

RIAM Exams

Guide to Selecting Pieces for Performance Grades: Piano

Pieces should match the technical requirements expected for a similar level of Practical Grade. Teachers can assess this by referencing the pieces in RIAM Piano albums as well as the extended lists of repertoire for Grades VI and higher in the RIAM Piano Syllabus. Candidates may use any/all pieces included in the RIAM syllabus, but are not limited to these selections. Pieces that are significantly easier than those listed in the syllabus would be considered unsuitable. Simplified arrangements of classical repertoire should be avoided; if choosing an arrangement of film or pop music, a good-quality arrangement should be sourced. When consulting the RIAM Exams syllabi lists or any choice piece you wish to consider, some key considerations are:

Aim for a contrasting programme that will demonstrate different styles, keys, characters, tempi and expressive qualities. Whether the chosen pieces are classical, popular, jazzy, traditional or other, it is important to choose pieces that will show a range of technical aspects, but will also bring out the best qualities of the individual performer. Candidates are not expected to cover the entire range of requirements listed, these are intended as a general guideline. A varied list of recommended albums and publications can be found at the end of this document.

- **Rhythmic Complexity:** The rhythmic demands of pieces should broadly align with the same grade in RIAM Practical Exams. The specific rhythms do not need to be an exact match, but should be of a similar standard.
- **Technical and Expressive Elements:** Even at the earliest grades, pieces should be played with both hands together (except where indicated by the composer). While the selected pieces do not need to cover all technical and expressive criteria, they should include a suitable selection of elements, for example: legato phrasing, slurs, staccato touch, clear and controlled fingerwork in faster passages, cantabile touch, appropriate use of pedal, shaping of phrases, articulation detail and dynamic contrasts. Appropriate balance between right and left hands is expected.

Performance and Requirements

Grade 1 (maximum 32 bars)

To include a range of note values from semibreves to semiquavers, and possible inclusion of dotted rhythms and tied notes. Pieces might be in Simple or Compound time, key signatures of up to two sharps and two flats, with simple changes of hand position and a minimum range of one octave (no more than two octaves). Melody and accompaniment should be balanced. Independence of hands is limited to chords or single notes supporting a melodic line. Tempo indications should vary, basic dynamic and articulation detail should be present.

Grade 2 (maximum 40 bars)

A range of note values, including semiquaver passages, and possible inclusion of dotted rhythms and tied notes. Pieces might be in Simple or Compound Duple time, key signatures of up to three sharps or flats. Right and left hands can move independently of each other, with changes of hand position and a range of two octaves. Melodic phrases should have singing tone and good shape. Tempo indications should vary, a range of dynamic detail, shaping of phrases and articulation should be present.

Grade 3 (maximum 60 bars)

A range of note values demonstrating more complex rhythms, for example syncopated rhythms, triplets etc. might be introduced. Legato pedal is usually introduced at this level, and some demonstration of this technique must be included. Pieces might be in Simple or Compound time, a range of key signatures can be demonstrated across a possible range of three octaves. Good tone quality and sensitive phrasing should be evident. Tempo indications should vary, possible inclusion of ornamentation, as appropriate; a growing range of articulation and dynamic detail should be present.

Grade 4 (maximum 80 bars)

A range of note values with variety of rhythmic detail. Legato pedalling technique should be included in at least one piece, and fast semiquaver passages with clear and even sound should also be demonstrated in at least one piece. Pieces might be in Simple or Compound time, a range of key signatures up to four sharps or flats can be explored and an unlimited range of the keyboard. Candidate should be able to demonstrate stylistic detail, good tone and appropriate shaping of phrases. A range of articulation detail, dynamics, shaping and balance should be present and consistent in delivery.

Grade 5 (maximum 100 bars)

At this level, the student should be able to demonstrate greater independence of the hands with tidy and even fingerwork. An expanded range of key signatures can be considered, and a stronger understanding of style and character should be emerging at this stage. Finer detail should be closely observed, and musical expression should be developing. Pieces may well include more layered textures or more complex chords, and greater use of pedal. Articulation detail appropriate to the style, and a wider dynamic range should be present.

Senior Grades

At this higher level, there is an expectation of greater maturity in terms of stylistic awareness, expressive detail, tonal nuances, appropriate tempo choices and overall stamina. These factors will all be taken into consideration by the examiner, and will be reflected in the marking of these higher grade exams.

Grade 6

Stronger technique and independence of the hands developing at this stage. Pieces should be played at a tempo appropriate to the style/character, they may include shifting tempo markings with changes of character, and these adjustments should be comfortably realised. Pieces may include large leaps, or possible counterpoint. Fast passagework and good pedalling technique should be demonstrated, rhythmic detail should be precise and a wide dynamic range is expected.

Grade 7

Appropriate tempo choices are expected in the chosen pieces, and must be maintained as appropriate. Passages of controlled and agile fingerwork should be included, and any leaps should be confidently executed. Appropriate tempo and consistency of speed is expected at this level. Aim to vary the style/tempo/character/mood of the pieces and demonstrate these differences accordingly in the performance. A full range of dynamics should be demonstrated with good shape and line, textured content must be balanced, and softer tones must be sensitively controlled.

Grade 8

Advanced repertoire of appropriate length, to be played at appropriate tempo choices. A varied range of pieces is expected, to demonstrate a range of technical and stylistic methods. Candidate should demonstrate an ability to play fluently, with advanced nuances of expressive devices such as rallentando, accelerando, rubato and ornamentation where appropriate to the music. Any handling of complex rhythms must be accurately and confidently executed. Subtleties of colour and shape, as well as a wide dynamic range must be demonstrated. There should be inclusion of demanding passagework, pedalling technique, detailed stylistic characteristics, balanced textures, lyricism of line where appropriate and overall expressive qualities to suit the context of the music.

Senior Certificate

Advanced repertoire of appropriate length, demonstrating a highly developed technique and mature musical awareness and perception. A varied programme is expected, to suitably demonstrate a wide range of stylistic characteristics and musically expressive approaches. The appropriate selection of pieces will help to establish a comprehensive level of musical integrity and pianistic command.