

Rockschool | Ukulele Syllabus 2019 | Free Choice Piece Guidance

General Guidance

Free choice pieces can be performed in place of Rockschool grade book arrangements (a maximum of two for a graded exam, or three for a performance certificate), provided they are of comparable standard (please see 'Free Choice Piece Features' below). They can be previous syllabus pieces, other hit tune arrangements or original compositions, including by the candidate him/herself. Arrangements can be performed with or without backing tracks, and can be shortened to suit the recommended duration boundaries, provided this is reflected in the audio (where used) and accompanying notation.

Candidates must bring two copies of sheet music if they are performing a Free Choice Piece; an original copy of the arrangement for the performance and a second copy (photocopy) for the examiner. The backing track audio (where used) can be on any portable device with a 3.5mm jack output. Please note that the audio cannot be streamed from a device and must be a downloaded audio file for accessible playback on the exam day. Scores must be fully staff notated and backing tracks must be without the examined part.

Note: the appropriate grade book must be brought into the exam.

Free Choice Pieces – Features

The following tables outline features that would normally be found within a free choice selection 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, or email freechoicepieceenquiries@rslawards.com with a copy of the sheet music to check the suitability of a free choice piece.

Note: please allow four weeks for a decision regarding the suitability of the submitted piece.

Examples of balancing judgements:

- **Key centre** | A chosen piece may have more or fewer accidentals in the key centre than shown in the guidelines, if balanced with compensating technical areas elsewhere
- **Chord Voicings** | Chord voicings might be simpler than shown in the guidelines, if the rate of harmonic change denotes a higher technical level
- **Tempo** | The suitability of the stated rhythmic values will be a consequence of the chosen tempo. As this is the case, each grade has a range of rhythmic values stated. At lower tempos, more complex rhythms and smaller rhythmic values are likely to be more prominent, whereas at higher tempos, the grade level can still be met by a prevalence of less complex rhythms and larger rhythmic values. Gauging this balance should be done in reference to the pieces in the Rockschool grade books.

Note: If pieces exceed the maximum recommended duration, the examiner reserves the right to bring the performance to a close if they feel the standard has been sufficiently evidenced.

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Debut

Duration	40 secs–1 min 20 secs
Tempo	60–160 bpm
Time Signatures	Simple time signatures, i.e. 4/4, 3/4
Rhythmic Values	Whole, half, quarter, 8th notes and rests, occasional dotted half notes or dotted quarter notes
Dynamics	None, or very simple/sparse
Articulation	None, or very simple/sparse
Harmonic Features & Tonality	Chord types generally will not extend beyond triads, and tonality will be predominantly diatonic
Melodic Features	Melodies will be predominantly diatonic Intervallic transitions will be stepwise or small (for example, crossing strings)
Physical Techniques	Chord shapes will be simple and predominantly in open or first position Harmonic rate of change will be fairly slow giving time for preparation There may be basic or infrequent muting techniques required in either hand

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 1

Duration	50 secs – 1 min 30 secs
Tempo	60-170 bpm
Time Signatures	Simple, or basic compound time signatures, i.e. 4/4, 3 /4, 6/8
Rhythmic Values	As shown in Debut, <i>plus</i> 8th notes and rests, occasional dotted 8th notes, 8 th note syncopation, occasional 16th notes, and very occasional non-complex triplet groupings
Dynamics	Simple dynamics [P, F, MP, MF]. Subtle transitions will be very infrequent
Articulation	Simple/sparse, with infrequent variation
Harmonic Features & Tonality	Harmony will generally will not extend beyond triads, and tonality will be predominantly diatonic, but there may be occasional closely related non-diatonic chords, or occasional dominant 7ths
Melodic Features	Melodies will be predominantly diatonic Intervallic transitions will be stepwise or small (for example, crossing strings)
Physical Techniques	Chord shapes will be simple and predominantly in open or first position Melodic passages will remain on single strings, or move at a moderate tempo to an adjacent string. Simple string skipping may feature. Melodic work might be harmonised with occasional double stops Basic muting techniques may be required in either hand, and occasional simple legato techniques may appear (hammer-ons, pull-offs, slides)

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 2

Duration	1 min 10 secs–1 min 45 secs
Tempo	60-170 bpm
Time Signatures	4/4 (straight or swung), 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 12/8
Rhythmic Values	As shown in previous grades <i>plus</i> 16th notes and rests, dotted 8th notes, syncopations, some 16th note syncopation, non-complex triplet groupings
Dynamics	Simple dynamics [P, F, MP, MF], crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation	Simple/sparse, with infrequent variation
Melodic Features	Melodies will be predominantly diatonic but chromatic notes may occur
Harmonic Features & Tonality	Chord types might extend to 7ths, and tonality will be predominantly diatonic, but there may be occasional non-diatonic chords
Physical Techniques	Chords may feature partial barre shapes, or very occasional full barre shapes Melodic passages may move at a faster rate between strings. String skipping may feature more frequently Melodic work might be harmonised with occasional 6ths or thirds There may be more frequent transitions between melodic and chordal passages Basic muting techniques may be required in either hand, and simple legato techniques may appear (hammer-ons, pull-offs, slides)

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 3

Duration	1 min 30 secs –2 mins
Tempo	60-180 bpm
Time Signatures	4/4 (straight or swung), 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 12/8
Rhythmic Values	As shown in previous grades <i>plus</i> quarter note triplets and 16th note syncopation. There may be some variation in 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 (>), <i>sFz</i>
Articulation	Staccato, tenuto and/or accents may occur with some variation
Melodic Features	Melodies will be predominantly diatonic but chromatic notes may occur
Harmonic Features & Tonality	Chord types might extend to 7ths, and tonality will be predominantly diatonic, but there may be occasional closely related non-diatonic chords
Physical Techniques	Melodic passages might incorporate basic string skipping and position shifts Full barre shapes may be required in chordal work Harmonic rate of change is moderate but might include some more challenging sequences Rhythmic groupings may differ more frequently Muting and legato techniques might be more frequent Simple expressive/physical techniques such as spread chords may feature
Solo/Development	Open, solo or development sections are not obligatory, but if included should not exceed 8 bars' length as a guide.

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 4

Duration	1 min 45 secs–2 min 15 secs
Tempo	60-180 bpm
Time Signatures	6/4, 4/4 (straight or swung), 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 12/8. Time signature changes may occur
Rhythmic Values	As shown in previous grades. Simpler rhythms may appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work). There may be some variation in permutations of rhythmic groupings
Dynamics	[PP, MP, P, MF, F, FF], crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & Phrasing	Moderate variation in articulation and phrasing. Moderate frequency of hammer-ons, pull-offs and slides, with some repetition or extension
Melodic Features	Intervallic transitions over an octave may occur, and some non-diatonic notes might occur
Harmonic Features & Tonality	Chords might occasionally extend beyond 7ths, and tonality may be diatonic or based in a modal key centre. Some non-diatonic chords might occur
Physical Techniques	Melodic passages can skip strings more frequently, and incorporate some position shifts Melodic work might be harmonised with thirds, sixths or octaves There may be some variation in muting and legato techniques, with moderate technical challenges Melody and accompaniment voicings may appear in one part There may be some variation in voicings and accompaniment styles within sections Expressive techniques such as spread chords may occur Campanella style melodies may occur Natural harmonics or special effects such as percussive may feature infrequently
Solo/Development	Open solo or development sections are not obligatory, but if included should not exceed 16 bars' length as a guide

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 5

Duration	2 mins–2 mins 45 secs
Tempo	60-160 bpm
Time Signatures	6/4, 4/4 (straight or swung), 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 12/8. There may be occasional time signature changes
Rhythmic Values	As previous grades plus occasional 32nd notes and 16 th note triplet groupings. Simpler rhythms appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work). There may be some variation in permutations of rhythmic groupings
Dynamics	[PP, MP, P, MF, F, FF], crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & Phrasing	Moderate variation in articulation and phrasing. Moderate frequency of hammer-ons, pull-offs and slides, with some repetition or extension
Melodic Features	Intervallic transitions over an octave may be regular, and melodies may feature non-diatonic notes at regular points
Harmonic Features & Tonality	Chords types might extend to 9ths, and include occasional alterations or non-diatonic chord tones
Physical Techniques	<p>Melodic passages might incorporate moderate string skipping and position shifts</p> <p>Melodic work might be harmonised with thirds, sixths or octaves</p> <p>Melody and accompaniment voicings may appear in one part</p> <p>There may be some variation in muting and legato techniques, with moderate technical challenges</p> <p>There may be some variation in voicings and accompaniment styles within sections</p> <p>Expressive techniques such as spread chords may occur</p> <p><i>Campanella</i> style melodies may occur</p> <p>Natural harmonics may feature</p>
Solo/Development	Open solo or development sections are not obligatory, but if included should not exceed 16 bars' length as a guide

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 6

Duration	2 min 15 secs–3 mins
Tempo	50-200 bpm
Time Signatures	6/4, 4/4 (straight or swung), 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 9/8, 12/8. There may be time signature changes, or occasional irregular time signatures such as 5/4, 5/8, 7/8 etc
Rhythmic Values	As previous grades. Permutations of rhythmic groupings may show some complexity
Dynamics	Any, with changes
Articulation & Phrasing	Regular variation of articulation, including some differentiation between voices in the same part
Melodic Features	Melodic content may be diatonic or based on modal scales, and there may be frequent chromaticism
Harmonic Features & Tonality	Chords may occasionally extend beyond 9ths, and include occasional alterations or simple substitutions. Modal interchange and temporary modulations may occur
Physical Techniques	Chordal work might involve rootless voicings, cluster voicings or extension notes There may be variety in voicings and accompaniment styles within sections Special expressive effects such as harmonics and body percussion may feature A range of legato and non-legato techniques may feature, presenting some advanced challenges <i>Campanella</i> style and <i>rasgueado</i> techniques may feature
Solo/Development	Open solo or development sections are not obligatory, but if included should not exceed 16 bars' length as a guide

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 7

Duration	2 mins 30 secs–3 mins 30 secs
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). Triplet figures will show more complexity
Dynamics	Any, with changes, and including strong contrasts
Articulation & Phrasing	Regular variation of articulation, including some differentiation between voices in the same part. Subtlety of control between legato and staccato will be required and there may be different articulations occurring simultaneously
Melodic Features	Melodic content may be diatonic or based on modal scales, and there may be frequent chromaticism
Harmonic Features & Tonality	Chord voicings may regularly extend beyond 9ths, and include alterations/substitutions. Modal interchange may occur. Temporary modulations may occur more frequently
Physical Techniques	<p>Voicings and accompaniment styles within sections will show depth and variety of technique</p> <p>Alternate tunings may be required</p> <p>Special expressive effects such as harmonics and body percussion may feature</p> <p>A range of legato and non-legato techniques may feature, presenting some advanced challenges</p> <p>A range of expressive techniques may feature, presenting some advanced challenges</p> <p><i>Campanella</i> style and <i>rasgueado</i> techniques may feature</p>
Solo/Development	Open solo or development sections are not obligatory, but if included should not exceed 16 bars' length as a guide

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). Triplet rhythms may be complex
Dynamics	Any, with changes, and including strong contrasts
Articulation & Phrasing	Regular variation of articulation, including differentiation between voices in the same part. Subtlety of control between legato and staccato will be required and there may be different articulations occurring simultaneously
Melodic Features	Melodic content may be diatonic or based on modal scales, and there may be frequent chromaticism or challenging intervals
Harmonic Features & Tonality	Chord voicings may regularly extend beyond 9ths. Chordal voicings may be more advanced, denser and/or more frequent, differ regularly, and include alterations. Modal interchange may occur. Temporary modulations may occur frequently
Physical Techniques	Voicings and accompaniment styles within sections will show depth and variety of technique Alternate tunings may be required Special expressive effects such as harmonics and body percussion may feature A range of legato and non-legato techniques may feature, presenting some advanced challenges A range of expressive techniques may feature, presenting some advanced challenges <i>Campanella</i> style and <i>rasgueado</i> techniques may feature
Solo/Development	Open solo or development sections are not obligatory, but if included should not exceed 16 bars' length as a guide