

MTB Marking Criteria

Performance Grades

Pre-Grades to 8

September 2025

MTB MARKING CRITERIA

PERFORMANCE GRADE EXAMINATIONS

Contents

- Important Notes P2
- Assessment Categories P3
- Recital Section P6
- Stagecraft and Sense of Performance Section P7
- Programme Section P9
- Technical Specifications by instrument P11

Award Categories

The examination is marked out of 100 with a pass mark of 60.
Award categories are as follows:

87-100	Distinction
75-86	Merit
60-74	Pass
45-59	Blue
0-44	White

Important notes about these guidelines

1. The guidelines below are structured and colour co-ordinated by our award categories. These give an indication within each section of the exam of the trajectory towards your final result.
2. Terms in the tables should be interpreted appropriately for the level of the examination. Terminology used in the assessment categories and marking tables has a different level of expectation at each grade.
3. A mark of 0 is only awarded if the section is not performed at all.
4. Each category is likely to have several/many constituent elements which are being assessed and examiners establish a mark resulting from the balance of all these elements as well as any others which arise from time to time. The marking outcome is drawn from all relevant elements in a particular examination.
5. For grades 1-5 Target Durations are a flexible guide to help you create a programme of appropriate length, substance and content for each grade. Performances that deviate (we advise no more than 33% longer or shorter) from the Target Duration could be penalised if this negatively impacts the level of content.

For grades 6-8 MTB realistically expects the candidate to be responsible for the Target Duration of their programme. It should be a skill which they have acquired over time and now have the confidence to use to benefit their planning. For this reason, from grades 6-8 we provide a minimum and maximum time for their recital as well as a target duration. Performances with a duration outside of these parameters will be penalised.

Duration starts when the recording begins and finishes when it ends, care should be taken to avoid unnecessary lengthy pauses either at the start, end or during the performance. If this occurs it may be factored into the assessment of Duration and may be reflected in the marking.

Target Durations - Grades 1-5	Target Durations - Grades 6-8
Grade 1 – Target Duration: 5 minutes Grade 2 – Target Duration: 6 minutes Grade 3 – Target Duration: 8 minutes Grade 4 – Target Duration: 10 minutes Grade 5 – Target Duration: 12 minutes	Grade 6 – Target Duration: 15 minutes (Minimum 12 minutes – maximum 18 minutes) Grade 7 – Target Duration: 18 minutes (Minimum 15 minutes – maximum 21 minutes) Grade 8 – Target Duration: 22 minutes (Minimum 19 minutes – maximum 25 minutes)

Assessment Categories

Accuracy		
Key Areas	Key Elements	
Rhythm	Control of pulse. Control of rhythm. Rhythmic character. Interpretation of rhythm (when appropriate).	
Pitch	Accuracy of notes. Intonation (when appropriate). Maintaining tonality (when appropriate). Maintaining level of pitch (when appropriate). Interpretation of pitch (when appropriate).	
Fluency	Sense of fluency regarding notes and rhythm. Sense of musical fluency. The ability to maintain a flowing musical line. Ability to recover quickly from slips or from hesitations due to loss of control or losing place in the music.	
Duration (grades 6-8 only)	Total duration falls within the minimum and maximum specified for the grade.	
	Durations: (not penalised at grade 1-5) Gd 6 – minimum: 12 minutes / maximum: 18 minutes Gd 7 – minimum: 15 minutes / maximum: 21 minutes Gd 8 – minimum: 19 minutes / maximum: 25 minutes	Penalties: 0-1 minute outside of min/max duration: deduct 3 marks 1-2 minutes outside of min/max duration: deduct 6 marks 2-3 minutes outside of min/max duration: deduct 9 marks Over 3 minutes outside of min/max durations will be disqualified.

Expression	
Key Areas	Key Elements
Phrasing	Expressive. Idiomatic. Musical shaping (without technical issues distorting the line). Well-realised detail. Appropriate rubato.
Dynamics	Due regard given to notated dynamic markings. Appropriate and stylish use of performer's own dynamic inflections.
Articulation	Due regard given to notated articulation markings. Articulation performed in an appropriate style for the piece.
Character	Ability to convey musical character. Ability to contrast musical character.
Stylistic understanding	An informed knowledge of musical stylistic context. The ability to perform with conviction in an appropriate style. The ability to maintain a coherent style within a piece. An understanding of musical form and its impact on performance.
Musicality	Demonstrate an understanding of the music being performed. Avoid 'musical awkwardness' (this might well arise from gaps in technical facility). To let the music flow with a sense of musical logic (i.e. subsequent material is influenced appropriately by that which precedes it). An ability to command the expressive elements in the music. Confidence. An assured performance. An ability to engage the listener in the performance. Vivid communication. Creative ideas of interpretation and the ability to incorporate these.
Level of content	Appropriate complexity, range and substance of expressive demands for the grade.

Technique	
Key Areas	Key Elements
Up to /appropriate tempo	Establish a clear tempo in the light of information and/or stylistic considerations. Maintain tempo or allow it to fluctuate for musical reasons rather than technical ones.
Control	Show an ability to control technical elements in order to present musical ideas with conviction. Avoid a lack of technical facility undermining musical intentions.
Tone quality	Projection. To have secure control over tone quality. To maintain consistency of tone quality. To be aware of tone quality whilst playing and vary it appropriately. Ability to establish, maintain and contrast a wide range of tone colours. Have the technical ability to use a palette of tone colours imaginatively.
Posture	Correct standing/sitting position for playing the instrument. Avoiding undue tensions on the body. Fingering, arm movement where appropriate.
Level of content	Appropriate complexity, range and substance of technical demands for the grade.
Technical elements which are specific to each discipline (instrument)	See Appendix 1 (P11) for the technical elements which are specific to each discipline (instrument).

RECITAL (75 marks)

Categories being assessed: accuracy, expression and technique.

	Accuracy (25 marks)	Expression (25 marks)	Technique (25 marks)
Distinction [66-75]	22-25 Completely/almost completely accurate, only inconsequential faults or errors across elements which do not affect the overall performance.	22-25 Excellent expression, any missing elements do not affect the success of the overall performance.	22-25 Excellent technique, only inconsequential technical deficiencies across elements which do not affect the overall performance.
Merit [57-65]	19-21 Predominantly accurate, minor faults or errors across elements which have only a limited effect on the overall performance.	19-21 Good expression, some missing elements which have a limited effect on the success of the overall performance.	19-21 Good technique, minor technical deficiencies across elements which have a limited effect on the overall performance.
Pass [45-56]	15-18 Reasonably accurate, several faults or errors across elements which affect the overall performance.	15-18 Reasonably expressive, several missing elements which affect the success of the overall performance.	15-18 Reasonable technique, several technical deficiencies across elements which affect the overall performance.
Blue [33-44]	11-14 Significant inaccuracies, many faults or errors across elements which significantly affect the overall performance.	11-14 Lacking expressive elements which significantly affect the success of the overall performance.	11-14 Insecure technique, significant technical deficiencies across elements which significantly affect the overall performance.
White [0-35]	0-10 Fundamental inaccuracies with numerous serious faults or errors across elements which substantially undermine the overall performance.	0-10 Little or no attention to expression, significant missing elements which substantially affect the success of the overall performance.	0-10 Serious technical insecurity, serious deficiencies across elements which substantially undermine the overall performance.

Stagecraft and Sense of Performance Assessment Category

Stagecraft and Sense of Performance	
Key Areas	Key Elements
Presentation	Appearance. Preparation of the performance area. Organisation. Preparation of equipment such as music stand, music, instrument accessories, water, etc. Pace of overall delivery of performance. Appropriate gaps/relaxation between pieces. Appropriate conventions used to start and end the performance.
Deportment	Stage manner. Entrances, exits and activity between pieces. Posture in performance. Any movement within the performance area.
Communication	Communication with the audience (musical or verbal). Communication with accompanist/other musicians as appropriate. Acknowledgements as appropriate.
Engagement	Engagement with the music. Engaging listeners in the performance.
Confidence	Presenting the performance with confidence. Assured performance. Commitment/conviction of performance. Convincing Performance.

Stagecraft and Sense of Performance (15 marks)

Marked out of 15

Categories being assessed: Stagecraft and Sense of Performance

Distinction [13-15]	Excellent Stagecraft (presentation & deportment). Excellent Sense of Performance (communication, engagement & confidence).
Merit [11-12]	Good Stagecraft (presentation & deportment). Good Sense of Performance (communication, engagement & confidence).
Pass [9-10]	Reasonable attempt at Stagecraft (presentation & deportment). Reasonable attempt at Sense of Performance (communication, engagement & confidence).
Blue [7-8]	Limited Stagecraft (presentation & deportment). Limited Sense of Performance (communication, engagement & confidence).
White [0-6]	Little or no awareness of Stagecraft (presentation & deportment). Little or no awareness of Sense of Performance (communication, engagement & confidence).

Programme Assessment Category

Programme		
Key Areas	Key Elements	
Level of Content	Appropriate complexity and substance of technical demands. Appropriate complexity and substance of expressive demands. Balance of musical content and duration.	
Variety	Choose a balanced programme which allows demonstration of a range of contrasting technical and expressive skills. Imaginative/creative approach to programming. Programmed contrast realised through the performance.	
Communication of Programme	Clearly convey the content of the programme plus appropriate supporting information or detail, in any suitable format; e.g verbal or written programme.	
Duration	Management of Target Durations (Grades 1-5): Grade 1 – Target Duration: 5 minutes Grade 2 – Target Duration: 6 minutes Grade 3 – Target Duration: 8 minutes Grade 4 – Target Duration: 10 minutes Grade 5 – Target Duration: 12 minutes Management of Fixed Durations: Gd 6 – minimum: 12 minutes / maximum: 18 minutes Gd 7 – minimum: 15 minutes / maximum: 21 minutes Gd 8 – minimum: 19 minutes / maximum: 25 minutes	Mandatory Penalties (Grades 6-8 only): 0-1 minute outside of min/max duration: deduct 2 marks 1-2 minutes outside of min/max duration: deduct 4 marks 2-3 minutes outside of min/max duration: deduct 6 marks Over 3 minutes outside of min/max durations will be disqualified.

Programme (10 marks)

Marked out of 10

Categories being assessed: Programme

Distinction [9-10]	Excellent variety, content, management of duration and communication of programme.
Merit [7-8]	Good variety, content, management of duration and communication of programme.
Pass [6]	Satisfactory variety, content, management of duration and communication of programme.
Blue [5]	Limitations in variety, content, management of duration and communication of programme.
White [0-4]	Little or no variety, content, management of duration and communication of programme.

Appendix 1: Instrument Specific Technique

The below provides an example of instrument specific technical elements, this list is not exhaustive and technical aspects relevant to the repertoire will also be considered within the technical assessment criteria.

Classical Guitar Clarity of note production, shifts, plucking techniques (tirando and apoyando), vibrato, chords, intonation, technical facility, technical aspects relevant to the repertoire.
Piano Touch, balance between hands, pedalling, passagework, technical aspects relevant to the repertoire.
Singing Smooth movement between head/chest/different registers, breath control & support, vibrato, diction, intonation, technical facility, range, quality of sound at extremes of registers, technical aspects relevant to the repertoire.
Strings Shifts, string crossing, intonation, double stopping, vibrato, technical facility, technical aspects relevant to the repertoire.
Woodwind & Brass Breath control, quality of articulation, intonation, pitching, stamina, range, quality of sound at extremes of registers, technical facility, technical aspects relevant to the repertoire.
Drums Balance between hands and feet, foot work, rolls, co-ordination, correct use of instrument (such as bell of ride, rim-click, trashy hi-hat etc.) technical facility, technical aspects relevant to the repertoire.
Keyboard Voicing, chords, use of available effects, pedalling (if relevant), passagework, technical aspects relevant to the repertoire.
Contemporary Guitar Clarity of note production, shifts, plucking techniques, vibrato, chords, intonation, technical facility, technical aspects relevant to the repertoire.
Contemporary Drums Balance between hands and feet, foot work, co-ordination, correct use of instrument (such as bell of ride, rim-click, trashy hi-hat etc.), technical facility, technical aspects relevant to the repertoire.
Contemporary Singing Smooth movement between head/chest/different registers, breath control & support, vibrato, diction, intonation, technical facility, range, quality of sound at extremes of registers, technical aspects relevant to the repertoire.