

RIAM Exams

Guide to Selecting Pieces for Performance Grades

Voice

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 range and key requirements for the similar RIAM Practical Exams grade, covering a substantial portion of the range, including its extremes. For voice, this includes exploring tessitura, breath support, and flexibility across various registers (chest, head, and mixed voice where appropriate). Repertoire should include a variety of keys suitable for the student's vocal range (soprano, alto, tenor, or bass). Vocal scales are not required in Performance Grades but remain a useful guide for assessing the suitability of 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 singers, this involves accurate timing, breath management, and clear enunciation during both legato and articulated phrases.
- **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 phrasing, dynamic control, articulation, and diction. For voice, this involves proper vowel placement, accurate pitch in melismatic phrases, and clear emotional communication through text.

Performance and Requirements

Grade 1

- Basic understanding of note values, including semibreves, minims, crotchets, and tied notes.
- Ability to sing simple stepwise melodies with small leaps within a comfortable range.
- Basic breath control to sustain phrases of 4–6 beats.
- Introduction to dynamic markings such as piano and forte.

Grade 2

- Ability to sing stepwise and scalar passages in both major and minor keys.
- Develop breath management to support phrases of 6–8 beats.
- Control of basic articulation (legato and staccato).
- Sing with consistent tone and pitch across the lower and middle registers.
- 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 fully refined tone quality or precise dynamic control is not necessary. Singers will typically focus on clear diction, tone quality, 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 smooth register transitions (between chest and head voice).
- Ability to execute simple melismatic phrases and slurs.
- Handle more complex rhythmic patterns, including dotted rhythms, at various tempi.

Grade 4

- Extended range to cover an 11th, with early development of higher and lower registers.
- Understand keys and accidentals up to 4 sharps or flats and sing chromatic passages confidently.
- Manage more varied articulation patterns, including legato, staccato, and marcato.
- Demonstrate increased control over dynamics, including crescendo and diminuendo.
- 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, such as phrasing, breath marks, and dynamic shaping. Singers are expected to demonstrate a clear, focused tone, consistent breath support, and accurate intonation, with repertoire introducing more expressive elements.

Grade 5

- Extended range to a 12th, with greater fluency in higher and lower registers.
- Understand and perform key signatures involving multiple sharps and flats, as well as chromatic and modal scales.
- Controlled register shifts with smooth transitions between chest, head, and mixed voice.
- Manage more advanced melismatic phrases, ornaments, and dynamic contrast.
- Handle longer and quicker passages using semiquavers at faster tempi with clear articulation.

Grade 6

- Confident use of head and chest registers.
- Expand knowledge of complex keys and scales, including harmonic and melodic passages.
- Perform rapid melismatic runs and chromatic phrases seamlessly.
- Develop advanced phrasing techniques, including breath management over longer phrases.
- Increased use of expressive devices such as rubato, rallentando, and accelerando.

Pieces at these levels will be moderate in length, ranging from about 32 to 64 bars. Singers are expected to demonstrate a clear, strong, and focused tone across all registers, accurate pitch control, and expressive phrasing. Repertoire should support fluency, accurate intonation, and a well-developed sense of musical line.

Grade 7

- Mastery of head, chest, and mixed voice transitions.
- Master keys and accidentals with multiple sharps and flats, including chromatic, whole-tone, and modal scales.
- Demonstrate control of vibrato, integrating it naturally into phrasing.
- Confidently handle extended passages involving legato phrases, dynamic shaping, and ornaments.
- Manage complex rhythms, including syncopation, triplets, and tied notes at varying tempi.

Grade 8

- Fluent control over the entire vocal range.
- Understand and perform a wide variety of keys and melodic patterns, including chromatic and ornamented lines.
- Execute advanced techniques, such as vocal trills, appoggiaturas, and mordents.
- Manage extended legato phrases with sustained breath control.
- Handle rhythmic complexity confidently, including mixed meter and syncopated phrases.

Senior Certificate

- Mastery of advanced register shifts.
- Display mastery of scales in numerous keys, including chromatic and modal scales.
- Execute advanced technical elements such as complex ornaments, portamento, and sustained high notes.
- Manage rapid melismatic phrases with clear articulation and dynamic control.
- Handle complex rhythmic structures, including irregular time signatures and rubato passages.

Pieces at these levels range from moderate to extended length. Through their choice of repertoire, singers are expected to demonstrate a consistently clear and focused tone across all dynamics and registers, mastery of advanced breathing techniques, and an established sense of musical phrasing.

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 diction, articulation, and emotional delivery to suit the musical context.