

## SINGING GRADES: requirements and information

*This section provides a summary of the most important points that teachers and candidates need to know when taking ABRSM graded Singing 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.*

### Changes in the 2018 syllabus (Grades 6–8)

There are changes to the structure and some of the requirements at Grades 6–8. The changes are:

- The number of repertoire lists has been expanded (from four to five).
- Candidates perform three songs (rather than four), chosen from any three of the five lists.
- All songs are marked out of 30.
- Candidates are no longer required to sing in two languages or to sing certain songs in their original language.
- Any song may be sung by any voice type and in any key.

### Entering for an exam

**Eligibility:** There are eight grades for Singing and candidates may be entered for any grade irrespective of age and without previously having taken any other grade in Singing. 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/examregulations](http://www.abrsm.org/examregulations).

**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, venues, fees and how to book an exam are available online at [www.abrsm.org/exambooking](http://www.abrsm.org/exambooking).

### Elements of the exam

All ABRSM graded Singing exams comprise the following elements: three Accompanied songs; one Unaccompanied traditional song; Sight-singing; and Aural tests. In all grades, marks are allocated as follows:

Accompanied songs: 1	30
2	30
3	30
Unaccompanied traditional song	21
Sight-singing	21
Aural tests	18
Total	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. 100–101 for the marking criteria used by examiners.

## **Accompanied songs**

**Programme planning:** In all grades, candidates must perform three Accompanied songs (as well as an Unaccompanied traditional song: see p. 11).

In Grades 1–5, candidates choose one song from each of the three Lists, A, B and C. In Grades 1–3, there is a total maximum programme time for the accompanied songs that must be observed: four minutes at Grade 1, five minutes at Grade 2, and six minutes at Grade 3.

In Grades 6–8, candidates choose one song from any three of the five Lists, A, B, C, D and E.

Every effort has been made to ensure the syllabus lists feature a broad range of repertoire, with items to suit different voices and to appeal to candidates of differing ages and backgrounds. Not every song will be suitable for every candidate due to vocal range, content (themes, lyrics) or the wider context (historical, cultural, subject matter of the larger work from which it is drawn etc.). It is advised that songs selected are considered carefully for their appropriateness to each individual, which may require consultation between teachers and parents/guardians.

**Languages:** In all grades, all items may be sung either in their original language or in a singing translation in any other language. The syllabus details the languages/singing translations for all the listed editions (except for English-language songs that are published without singing translations).

**Keys:** The syllabus details the published keys and vocal ranges for all items (except for those items encompassing more than one key, for which only the vocal range is specified). Where the syllabus cites more than one edition for a particular song, keys are listed for all editions, and, where there are different keys, the edition in the highest key is presented first. The vocal range is given for the first-listed edition only (unless there are slight variants in range between editions).

The vocal ranges are presented using the Helmholtz system, i.e.:



C B c b c' b' c'' b'' c'''

All items may be sung by any voice and in any key, suited to the compass of the candidate's voice. Many songs are available published in different keys, and candidates/teachers may make their own transpositions.

*(continued overleaf)*

**Exam music & editions:** Whenever the syllabus requires a specific arrangement of a song, the edition listed in the syllabus must be used in the exam; in such cases the arranger's name is presented in bold type or the syllabus indicates 'this version only'. For all other songs, candidates may use any edition of their choice (in- or out-of-print or downloadable).

The listing of editions in this syllabus is given only for guidance and for the purposes of correct identification and is not intended to be comprehensive since many of the syllabus items are available in a large number of song collections and editions. The information on published keys, vocal ranges and translations is likewise given for guidance.

Songs marked (F) or (M) contain words that indicate or suggest a female or male singer, but this information need not be regarded as obligatory. Pronouns may be changed, at the candidate's discretion, as may other gender-specific words that are easily substituted.

**Interpreting the score:** Printed editorial suggestions such as phrasing, 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.

**Verses and repeats:** Unless otherwise indicated in the syllabus, candidates should perform all items complete, although they may omit repeats of sections where the music and words are unchanged (and therefore little is added to the overall effect of the performance).

In verse/chorus songs, the choruses are required. All da capo and dal segno indications should be observed, unless the syllabus specifies otherwise.

**Singing from memory:** All items in all grades must be sung from memory, except for items from oratorios, cantatas and large-scale sacred works, where candidates are permitted to sing with score, if they wish, in accordance with accepted performance practice.

**Accompaniment:** All songs in Lists A, B, C, D and E must be performed with a live piano accompaniment. Candidates must provide their own accompanist, who may remain in the exam room only while accompanying. The candidate's teacher may act as accompanist but candidates are not permitted to accompany themselves. The examiner will not act as an accompanist (except in the Sight-singing test). If necessary, an accompanist may simplify any part of the piano accompaniment, provided the result is musically satisfactory.

In a Grade 6–8 exam, the accompanist is permitted to bring a page-turner to assist with any difficult page-turns in the piano part. Examiners are unable to help with page-turning.

**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.

## Unaccompanied traditional song (folk song)

In all grades, candidates are required to perform an unaccompanied traditional (folk) song of their own choice, from memory. A traditional song is defined as a folk song originating among the people of a region and forming part of their culture. Folk songs are essentially colloquial and have no traceable composer, and they cover a broad range of topics, such as: the natural world and the cycle of life; love and romance; work and relaxation; historical events; and situations of hardship, suffering, inequality and rebellion.

The following genres are not suitable: hymns, carols, chants, plainsong; nursery rhymes; national anthems; stylized folk song arrangements (i.e. that would rely on their piano accompaniment for the full musical effect to be achieved).

The unaccompanied traditional song may be sung in any language. An English translation or short summary should be provided for the examiner when words other than English are used. The song may be sung in any key comfortable for the candidate, and, if required, the first note or key-chord may be played on the piano to establish the pitch. The candidate's unaccompanied traditional song must be different from the accompanied songs performed in the same exam.

Candidates must ensure that the unaccompanied traditional song fulfils the following timings:

	<i>minimum</i>	<i>maximum</i>
<i>Grades 1–4</i>	1 minute	2 minutes
<i>Grades 5–8</i>	1 minute	3 minutes

**Possible sources:** There are no 'set' songs for this part of the exam. Candidates are free to perform any song from any source or publication at any grade (provided the guidelines above are followed). The many available collections of traditional/folk songs include the following:

- The ABRSM Songbook, Books 1–5 (ABRSM) (*each album contains twelve unaccompanied traditional songs*)
- Best of Folk Songs: 40 British, Irish and American Songs (*available in melody-only and accompanied editions: Schott ED 12881 or 12880*)
- Folk Songs of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales (*Alfred VF1880*)
- Folk Voiceworks: 30 Traditional Songs (*OUP*)
- The Language of Folk, Books 1 & 2 (*Faber Music*)
- The Library of Folk Songs (*Amsco AM 961521*)
- The New Penguin Book of English Folk Songs (*Penguin Classics*)
- The New Scottish Song Book (*Hardie Press HP14*)
- The Saltire Scottish Song Book (*Hardie Press HP11*)
- A Selection of Collected Folk Songs, Vols 1 & 2, arr. Sharp & Vaughan Williams (*Novello NOV190038 or NOV190040*)
- Sing Together (*available in melody-only and accompanied editions: OUP*)
- Strawberry Fair (*Collins Music; formerly published by A & C Black*)

## **Sight-singing**

**Useful information:** Candidates will be asked to sing a short piece of music which they have not previously seen; this Sight-singing test will be accompanied by the examiner at the piano.

The tests for Grades 1–5 are printed without words and may be sung to any vowel (with or without consonant) or to sol-fa. The tests for Grades 6–8 are printed with clear, simple and singable words in English; candidates may use these or they may sing to any vowel or sol-fa, if they prefer (the choice will not affect the marking).









Separate bass-clef versions of tests are available for all grades: candidates should let the examiner know if they would prefer a bass-clef to a treble-clef test.

For practice purposes, two books of sample Sight-singing tests (Grades 1–5 and Grades 6–8) are available, published by ABRSM.

**Preparation:** Candidates will be given half a minute in which to look through and, if they wish, try out any part of the test (unaccompanied) before they are required to sing it for assessment. The examiner will play the key-chord and starting note before the preparation time and again before the actual assessment.

**Accompaniments:** None of the Sight-singing tests feature piano introductions and therefore it is the candidate who starts the performance, setting his or her own pulse and ‘shadowed’ by the examiner at the piano. In Grades 1 and 2 the piano accompaniments are minimal (occasional chords), with the top notes of the chords doubling the vocal line. In Grades 3–5 the accompaniments are slightly fuller, while in Grades 6–8 they are more akin to ‘real’ song accompaniments.

**Parameters:** The table on p. 13 shows the introduction of elements at each grade. Please note that these parameters are presented cumulatively, i.e. once introduced they apply for all subsequent grades (albeit within a logical progression of difficulty). Rests are provided at suitable breathing places and dynamic markings are printed above the vocalist’s stave. Italian and English descriptors are used (the Italian terms relating to the requirements of ABRSM’s Music Theory grades).

Grade	Length (bars)	Keys	Time	Vocal range	Intervals in vocal part	Other features that may be included	Texts
1	4	C, G & F majors	4/4	about a sixth, within the range of: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>major/minor 2nds only</li> <li>stepwise and diatonic</li> <li>no repeated notes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <math>\dot{\zeta}</math></li> <li><i>f</i> and <i>p</i></li> <li><i>cresc.</i> and <i>dim.</i> hairpins</li> </ul>	None
2		D major	3/4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>rising major/minor 3rds within tonic chord</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> <li><i>mf</i> and <i>mp</i></li> </ul>	
3	8	B $\flat$ major A minor		about an octave, within the range of: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>rising and falling major/minor 3rds</li> <li>cadential rising perfect 4ths</li> <li>repeated notes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <math>\dot{\zeta}</math></li> <li>slowing of tempo at end</li> </ul>	
4		A & E $\flat$ majors E & D minors	6/8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>rising perfect 4ths (or 4ths falling back to note of departure)</li> <li>rising and falling octaves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>semiquaver patterns, dotted rhythms</li> </ul>	
5		E major B & G minors			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>perfect 5ths</li> <li>falling perfect 4ths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> <li>ties</li> <li>phrase marks</li> </ul>	
6	8–10	A $\flat$ major C minor			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>major/minor 6ths</li> <li>occasional chromatic notes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>pp</i></li> <li>slurs</li> <li>accents</li> </ul>	English (optional)
7		F $\sharp$ minor			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>occasional minor 7ths</li> <li>chromatic semitones</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>triplets</li> <li>semiquaver rests</li> <li>staccato</li> <li>slowing of tempo followed by <i>a tempo</i></li> <li>pause sign</li> </ul>	
8	8–12	C $\sharp$ & F minors			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>diminished 7ths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>ff</i></li> </ul>	

## **Aural tests**

The requirements are the same for all subjects. Full details of the Aural tests are given on pp. 88–93.

## **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 (e.g. the accompanist's score – no additional copies are required) before or after the performance of an accompanied song. Examiners may stop the performance of a song when they have heard enough to form a judgment. They will not issue, or discuss, a candidate's result; instead, the mark form (and certificate for successful candidates) will be issued by ABRSM after the exam.

**Songlist:** Candidates should provide the examiner with a list of the songs they will be performing, in particular the syllabus-number (e.g. A16) for each song in each list. Blank exam programme & running order forms are provided on pp. 103–109 and may be filled in for this purpose.

**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 songs to be performed consecutively.

**Performance:** Candidates are advised to direct their performance towards the examiner (the 'audience'), who will be listening even when he/she has to look down to write.

## **Assessment**

The tables on pp. 100–101 show the marking criteria used by examiners. 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. 100–101 (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).