



Recorded Digital Exams

A Guide



paa
Performance Arts Awards

YOUR PERSONALISED GUIDE TO TAKING PAA GRADED EXAMS VIA VIDEO SUBMISSION

Video has become a much easier tool to access over the past few years and even modest smart phones, tablets and cameras are capable of producing a good image and sound if you take a little bit of time to understand the hardware and follow a few simple guidelines.

RSL Awards is excited about the possibilities of digital video submission, but we do still need to make sure that the exams are fit for purpose and adhere to a reasonable set of principles, to ensure we can still provide the excellent level of fairness and consistency you would expect from an RSL Awards exam process.

All submissions will be marked by an official RSL Awards examiner in exactly the same way that they would be in a face-to-face exam.

Types of Exam

PAA graded exams can now be assessed via digital video across our suite of qualifications. These digital solutions are part of our commitment to making PAA graded exams as accessible as possible.

- Musical Theatre
- Jazz & Street Dance
- Acting
- Screen Acting
- Public Speaking

Please visit our Performance Arts Page to download all PAA Performing Arts Syllabus:

<https://www.rslawards.com/performing-arts-grades/>

How to Register for a Video Exam

To register for a video exam, candidates (or their parents or their teacher) should fill in the online entry form with information about the candidate(s) and the exam (discipline, grade).

After the online entry is submitted and confirmed, you will be sent a link for the Digital Exam fee payment. Once the payment is received, you will receive a link to a secure portal to upload your exam video.

Please Note:

From the point of payment*, candidates have 3 MONTHS to then record and upload the exam submission.

*Exam fees will not be subject to refund once the candidates have been confirmed and payment made.

After uploading the recording of the exam, the candidate can relax, and we will send a notification when the result is available.

We will then produce the official qualification certificate which confirms the award of the qualification. A minimum of 'Pass' is required to receive the certificate.

Checklist:

- Read up on all information about how to record digital exams
- Fill in the entry form and complete exam session sheet
- Pay for the Exam
- Record the Exam Performance
- Upload the recording
- Await results. We aim to send these by email within 3-4 weeks after submission, and the certificate will be posted after.

Musical Theatre

At all grades you can submit recorded digital exams for a Musical Theatre Group or Show Exam. It is important to remember a few things to ensure the exam does not break any rules:

Performance

Group Exam – 2-8 candidates per exam

- There must be a minimum of two and a maximum of eight candidates entering for an exam.
- All candidates must be fully visible.
- The whole exam must be recorded continuously in one take, as if it was a live exam, with no editing permitted.
- Grades 6-8 candidates should clearly display a valid photographic identification (such as Passport, Driving License, Student Union Card, ID Card) at the start of the video recording for at least ten seconds, in line with our policy.
- The Group Performance must adhere to the maximum duration indicated in the syllabus at the relevant grade.
- The music operator or principal must be visible on the video. They must not be positioned out of shot.
- Staff or audience members must not lead, direct or influence the candidates during any component of the examination.

Show Exams – 9-16 candidates per exam

- All candidates must be fully visible.
- For singing and dancing, candidates must be split into groups of maximum eight for their song/dance. The song/dance should then be repeated with the other group of eight performing.
- The exam must be continuous, as if it was a live exam. However, if it cannot be guaranteed that there is enough memory in the camera to capture the whole exam, it is permissible to submit two videos, as follows:
 - Group performance video, time dated.
 - Technical Skills Demonstration and Understanding & Reflection video, time dated.

The time difference between the end of the performance video and the start of the Technical Skills video must be no more than 20 minutes.

- The video should capture the entire performance space from the front, as if from the vantage point of the examiner. Different camera angles, close-ups etc. should not be used.
- The music operator or principal will undertake the running of the exam, including introducing the exam session at the start (School name, date, candidate names and numbers) and introducing each exam component (Performance, Technical Skills Demonstration, and Understanding & Reflection).
- Grades 6-8 candidates should clearly display a valid photographic identification (such as Passport, Driving Licence, Student Union Card, ID Card) at the start of the video recording for at least ten seconds, in line with our policy.
- For the Performance only, an audience is permitted; however, as the video is continuous, the time taken to seat the audience must be minimal. The audience does not need to be in shot.
- Staff or audience members must not lead, direct or influence the candidates during any component of the examination.

RSL has provided an example script to assist when conducting a musical theatre digital video examination.
<https://www.rslawards.com/musical-theatre-exams/>

Technical Skills Demonstration

Debut

- Candidates should be organised into groups of no more than 8, and demonstrate **all four** characters (Lion, Witch, Monkey, Clown) to the set music.
- The examiner will select at random **one** of the demonstrations to watch and assess.

Singing and Dance - Grades 1-8:

- Grades 1, 2 or 3, candidates should perform in groups of **no more than four**.
- Grades 4 or 5, candidates should perform solo or in groups of **no more than four**.
- Grades 6, 7 or 8, candidates should perform solo or in groups of **no more than two**.

Acting - Grades 1, 2 or 3:

- Grades 1, 2 or 3, candidates should be arranged into pairs or threes **by the teacher**.
- **All** scenarios should be demonstrated at the relevant grade. Candidates should state which of them is A, which is B, and, if applicable, C, to camera prior to their technical demonstration.
- The examiner will select at random **one** of the scenarios to watch and assess.

Acting - Grade 4:

- Candidates should be arranged into pairs or threes **by the teacher**, where they will be required to perform the set Grade 4 scenario. Candidates should state which **character status** they have chosen (from the given list stated in the syllabus), prior to their technical demonstration.

Acting - Grade 5:

- Candidates should be arranged into pairs or threes by the teacher, where they will be required to perform the set Grade 4 scenario. Candidates should state which character objective they have chosen (from the given list stated in the syllabus), prior to their technical demonstration.

Acting - Grade 6, 7 & 8:

- Candidates are required to perform one monologue lasting between 45 to 60 seconds or one duologue lasting between 60 and 75 seconds.

Understanding and Reflection

Each candidate must select one question from List A and one question from List B and present their responses to the questions. Please see the syllabus specifications for grade- by-grade questions.

- Facing directly to camera, each candidate should announce their chosen questions followed by presenting their response to each question.
- Small notecards may be used if required, but only as a reminder of the questions chosen. Candidates must not read their responses. If notecards are used, they must be handheld, and not positioned out of camera shot.

Jazz & Street Dance

**At all grades you can submit recorded digital exams for a Jazz or Street Dance Exam.
It is important to remember a few things to ensure the exam does not break any rules:**

- There is a minimum of one candidate and a maximum of eight candidates per digital video exam.
- All candidates must be fully visible.
- For Grades 6–8 candidates should clearly display for at least ten seconds valid photographic identification (such as Passport, Driving License, Student Union Card, ID Card) at the start of the video recording in line with our policy.
- The whole exam must be recorded continuously in one take, as if it was a live exam, with no editing permitted.
- The Dance Performance must adhere to the maximum duration indicated in the syllabus at the relevant grade.
- The music operator or principal must be visible on the video. They must not be positioned out of shot.
- Staff members must not lead, direct or influence the candidates during any component of the examination.
- The music operator will undertake the running of the exam, including introducing the exam session at the start (school name, date, candidate names and numbers) and introducing each exercise/dance routine.

RSL has provided example scripts (for both Street Dance and Jazz Dance) to assist when conducting a dance digital video examination.

<https://www.rslawards.com/learn-street-dance/>

<https://www.rslawards.com/jazz-dance-exams/>

Improvisation/Freestyle (Grades 4-8 only)

For the Improvisation/Freestyle component, the examiner will email a link to the dance track (chosen by the examiner) on the morning of the exam day. At the appropriate time in the exam, the music operator must play this track for approximately one minute, and the candidates listen. The candidates will then improvise for the correct amount of time, as specified in the syllabus at the relevant grade.

Dance Performance

- There should be no more than six candidates for the performance component. If there are seven or eight candidates taking the exam, the music operator should split candidates into two groups.
- All candidates should be fully visible throughout the examination. The video should capture the entire performance space from the front, as if from the vantage point of the examiner. Different camera angles, close-ups etc. should not be used.
- The music operator will run the exam, including introducing the exam session at the start (school name, date, candidate names and numbers) and each exercise/dance routine. RSL has provided example scripts (for both Street Dance and Jazz Dance) to assist when conducting a dance video examination.

Public Speaking

At all grades you can submit recorded digital exams for a Graded Public Speaking Exam via video submission. For RSL Recorded Digital exams to be valid, there are a few rules you must adhere to:

- The whole exam needs to be captured as a single, continuous shot in real time - you must not stop or pause the camera between tasks.
- Candidates should introduce themselves by stating their full name and the exam grade they are taking.
- For Grades 6-8, candidates should clearly display for at least ten seconds valid photographic identification (such as Passport, Driving License, Student Union Card, ID Card) at the start of the video recording in line with our policy.
- You must not use video editing software to cut out takes or reduce the time between tasks - the video should represent an exam taken in person as closely as possible, so do not worry if there is a short pause between tasks if the candidate needs, for example, a sip of water.
- For Premiere/Debut Task 1, and Grades 1-8 Tasks 1 and 2, the candidate's whole face and body must be visible in the video -please refer to the framing guide for further details.
- For the final task (Premiere/Debut Task 2, and Grades 1-8 Task 3) the learner may move nearer to the camera to answer the questions, but with their head and shoulders clearly visible.
- All tasks may be presented from a seated position if necessary. Another person is permitted to be present in the room in order to operate the camera. However, the other person is not permitted to interact with the candidate or intervene in the exam.
- Schools/organisations may video multiple candidates, presenting their exam one after the other, without turning off the camera. The file size submitted **must not exceed 2GB**.

RSL has provided further guidance to assist when conducting a public speaking digital video examination, please visit: <https://www.rslawards.com/learn-public-speaking/>

Acting

At all grades you can submit recorded digital exams for a Graded Acting Exam via video submission. For RSL Acting Recorded Video exams to be valid, there are a number of rules you must adhere to:

- The performance needs to be captured as a single, continuous shot in real time - you must not stop or pause the camera in between scenes.
- Candidates should introduce themselves by stating their full name and exam grade, and each scene.
- For Grades 6-8, candidates should clearly display for at least ten seconds valid photographic identification (such as Passport, Driving License, Student Union Card, ID Card) at the start of the video recording in line with our policy.
- Candidates taking grades 6-8 should outline the context of each scene, as required by the syllabus.
- You must not use video editing software to cut out takes or reduce the time between scenes, the video should represent an exam taken in person as closely as possible, so do not worry about taking a little time to reset between scenes.
- After the performance, **with the camera still rolling**, present your responses to the chosen questions as required for the Knowledge and Understanding component.
- The candidate's whole face and body must be visible in the video -please refer to the framing guide for further details.
- Another person is permitted to be present in the room to operate the camera. However, the other person is not permitted to interact with the candidate or intervene in the exam.

RSL has provided example scripts to assist when conducting an acting digital video examination.

<https://www.rslawards.com/acting-exams/>

Screen Acting

RSL Graded Screen Acting exams are only available via recorded digital video submission.

- Only one camera/smartphone must be used for filming.
- A separate video must be made for every task.
- Videos must not be edited.
- The file size limit for **all videos** in one exam is 2GB.
- Please note that if a file exceeds this limit the applicant will be asked to resend the video(s) in a smaller file size.
- Another person may be present to operate the camera. However, the other person is not permitted to interact with the candidate or intervene in the exam, except for introducing the candidate, if required.
- Pdf copies of Task 1 (Grades 1-8), Task 3 (Grades 6), and Task 3a (Grade 7/8) performance should be submitted at the point of upload.
- Prior to the performance of Task 1, Grades 6-8 candidates should clearly display valid photographic identification (such as Passport, Driving License, Student Union Card, ID Card) for at least ten seconds, in line with our policy.
- Prior to the performance of every task (therefore every video submitted), candidates state the task number, to camera. For younger candidates, this can be done by the camera operator. Grades 1-8 candidates must ensure they have included the required contextual introductions to scenes/scenarios, which vary dependent upon the grade. Please see the syllabus specifications at the relevant grade for full details.
- Task 4 - Knowledge and Understanding video (Grades Debut – 8):
 - Candidates state “Task 4” then present their prepared response(s) to the questions (the number of which is dependent upon the grade), direct to the camera.
 - For exams with two candidates, one Task 4 recording must be made, and each candidate states their name and presents their prepared responses in turn.
- Upload the video recordings **as one package** ensuring:
 - Each video is clearly labelled with the candidates’ name(s), the grade taken, and the task number.
 - The package containing the videos is labelled with the candidate’s name(s) and the grade taken.
 - Candidates entering in twos upload the videos to one shared package, clearly labelled with both of their names and the grade taken.
 - **Note that candidates entering in twos must be taking the same grade.**

Screen Acting upload checklist:

Premiere:

Solo candidate: Task 1, Task 2a, Task 2b, Task 3 = **TOTAL 4 VIDEOS**

Two candidates: Task 1, Task 2a, Task 2b x 2, Task 3 x 2 = **TOTAL 6 VIDEOS**

Debut:

Solo candidate: Task 1, Task 2a, Task 2b, Task 3, Task 4 = **TOTAL 5 VIDEOS**

Two candidates: Task 1, Task 2a, Task 2b x 2, Task 3 x 2, Task 4 = **TOTAL 7 VIDEOS**

Grade 1 to 3:

Solo candidate: Task 1, Task 2a, Task 2b, Task 3, Task 4 = **TOTAL 5 VIDEOS**

Two candidates: Task 1, Task 2a, Task 2b x 2, Task 3, Task 4 = **TOTAL 6 VIDEOS**

Grade 4 to 5:

Solo candidate: Task 1, Task 2a, Task 2b, Task 3, Task 4 = **TOTAL 5 VIDEOS**

Two candidates: Task 1, Task 2a x 2, Task 2b x 2, Task 3, Task 4 = **TOTAL 7 VIDEOS**

Grade 6:

Solo candidate: Task 1, Task 2a, Task 2b, Task 3, Task 4 = **TOTAL 5 VIDEOS**

Two candidates: Task 1, Task 2a x 2, Task 2b x 2, Task 3, Task 4 = **TOTAL 7 VIDEOS**

Grade 7:

Solo candidate: Task 1, Task 2a, Task 2b, Task 3a, Task 3b, Task 4 = **TOTAL 6 VIDEOS**

Two candidates: Task 1, Task 2a x 2, Task 2b x 2, Task 3a, Task 3b, Task 4 = **TOTAL 8 VIDEOS**

Grade 8:

Solo candidate: Task 1, Task 2a, Task 2b, Task 3a, Task 3b, Task 4 = **TOTAL 6 VIDEOS**

Two candidates: Task 1, Task 2a x 2, Task 2b x 2, Task 3a x 2, Task 3b, Task 4 = Video Exam Checklist **TOTAL 9 VIDEOS**

For further filming guidance and an example script for conducting a screen acting exam please visit:

<https://www.rslawards.com/screen-acting-exams/#filmingguidance>

Video Exam Checklist

- The whole exam must be recorded continuously in one take, with no editing permitted.
- All candidates must be fully visible.
- Upload the unedited video, ensuring the file size is no more than 2GB

Understanding Digital Video

We understand that it can get confusing just trying to understand all the words and codes used by companies to sell us their latest gadgets. You are likely to have come across terms like 720P, 1080HD or 4k - but may not know what any of the numbers or letters stand for. This part of the guide should help you navigate through the jargon and make the process easier.

Please read the guidance below in full to help you have the best chance of submitting a video that we can accept for submission and allow you to complete your RSL exam successfully.

What frame size should I set my equipment to use?

As a very rough rule, the larger the number stated, the more detail is captured within each video frame you record - but there is a downside. More detail often means bigger digital files - which require more storage and take longer to upload to the internet.

4k video can, and often does, look fantastic - but the file sizes are big and can cause some compatibility issues too. At the other end of the spectrum, if the frame size is too small, the images can look blurry or pixelated when you try and view them on computer monitors or tablets, so it is best to go for a happy medium - striking a balance between detail and file size.

Full HD (often referred to by the names 1080i or 1080P) is a very good happy medium. However, 720HD video can still look very good (720i or 720P) and will produce noticeably smaller file sizes. As a result, RSL is asking for a minimum of 720HD videos and currently setting a maximum of 1080HD, to ensure your picture quality is good whilst keeping the file sizes manageable. Please note that the current file size limit is 2GB.

What does the 'i' and/or 'P' after the numbers mean?

The 'i' stands for 'interlaced', meaning that the video file captured refreshes every other line of pixels every frame, so the video file actually contains half the amount of data. It refreshes very quickly, so you can't see the interlacing in a perfectly set up system. However, most mobile phones and cameras now only give you the option to record in a progressive format - meaning every line is captured. It's probably best to avoid interlaced formats if you can. If your settings don't mention it and your equipment is relatively modern, it's more than likely to be a progressive video format.

But what do those numbers actually mean?

Look at the chart below to see how each frame size relates to each other. This should also explain why 4k is so detailed, but why the file sizes are so big:

What frame rate should I use?

Frame rate has an impact on the perceived quality of video to an extent - a very low frame rate will result in jerky video. However, you don't need a huge number of frames per second before things start to look smooth. Feature films, for instance, typically use 24 frames per second. This is important, because mobile phone and camera manufacturers are currently increasing the frame rates that their devices can capture, largely so extreme slow-motion video can be produced. Whilst this is impressive, RSL don't need this - and the more frames your video contains, the bigger the file sizes get again.

So, it's for this reason RSL is asking you to set your frame rate to somewhere between 24 fps (frames per second) and 30fps. Typically, this will be a choice between 25fps and 30fps, depending on the hardware. This will generate video that is smooth but should keep your video file size manageable.



This figure refers to how many frames your camera captures every second. A camera that captures 30 frames per second (30fps) is essentially capturing 30 images which, when played at the correct speed, gives a good impression of natural movement.

What video format should I use?

Mobile phones and consumer cameras largely gather video and process them and store them in a file, which makes it easier to share using the internet. The results vary, but a well-designed video format can do an excellent job of retaining a good sound and image while squeezing it into a small package. The most common formats are .MP4 files which are a good choice, as they are both quite small and open across lots of devices, but .mov files and .Avi files are also well supported. If you are at all confused or concerned, it may be worth contacting RSL to check that your submitted video files will open.

Tip:

You should ensure that there is enough battery charge and storage on the device for the full length of the exam. With many devices such as mobile phones it is useful to have a memory card installed if the device offers this as a feature to extend storage. The app used for making the recording would typically have its settings adjusted to set the card as the destination for recordings.

To gauge the amount of storage required, a short 1-minute test recording could be made and then inspected for its size. This size would need to be multiplied with the number of minutes taken up by the exam. Please see the syllabus guide for exam durations.

Framing Guide for Video for Screen Acting

- We need to have a good view of the performance - you should capture your face and whole body clearly in the video frame.
- The room you choose should have easily enough space for any movement required in your scene(s), and free of furniture that may get in the way when you are performing. You may consider marking the boundaries.
- You could record yourself moving around the space, and watch the recording back, carefully checking that you will be in shot throughout your performance(s)
- The shot needs to be well lit: Please try and avoid shooting in very dark environments, as this significantly affects the video quality. If you can record your performance in a space with good natural light or have access to good photographic or stage lighting, the result will be better. Ensure you are lit from the front, and don't have a window behind you. Please avoid coloured or moving lights in your videos too - we need to see you clearly.
- Keep your footage as steady as possible. If you can use a tripod or some other kind of camera mount, that would be ideal. If you do need someone to hold a camera or phone, please ensure you keep the video as stable as possible and avoid zooming in or out during the exam. NB. For guidance on acting for close-up, please see the Definitions section, found later in this guide.

For solo candidates:

- In your close-up task, if you are directing your speech to another, imagined character, do not look directly at the camera, but slightly beyond the side edge of the camera, focusing on the imagined other character.

For candidates entering in twos:

- If your close-up task requires performing an extract from a duologue scene, the extract must be filmed twice, with the camera focused on each candidate in turn, framed in close-up. If you're the other actor in someone else's close-up scene, get as close to the camera as possible without it catching you (unless it's an over-the-shoulder shot – see below) so the main actor is captured clearly in the frame.
- It is suggested (but not mandatory) that you also have the edge of the other person in frame as well as yourself. This is known as an over-the-shoulder shot and is a common way of filming dialogue between two people. It is important to maintain eye contact with your acting partner for this shot. Remember not to look directly at the camera.

Framing an Over-the-Shoulder Close-up:

- This shot is achieved by moving the camera closer to you, just as if you were performing by yourself but then rotating yourself and your partner's body around so that you both remain within the backdrop and frame. As you are intending to have the edge of your performing partner's face as well as your own in shot you most likely will not need to move the camera in quite as close as if you were performing by yourself.
- Now that you have done the close-up shot for yourself you just need to repeat this shot so that your partner is the main focus and only the edge of yourself is seen.
- The simplest way to achieve this is by adjusting positions with each other and not altering the frame of the camera, whilst also swapping the shoulder you are filming over. For example, if you filmed over the right shoulder of the first person, film over the left shoulder of the second person.
- It is worth checking this before recording and maybe making slight adjustments, but in most cases, you will not have to move the camera.

How to position your camera / smartphone:

- The Screen Acting syllabus has been created for static camera shots. A static shot is a shot that is devoid of camera movement. This is why planning your shot first is useful.
- If another person is going to be holding the camera phone, they should keep the footage as steady as possible. If you can use a tripod or some other kind of camera mount, that would be ideal. If the camera phone is handheld, please ensure you keep the video as stable as possible and stick to the same guidelines below. Zooming in or out is not permitted.
- If you do not have a tripod, you need to hold the camera phone in place by other means. Hardback books, paper weights, place mats, whatever you find that works for you.



Audio Guide for Video

Avoid very noisy or reverberant spaces. Your examiner wants to give your performance their full attention, so avoid recording your exam in a space where there is likely to be background noise. Whilst you can record reasonable audio using a mobile phone in most instances, there are several devices you may wish to consider if you want to ensure your audio is of a good quality. Please see below for a list of devices and apps that RSL recommends that can help you improve audio quality when creating your video exam.

Recommended audio / video devices and apps

- Microphone for use with mobile phones (check for handset compatibility): Zoom iQ7, Shure MV88, RØDE iXY, RØDE VideoMic
- Mobile phone video apps that allow manual control of audio: FV-5 (supported Android devices) Filmic Pro (IOS devices and some supported Android devices)
- Dedicated video cameras for recording high quality audio: Zoom Q4, Zoom Q2n

Revision History

September 2024


- Submission Procedure: Candidates have a maximum of 3 months from the point of payment to **record** and **upload** the exam submission.
- Musical Theatre: Show Exam - Candidates should be split into groups of a maximum of 8 for their song/dance. The song/dance should then be repeated with the other group of 8 performing.
- Musical Theatre: Technical Skills - For singing and dance the maximum group numbers have been updated.
- Jazz and Street dance – minimum and maximum candidate number allowance has changed.




We hope this set of guidelines has helped you understand the RSL graded syllabus video exam process and provides the necessary guidance for capturing and submitting exam material.

Should you require any further advice, please contact us on:

 [**paa@rslawards.com**](mailto:paa@rslawards.com)

 **0203 141 2524**

 [**www.rslawards.com**](http://www.rslawards.com)

 RSL Awards Ltd, Harlequin House,
7 High St, Teddington, TW11 8EE