

## Free Choice Pieces

### Guide to selecting pieces and studies of a suitable standard

#### Woodwind

The expected technical difficulty of pieces and studies for Free Choice Repertoire will align to the general requirements of the technical exercises for each grade. Teachers wishing to select suitable Free Choice pieces and studies should therefore look at our technical exercises for each instrument at each grade to establish whether pieces reflect the range of technical demands demonstrated by the exercises. Pieces and studies which are significantly easier (technically) than the technical exercises would not be suitable.

The scale requirements for each grade demonstrate the 'range' and 'keys' that would be suitable per grade. Pieces which do not cover a large part of this range (in particular the extremes) would be unlikely to be suitable Free Choice Pieces.

The range of rhythms suitable for each grade can be judged by viewing the 'Reading Skills' on the MTB Exams syllabuses (additional resources pages). Pieces or studies should demonstrate a rhythmic complexity equivalent to the Reading skills for that grade. The rhythms do not necessarily have to be the same but should demonstrate equivalent complexity.

An outline of the appropriate technical and expressive expectations at each grade are listed below. Pieces would not be expected to include all of these but should include a selection of them. If you are unsure whether your free choice pieces or studies meet our criteria, we recommend that you use our optional Approval Service. This service requires you to provide an image of the music along with the following information: instrument, grade, title, composer and the book in which it is published, if applicable, along with a short description of why you believe it meets the required standard. We are currently offering this service for free.

#### **Entry Level - Pre Grades**

##### Technical expectations

- Pre Grade Introductory – approx. 6 notes established (see individual technical exercises range for reference). Understanding of Semibreves,

minims, crotchets and tied notes, Ability to tongue and centre notes in stepwise motion and leaps

- Pre Grade Higher – Establish a range of an octave+ (see individual technical exercises range for reference), addition of quavers, Ability to play and centre notes tongued and slurred (in pairs or 4 note patterns), Slightly greater flexibility and ability to handle and centre notes in leaps, increased demands of stamina required.

Pieces at this level will include elements of the above and be very basic and short in length. (often approx. 8-16 bars). At Pre Grade Introductory a fully focused sound/quality of articulation is not expected but by Pre Grade Higher, players will be expected to display a very basic focused sound and developing clarity of articulation plus an ability to play fluently at a steady tempo with a basic sense of line.

Musicality/expression, expectations: There is very basic expectation of expression at this level. Avoidance of awkwardness musically is sufficient. Awkwardness may include forcing the tone too much making it ugly or too little tone meaning it sounds uncertain or lacking in conviction or unwanted unevenness of volume or tone such as sudden loud notes or soft notes maybe because these notes are causing production difficulties or they are uncertain of them. The use of dynamic contrast will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this level.

### **Level 1 – Grades 1-3**

- Grade 1 – Range of approx. 10<sup>th</sup> established (see individual technical exercises and scales for reference), ability to slur across registers, play and centre notes in a major and minor mode (scale and arpeggio), ability to play basic scalic passages at a faster tempo, ability to slur an entire scale or arpeggio. Comfortable with rhythmic patterns utilising basic note values at a variety of tempi.
- Grade 2 – Range of approx. 11<sup>th</sup> established (see individual technical exercises and scales for reference), extended knowledge of keys or accidentals up to 2 sharps or flats, ability to slur across registers, introduction of fingering and articulation patterns in simple keys.

Comfortable with rhythmic patterns utilising basic note values and dotted notes at a variety of tempi.

- Grade 3 – Range of approx. 12<sup>th</sup> established (see individual technical exercises and scales for reference), Extended knowledge of keys or accidentals up to 4 sharps and to play fully chromatically over a full octave, ability to slur across registers, development of more complex and varied fingering and articulation patterns in a variety of keys, display increased dynamic control and basic faster tonguing patterns (including semi-quavers up to 5 notes in length crotchet =104 or above).  
Comfortable with rhythmic patterns utilising compound time signatures at a variety of tempi.

Pieces at this level will include elements of the above at each grade and will be basic and relatively short in length (often approx. 16-32 bars). Players will be expected to display a clear focused sound and clear articulation including attention to some subtlety of articulation including staccato, tenuto and accents for example. They should show the ability to play fluently at an appropriate tempo with a developing sense of shape and line. Players should also display a good basic level of breath control, stamina and dynamic range.

Musicality/expression, expectations: There is basic expectation of expression at this level. Performances should avoid awkwardness musically such as inappropriate emphasis of notes or breathing/bowing which distorts the phrasing or line. The use of some basic dynamic contrast is expected at this level such as piano/forte. More detailed dynamic contrast such as crescendo and diminuendo etc. is appropriate by grade 3 and will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this level. Similarly, performances should display an awareness of articulation and phrasing at this level including such elements as correct slurring and breathing in appropriate places, Although performances should show an increasing awareness of articulation moving from grades 1-3 such as the use of staccato, tenuto and accents, more detailed use of these will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this level.

## Level 2 – Grades 4-5

- Grade 4 – Range established approx. 2 oct (see individual technical exercises and scales for reference). Knowledge of keys or accidentals with multiple flats and sharps and the performance of both harmonic and melodic scale patterns. Show greater control flexibility of slurring, more complex and faster chromatic fingering patterns and longer/faster tonguing patterns (including semi-quavers up to 13 notes in length crotchet = 108 or above). Comfortable with rhythmic patterns including utilising dotted quaver rhythms at a variety of tempi.
- Grade 5– Range established approx. 2 oct+ (see individual technical exercises and scales for reference). Knowledge of a wide range of keys with multiple flats and sharps and the performance of both harmonic and melodic scale patterns. Ability to play fully chromatically throughout the 2 oct+ range. Display a developing range of technical ability beyond that of grade 4 through the technical exercises for this grade. For example, control of more advanced rapid chromatic or diatonic fingering patterns throughout the range etc. Comfortable with rhythmic patterns including utilising a variety of semi-quaver patterns at a variety of tempi

Pieces at this level will include elements of the above at each grade and will be straightforward and of moderate length (often approx. 32-64 bars). Players will be expected to display a strong, clear focused sound at all dynamics and clear articulation including paying full attention to the subtlety of articulation including staccato, tenuto and accents for example. They should show the ability to play fluently, in tune and at an appropriate tempo with an established sense of shape and line. Players should also display a good level of breath control, stamina, dynamic range and clarity of articulation.

Musicality/expression, expectations: There is an expectation of a developing degree of expression at this level. Performances should include use of straightforward dynamic contrast including piano or pianissimo/forte or fortissimo/crescendo/diminuendo/rallentando/accelerando etc. More detailed dynamic contrast such as staccato accents/semi staccato and a detailed understanding of phrasing etc. will enhance a performance but will not be expected to pass at this level. Similarly, performances should display correct articulation and phrasing at this level including such elements as correct slurring and breathing in appropriate places.

### Level 3 – Grades 6-8

- Grade 6 - Range of approx. 2 octaves+ (see individual technical exercises and scales for reference). Knowledge of keys or accidentals with multiple flats and sharps and the performance of harmonic, melodic and whole tone scale patterns. Technical expertise will need to be demonstrated in a range of techniques taken from development of more complex and faster chromatic and diatonic fingering patterns requiring excellent breath control and advanced control of the fingers. Comfortable with rhythmic patterns including swung rhythms at a variety of tempi.
- Grade 7 - Range of approx. 2 ½ octaves (see individual technical exercises and scales for reference). Knowledge of a wide range of keys with multiple flats and sharps and the performance of a wide range of scale patterns including chromatically throughout the full range. Display a developing range of technical ability beyond that of grade 6 through the technical exercises for this grade. For example, control of advanced rapid chromatic or diatonic fingering patterns throughout the range, fast tonguing etc. Comfortable with rhythmic patterns including syncopation, ties and triplets at a variety of tempi.
- Grade 8 - Range of approx. 2 ½ octaves+ (see individual technical exercises and scales for reference). Knowledge of a wide range of keys with multiple flats and sharps and the performance of a wide range of scale patterns including chromatically throughout the range. Display a developing range of technical ability beyond that of grade 7 through the technical exercises for this grade. For example: control of advanced rapid chromatic or diatonic fingering patterns throughout the range, fast tonguing/ double etc. Comfortable with complex rhythmic patterns including changing time signatures, irregular time signatures, irregular subdivisions of beats (e.g. quintuplets) at a variety of tempi.

Pieces at this level will include elements of the above at each grade and will be complex and full length concert items often 1 to 2 pages or more in length (including movements from Sonatas and Concertos). Players will be expected to display a strong, clear, focused, refined and nuanced sound at all dynamics and in all ranges with a variety of tone colours as appropriate to the demands

of the music (solemn, fanfare, majestic, jazzy, lyrical etc) and clear articulation including paying detailed attention to the subtlety of complex articulation including staccato, tenuto and a variety of accents etc. They should show the ability to play fluently and in tune in all registers and at an appropriate tempo with a detailed sense of shape and line. Players should also display a high level of breath control, stamina, dynamic range and clarity of articulation.

Musicality/expression, expectations: There is an expectation of a wide range of expression at this level. Performances should include use of a full range of dynamic contrast from pianissimo to fortissimo and utilising crescendo/diminuendo/rallentando/accelerando to enhance the performance and create contrast and interest as appropriate etc. There is an expectation of an understanding of the complex stylistic demands of music such as baroque/jazz etc. Correct/appropriate articulation, phrasing, slurring and breathing is expected at this level.