

RIAM Exams

Guide to Selecting Pieces for Performance Grades

Brass

Pieces should match the technical requirements expected for a similar level of Practical Grade. Teachers can assess this by referencing the repertoire in RIAM Exams syllabi for the instrument at that grade level.

Selections that are significantly easier than the exercises would not be considered suitable.

When assessing the RIAM Exams syllabi lists or any choice piece you wish to consider, the key considerations include:

- **Range and Keys:** Pieces should reflect the scale requirements for the similar RIAM Practical Exams grade, covering a substantial portion of the range, including its extremes. For valved instruments (trumpet, cornet, French horn, tenor horn, baritone, and tuba), this includes exploring the appropriate fingerings for different keys and maintaining flexibility across major, minor, and chromatic scales. For trombones (tenor and bass), ensure that the repertoire allows practice across the full range of slide positions, including the outer positions required for chromatic and extended range passages. Scales are not required in Performance Grades but remain a useful guide for assessing open-choice repertoire.
- **Rhythmic Complexity:** The rhythmic demands of pieces should align with the similar grade in RIAM Practical Exams. The specific rhythms do not need to match exactly but should be of equivalent complexity. For valved instruments, this involves coordination between tongue and finger articulation, while trombone players must focus on smooth slide transitions during rhythmically complex passages.
- **Technical and Expressive Elements:** While pieces do not need to cover all technical and expressive criteria, they should include a suitable selection of elements, such as tonguing, slurring, and dynamic contrast. For valved instruments, this involves coordination of fingering with airflow to achieve clean attacks and sustained notes. For trombones, smooth and accurate slide movements, particularly during legato passages, are essential to technical proficiency.

Performance and Requirements

Grade 1

- Basic understanding of note values, including semibreves, minims, crotchets, and tied notes.
- Ability to tongue and centre notes in both stepwise motion and small leaps.
- For valved instruments: familiarity with basic valve combinations (1st, 2nd, and 3rd valves) in common keys.
- For trombones: basic slide movements covering small intervals within a limited range (positions 1 to 4 typically).

Grade 2

- Ability to execute essential lip slurs (between the first two harmonics).
- Play and centre notes in both major and minor modes (scales and arpeggios).
- Navigate basic scalar passages at a faster tempo.
- For valved instruments: ensure smooth valve transitions without audible breaks.
- For trombones: develop smooth slide movements through entire scales or arpeggios, avoiding unwanted glissandos.
- Comfort with simple rhythmic patterns using common note values across different tempi.

Pieces at this level are generally short and simple, often around 8-16 bars in length. At the introductory level, producing a fully focused tone or precise articulation is not necessary. Players will typically have a basic focus on tone quality, articulation, and the ability to maintain a steady tempo with a simple sense of phrasing.

Grade 3

- Develop a range spanning approximately a tenth.
- Understand keys and accidentals up to 2 sharps or flats.
- Perform lip slurs involving the first three harmonics.
- For valved instruments: manage simple chromatic fingerings, ensuring agility and precision.
- For trombones: handle more complex slide positions (up to 6th or 7th position as needed).
- Handle more complex rhythmic patterns, including dotted rhythms, at various tempi.

Grade 4

- Extended range to a minimum of 12th.
- Understand keys and accidentals up to 4 sharps or flats and play chromatically over a full octave.
- Manage more varied valve fingerings (or slide positions for trombone) and articulation patterns.
- Demonstrate increased control over dynamics and faster tonguing patterns.
- For valved instruments: execute clean, rapid changes in fingerings without compromising tone.
- For trombones: manage slide transitions efficiently, ensuring accurate intonation during fast passages.
- Comfort with rhythmic patterns in compound time at varying speeds

Pieces at these levels typically are short to moderate in length, ranging from 16 to 32 bars. By Grades 3 and 4, the repertoire should incorporate more detailed contrasts, like crescendos and diminuendos.

Players are expected to demonstrate a clear, focused tone, consistent and accurate articulation, with repertoire that introduces staccato, tenuto, and accents. Fluent playing, with an emerging ability to shape musical lines whilst maintaining essential breath control, stamina, and an expanding dynamic range should be evident.

Grade 5

- Extended range to a minimum of 13th.
- Understand and perform key signatures involving multiple sharps and flats, as well as harmonic and melodic scales.
- Demonstrate controlled flexibility through lip slurs (up to the first four harmonics).
- For valved instruments: develop rapid, accurate finger patterns and improved coordination in chromatic scales.
- For trombones: precise slide movements in faster passages, minimizing unintended glissando effects.
- Execute longer and quicker tonguing passages, such as semiquavers at higher tempi.

Grade 6

- Extended range to a minimum of 2 octaves.
- Expand knowledge of keys with multiple flats and sharps and perform harmonic and melodic scales across this extended range.
- Play chromatic passages seamlessly within the full 2-octave span.
- For valved instruments: achieve precise finger coordination at higher speeds and increased dynamic control.
- For trombones: demonstrate mastery of alternate positions to improve speed and accuracy.
- Develop technical skills including controlled lip slurs up to five harmonics.

Pieces at these levels will be moderate in length, ranging from about 32 to 64 bars. Players are expected to demonstrate a clear, strong, and focused sound across all dynamics, and accurate articulation, with increased use of like staccato, tenuto, and accents. Repertoire choices should support fluency and accurate intonation at an appropriate tempo, with a well-developed sense of phrasing and musical line.

Reliable breath control, stamina, and an ability to produce a dynamic and expressive performance must be evident.

An increased demonstration of expression is expected, including the effective use of basic dynamic contrasts such as piano, pianissimo, forte, fortissimo, and gradual changes like crescendo, diminuendo, rallentando, and accelerando.

Grade 7

- Extended range to a minimum of 2 octaves and a 3rd.
- Master keys and accidentals with multiple sharps and flats, including harmonic, melodic, and whole-tone scales.
- Demonstrate technical control through lip slurs spanning up to 7 harmonics.
- For valved instruments: demonstrate advanced finger coordination during extended chromatic and diatonic passages.
- For trombones: ensure efficient use of alternate positions to minimize excessive slide movement.
- Handle rhythmic complexity, including swung rhythms and syncopation.

Grade 8

- Extended range to a minimum of 2 octaves and a 4th.
- Understand and perform a wide variety of keys and scale patterns, including chromatic passages across the full range.
- For valved instruments: execute advanced techniques, such as double and triple tonguing, with precision.
- For trombones: maintain clean articulation, using legato tonguing and controlled slide movements.
- Manage complex rhythms, syncopation, and various tempi confidently.

Senior Certificate

- Extended range to a minimum of 2 octaves and a 5th.
- Display mastery of scales in numerous keys, including chromatic scales throughout the extended range.
- Demonstrate a mastery of complex lip slurs.
- For valved instruments: execute rapid articulation (double and triple tonguing) alongside agile finger movement.
- For trombones: master advanced slide techniques, including precise control over alternate positions.
- Handle complex rhythmic structures, including irregular time signatures.

Pieces at these levels range from moderate to extended length. Through their choice of repertoire players are expected to demonstrate a consistently clear and focused tone across all dynamics and registers, accurate articulation, with mastery of nuanced techniques like staccato, tenuto, accents, and varied slurring, as well as fluency, good intonation, and an established sense of musical phrasing, with confident breath control and stamina.

The correct selection of pieces will help evidence a strong level of expressive control, including the effective use of dynamic contrast such as piano, pianissimo, forte, fortissimo, crescendo, and diminuendo, along with expressive devices like rallentando and accelerando.

Performances should show an advanced awareness of musical phrasing, with refined control of articulation and the ability to adjust dynamics and accents to suit the musical context.