

RSL Classical Piano Syllabus 2020 | Free Choice Piece Guidance

General Guidance

Free choice pieces can be performed in place of RSL Classical Piano grade book pieces (*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). A Free Choice Piece can be chosen from any other exam board's repertoire lists, but this is not mandatory and other non-graded repertoire may be submitted. Candidates may also submit original compositions. 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 the 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 RSL 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
Key	C major / A minor
Tempo	60-130 bpm
Time Signatures	4/4, 3/4
Rhythmic Values	Quavers and rests, occasional dotted crotchets
Dynamics	Very simple/sparse
Articulation & Phrasing	Very simple/sparse
Melodic Features	Mainly stepwise movement or small intervallic transitions
Harmonic Features	Occasional two-note chords in one hand (three-note chords will be between both hands)
Rhythmic Features	Non-complex rhythmic groupings

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 1

Duration	50 secs – 1 min 30 secs
Key	One sharp or one flat, or no sharps or flats but accidentals may occur within the piece
Tempo	60-140 bpm
Time Signatures	4/4, 3/4, 6/8
Rhythmic values	Quavers and rests, dotted quavers and syncopations, occasional semiquavers, occasional non-complex triplet groupings
Dynamics	Simple dynamics
Articulation & Phrasing	Simple changes in articulation and phrasing, occasional slurs and simple occasional use of staccato and accented articulation may occur.
Melodic features	Mainly stepwise movement or small intervallic transitions
Harmonic features	Two-note chords in one hand, occasional three-note chords, four-note chords will generally be spread across both hands
Rhythmic features	Rhythms will be simple; simultaneously differing patterns will be limited

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 2

Recommended Maximum Duration	1 min 10 secs–1 min 45 secs
Key	Two sharps or flats (or fewer, but accidentals may occur within the piece)
Tempo	60-140 bpm
Time Signatures	4/4, 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 9/8, 12/8
Rhythmic values	Semiquavers and rests, dotted quavers and syncopations, occasional semiquaver syncopation, non-complex triplet groupings. Simpler rhythms may appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work)
Dynamics	Simple dynamics [<i>P</i> , <i>F</i> , <i>MP</i> , <i>MF</i>], crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & Phrasing	Frequent changes in articulation and phrasing, slurs and simple use of staccato/accented articulation may occur.
Melodic features	Greater intervallic transitions and more frequent accidentals may occur
Harmonic features	Two-note chords in one hand, occasional three-note chords, four-note chords will generally be spread across both hands
Rhythmic features	Rhythmic groupings may differ more frequently between hands

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 3

Duration	1 min 30 secs –2 mins
Key	Three sharps or flats (or fewer, but accidentals may occur within the piece)
Tempo	60-150 bpm
Time Signatures	4/4, 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 9/8, 12/8
Rhythmic values	Semiquavers and rests, syncopation, triplet groupings. Simpler rhythms may appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work)
Dynamics	[<i>P, F, MP, MF</i>], crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & Phrasing	Articulation and phrasing will have variety and may differ between hands at simultaneous points
Melodic Features	Greater intervallic transitions may appear spanning over an octave, and more frequent accidentals may occur
Harmonic Features	Three note chords may appear in either hand, occasional four note chords in either hand may be present
Rhythmic Features	Rhythmic groupings may differ more frequently between hands or occur simultaneously
Other Features	Melody and accompaniment voicings may appear in one hand; musical passages may spread between both hands

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 4

Duration	1 min 45 secs–2 min 15 secs
Key	Four sharps or flats (or fewer, but accidentals may occur within the piece) There may be very occasional, simple key changes
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
Rhythmic values	Semiquavers and rests in more complex groupings, occasional demisemiquavers, syncopation. Simpler rhythms appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work)
Dynamics	[<i>P, F, MP, MF</i>], crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & Phrasing	Articulation and phrasing will have variety and may differ between hands at simultaneous points
Melodic Features	Intervallic transitions may span over an octave and frequent accidentals may occur
Harmonic Features	Five note chords may appear in either hand, and partial chords may be combined with melodic elements
Rhythmic Features	Rhythmic groupings may differ more frequently between hands or occur simultaneously
Other Features	Variety in voicings and accompaniment styles within sections

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 5

Duration	2 mins–2 mins 45 secs
Key	Five sharps or flats (or fewer, but accidentals may occur within the piece) There may be occasional key centre changes
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
Rhythmic values	Semiquavers and rests in more complex groupings, occasional demisemiquavers, semiquaver syncopation. Simpler rhythms appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work)
Dynamics	<i>[P, F, MP, MF]</i> , crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & Phrasing	Articulation and phrasing will have variety and may differ between hands at simultaneous points. More subtlety of control between legato and staccato will likely be required
Melodic Features	Intervallic transitions over an octave may be regular, and frequent accidentals may occur
Harmonic Features	Five note chords may appear in either hand, and partial chords may be combined with melodic elements. Chordal cluster voicings may be more advanced or more frequent
Rhythmic Features	Rhythmic groupings may differ frequently between hands and occur simultaneously; faster note values may be more repetitive/continuous
Other Features	Variety in voicings and accompaniment styles within sections

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 6

Duration	2 min 15 secs–3 mins
Key	Six sharps or flats (or fewer, but accidentals may occur within the piece) There may be key centre changes
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 occasional irregular time signatures
Rhythmic values	Semiquavers and rests in more complex groupings, semiquaver triplets, demisemiquavers and frequent syncopation may occur. Simpler rhythms will appear in conjunction with other elements (e.g. more detailed harmonic work)
Dynamics	<i>[PP, F, MP, MF, FF]</i> , crescendo (<) and diminuendo (>)
Articulation & Phrasing	Articulation and phrasing will have variety and may differ between hands at simultaneous points.
Melodic Features	Intervallic transitions over an octave may be regular, and frequent accidentals may occur
Harmonic Features	Five note chords may appear in either hand, and partial chords may be combined with melodic elements. Chordal cluster voicings may be more advanced, denser and/or more frequent
Rhythmic Features	Rhythmic groupings may differ frequently between hands and occur simultaneously; faster note values may be more repetitive/continuous
Other Features	Variety in voicings and accompaniment styles within sections

FREE CHOICE PIECE GUIDELINES | Grade 7

Duration	2 mins 30 secs–3 mins 30 secs
Key	Seven sharps or flats (or fewer, but accidentals may occur within the piece) There may be more frequent key centre changes
Tempo	50-200 bpm
Time Signatures	Any, with changes
Rhythmic values	Any, up to demisemiquavers. Complex combinations beyond semiquaver 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)
Dynamics	Any, with changes, and including strong contrasts
Articulation & Phrasing	Articulation and phrasing will have variety and may differ between hands at simultaneous points. Subtlety of control between legato and staccato will be required
Melodic Features	Intervallic transitions over an octave may be regular, and frequent accidentals may occur
Harmonic Features	Five note chords may appear in either hand, and partial chords may be combined with melodic elements. Chordal cluster voicings may be more advanced, denser and/or more frequent
Rhythmic Features	Rhythmic groupings may differ frequently between hands and occur simultaneously; faster note values will be more repetitive/continuous and combine in both hands
Other Features	Voicings and accompaniment styles within sections will show depth and variety of technique Cadenzas may feature

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 semiquaver 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)
Dynamics	Any, with changes, and including strong contrasts
Articulation & Phrasing	Articulation and phrasing will have wide variety and may differ between hands at simultaneous points throughout. Subtlety of control between legato and staccato will be required
Melodic Features	Intervallic transitions over an octave may be regular, and frequent accidentals may occur
Harmonic Features	Five note chords may appear in either hand, and partial chords may be combined with melodic elements. Chordal voicings may be more advanced, denser and/or more frequent, and differ regularly
Rhythmic Features	Rhythmic groupings may differ frequently between hands and occur simultaneously; faster note values will be more repetitive/continuous and combine in both hands
Other Features	Voicings and accompaniment styles within sections will show advanced depth and variety of technique Cadenzas may feature