

MUSIC PERFORMANCE GRADES



SINGING

Syllabus (Section 3)

This syllabus is specific to Singing and is part of the main *Qualification Specification: Music Performance Grades*. The remainder of that specification provides other relevant information for those preparing for Performance Grades exams and applies to all subjects (instruments). It can be found at www.abrsm.org/performancegrades and should be read when preparing for an exam.

Qualification Specification: Performance Grades

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3. Singing Performance Grades syllabus

Introducing the qualification

Performance Grades are new qualifications from ABRSM, introduced in 2020 to run alongside our long-standing and respected Practical Grades. They allow learners to focus on and showcase their performance skills if that is their preference. This additional suite of qualifications has been designed to allow learners to play to their strengths and interests and still have their level of achievement formally recognised with a regulated qualification that attracts UCAS points (in the UK) at Grades 6–8. Performance Grades are accessible exams given their sole focus on performance, without the assessment of any supporting tests. Instead they encourage the selection of appropriate repertoire to be delivered in a sustained performance, even at the earliest levels.

Musicians learn to play an instrument to explore and perform repertoire, which is why songs, and the way they can be combined to create a convincing and sustained performance, are the focus of the exam. For Performance Grades, candidates are asked to present four songs at each grade.

ABRSM Performance Grades draw on the same repertoire set for our Practical Grades. This syllabus repertoire is organised into lists, which explore different traditions and styles, dating from the Renaissance period to the present day. Choosing repertoire from different lists gives candidates the opportunity to perform a balanced selection and demonstrate a range of skills.

Since Performance Grades focus on performance alone, the choice of repertoire is important, and attention should be given to the way songs are contrasted, the order in which they are presented, and the different moods and characters they inhabit. This will enable candidates to demonstrate their ability to deliver a coherent and convincing performance event, not just a series of individual songs. Credit for this is given through the performance as a whole assessment criteria that are applied.

Grades 1–8: requirements and information

The syllabus repertoire is valid until further notice.

This section provides a summary of the most important points that teachers and candidates need to know when taking ABRSM Performance Grades for Singing. 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 making an exam booking.

Selecting repertoire

Number of songs: Candidates present four accompanied songs in one continuous performance. In Grades 1–5, candidates choose at least one song from each of the three lists (A, B and C). In Grades 6–8, candidates choose at least one song from any three of the five lists (A, B, C, D and E). The fourth song at all grades can be from the repertoire lists (any list) or an accompanied song of the candidate's choice. The songs can be performed in any order. See further programming requirements within this 'Selecting repertoire' section.

Own-choice song: The following options and restrictions apply to the own-choice song selection:

- the song should be at the same standard, or above, as repertoire set for the grade being taken (prior approval from ABRSM is not needed, and can't be given)
- the song may be chosen from any of the repertoire lists set for the grade (performing all four songs from the lists gives no advantage)
- the song should exist in a published edition (either in print or downloadable), which candidates should indicate on the programme form
- the song should not last less than the following timings for each grade (unless the overall programme time would be exceeded; see 'Programme times'):

	Grade							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Minimum duration (mm:ss)	00:25	00:30	00:35	00:45	01:00	01:30	02:00	03:00

The other programming requirements described in this 'Selecting repertoire' section should also be met.

Programme times: The overall performance, including breaks between songs and the inclusion of a longer break if taken (see 'Break'), should not exceed the maximum programme time set for the grade, as follows:

	Grade							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Maximum programme time (minutes)	6	7	8	10	12	15	20	25

Break: Candidates may take one slightly longer break during their performance if they wish. The break should not exceed the timing for the grade shown in the following table. Candidates should indicate on the programme form where in the programme a planned break will be taken. The exam recording should not be stopped during the break.

	Grades	
	1-5	6-8
Maximum break time (minutes)	1	2

Accompaniment*: A live piano accompaniment is required for all songs. Candidates provide their own accompanist. The teacher may accompany, but candidates may not accompany themselves. If necessary, an accompanist may simplify any part of the accompaniment, as long as the result is musical. Recorded accompaniments are not allowed.

The accompanist may use a page-turner (prior permission is not required; the turner may be the teacher).

Composers: Up to two songs by the same composer may be performed. Where two or more songs/movements by a composer are required by the syllabus (i.e. under one list number and indicated with an 'and'), these are considered as one 'song'.

* Given COVID-19 social-distancing requirements, we are temporarily relaxing the live accompaniment requirement for exams. Details of the options available can be found at www.abrsm.org/performancegrades.

Languages: All songs may be sung in their original language or in a singing translation in any other language. The syllabus details the languages/singing translations for all the listed editions (except for English-language songs that are published without singing translations).

Keys: All songs may be sung by any voice and in any key. Many songs are available published in different keys, and candidates/teachers may make their own transpositions. The key of each song should be chosen carefully to ensure it is appropriate for the candidate's voice.

For guidance, the syllabus shows the published keys and vocal ranges for all songs (except for songs that are in more than one key, in which case only the vocal range is shown). Keys are shown for all editions of songs listed and the edition in the highest key is listed first. The vocal range is shown for the first-listed edition only (unless there are slight variants in range between editions).

The vocal ranges are presented using the Helmholtz system, i.e.:



Repertoire lists: There is a broad range of songs set on the syllabus, to suit different voices and to appeal to candidates of different ages, backgrounds and interests. Not every song will be suitable for every candidate because of vocal range, content (theme, lyrics) or the wider context (historical, cultural, subject matter, etc.). We advise that songs are chosen carefully for their appropriateness to each individual, which may require consultation between teachers and parents/guardians. Teachers and parents/guardians should also exercise caution when allowing younger candidates to research songs online: www.nspcc.org.uk/onlinesafety.

The repertoire lists are the same as for ABRSM Practical Grades. Candidates may not present the same repertoire (in full or individual songs) for the same grade of both qualifications, irrespective of when the exams are taken.

Exam music & editions: Wherever the syllabus requires a specific arrangement of a song, the edition listed in the syllabus must be used; in such cases the arranger's name is presented in bold type or the syllabus indicates 'this version only'. For all other songs, editions (and associated information) 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 6.

Lyrics: Songs on the repertoire lists marked **(F)** or **(M)** contain words that indicate or suggest a female or male singer. This information is for guidance only. All songs may be sung by singers of any gender, and candidates may change pronouns and gender-specific words.

Verses & repeats: Songs should be performed complete, including choruses in verse/chorus songs, and following standard repeats and *dal segno*/*da capo* markings, with the following exceptions:

- where the repertoire list specifies 'without repeats' (this applies to standard repeats) or 'without *dal segno*/*da capo*'. (If there are different lyrics, candidates can choose which lyric to sing.)
- where the repertoire list specifies cuts or other instructions.
- where there is a standard repeat mark indicated in the score but words and music are exactly the same, in which case the repeat need not be sung.

Where cuts are indicated in the syllabus, they are specified to make songs suitable for exam purposes. A suitably adjusted piano introduction, ending or bridging passage may be needed.

Candidates may, however, choose to include repeats, extra verses or sections that would be cut following the syllabus instructions as long as the maximum programme time is not exceeded (see 'Programme times').

Preparing for the exam

Programme form & announcement: Candidates should complete a programme form and show it to the camera at the start of the exam recording. The following information is required and should be given in the order the songs will be performed:

- Full song information, including title and, as applicable, larger work title, movement/section number and catalogue number (e.g. Opus, BWV etc.).
- The composers' names.
- The list and number for each of the three songs chosen from the syllabus repertoire lists (and for the own-choice song if also chosen from the lists).
- For own-choice repertoire, the following additional information is needed unless the song is chosen from the syllabus repertoire lists:
 - the arranger's/transcriber's name, where applicable
 - details of the edition used (title and publisher)
- The validity period (e.g. from 2018) of the syllabus repertoire lists that the songs have been chosen from.
- Where the break (if intended) will be taken.

A form that can be printed and completed is provided on page 7. Alternatively, the required information can be written on a blank piece of paper.

As well as showing the form to the camera, candidates should show the opening of their own-choice song and announce the following information before beginning their performance:

- Name, subject and grade.
- Song title, composer name and list information (where applicable) for each song, in the order they will be performed.

If preferred, a Responsible Adult present may show the form and music to camera and make the introductory announcement, as this does not form part of the performance.

Interpreting the score: Printed editorial suggestions such as phrasing, metronome marks, realisation of ornaments, etc. do not need to be strictly observed. Whether the song contains musical indications or not, candidates are encouraged to interpret the score in a musical and stylistic way. For songs in a jazz style, candidates may add slight embellishment, as stylistically appropriate, but not include extensive improvisation. Examiners' marking will be determined by how candidates' decisions contribute to the musical outcome of each individual song and to the performance as a whole.

Performing from memory: All songs should be performed from memory, except for items from oratorios, cantatas and large-scale sacred works, where candidates are allowed to sing from a score, if they wish, in accordance with accepted performance practice.

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

Photocopies & downloads: Performing from unauthorised photocopies (or other kinds of copies) or illegal downloads of copyright editions is not allowed. ABRSM may withhold the exam result where we have 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.

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.

Singing repertoire lists

The repertoire lists will be included here soon. Until then, they can be found in the Practical Grades syllabus at www.abrsm.org/singing

Programme form – Performance Grades

Please show this completed form and your own-choice piece/song to the camera, and announce yourself (name, subject, grade) and your pieces/songs (titles, composers, list information) in the order you will be performing them, before beginning your performance.



Candidate name _____ Subject (instrument) _____ Grade _____

Piece/Song	Title	Composer	List*	Number*
1				
2				
3				
4				

Year of syllabus repertoire lists _____ Break (if taking) between pieces ___ and ___

Related instrument(s) (if used) _____

* Write 'OC' for your own-choice piece/song (unless from the repertoire lists); leave 'List' blank if a Snare Drum, Timpani or Tuned Percussion candidate

Additional information for own-choice piece/song (unless chosen from the repertoire lists)

Piece/ Song no.	Arranger (if applicable)	Book title	Publisher
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Programme form – Performance Grades



Please show this completed form and your own-choice piece/song to the camera, and announce yourself (name, subject, grade) and your pieces/songs (titles, composers, list information) in the order you will be performing them, before beginning your performance.

Candidate name _____

Subject (instrument) _____ Grade _____

Piece/Song	Title	Composer	List*	Number*
1				
<hr/>				
2				
<hr/>				
3				
<hr/>				
4				
<hr/>				

Year of syllabus repertoire lists _____ Break (if taking) between pieces ____ and ____

Related instrument(s) (if used) _____

Additional information for own-choice piece/song (unless chosen from the repertoire lists)

Piece/ Song no.	Arranger (if applicable)	Book title	Publisher
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* Write 'OC' for your own-choice piece/song (unless from the repertoire lists);
leave 'List' blank if a Snare Drum, Timpani or Tuned Percussion candidate