

## BOWED STRINGS REQUIREMENTS AND INFORMATION

*This section provides a summary of the most important points that teachers and candidates need to know when taking ABRSM bowed strings exams. Further details, as well as administrative information relating to the exams, are given in ABRSM's Information & Regulations (available at [www.abrsm.org/regulations](http://www.abrsm.org/regulations)) which should be read before an exam booking is made.*

### Entering for an exam

**Eligibility:** There are eight grades of exam for each subject and candidates may be entered in any grade irrespective of age and without previously having taken any other grade in the same subject. Candidates for a Grade 6, 7 or 8 exam must already have passed ABRSM Grade 5 (or above) in Music Theory, Practical Musicianship or a solo Jazz subject; for full details, including a list of accepted alternatives, see Regulation 1d at [www.abrsm.org/regulations](http://www.abrsm.org/regulations).

**Access:** ABRSM endeavours to make its exams as accessible as possible to all candidates, regardless of sensory impairments, learning difficulties or particular physical needs. There is a range of alternative tests and formats as well as sets of guidelines for candidates with particular access needs (see [www.abrsm.org/specificneeds](http://www.abrsm.org/specificneeds)). Where a candidate's needs are not covered by the guidelines, each case is considered on an individual basis. Further information is available from the Access Co-ordinator ([accesscoordinator@abrsm.ac.uk](mailto:accesscoordinator@abrsm.ac.uk)).

**Exam booking:** Details of exam dates, locations, fees and how to book an exam are available online at [www.abrsm.org/exambooking](http://www.abrsm.org/exambooking).

### Instruments

Candidates are required to perform on acoustic instruments (electric instruments are not permitted). Any size of instrument may be used. Examiners apply the marking criteria (which include the assessment of pitch, tone and musical shaping) to assess musical outcomes without reference to the specific attributes of the instrument.

### Elements of the exam

All ABRSM graded bowed strings exams comprise the following elements: three Pieces; Scales and arpeggios; Sight-reading; and Aural tests. In all grades, marks are allocated as follows:

Pieces: 1	30
2	30
3	30
Scales and arpeggios	21
Sight-reading	21
Aural tests	18
Total	<hr/> 150

**Marking scheme:** 100 marks are required for a Pass, 120 for a Merit and 130 for a Distinction. A Pass in each individual section is not required to pass overall. See pp. 88–89 for the marking criteria used by examiners.

## **Pieces**

**Programme planning:** Candidates must choose one piece from each of the three lists (A, B and C) in each grade. In the exam, they should inform the examiner which pieces they are performing, and they are welcome to use the form on p. 91 for this purpose.

**Accompaniment:** A live piano accompaniment is required for all pieces, except those which are published as studies or unaccompanied works and those Double Bass List C pieces marked ‘solo’. Candidates must provide their own accompanist, who may remain in the exam room only while accompanying. The candidate’s teacher may act as accompanist (examiners will not). If necessary, the accompanist may simplify any part of the piano accompaniment, provided the result is musically satisfactory.

**Exam music & editions:** Wherever the syllabus includes an arrangement or transcription, the edition listed in the syllabus must be used in the exam; in all such cases the abbreviation ‘arr.’ or ‘trans.’ appears in the syllabus entry. For all other pieces, the editions quoted in the syllabus are given for guidance only and candidates may use any edition of their choice (in- or out-of-print or downloadable). Information on obtaining exam music is given on p. 10.

**Interpreting the score:** Printed editorial suggestions such as fingering, bowing, metronome marks, realization of ornaments etc. need not be strictly observed. Whether the piece contains musical indications or not, candidates are always encouraged to interpret the score in a stylistically appropriate manner. Ultimately, examiners’ marking will be determined by consideration of pitch, time, tone, shape and performance, and how control of these contributes to the overall musical outcome.

**Vibrato:** The use and control of vibrato, and its effect on tone and shape, will be taken into account by examiners, who will be assessing the overall musical outcome. Pieces whose full musical effect is heavily reliant on vibrato tend not to appear in the syllabus before around Grade 5.

**Repeats:** All da capo and dal segno indications should be observed but all other repeats (including first-time bars) should be omitted unless they are very brief (i.e. of a few bars) or unless the syllabus specifies otherwise.

**Cadenzas & tuttis:** Cadenzas should not be played unless the syllabus specifies otherwise. Lengthy orchestral tutti sections should be cut.

**Performing from memory:** Candidates are free to perform any of their pieces from memory; in such cases they must ensure that a copy of the music is available for the examiner to refer to if necessary. No additional marks are awarded for playing from memory.

**Page-turns:** Examiners will be understanding if a page-turn causes a lack of continuity during a piece, and this will not affect the marking. A variety of solutions for awkward page-turns exists, including the use of an additional copy of the music or a photocopy of a section of the piece (but see ‘Photocopies’ below). In cases where candidates believe there is no solution to a particularly awkward page-turn, they may apply to bring a page-turner to the exam. The request must be made to the Syllabus Department ([syllabus@abrsm.ac.uk](mailto:syllabus@abrsm.ac.uk)) no later than the closing date for entry, and details of the piece, edition and nature of the difficulty should be given. If permission is granted, a confirmation letter will be issued which must be taken to the exam as verification. Examiners are unable to help with page-turning. In a Grade 8 exam, a candidate’s accompanist is permitted to bring a page-turner to assist with page-turns in the piano part (prior permission is not required).

**Photocopies:** Performing from unauthorized photocopies (or other kinds of copies) of copyright editions is not allowed. ABRSM may withhold the exam result where it has evidence of an illegal copy (or copies) being used. In the UK, copies may be used in certain limited circumstances – for full details, see the MPA’s *Code of Fair Practice* at [www.mpaonline.org.uk](http://www.mpaonline.org.uk). In all other cases, application should be made to the copyright holder before any copy is made, and evidence of permission received should be brought to the exam.

## **Scales and arpeggios**

Examiners will usually ask for at least one of each type of scale/arpeggio etc. required at each grade, as well as aiming to hear a balance of separately-bowed and slurred requirements. When asking for requirements, examiners will specify only:

- the key (including minor form – harmonic *or* melodic – in the Grade 6–8 scales) or the starting note
- separate bows *or* slurred (except for where the requirements are to be prepared with separate bows *only* – e.g. Grade 1 arpeggios)

All scales and arpeggios should:

- be played from memory
- be played from the lowest possible tonic/starting note, unless the syllabus indicates otherwise
- ascend and descend according to the specified range (and pattern)

Candidates are free to use any fingering that produces a successful musical outcome.

For major and minor scales (and double-stop scales in parallel sixths/octaves) candidates may choose between two rhythm patterns: even notes *or* long tonic. Arpeggios, dominant and diminished sevenths are required in root position only. All dominant sevenths must finish by resolving on the tonic.

Examples of scale/arpeggio etc. patterns found in this syllabus are given on pp. 12–13.

Books of the scale requirements are published for all bowed strings subjects by ABRSM.

Bowing will generally dictate the tempi of slurred scales and arpeggios. Separately-bowed requirements should be played briskly, using no more than half the bow length. The speeds on pp. 14–15 are given as a general guide.

### **Sight-reading**

Candidates will be asked to play a short unaccompanied piece of music which they have not previously seen. They will be given up to half a minute in which to look through and, if they wish, try out all or any part of the test before they are required to play it for assessment. The main technical parameters are outlined on each grade page of this syllabus; once introduced, these parameters apply for all subsequent grades (albeit with a logical progression of difficulty). For practice purposes, books of specimen sight-reading tests are published for all bowed string subjects by ABRSM.

### **Aural tests**

The requirements are the same for all subjects. Full details of the Aural tests are given on pp. 68–73.

### **In the exam**

**Examiners:** Generally, there will be one examiner in the exam room; however, for training and quality assurance purposes, a second examiner may sometimes be present. Examiners may ask to look at the music before or after the performance of a piece (a separate copy is not required: the candidate's or accompanist's copy will suffice). Examiners may also decide to stop the performance of a piece when they have heard enough to form a judgment. They will not issue, or comment on, a candidate's result; instead, the mark form (and certificate for successful candidates) will be issued by ABRSM after the exam.

**Tuning:** In Grades 1–5, the teacher or accompanist may tune the candidate's instrument (or advise on tuning) before the exam begins. In Grades 6–8, candidates must tune their instrument themselves. Examiners are unable to help with tuning.

**Seating:** Double bass candidates should provide their own stool if required. A chair/stool will be provided for cello candidates.

**Order of the exam:** The individual sections of the exam may be undertaken in any order, at the candidate's choice, although it is always preferable for accompanied pieces to be performed consecutively.

*(continued overleaf)*

## **Assessment**

The tables on pp. 88–89 show the marking criteria used by examiners. These criteria (newly revised and amended) have been in use in exams from January 2014. In each element of the exam, ABRSM operates the principle of marking from the required pass mark positively or negatively, rather than awarding marks by deduction from the maximum or addition from zero. In awarding marks, examiners balance the extent to which the qualities and skills listed on pp. 88–89 (broadly categorized by pitch, time, tone, shape and performance) are demonstrated and contribute towards the overall musical outcome.

## **Obtaining exam music**

Exam music is available from music retailers as well as online, including at the ABRSM music shop: [www.abrsm.org/shop](http://www.abrsm.org/shop). Every effort has been made to ensure that all the publications listed will remain available for the duration of the syllabus. Candidates are advised to obtain their music well in advance of the exam in case of any delays with items not kept in stock by retailers. Apart from queries relating to exams, all enquiries about the music (e.g. editorial, availability) should be addressed to the relevant publisher: contact details are listed at [www.abrsm.org/publishers](http://www.abrsm.org/publishers).