

GUITAR GRADES: requirements and information

This syllabus is valid from 2019 until further notice.

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

Entering for an exam

Eligibility: There are eight grades of exam for Guitar and candidates may be entered for any grade irrespective of age and without previously having taken any other grade in Guitar. Candidates for a Grade 6, 7 or 8 exam must already have passed ABRSM Grade 5 (or above) in Music Theory, Practical Musicianship or a solo Jazz instrument; for full details, including a list of accepted alternatives, see www.abrsm.org/prerequisite.

Access: ABRSM endeavours to make its exams as accessible as possible to all candidates, regardless of sensory impairments, learning difficulties or particular physical needs. There is a range of alternative tests and formats as well as sets of guidelines for candidates with particular access needs (see www.abrsm.org/specificneeds). Where a candidate's needs are not covered by the guidelines, each case is considered on an individual basis. Further information is available from the Access Co-ordinator (accesscoordinator@abrsm.ac.uk).

Exam booking: Details of exam dates, locations, fees and how to book an exam are available online at www.abrsm.org/exambooking.

Instruments

This syllabus is only appropriate for the standard classical instrument fitted with nylon strings (guitars with a cutaway body are permitted). Candidates may choose to use a capo at the 2nd or 3rd fret for the pieces in Grades 7 and 8 that have an optional F# tuning; no other use of the capo is permitted unless specified by the composer.

Elements of the exam

All ABRSM graded Guitar exams comprise the following elements: three Pieces; Scales and arpeggios; Sight-reading; and Aural tests. In all grades, marks are allocated as follows:

Pieces: 1	30
2	30
3	30
Scales and arpeggios	21
Sight-reading	21
Aural tests	18
Total	150





Marking scheme: 100 marks are required for a Pass, 120 for a Merit and 130 for a Distinction. A Pass in each individual section is not required to pass overall. See pp. 42–43 for the marking criteria used by examiners.

Pieces

Programme planning: Candidates must choose one piece from each of the three lists (A, B and C) in each grade (see also 'Accompaniment' below). In the exam, they should inform the examiner which pieces they are performing, and they are welcome to use the form on p. 45 for this purpose.

Every effort has been made to ensure the syllabus lists feature a broad range of repertoire, with items to suit and appeal to candidates of differing ages, backgrounds and interests. Not every piece will be suitable for every candidate due to technical reasons (e.g. hand size) or wider context (historical, cultural, subject matter of the larger work from which it is drawn, lyrics if an arrangement of a song etc.). It is advised that pieces selected are considered carefully for their appropriateness to each individual, which may require consultation between teachers and parents/guardians. Given the ever-changing nature of the digital world, teachers and parents/guardians should also exercise caution when allowing younger candidates to research items online: www.nspcc.org.uk/onlinesafety.

Accompaniment: In Grades 1-3, candidates may perform *up to two* pieces accompanied by another guitar (or, if necessary, a piano); in Grades 4 and 5, *only one* such piece may be performed. In Grade 8, candidates may perform *one* piece accompanied by piano.

Accompanied pieces are marked with a  or  in the syllabus. None of the pieces marked with a  in Grades 1-5 or a  in Grade 8 may be performed solo. *All other* pieces must be performed solo.

Candidates must provide their own accompanist, who may remain in the exam room only while accompanying. The candidate's teacher may act as accompanist (examiners will not). If necessary, the accompanist may simplify any part of the accompaniment, provided the result is musically satisfactory. Recorded accompaniments are not allowed.

Exam music & editions: Wherever the syllabus includes an arrangement or transcription, the edition listed in the syllabus must be used in the exam; in all such cases the abbreviation 'arr.' or 'trans.' appears in the syllabus entry. For all other pieces, the editions quoted in the syllabus are given for guidance only and candidates may use any edition of their choice (in- or out-of-print or downloadable). Information on obtaining exam music is given on p. 13.

Interpreting the score: Printed editorial suggestions such as fingering, metronome marks, realization of ornaments etc. need not be strictly observed. Whether the piece contains musical indications or not, candidates are always encouraged to interpret the score in a stylistically appropriate manner. Ultimately, examiners' marking will be determined by consideration of pitch, time, tone, shape and performance, and how control of these contributes to the overall musical outcome.

Repeats: All da capo and dal segno indications should be observed but all other repeats (including first-time bars) should be omitted unless they are very brief (i.e. of a few bars) or unless the syllabus specifies otherwise.

Performing from memory: Candidates are free to perform any of their pieces from memory; in such cases they must ensure that a copy of the music is available for the examiner to refer to if necessary. No additional marks are 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. A variety of solutions for awkward page-turns exists, including the use of an additional copy of the music or a photocopy of a section of the piece (but see ‘Photocopies’ below). In cases where candidates at Grades 6–8 believe there is no solution to a particularly awkward page-turn, they may bring a page-turner to the exam (prior permission is not required; the turner may be a candidate’s teacher). Examiners are unable to help with page-turning.

Photocopies: Performing from unauthorized photocopies (or other kinds of copies) of copyright editions is not allowed. ABRSM may withhold the exam result where it has evidence of an illegal copy (or copies) being used. 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. In all other cases, application should be made to the copyright holder before any copy is made, and evidence of permission received should be brought to the exam.

Scales and arpeggios

Examiners will usually ask for at least one of each type of scale/arpeggio etc. required at each grade and will ask for majors followed by minors within each type. In the Grade 5–8 fingers-only scales, they will also ask to hear a balance of the specified strokes. When asking for requirements, examiners will specify:

- the key (including minor form – harmonic *or* melodic – in the Grade 6–8 scales) or the starting note
- the stroke for fingers-only scales (*tirando* or *apoyando*), Grades 5–8
- the form for interval scales (together *or* broken)

All scales and arpeggios should:

- be played from memory
- be played in even notes (except where indicated at Grades 1–5)
- be played from the lowest possible tonic/starting note unless the syllabus indicates otherwise
- ascend and descend according to the specified range (and pattern)
- be played legato

In Grades 1–4, candidates may choose to play ‘fingers-only’ scales either *tirando* (free stroke) or *apoyando* (rest stroke); from Grade 5, these scales must be prepared with *both* right-hand techniques. The *tirando* stroke is expected for all other requirements.

Any combination of alternating right-hand fingers may be used for ‘fingers-only’ scales. Any left-hand fingering may be used, but candidates are expected to observe the requirements regarding over-ringing and non-over-ringing for broken chords and arpeggios from Grade 3.

Arpeggios and dominant sevenths are required in root position only. Scales in thirds and tenths should begin with the tonic as the lower note, while scales in sixths should begin with the tonic as the upper note.

Examples of scale/arpeggio etc. patterns specified in this syllabus are given on pp. 14–15.

Books of the requirements are published for Guitar by ABRSM (for Grades 1–5 and 6–8).

The following speeds are given as a general guide:

	pattern	Grade / Speed							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Thumb-only scales*		♩ = 96	♩ = 112						
Scales†									
1 & 2 octaves		♩ = 48	♩ = 56	♩ = 66	♩ = 80	♩ = 96			
2 octaves							♩ = 112	♩ = 126	♩ = 144
3 octaves							♩ = 76	♩ = 84	♩ = 96
Chromatic scales									
1 & 2 octaves				♩ = 66	♩ = 80	♩ = 96	♩ = 112		
3 octaves								♩ = 84	♩ = 96
Interval scales				♩ = 60	♩ = 72	♩ = 84	♩ = 96	♩ = 104	♩ = 116
Arpeggios		♩ = 40	♩ = 42	♩ = 44	♩ = 48	♩ = 56	♩ = 63	♩ = 69	♩ = 76
Broken chords				♩ = 54	♩ = 60	♩ = 66	♩ = 72	♩ = 80	♩ = 88
Dom. & Dim. 7ths‡					♩ = 72	♩ = 84	♩ = 96	♩ = 104	♩ = 116

* Including chromatic scale at Grade 2

† Fingers-only & thumb and fingers combined

‡ Dim. 7ths from Grade 5

Sight-reading

Candidates will be asked to play a short unaccompanied piece of music which they have not previously seen. They will be given half a minute in which to look though and, if they wish, try out all or any part of the test before they are required to play it for assessment. The table on p. 12 shows the introduction of elements at each grade. Please note that these parameters are presented cumulatively, i.e. once introduced they apply for all subsequent grades (albeit within a logical progression of difficulty).

For practice purposes, a book of sample sight-reading tests is published for Guitar by ABRSM.

(continued overleaf)

Guitar grades: requirements and information

	Length (bars)	Time	Keys	Other features that may be included
Grade 1	4	4/4 3/4	C, G, F majors A, E minors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ♩, ♪, ♫, ♬ note values; ♯ rests • 1st position • accidentals (within minor keys only) • single-line texture • passages for thumb alone • f and p • <i>cresc.</i> and <i>dim.</i> hairpins
	6	2/4		
Grade 2			D minor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ♩, ♪, ♫, ♬ and ♩, ♪ patterns • staccato • mp and mf
Grade 3	up to 8	3/8	D major	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ♩ rests • 2nd position • integration of thumb and fingers into simple broken-chord patterns • accents • slurs • pp
Grade 4	c. 8	6/8	A major	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • simple semiquaver patterns • tied notes • chromatic notes • simple two-part writing (mostly open strings in one or other voice) • pause sign • tenuto
Grade 5	c. 8–12		B minor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anacrusis • simple syncopation • use of fingerboard up to 5th position • simple two-note chords within a single voice • slowing of tempo at end • ff
Grade 6		9/8 5/8 5/4	B♭ major F♯ minor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • triplet patterns • use of fingerboard above 5th position • three-note chords within a single voice • easily prepared partial barrés
Grade 7	c. 12–16	7/8 7/4	E major G minor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • simple use of 12th-fret harmonics • four-note chords • slowing of tempo followed by <i>a tempo</i>
Grade 8	c. 16–20	12/8	C minor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • full barrés • acceleration of tempo • simple ornaments

Aural tests

The requirements are the same for all subjects. Full details of the Aural tests are given on pp. 32–37.

In the exam

Examiners: Generally, there will be one examiner in the exam room; however, for training and quality assurance purposes, a second examiner may sometimes be present. Examiners may ask to look at the music before or after the performance of a piece (a separate copy is not required: the candidate's copy will suffice). Examiners may stop the performance of a piece when they have heard enough to form a judgment. They will not issue or discuss a candidate's result; instead, the mark form (and certificate for successful candidates) will be issued by ABRSM after the exam.

Order of the exam: The individual sections of the exam may be taken in any order, at the candidate's choice, although it is preferable for accompanied pieces (see 'Accompaniment' on p. 9) to be performed consecutively and at the beginning of the exam.

Tuning: The guitar should be tuned before entering the exam room, but in cases at Grades 1–5 where the candidate is playing with a piano accompaniment the teacher or accompanist may tune the candidate's instrument to the piano (or advise on tuning) before the exam begins. In Grades 6–8, candidates must tune their instrument themselves. Examiners are unable to help with tuning.

Footstools: Candidates should provide their own footstool (or other form of guitar support) if required.

Music stands: All ABRSM public venues provide a music stand, but candidates are welcome to bring their own if they prefer. The examiner will be happy to help adjust the height or position of the stand.

Assessment

The tables on pp. 42–43 show the marking criteria used by examiners. In each element of the exam, ABRSM operates the principle of marking from the required pass mark positively or negatively, rather than awarding marks by deduction from the maximum or addition from zero. In awarding marks, examiners balance the extent to which the qualities and skills listed on pp. 42–43 (broadly categorized by pitch, time, tone, shape and performance) are demonstrated and contribute towards the overall musical outcome.

Obtaining exam music

Exam music is available from music retailers as well as online, including at the ABRSM music shop: www.abrsm.org/shop. Every effort has been made to ensure that all the publications listed will remain available for the duration of the syllabus. Candidates are advised to obtain their music well in advance of the exam in case of any delays with items not kept in stock by retailers. Apart from queries relating to exams, all enquiries about the music (e.g. editorial, availability) should be addressed to the relevant publisher: contact details are listed at www.abrsm.org/publishers.