

Improvisation

The requirements for the improvisation test have changed. Changes apply to all exams taken from 1 January 2017 onwards. Please note that there is no overlap for supporting tests, and the previous improvisation test cannot be offered after 31 December 2016.

This test assesses candidates' ability to improvise fluently, coherently and creatively in response to a musical stimulus. Candidates must choose a stimulus from the following three options, indicating their choice of stimulus on the appointment form:

- ▶ stylistic
- ▶ motivic
- ▶ harmonic

Stylistic stimulus

The stylistic stimulus requires candidates to improvise over a notated piano part played by the examiner. Candidates are given a stimulus which includes the notated piano part and chord symbols. The stimulus begins with a two-bar introduction played by the examiner alone, followed by a further section over which candidates must improvise for a specified number of repeats. In the exam, the examiner plays the stimulus twice for candidates' reference, without repeats. Candidates are then given 30 seconds' preparation time, during which they may prepare for their improvisation aloud if they wish. The test then follows. The examiner then plays the stimulus again, and candidates join after the introduction, improvising for the specified number of repeats. Candidates should aim to improvise in a way that complements the musical idiom of the stimulus.

Motivic stimulus

The motivic stimulus requires candidates to improvise unaccompanied in response to a short melodic fragment. Candidates are given a notated melodic fragment which the examiner plays twice on the piano for candidates' reference (candidates are not required to play this back). Candidates are then given 30 seconds' preparation time, during which they may prepare for their improvisation aloud if they wish. The test then follows. Candidates should aim to improvise within the specified duration range and may begin by quoting the stimulus directly, developing their improvisation from there. However, candidates are not required to quote the stimulus directly, and may instead develop their improvisation from ideas taken from the stimulus such as a small group of notes or an interval.

Harmonic stimulus

The harmonic stimulus requires candidates to improvise unaccompanied in response to a chord sequence. Candidates are given a notated chord sequence, including chord symbols, which the examiner plays twice on the piano for candidates' reference. Candidates are then given 30 seconds' preparation time, during which they may prepare for their improvisation aloud if they wish. The test then follows. Candidates should improvise for the specified number of repeats, following the chord sequence. Please note that this test is always unaccompanied and the examiner will not provide a piano accompaniment for melodic instruments.

Parameters for improvisation

All stimuli comply with the musical parameters listed in the tables on the following pages. Lists are cumulative, meaning that tests may also include requirements from preceding grades. Further guidance and example stimuli can be found on our website.

Stylistic stimulus

Grade	Length of introduction	Length of improvised section	Times improvised section is played	Total to improvise	Time signatures (cumulative*)	Keys (cumulative*)	Number of chords per bar	Chords	Styles/speeds (cumulative*)
Initial	2 bars	4 bars	1	4 bars	$\frac{4}{4}$	C major	1	I, V	March, Lullaby
Grade 1	2 bars	4 bars	2	8 bars		F and G major	1	I, V	Fantasia, Moderato
Grade 2	2 bars	4 bars	2	8 bars		A minor	1	I, IV, V i, iv, V	Tango, Andante
Grade 3	2 bars	4 bars	2	8 bars	$\frac{3}{4}$	D and Bb major D and E minor	1	I, ii, IV, V i, iib5, iv, V	Waltz, Allegretto
Grade 4	2 bars	4 bars	3	12 bars	$\frac{2}{4}$	G and B minor	1	I, ii, IV, V i, iib5, iv, V	Adagio, Allegro
Grade 5	2 bars	4 bars	3	12 bars	$\frac{6}{8}$	A and Eb major	up to 2	I, ii, IV, V, vi i, iib5, iv, V, VI	Grazioso, Vivace
Grade 6	2 bars	8 bars	2	16 bars	$\frac{12}{8}$	F# and C minor	up to 2	I, ii, IV, V, vi i, iib5, iv, V, VI 7ths	Agitato, Nocturne
Grade 7	2 bars	8 bars	2	16 bars	$\frac{9}{8}$	E and Ab major	up to 2	I, ii, iii, IV, V, vi i, iib5, III, iv, V, VI 7ths	Gigue, Grave
Grade 8	2 bars	8 bars	2	16 bars	$\frac{5}{4}$	C# and F minor	up to 2	all chords 7ths, 9ths, suspensions	Impressionistic, Irregular Dance

* Tests may also include requirements from preceding grades.

Motivic stimulus

Grade	Length of stimulus	Length of response	Time signatures (cumulative*)	Rhythmic features (cumulative*)	Articulation (cumulative*)	Intervals (cumulative*)	Keys (cumulative*)
Initial	2 bars	4-6 bars	$\frac{4}{4}$	minims, crotchets		up to minor 3rd	C major
Grade 1	2 bars	4-8 bars		quavers		major 3rd	F and G major
Grade 2	2 bars	6-8 bars		dotted notes	sfaccato	perfect 4th	A minor
Grade 3	2 bars	6-8 bars	$\frac{3}{4}$	ties		perfect 5th	D and B \flat major D and E minor
Grade 4	2 bars	8-12 bars	$\frac{2}{4}$	syncopation	accents	minor 6th, major 6th	G and B minor
Grade 5	2 bars	8-12 bars	$\frac{6}{8}$	semiquavers	slurs	octave	A and E \flat major
Grade 6	1 bar	12-16 bars	$\frac{12}{8}$		acciaccaturas	augmented 4th, diminished 5th	F# and C minor
Grade 7	1 bar	12-16 bars	$\frac{9}{8}$			minor 7th, major 7th	E and A \flat major
Grade 8	1 bar	12-16 bars	$\frac{5}{4}$	triplets, duplets	sfz	all up to major 10th	C# and F minor

* Tests may also include requirements from preceding grades.

Harmonic stimulus

Grade	Length of chord sequence	Times chord sequence is played	Total to improvise	Number of chords per bar	Chords	Keys (all instruments except those in the table below)
Initial	4 bars	1	4 bars	1	I, V	C major
Grade 1	4 bars	2	8 bars	1	I, V	
Grade 2	4 bars	2	8 bars	1	I, IV, V	C, F, G major
Grade 3	4 bars	2	8 bars	1	I, ii, IV, V	
Grade 4	4 bars	3	12 bars	1	i, iv, V	A, D, E, G, B minor
Grade 5	4 bars	3	12 bars	1	i, iv, V, VI	
Grade 6	8 bars	2	16 bars	1	I, ii, IV, V i, ii♭5, iv, V 7ths	
Grade 7	8 bars	2	16 bars	1	I, ii, iii, IV, V, vi i, ii♭5, III, iv, V, VI 7ths	C, F, G, B♭, D, Eb, A major A, D, E, G, B, C, F# minor
Grade 8	8 bars	2	16 bars	1	all chords 7ths, 9ths, suspensions	

Grade	Keys (treble recorder)	Keys (violin)	Keys (viola)	Keys (cello)	Keys (double bass)
Initial	C major	D major	D major	C major	C major
Grades 1-3	C, F, B♭ major	D, E, A major	D, G, A major	C, D, G major	C, D, G major
Grades 4-5	A, D, E, G, C minor	C#, E, F#, A, B minor	D, E, F#, A, B minor	D, E, F#, A, B minor	D, E, F#, A, B minor
Grades 6-8	C, F, G, B♭, D, Eb, A♭ major A, D, E, G, B, C, F minor	C, D, E, F, G, A, B♭ major A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G minor	C, D, E, F, G, A, B♭ major A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G minor	C, D, Eb, F, G, A, B♭ major A, B, C, D, E, F#, G minor	C, D, E, F, G, A, B♭ major A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G minor