

# General Musicianship Questions

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Each Rockschool grade exam ends with five questions asked by the examiner. The examiner will ask you these questions using a piece played by you as a starting point. In Grades 1-6, you will be asked questions in two main areas: (i) music notation and (ii) knowledge of the guitar (including amplification). Grades 7 & 8 will include a third category of question concerning history and style.

Here are some sample questions that are typically asked by Rockschool's examiners grade by grade, along with sample answers typically given by candidates. As a general rule, in Grades 1-3, examiners will ask candidates 4 questions on the music notation and one instrument question. In Grades 4-6 the instrument knowledge questions may also include cover guitar amplification and effects. In Grades 7 & 8 you can expect questions to cover all three categories of notation, style and instrument knowledge. Please note that these are indicative questions and some may be asked in more than one grade.

## Grade 1

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece 'Head On', page 5.

Q: What does 4/4 mean?

A: Four quarter (crotchet) notes in a bar

Q: How many beats is that note worth (examiner selects a half (minim) note)?

A: Two beats

Q: What is the pitch of the first note?

A: E

Q: What is the difference between a major and a minor chord?

A: A major chord sounds 'happy' and a minor chord sounds 'sad' OR A major chord has a major third and a minor chord has a minor third

Instrumental question:

Q: Where is/are: the nut/pick-ups/neck/frets on your guitar?

## Grade 2

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece 'Blue Phones', page 8.

Q: What do we call the two notes played at the beginning?

A: Eighth (quaver) notes

Q: What does *f* mean?

A: Loud (*forte*)

Q: What value is the rest in the first bar of line two?

A: Eighth (quaver) note rest

Q: what do these signs mean in bar 10?

A: Repeat marks: play the same bar again

Q: How is a major chord made up?

A: A root note (1<sup>st</sup> note), major third (3<sup>rd</sup> note), perfect fifth (5<sup>th</sup> note) of the major scale

Instrument question:

Q: What do the volume and tone controls do?

A: The volume makes the sound louder or softer. The tone control gives more treble or more bass, depending on the setting.

## Grade 3

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece 'Been There', pages 6-7.

Q: What do the symbols at the beginning of the first bar refer to?

A: The key signature

Q: What is the value of the final rest in the last bar?

A: Two beats (half note or minim)

Q: What is this mark over the B<sup>b</sup> in line 5?

A: It is an accent mark

Q: What does the dot above a note mean?

A: Play the note short or *staccato*

Instrument question:

Q: How do you get distortion from most standard amps?

A: You turn down the volume and turn up the gain

#### Grade 4

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece 'Rage Against Everything', pages 10-11.

Q: What is the difference between the two markings at the beginning of bars three and four?

A: Bar three contains a sharp sign and bar four is a natural sign

Q: What do the markings '*f*' and '*mp*' mean?

A: Loud and moderately quiet (*forte* & *mezzo piano*)

Q: In bar 20, what type of notes are these and what does 'pm' mean?

A: These are sixteenth notes (semiquavers) and 'pm' means palm muting

Q: Explain what you do at the D.C. al Coda marking

A: At this point you return to the beginning and play until you see the Coda sign and then skip to the Coda

Instrument question:

Q: How would you tune your guitar without using a tuner?

A: Tune to the fifth/fourth fret or use harmonics

#### Grade 5

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece 'All Funked Up', pages 10-11.

Q: What do these signs mean in bar one, line three?

A: A slide and an accent

Q: Explain how you would construct a dominant seventh chord

A: A dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chord is made up of the root, major 3<sup>rd</sup>, perfect 5<sup>th</sup> and flattened 7<sup>th</sup> notes of a major scale

Q: Name the pitches of the two notes in bar one, line four

A: C# and E

Q: What is another name for a 5 chord (eg A5)?

A: A power chord

Instrument question:

Q: Which position would you choose on your pick up selector for this piece? What type of sound are you creating?

A: The neck pick up will give you the brighter tone found in funk rhythm

#### Grade 6

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece 'Big, Big, Big', pages 4-5.

Q: Can you point out and describe three physical/expressive techniques in this piece?

A: Palm muting, vibrato and bends

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Q: The direction *to neck pickup* at bar 25 creates a more mellow sound. Why is this?

A: The aim is create variety in the overdrive sound at a point where the song shifts to a higher register

Q: How is a minor 9<sup>th</sup> chord constructed?

A: Root, minor 3<sup>rd</sup>, perfect 5<sup>th</sup>, minor 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>

Q: Could you please tell me the notes of an A harmonic minor scale?

A: A, B, C, D, E, F, G#, A or tone equivalent

Instrumental question:

Q: What is a truss rod used for in a guitar?

A: The truss rod is a part of a guitar used to stabilise the profile (or 'relief') of the neck. Usually it is a steel rod running inside the neck and has a bolt used for adjustment of tension.

### Grade 7

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece 'Third Degree', pages 10-13.

Q: Explain how the tapped harmonics technique works in bar 2

A: Tapped harmonics are an extension of the tapping technique. The note is fretted as usual, but instead of striking the string, the string is tapped at one of the places where natural harmonics occur.

Q: What are the notes of the G lydian mode?

A: G, A, B, C#, D, E, F# and G

Q: In a Sus2 chord, what note is not often included?

A: The major third

Q: Name and demonstrate three techniques in this piece.

A: Bends, artificial harmonics and slides

Instrumental and history question:

Q: The piece is styled 'Van Halen Rock'. What can you tell me about this style?

A: Van Halen was a band formed by Edward van Halen and his brother Alex which had a great deal of success in the late 70s and throughout the 1980s. Edward van Halen is credited with revolutionising the sound of the guitar by his use of the tapping technique.

### Grade 8

The theory questions here refer to the performance piece '667', pages 4-6.

Q: The Coda uses 4/4, 12/8 and 3/4. Can you please explain these to me?

A: The first is four quarter (crotchet) notes to the bar; the second is twelve eighth (quaver) notes to the bar and the third is three quarter notes to the bar

Q: What is the key signature in the 3/4 section?

A: Four sharps: F#, C#, G# and D#

Q: This is in the key of E major. What note does the Aeolian mode begin on and how is it constructed?

A: C#. The notes of the mode are: C#, D#, E, F#, G#, A, B and C#

Q: What scale is being used in the sixteenth (semiquaver) note run in the last bar on line 3, page 4?

A: The E natural minor scale

Instrumental and history question:

Q: Tell me about heavy metal music and name some important performers in this style

A: Heavy metal grew out of heavy rock in the late 60s with bands such as Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple. It is characterised by use of heavily distorted guitars, driving rhythms and a dense bass and drum style. There are now many different sub-genres of the music and it remains one of the most popular music forms in rock. Modern performers would include Metallica and Marilyn Manson.

# Guitar Notation Explained

**THE MUSICAL STAVE** shows pitches and rhythms and is divided by lines into bars. Pitches are named after the first seven letters of the alphabet.

**TABLATURE** graphically represents the guitar fingerboard. Each horizontal line represents a string, and each number represents a fret.

Notes: F D B G A E  
E D B G A E

Strings: E B G D A E

4<sup>th</sup> string, 2<sup>nd</sup> fret      Open D chord      Rhythm notation with suggested fingering      *Ad lib. and cont. sim.* sections are shown in slash notation

## Definitions For Special Guitar Notation

**HAMMER ON:** Pick the lower note, then sound the higher note by fretting it without picking.

**PULL OFF:** Pick the higher note then sound the lower note by lifting the finger without picking.

**SLIDE:** Pick the first note, then slide to the next with the same finger.

**STRING BENDS:** Pick the first note then bend (or release the bend) to the pitch indicated in brackets.

**GLISSANDO:** A small slide off of a note toward the end of its rhythmic duration. Do not slide 'into' the following note – subsequent notes should be repicked.

**VIBRATO:** Vibrate the note by bending and releasing the string smoothly and continuously.

**TRILL:** Rapidly alternate between the two bracketed notes by hammering on and pulling off.

**NATURAL HARMONICS:** Lightly touch the string above the indicated fret then pick to sound a harmonic.

**PINCHED HARMONICS:** Bring the thumb of the picking hand into contact with the string immediately after the pick.

**PICK HAND TAP:** Strike the indicated note with a finger from the picking hand. Usually followed by a pull off.

**FRET HAND TAP:** As pick hand tap, but use fretting hand. Usually followed by a pull off or hammer on.

**QUARTER TONE BEND:** Pick the note indicated and bend the string up by a quarter tone.

**PRE-BENDS:** Before picking the note, bend the string from the fret indicated between the staves, to the equivalent pitch indicated in brackets in the TAB

**WHAMMY BAR BEND:** Use the whammy bar to bend notes to the pitches indicated in brackets in the TAB

**D.%. al Coda**

**D.C. al Fine**

- Go back to the sign (%), then play until the bar marked *To Coda* ⊕ then skip to the section marked ⊕ *Coda*.
- Go back to the beginning of the song and play until the bar marked *Fine* (end).
- Repeat bars between signs.
- When a repeated section has different endings, play the first ending only the first time and the second ending only the second time.