repertoire, which is why pieces are at the core of the exam – candidates are asked to present three at each grade. The syllabus repertoire is organised into three lists that explore different traditions and styles, dating from the Renaissance period to the present day.

Choosing one piece from each list gives candidates the opportunity to play a balanced selection and demonstrate a range of skills. In this syllabus, the pieces are broadly grouped into lists by the characteristics of the music:

- List A pieces are generally faster moving and require technical agility
- List B pieces are more lyrical and invite expressive playing
- List C pieces reflect a wide variety of musical traditions, styles and characters.

At Initial Grade to Grade 3, there are opportunities to play duets. This is an activity that often occurs in lessons for beginners and helps build a strong sense of musical awareness as well as secure rhythm and pulse.

We hope that by offering this variety in the syllabus, candidates will find inspiring music that they enjoy learning and performing.

Programme planning: Candidates must choose one piece from each of the three lists (A, B and C)*. In the exam, they should inform the examiner which pieces they are performing, and they are welcome to use the form on page 126 for this purpose.

Every effort has been made to feature a broad range of repertoire to suit and appeal to candidates of different ages, backgrounds and interests. Certain pieces may not be suitable for every candidate for technical reasons, other pieces may not be suitable because of wider context (historical, cultural, subject matter, lyrics if an arrangement of a song, etc.). Pieces should be carefully considered for their appropriateness to each individual, which may need consultation between teachers and parents/carers. Teachers and parents/carers should also exercise caution when allowing younger candidates to research pieces online: www.nspcc.org.uk/onlinesafety.

The repertoire lists are the same as for ABRSM Performance Grades. Candidates intending on taking both qualifications at the same grade may find their musical development benefits from preparing different pieces for each.

Accompaniment: A live piano or string (where the option is listed) accompaniment is required for all pieces, except those which are published as studies or unaccompanied works (these are marked **SOLO** in the syllabus list).

At Initial Grade to Grade 3, candidates may perform some or all of their pieces with a string accompaniment. Pieces that are published as duets (or with string accompaniment only) are marked **DUET** in the syllabus list. Candidates must play the upper part unless the syllabus specifies otherwise. Pieces that are published with piano and string accompaniment options are marked **DUET/PIANO** in the syllabus list, and may be performed with either accompaniment in the exam.

Candidates must provide their own accompanist(s), who can only be in the exam room while accompanying. The candidate's teacher may accompany (examiners will not). If necessary, an accompanist may simplify any part of the accompaniment, as long as the result is musical. Recorded accompaniments are not allowed.

* Candidates must choose at least one accompanied piece.

Exam music & editions: Wherever the syllabus includes an arrangement or transcription (appearing as 'arr.' or 'trans.' in the repertoire lists), the edition listed in the syllabus must be used. For all other pieces, editions are listed for guidance only and candidates may use any edition of their choice. This includes editions that are downloaded. Information on sourcing exam music is given on page 14.

Interpreting the score: Printed editorial suggestions such as fingering, bowing, metronome marks, realisation of ornaments, etc. do not need to be strictly observed. Whether the piece contains musical indications or not, candidates are encouraged to interpret the score in a musical and stylistic way. Examiners' marking will be determined by how control of pitch, time, tone, shape and performance contributes to the overall musical outcome.

Vibrato: The use and control of vibrato, and its effect on tone and shape, will be taken into account by examiners, who will be assessing the overall musical outcome. Pieces that are heavily reliant on vibrato for their full musical effect tend not to appear in the syllabus before around Grade 5.

Repeats: Unless the syllabus specifies differently, all da capo and dal segno indications must be followed but other repeats (including first-time bars) should not be played unless they are very short (i.e. a few bars).

Ossias: Where an ossia (alternative musical line or note) occurs in the music, candidates may choose either option unless the repertoire list specifies differently.

Cadenzas & tuttis: Cadenzas should not be played unless the syllabus specifies differently. Accompanists should cut lengthy orchestral tutti sections.

Performing from memory: Candidates may perform any of their pieces from memory; if doing so, they must make sure that a copy of the music is available for the examiner to refer to. No extra marks are directly awarded for playing from memory.

Page-turns: Examiners will be understanding if a page-turn causes a lack of continuity during a piece, and this will not affect the marking. Candidates (and accompanists) may use an extra copy of the music or a photocopy of a section of the piece (but see 'Photocopies' below) to help with page-turns. Candidates and accompanists at Grades 6 to 8 may bring a page-turner to the exam if there is no solution to a particularly awkward page-turn (prior permission is not required; the turner may be the candidate's teacher). Examiners are unable to help with page-turning.

Photocopies & downloads: Performing from unauthorised photocopies (or other kinds of copies) or illegal downloads of copyright music is not allowed. In the UK, copies may be used in certain limited circumstances - for full details, see the MPA's *Code of Fair Practice* at www.mpaonline.org.uk/mpa-guidelines. In all other cases, application should be made to the copyright holder before any copy is made, and evidence of permission should be brought to the exam.

Candidates and Applicants are expected to act within the law with regard to copyright. ABRSM may withhold the exam result where we have evidence of an illegal copy (or copies) being used.

Sourcing exam music: Exam music is available from music retailers and online, including at the ABRSM music shop: www.abrsm.org/shop. Every effort has been made to make sure that the publications listed will be available for the duration of the syllabus. We advise candidates to get their music well before the exam in case items are not kept in stock by retailers. Non-exam related questions about the music (e.g. editorial, availability) should be addressed to the relevant publisher: contact details are listed at www.abrsm.org/publishers.

Scales and arpeggios

Playing scales and arpeggios is important for building strong technical skills such as reliable finger movement, hand position, co-ordination and fingerboard fluency. It also helps to develop pitch and interval awareness, familiarity with keys and their related patterns, and control of tone. This leads to greater confidence and security when sight-reading, learning new pieces and performing – from a score or from memory, as a solo musician or with others.

Memory: All requirements must be played from memory.

Range: All requirements must be played from the lowest possible tonic/starting note unless the syllabus specifies differently. They must ascend and descend according to the specified range (and pattern).

Rhythm: For most major and minor scales (and double-stop scales in parallel sixths/octaves) candidates may choose between two rhythm patterns: even notes or long tonic. The scale to a fifth (Initial Grade) must be played in even notes.

Patterns: Arpeggios and dominant sevenths are required in root position only. All dominant sevenths must finish by resolving on the tonic. Examples of scale/arpeggio etc. patterns found in this syllabus are given on pages 16–17. Fully notated versions of the requirements are published by ABRSM.

Fingering: Candidates may use any fingering that produces a successful musical outcome.

Speed: Bowing will generally dictate the tempi of slurred scales and arpeggios. Separately-bowed requirements should be played briskly, using no more than half the bow length. The speeds on pages 18–21 are given as a general guide.

In the exam: Initial Grade candidates must play all three requirements when asked for their scales. The examiner will prompt the keys/ranges where necessary.

At Grades 1 to 8, examiners will usually ask for at least one of each scale/arpeggio (etc.) type. They will ask for majors followed by minors within each type, and also ask to hear a balance of the separately-bowed and slurred requirements. When asking for requirements, examiners will specify:

- the key* (including minor form – harmonic or melodic – in the Grades 6 to 8 scales) or the starting note
- separate bows or slurred (except for where the requirements are to be prepared with separate bows *only* – e.g. Grade 1 arpeggios).

* Where keys at Grades 6 to 8 are listed enharmonically – D \flat /C \sharp and A \flat /G \sharp – the examiner will use the flat spelling when asking for major keys and the sharp spelling for minor keys.

Supporting publications: Books of the requirements are published by ABRSM. Purchasing these books is not a requirement.

Scale and arpeggio patterns

The examples below clarify patterns and ranges found in this syllabus. The full requirements for each instrument and grade are listed on the relevant syllabus pages. See also page 15.

Rhythm patterns for scales

For major scales (all grades) and minor scales (Grades 1 to 8), candidates may choose between two rhythm patterns: even notes or long tonic. (Chromatic scales must always be played with even notes.)

even notes

or

long tonic

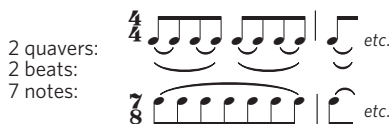


Slurring patterns for scales

even notes

or

long tonic



Natural minor scale



Scale to a fifth



Dominant seventh (resolving on tonic)



Double-stop scales

In broken steps



Double-stop scales *(cont.)*

In parallel

even notes

or long tonic

in sixths:  etc.  etc.

in octaves:  etc.  etc.

Patterns for Double Bass only

Scales to a sixth

even notes

or long tonic




Scales to a twelfth

even notes

or long tonic

 etc. 

Arpeggios to a twelfth



Scale in broken thirds







 etc.  etc. 

Scale in running thirds

 etc.  etc. 







Scale and arpeggio speeds

The following speeds are given as a general guide:

VIOLIN		Grade/Speed *								
	pattern	Initial	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Scales	 or	♩ = 46	♩ = 52	♩ = 58	♩ = 63	♩ = 69	♩ = 80	♩ = 92	♩ = 104	♩ = 120
Arpeggios			♩ = 104	♩ = 116	♩ = 40	♩ = 42	♩ = 44	♩ = 46	♩ = 48	♩ = 50
Chromatic scales					♩ = 63	♩ = 69	♩ = 80	♩ = 60	♩ = 104	♩ = 120
Dom. & Dim. 7ths*						♩ = 63	♩ = 66	♩ = 69	♩ = 72	♩ = 76
Double-stop scales (in broken steps)								♩ = 92	♩ = 104	♩ = 120
Double-stop scales (in parallel)										♩ = 72





































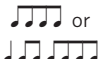

* Dim 7ths from Grade 5

The following speeds are given as a general guide:

VIOLA		Grade/Speed *								
	pattern	Initial	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Scales		♩ = 42	♩ = 48	♩ = 54	♩ = 58	♩ = 63	♩ = 72	♩ = 84	♩ = 96	♩ = 112
Arpeggios			♩ = 96	♩ = 108	♩ = 112	♩ = 116	♩ = 40	♩ = 42	♩ = 44	♩ = 46
Chromatic scales					♩ = 58	♩ = 63	♩ = 72	♩ = 56	♩ = 96	♩ = 112
Dom. & Dim. 7ths*						♩ = 58	♩ = 60	♩ = 63	♩ = 66	♩ = 69
Double-stop scales (in broken steps)								♩ = 84	♩ = 96	♩ = 112
Double-stop scales (in parallel)										♩ = 66

































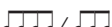





* Dim 7ths from Grade 5

The following speeds are given as a general guide:

CELLO	Grade/Speed *									
	pattern	Initial	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Scales	 or									
Arpeggios										
Chromatic scales										
Dom. & Dim. 7ths*										
Double-stop scales (in broken steps)										
Double-stop scales (in parallel)										

* Dim 7ths from Grade 5

The following speeds are given as a general guide:

DOUBLE BASS		Grade/Speed *								
	pattern	Initial	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Scales										
Arpeggios										
Chromatic scales										
Dom. & Dim. 7ths*										
Scale in broken and running thirds ♦										
Double-stop scales (in broken steps)										

* Dim 7ths from Grade 5

♦ Scale in broken thirds (Grade 6) and in running thirds (Grade 8)

Sight-reading

Sight-reading is a valuable skill with many benefits. Learning to sight-read helps to develop quick recognition of keys, tonality and common rhythm patterns. Strong sight-reading skills make learning new pieces quicker and easier, and also help when making music with others, so that playing in an ensemble becomes more rewarding and enjoyable.

About the test: Candidates will be asked to play a short unaccompanied piece of music that they have not seen before. They will be given half a minute to look through and, if they wish, try out all or any part of the test before they are asked to play it for assessment.

Parameters: The table on page 23 shows the elements that are introduced at each grade.

Fingering: Any fingering shown on the test is for guidance only. Candidates are welcome to use any fingering that produces a successful musical outcome.

Supporting publications: For practice purposes, sample sight-reading tests are published by ABRSM. Purchasing these books is not a requirement.

Blind or partially-sighted candidates: Blind or partially-sighted candidates may choose an alternative test (Braille memory or Aural repetition) in place of the standard test, if requested at the time of booking the exam. Further information is available at www.abrsm.org/specificneeds.

Aural tests

Listening lies at the heart of music-making and the ability to hear how music works helps with all aspects of musical development. Aural skills help with gauging the sound and balance of playing, keeping in time and playing with a sense of rhythm and pulse. These skills also help to develop a sense of pitch, musical memory and the ability to spot mistakes.

About the test: Full details of the Aural tests are given on pages 102–109.

Supporting publications: For practice purposes, sample Aural tests are published by ABRSM. Examples of the tests are given in *Specimen Aural Tests* and *Aural Training in Practice*. Purchasing these books is not a requirement.

Deaf or hearing-impaired candidates: Deaf or hearing-impaired candidates may choose alternative tests in place of the standard tests, if requested at the time of booking the exam. Further information, including the syllabus for the alternative tests, is available at www.abrsm.org/specificneeds.

Sight-reading parameters

The tables on pages 23–24 show the elements that are introduced at each grade. These parameters are presented cumulatively, i.e. once introduced they apply for all later grades (gradually progressing in difficulty). See also page 22.

	Length (bars)	Time	Other features that may be included
Initial	4	4/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st position ♩ and ♪ note values; ♯ rests notes separately bowed <i>mf</i>
	6	2/4	
Grade 1	4	3/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♩ and ♪ note values <i>f</i> and <i>p</i> <i>Double Bass</i>: 1st or half position, at candidate's choice
Grade 2	8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♩; ♯ rests simple two-note slurs <i>mp</i>; <i>cresc.</i> and <i>dim.</i> hairpins <i>Double Bass</i>: 1st position only
Grade 3			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> accidentals (within minor keys) ♩, ♪ and ♪ note values; simple semiquaver patterns; ♯ rests tied notes staccato; <i>pizzicato</i> (at end) <i>Double Bass</i>: half or 1st position, at examiner's choice
Grade 4	c. 8	6/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shifts between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Violin & Viola</i>: 1st and 3rd positions <i>Cello</i>: 1st and 4th positions <i>Double Bass</i>: half, 1st and 3rd positions (no more than two positions per test) chromatic notes anacrusis hooked bowing tenuto, accents pause sign <i>pp</i> and <i>ff</i>
Grade 5	c. 8–16		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shifts as required to cover range simple syncopation changes between <i>arco</i> and <i>pizzicato</i> slowing of tempo (at end) <i>Violin, Viola & Cello</i>: simple chords (at end)
Grade 6	c. 12–16	9/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> triplet patterns slowing of tempo followed by <i>a tempo</i> <i>Viola</i>: treble clef <i>Double Bass</i>: simple chords (at end)
		5/8	
		5/4	
Grade 7	c. 16–20	7/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Violin & Viola</i>: left-hand <i>pizzicato</i> <i>Cello & Double Bass</i>: tenor clef
		7/4	
Grade 8	c. 16–24	12/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> acceleration of tempo simple ornaments <i>Violin</i>: 8va sign <i>Cello</i>: left-hand <i>pizzicato</i> <i>Cello & Double Bass</i>: treble clef

KEYS MAJORS minors *	Violin	Viola	Cello	Double Bass ♦
Initial Grade	D, A	G, D	G, D	G, D
Grade 1	—	—	—	G, D or F, B♭ ◊
Grade 2	G e	C a	C a	C, G, D a
Grade 3	C, F, B♭ a, d, g	F, B♭, E♭ d, g, c	A, F, B♭ d, g	F, B♭ b
Grade 4	E♭	A	E♭ c	A e, d
Grade 5	E, A♭ b, c	E, A♭ e, f♯	e	g
Grade 6	c♯	f	—	E♭ c
Grade 7	f♯	b, c♯	E, A♭ b, f	E f♯
Grade 8	B, D♭ f	B, D♭	f♯	A♭ f

RANGES §	Violin	Viola	Cello	Double Bass
Initial Grade	d'-g', a'-d''	g-c', d'-g'	G-c, d-g	g-b, d-f♯
Grade 1	d'-a''	g-d''	G-d'	d-b or F-f ◊
Grade 2	g-a''	c-d''	C-d'	E-b
Grade 3	g-b''	c-e''	C-d'	E-b
Grade 4	g-d'''	c-g''	C-g'	E-d'
Grade 5	g-e'''	c-a''	C-a'	E-e'
Grade 6	g-e'''	c-a''	C-a'	E-g'
Grade 7	g-g'''	c-b''	C-bb'	E-a'
Grade 8	g-a'''	c-c'''	C-d''	E-c''

* Minors - natural form at Grade 2, any form from Grade 3

♦ Keys cumulative from Grade 2

◊ 1st or half position, at candidate's choice

§ Ranges are presented using the Helmholtz system, i.e.:



Aural test requirements

Included in all Practical Music graded exams*

Listening lies at the heart of all good music-making. Developing aural awareness is fundamental to musical training because having a 'musical ear' impacts on all aspects of musicianship. Singing, both silently in the head and out loud, is one of the best ways to develop the 'musical ear'. It connects the internal imagining of sound, the 'inner ear', with the external creation of it, without the necessity of mechanically having to 'find the note' on an instrument (important though that connection is). By integrating aural activities in imaginative ways in the lesson, preparation for the Aural tests within an exam will be a natural extension of what is already an essential part of the learning experience.

In the exam

Aural tests are an integral part of all Practical Music graded exams.

The tests are given by the examiner from the piano. For any test that requires a sung response, pitch rather than vocal quality is being assessed. The examiner will be happy to adapt to the vocal range of the candidate, whose responses may be sung to any vowel (or consonant followed by a vowel), hummed or whistled (and at a different octave, if appropriate).

The information on pages 103–109 sets out the tasks that candidates will be asked to complete in the exam.

Assessment

Some tests allow for a second attempt or for an additional playing by the examiner, if necessary. The examiner will also be ready to prompt, where helpful, although this may affect the assessment.

Marks are not awarded for each individual test or deducted for mistakes; instead they reflect the candidate's overall response in this component. The marking criteria for the Aural tests are given on page 117.

Supporting publications

For practice purposes, sample Aural tests are published by ABRSM. Examples of the tests for Initial Grade to Grade 8 are given in *Specimen Aural Tests*. More examples for Grades 1 to 8 are given in *Aural Training in Practice*. Purchasing these books is not a requirement.

Deaf or hearing-impaired candidates

Deaf or hearing-impaired candidates may choose alternative tests in place of the standard tests, if requested at the time of booking the exam. Further information, including the syllabus for the alternative tests, is available at www.abrsm.org/specificneeds.