

## RIAM Exams

### Guide to Selecting Pieces for Performance Grades

#### High Strings (Violin and Viola) *Low Strings (Cello and Double Bass) below*

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 violin and viola, this includes exploring finger patterns in both first position and higher positions, as required for the level, and covering a variety of keys including major, minor, and chromatic scales. 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 high strings, this involves coordination between bowing and left-hand fingerings, particularly in passages involving syncopation, ties, and slurs.
- **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 bowing patterns, shifting, and dynamic contrast. For violin and viola, this involves smooth transitions between strings, effective use of legato and staccato bowing, and accurate intonation in both simple and complex passages.

## Performance and Requirements

### Grade 1

- Basic understanding of note values, including semibreves, minims, crotchets, and tied notes.
- Ability to play stepwise motion and small leaps in first position.
- Bow control for basic strokes, including détaché and simple legato bowing.
- Familiarity with common finger patterns within the first position.

### Grade 2

- Introduction to simple shifts (e.g., half-position or second position as needed).
- Play and center notes in both major and minor modes (scales and arpeggios).
- Navigate basic scalar passages at a faster tempo using détaché or legato bowing.
- Ability to maintain consistent intonation while crossing strings.
- 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 bow control is not necessary. Players will typically focus on basic tone quality, even bow distribution, and maintaining 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.
- Introduction to shifting to third position or equivalent.
- Ability to execute slurred bowing involving multiple notes per bow.
- Handle more complex rhythmic patterns, including dotted rhythms, at various tempi.

### **Grade 4**

- Extended range to a minimum of a 12th, with more frequent use of third position and occasional use of higher positions.
- Understand keys and accidentals up to 4 sharps or flats and play chromatically over a full octave.
- Manage varied bowing patterns, including détaché, legato, staccato, and hooked bowing.
- Demonstrate increased control over dynamics and faster bow changes.
- Comfort with rhythmic patterns in compound time at varying speeds.

Pieces at these levels are typically 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 bow control, and accurate intonation, with repertoire introducing slurs, accents, and simple string crossings.

### **Grade 5**

- Extended range to a minimum of an octave and a 6th, with greater fluency in shifting between positions.
- Understand and perform key signatures involving multiple sharps and flats, as well as harmonic and melodic scales.
- Demonstrate controlled flexibility through shifting and vibrato (where appropriate).
- Manage rapid scale passages using smooth slurring or détaché bowing.
- Handle longer and quicker passages using semiquaver runs at faster tempi.

### **Grade 6**

- Extended range to a minimum of 2 octaves, with confident use of third and fifth positions.
- 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.
- Develop technical skills including clean string crossings, controlled shifts, and slurred string changes.
- Increased use of bowing techniques such as spiccato or hooked bowing in fast passages.

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, with accurate bow control and intonation. Repertoire choices should support fluency and phrasing, along with a well-developed sense of line.

### **Grade 7**

- Extended range to a minimum of 2 octaves and a 3rd, with mastery of higher positions (including 5th and occasionally 7th).
- Master keys and accidentals with multiple sharps and flats, including harmonic, melodic, and chromatic scales.
- Demonstrate technical control through shifting and vibrato, integrating them smoothly into phrasing.
- Confidently handle extended passages involving slurs, string crossings, and rapid détaché bowing.
- Manage complex rhythms, including syncopation, tied notes, and irregular patterns.

### **Grade 8**

- Extended range to a minimum of 2 octaves and a 4th, with fluency in positions up to 7th (or higher when required).
- Understand and perform a wide variety of keys and scale patterns, including chromatic passages across the full range.
- Execute advanced bowing techniques, such as ricochet and spiccato, with precision.
- Manage extended legato phrases with sustained bow control.
- Handle rhythmic complexity confidently, including rapid string crossings and compound rhythms.

### **Senior Certificate**

- Extended range to a minimum of 2 octaves and a 5th, with mastery of higher positions and fast shifts.
- Display mastery of scales in numerous keys, including chromatic and double-stop scales.
- Execute advanced techniques such as double-stopping, harmonics, and pizzicato passages where required.
- Manage rapid bowing patterns with precision, including sautillé and flying spiccato.
- Handle complex rhythmic structures, including irregular time signatures and syncopation.

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, mastery of advanced bowing techniques, and an established sense of musical phrasing and intonation.

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 bow speed, distribution, and pressure to suit the musical context.

## **Low Strings (Cello and Double Bass)**

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 cello and double bass, this includes exploring finger patterns in first position and higher positions (including thumb position for cello and extensions for double bass), and covering a variety of keys, including major, minor, and chromatic scales. Cello players will often shift through more positions at earlier stages, while double bass players typically rely on half-position and extensions before moving into thumb position. 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 low strings, this involves coordination between bowing and left-hand fingerings, particularly when shifting positions, crossing strings, and navigating slurs and syncopated passages. Double bass players often encounter unique challenges due to the larger physical distances between notes and strings, requiring adjustments to rhythmic precision and articulation.
- **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 bowing patterns, shifting, and dynamic contrast. For cello and double bass, this involves smooth string crossings, effective use of legato and staccato bowing, and accurate intonation in both slow and fast passages. Cello players often develop fluency in higher positions earlier due to their smaller fingerboard, whereas double bass players typically focus on mastering smooth string transitions and extensions in the lower positions before advancing to thumb position.

## **Performance and Requirements**

### **Grade 1**

- Basic understanding of note values, including semibreves, minims, crotchets, and tied notes.
- Ability to play stepwise motion and small leaps in first position.
- Bow control for basic strokes, including détaché and simple legato bowing.
- Familiarity with common finger patterns within the first position.
- Cello: Early emphasis on comfortable shifts within the first few positions, typically by Grade 2.
- Double Bass: Reliance on half-position and the use of extensions before shifting.

## Grade 2

- Introduction to simple shifts (e.g., half-position or second position as needed).
- Play and centre notes in both major and minor modes (scales and arpeggios).
- Navigate basic scalar passages at a faster tempo using détaché or legato bowing.
- Ability to maintain consistent intonation while crossing strings.
- Comfort with simple rhythmic patterns using common note values across different tempi.
- Cello: Early shifts to second and third positions should be introduced by this stage.
- Double Bass: Emphasis on precise intonation within extensions and limited early shifts.

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 bow control is not necessary. Players will typically focus on basic tone quality, even bow distribution, and maintaining 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.
- Introduction to shifting to third position or equivalent.
- Ability to execute slurred bowing involving multiple notes per bow.
- Handle more complex rhythmic patterns, including dotted rhythms, at various tempi.
- **Cello:** Increased comfort with shifting to third and fourth positions is expected.
- **Double Bass:** Expanded use of extensions and shifts to second or third positions may be required, but emphasis remains on precision.

## Grade 4

- Extended range to a minimum of a 12th, with more frequent use of third position and occasional use of higher positions.
- Understand keys and accidentals up to 4 sharps or flats and play chromatically over a full octave.
- Manage varied bowing patterns, including détaché, legato, staccato, and hooked bowing.
- Demonstrate increased control over dynamics and faster bow changes.
- Comfort with rhythmic patterns in compound time at varying speeds.
- **Cello:** Comfortable use of fourth and fifth positions and the occasional introduction of thumb position.
- **Double Bass:** Greater reliance on extensions and precise shifts within lower positions, with thumb position potentially introduced for certain pieces.

Pieces at these levels are typically short to moderate in length, ranging from 16 to 32 bars. Players are expected to demonstrate a clear, focused tone, consistent and accurate bow control, and accurate intonation, with repertoire introducing slurs, accents, and simple string crossings.

## Grade 5

- Extended range to a minimum of an octave and a 6th, with greater fluency in shifting between positions.
- Understand and perform key signatures involving multiple sharps and flats, as well as harmonic and melodic scales.
- Demonstrate controlled flexibility through shifting and vibrato (where appropriate).
- Manage rapid scale passages using smooth slurring or détaché bowing.
- Handle longer and quicker passages using semiquaver runs at faster tempi.
- **Cello:** Frequent use of fifth position, with occasional use of thumb position in rapid passages.
- **Double Bass:** Focus on precise shifting between half-position, second, and third positions, with occasional thumb position in higher passages.

## Grade 6

- Extended range to a minimum of 2 octaves, with confident use of third and fifth positions.
- 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.
- Develop technical skills, including clean string crossings, controlled shifts, and slurred string changes.
- Increased use of bowing techniques such as spiccato or hooked bowing in fast passages.
- **Cello:** Expanded use of thumb position, especially in chromatic or rapid scalar passages.
- **Double Bass:** Strong focus on shifting fluently through lower positions, with selective use of thumb position when required.

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, with accurate bow control and intonation. Repertoire choices should support fluency and phrasing, along with a well-developed sense of line.

## Grade 7

- Extended range to a minimum of 2 octaves and a 3rd, with mastery of higher positions (including thumb position where appropriate).
- Master keys and accidentals with multiple sharps and flats, including harmonic, melodic, and chromatic scales.
- Demonstrate technical control through shifting and vibrato, integrating them smoothly into phrasing.
- Confidently handle extended passages involving slurs, string crossings, and rapid détaché bowing.
- Manage complex rhythms, including syncopation, tied notes, and irregular patterns.

## Grade 8

- Extended range to a minimum of 2 octaves and a 4th, with fluency in positions up to thumb position or higher as required.
- Understand and perform a wide variety of keys and scale patterns, including chromatic passages across the full range.
- Execute advanced bowing techniques, such as ricochet and spiccato, with precision.
- Manage extended legato phrases with sustained bow control.
- Handle rhythmic complexity confidently, including rapid string crossings and compound rhythms.

## Senior Certificate

- Extended range to a minimum of 2 octaves and a 5th, with mastery of higher positions and fast shifts.
- Display mastery of scales in numerous keys, including chromatic and double-stop scales.
- Execute advanced techniques such as double-stopping, harmonics, and pizzicato passages where required.
- Manage rapid bowing patterns with precision, including sautillé and flying spiccato.
- Handle complex rhythmic structures, including irregular time signatures and syncopation.
- **Cello:** Mastery of fast passages using thumb position and rapid shifts in both single-note and double-stop contexts.
- **Double Bass:** Strong reliance on extensions, lower position accuracy, and refined thumb position technique for demanding passages.

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, mastery of advanced bowing techniques, and an established sense of musical phrasing and intonation.

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 bow speed, distribution, and pressure to suit the musical context.

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