

Acoustic Guitar Playing





“RGT offers quality exams you can have confidence in”.

RGT acoustic guitar grade exams are accredited by:



London College of Music Examinations

Founded in 1887 as an establishment devoted to musical education, the London College of Music was incorporated as a public educational institution in 1939, and became part of Thames Valley University in 1991. Today, London College of Music Examinations enjoys an esteemed reputation as a major international music examination board.

London College of Music Examinations is a QCA accredited and DfES approved music examination board.

Grade one to eight examinations are accredited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and have been placed on the National Qualifications Framework. From Grade Six onwards, the examinations attract UCAS points towards university entrance. The qualifications are awarded and certificated by Thames Valley University.

Registry of Guitar Tutors

The Registry of Guitar Tutors (RGT) was established in 1992 with the aims of improving standards in guitar education and helping the guitar teaching profession achieve recognition within the mainstream of music education by the establishment of an accredited range of comprehensive and well-structured teaching programmes.

RGT publishes an on-line Directory of registered guitar and bass tutors, and organises regular music education conferences and training seminars.

In association with LCM Exams, RGT also has a full range of graded examinations in popular music theory, classical guitar, electric guitar and bass guitar.



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Introduction To Acoustic Guitar Examinations

Internationally Recognised Qualifications

These examinations offer a formal recognition of the specific talents of acoustic guitar players. The examinations have been developed by the Registry of Guitar Tutors, in association with London College of Music Examinations (one of the world's most established and respected music examination boards – established in 1887), and are awarded and certificated by Thames Valley University. From Grade One onwards, these examinations are accredited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), and have been placed on the National Qualifications Framework, so establishing a formal and recognised standard by which the skills and abilities of acoustic guitarists can be assessed. From Grade Six onwards, the exams are awarded UCAS points towards university entrance.

A brief outline of what happens during an examination

The examiner will begin by asking you to play a selection of chords and scales. The examiner will then ask you to play through your chosen studies and/or pieces. At Grades One to Eight, the examiner will ask you a few spoken questions to test your knowledge of the instrument and the music performed; this is followed by a test to assess your accompaniment skills. From Preliminary Grade onwards, the exam will conclude with the examiner testing your 'ear for music' by giving you a selection of aural assessments.

Marking structure

The following table shows the maximum marks that can be awarded in each section of the examination.

Initial Stage:	Fingerboard Knowledge – 25 Performance – 75
Preliminary Grade:	Fingerboard Knowledge – 15 Performance – 75 Aural Assessment – 10
Grades 1 to 8:	Fingerboard Knowledge – 10 Performance – 50 Musical Knowledge – 10 Accompaniment – 20 Aural Assessment – 10
85 or above = Distinction. 75-84.5 = Merit. 65-74.5 = Pass. 55-64.5 = Below Pass Upper Level. 0-54.5 = Below Pass Lower Level.	

The requirements for each grade are shown on the following pages.

Examination Content

Fingerboard Knowledge

The examiner will request a selection of chords, scales and (from grade five) arpeggios from the lists below.

- Each chord should be strummed slowly, just once.
- Except at Initial Stage, scales and arpeggios should be played ascending and descending, without repeating the top note.
- All presentations should be played from memory.
- Whilst it is stated below that some scales/chords may be required in 'any' key, candidates will not be asked to play at pitches where fingerboard positions are inaccessible for their particular instrument.

Initial Stage [Max 25 marks]

Open position chords: C, G, Am, Em

1 octave open position scales: C major and G major – ascending only

Preliminary Grade [Max 15 marks]

Open position chords: G, C, D, Am, Dm, Em

1 octave open position scales: C major and G major – ascending and descending

Grade 1 [Max 10 marks]

As previous grade, plus:

Open position chords: A, E, A7, B7, D7, E7

1 octave open position scales: D major, A natural minor

Grade 2 [Max 10 marks]

As previous grades, plus:

Open/first position chords: F, C7, G7, Amaj7, Cmaj7, Dmaj7, Fmaj7, Gmaj7, Am7, Dm7, Em7

2 octave open position scales: A major, A Dorian

Grade 3 [Max 10 marks]

As previous grades, plus:

Open/first position chords: Asus2, Dsus2, Fsus2, Asus4, Csus4, Dsus4, Esus4, Fsus4, Gsus4

2 octave open position scales: G major, A natural minor, A Mixolydian

Grade 4 [Max 10 marks]

As previous grades, plus:

Open/first position chords: A6, D6, E6, G6, Aadd9, Cadd9, Eadd9, Fadd9, Gadd9

2 octave open position scales: E major, E natural minor, E blues

2 octave fretted major scales (played *without* the use of open strings): G, A, C, D

Grade 5 [Max 10 marks]

Barre chords with ANY root note: major, minor

2 octave fretted scales in ANY key: major, natural minor, blues

2 octave open position arpeggios: A, G and E major; A and E minor

Grade 6 [Max 10 marks]

Barre/fretted chords with ANY root note: major 7, minor 7, dominant 7

1 octave fretted major scales in 3 fingerboard positions in ANY key

2 octave fretted scales in ANY key: pentatonic major, pentatonic minor

2 octave major arpeggios with ANY root

Grade 7 [Max 10 marks]

Major chords with ANY root note in 3 different fingerboard positions

Diminished 7 chords with ANY root

Major chords in 1st and 2nd inversion: C, D, E, G, A

2 octave scales in ANY key: Mixolydian modal scale, Dorian modal scale, harmonic minor

1 octave fretted scales in 3 fingerboard positions in ANY key: natural minor

2 octave arpeggios with ANY root: minor

Grade 8 [Max 10 marks]

Major chords with ANY root note in 4 different fingerboard positions

Minor chords with ANY root note in 3 different fingerboard positions

Minor chords in 1st and 2nd inversion: Am, Dm, Em

1 octave scales in 5 fingerboard positions in ANY key: major

1 octave C major scale harmonised in 3rds and 6ths

1 octave G major scale harmonised in 10ths

2 octave arpeggios with ANY root: dominant 7

Each examination grade handbook provides all the chords, scales and arpeggios required for the grade in notation, tablature and fretbox formats.

Performance

Performances do NOT need to be from memory.

Initial Stage and Preliminary Grade

- A) The candidate should select and play ONE Rhythm Playing Study, chosen from the three Rhythm Playing Studies contained in the examination handbook. [Max. 25 marks]
- B) The candidate should select and play TWO melodies. *At least* ONE must be chosen from the four traditional melodies contained in the examination handbook (see Appendix 1 for list of melodies). If preferred, one melody can be a 'free choice' by the candidate of any other well-known melody from 1960 onwards – providing it is of at least similar technical standard and duration to the melodies within the examination handbook. (Candidates should bring copies of the notation of any free choice melodies to the examination for the examiner to view.) Melodies can be played with a pick or using fingers, as preferred by the candidate. [Max. 50 marks]

Grades 1 and 2

Candidates should perform a total of TWO pieces: ONE Rhythm Playing Study (from Group A), plus *either* ONE Fingerstyle Study (from Group B1) *or* ONE Melody (from Group B2). All are included in the examination handbook.

- A) The candidate should select and play ONE Rhythm Playing study, chosen from the three Rhythm Playing studies contained in the examination handbook. [Max. 25 marks]
- B1) The candidate should select and play ONE Fingerstyle study, chosen from the two Fingerstyle studies contained in the examination handbook. [Max. 25 marks]

OR

- B2) The candidate should select and play ONE melody, chosen either from the four traditional melodies contained in the examination handbook (see Appendix 1 for list of melodies) OR any well-known melody chosen by the candidate from 1960 onwards providing it is of at least similar technical standard and duration to the melodies within the examination handbook. (Candidates should bring copies of the notation of any free choice melody to the exam for the examiner to view.) The melody can be played with a pick or using fingers, as preferred by the candidate. [Max. 25 marks]

Grades 3, 4 and 5

Candidates should perform a total of TWO pieces: ONE Rhythm Playing Study from Group A, plus ONE piece from Group B.

- A) The candidate should select and play ONE Rhythm Playing study, chosen from the three Rhythm Playing studies contained in the examination handbook. [Max. 25 marks]
- B) The candidate should select and play *either* ONE piece chosen from the four in the examination handbook (see Appendix 2 for list of pieces) *or* ONE piece of similar standard chosen from the list of suggested pieces (see Appendix 3) *or* ONE 'free choice' piece (self-composed or otherwise) providing it is of at least similar standard to the set pieces within the grade. (Candidates should bring copies of any free choice pieces, in standard notation or tablature, to the examination for the examiner to view.) [Max. 25 marks]

Grades 6, 7 and 8

Candidates should perform a total of TWO pieces, demonstrating some variety in musical style and a range of technical ability. At these grades candidates are allowed to interpret the pieces in their own style, rather than sticking rigidly to the arrangement shown in the notation, providing the technical level is not simplified.

The two pieces can be selected from the following sources:

- At least ONE piece from the four pieces contained in the examination handbook (see Appendix 2 for list of pieces). [Max. 25 marks]
- A maximum of ONE piece from the list of suggested alternative pieces (see Appendix 3) *or* ONE 'Free choice piece'. This can be any piece (self-composed or otherwise) providing it is of at least similar standard to the set pieces within the grade. This could include pieces with altered tuning (e.g. dropped D, DADGAD, open G, etc.) *or* specialist styles of guitar playing such as slide guitar. (A second guitar can be brought to the examination for this purpose if preferred). Candidates should bring copies of any free choice pieces, in standard notation or tablature, to the examination for the examiner to view. [Max. 25 marks]

All performance pieces are included in the relevant grade examination handbook and on the accompanying CD.

Musical Knowledge (from Grade one onwards) [Max 10 marks]

Candidates may be asked questions relating to any of the topics listed below. The range, depth and complexity of the questions increases as the grades progress.

Grade 1 and 2

Questions to test the candidate's knowledge about the basic anatomy of the guitar: notes on the fingerboard, parts of the guitar.

Grade 3, 4 and 5

Questions to test the candidate's knowledge of the solo pieces performed (e.g. key, time signature, understanding of dynamics and repeat marks, techniques used).

Grade 6, 7 and 8

Discussion and questions arising from, but not limited exclusively to, the music performed, covering not only the topics listed in previous grades but also the selection of pieces, repertoire, widening musical and stylistic awareness and, where appropriate to the pieces performed, altered tunings, use of the capo and transposition.

Candidates should consult the relevant grade examination handbook, which gives examples and details of the requirements for this section of the examination.

Accompaniment (from Grade one onwards) [Max 20 marks]

The examiner will play a short melody (either live on guitar or piano, or via cd) and the candidate should provide an accompaniment. A wide range of musical styles may be used, reflecting those that normally involve acoustic guitar, such as traditional and contemporary folk, blues and ragtime, pop and light rock.

The candidate will be shown a chord chart suitable for accompanying the melody. The melody will first be played once for the candidate to listen to. It will then be played a further three times without stopping. The candidate should perform a suitable accompaniment over the last two playings (the candidate's performance over the first of the three playings will not be assessed and the first playing can be used either to 'practise' or just to read the chord chart). The style of the accompaniment is left to the candidate's discretion and the candidate can choose to either strum or fingerpick.

The range of the keys and chord symbols will reflect the chords required for the appropriate grade, and so the complexity of the chord progression will increase with the grades. The number of chords that appear in the chord progression, the range of time signatures and the rhythmic complexity of the melodies all increase as the grades progress.

The demonstration of the candidate's level of musicality, expression, inventiveness and stylistic awareness is expected to grow as the grades progress.

Grade 1 and 2

The time signature will be limited to $\frac{4}{4}$

Grade 3, 4 and 5

The range of time signatures will be limited to $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{4}{4}$

Grade 6, 7 and 8

The range of time signatures will be $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$, $\frac{6}{8}$

Candidates should consult the relevant grade examination handbook, which gives full details and examples of the tests, including audio examples on the CD.

Aural Assessment (from Preliminary Grade onwards) [Max 10 marks]

Preliminary Grade to Grade 8

Candidates' aural abilities will be assessed via five tests appropriate to the grade.

Tests A, B, C) A 4 bar melody will be played. The tests involve keeping time by clapping the pulse of the melody, identifying the time signature of the melody and reproducing the rhythm of an extract from the melody. The range of time signatures, rhythmic complexity and length of extract will increase as the grades progress.

Test D) Apart from at Preliminary Grade (where candidates identify the highest note of two notes), the test is to reproduce on guitar a short melodic phrase after the examiner plays it twice. The tests grow in rhythmic and melodic range and complexity as the grades progress. The range of time signatures and keys increases with the grade.

Test E) This test involves recognising chords and movement between chords. The range of chords and cadential movements increases as the grades progress.

Candidates should consult the relevant grade examination handbook, which gives full details and examples of the aural assessments, including audio examples on the accompanying CD.

Appendix 1

List of melodies included in the grade handbooks for the Performance section

Initial Stage

When The Saints Go Marching In – C major
On Top Of Old Smokey – C major
Michael Row The Boat Ashore – G major
Kumbaya – G major

Preliminary Grade

Morning Has Broken – C major
Aura Lea – C major
Early One Morning – C major
For He's A Jolly Good Fellow – G major

Grade 1

Auld Lang Syne – D major
The Bear Dance – A minor
Mairi's Wedding – G major
Swing Low Sweet Chariot – G major

Grade 2

Scarborough Fair – A Dorian
The Skye Boat Song – A major
House Of The Rising Sun – A minor
Londonderry Air – D major

Appendix 2

List of solo pieces included in the grade handbooks for the Performance section

Grade 3

Double Thumb Special – G major
Red Haired Boy – A Mixolydian
Get Sussed – D major
Athol Highlanders – A Mixolydian

Grade 4

Freight Train – C major
Down By The Sally Gardens – D major
Let Love Add Up – A major
The Rakes of Mallow – G major

Grade 5

Mourning Air – E Mixolydian
Everglade – A major
Country Mood – G major
The Ten Penny Bit – A Dorian

Grade 6

Amazing Grace – A major
Hometown Blues – E blues
On The Road – E major
Rake's of Kildare & The Blackthorn Stick – A Dorian

Grade 7

Song for Eric – A major
Auburn – D major
Invocation – G minor
Off To California and Harvest Home – G & D major

Grade 8

I Dare You – D major
The Coast Road – E major
Acoustic Fuel – D Dorian
The Derry Hornpipe – D major

Appendix 3

List of suggested alternative pieces for Performance section

This list is published on the RGT website (www.RegistryOfGuitarTutors.com), rather than in traditional print format, in order to enable it to be reviewed and updated regularly – with any books that go out of print being removed from the list and any suitable new publications being added to the list.

Anyone without internet access can obtain a printed version of the current list upon request to the RGT office.

Publishers are invited to forward any suitable publications to the RGT with a request for inclusion on this list. Inclusion will be at the discretion of the RGT Examinations Dept.

There is no compulsion to select any of the pieces listed – candidates are allowed to select their own choice of material (self-composed or otherwise) providing it is of at least similar standard to the set pieces within the grade.

The grade listed for each alternative piece is for general guidance only – to demonstrate the typical grade of each piece when performed reasonably well – but candidates should note that grade differentiation is primarily by performance standard rather than purely by the piece chosen, therefore a piece may be suitable for a lower or higher grade depending upon the level of the actual performance. For example, at Grade Three a high level of stylistic interpretation and expression is not expected, but if a piece listed at this grade was performed fluently and accurately with flair, character and style it could quite appropriately be entered for a higher grade.

In order to make obtaining musical material easy for candidates, the list is deliberately biased towards pieces for which good quality transcriptions/arrangements are readily available usually in both standard notation and tablature, often with the inclusion of a demonstration CD. You can view the list at www.RegistryOfGuitarTutors.com.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can I Use An Electro-Acoustic Guitar For The Examination?

Yes. You may play acoustic or electro-acoustic guitar. The use of solid-body electric guitars is permitted but NOT recommended for these exams. If using a guitar that you wish to amplify you may need to supply your own amplifier and you should be able to set-up this amplification and any effects units promptly and unaided. The use of nylon-strung 'classical' guitars is not recommended for these exams from Grade Three onwards.

Do I Have To Use The Fingering Given In The Examination Handbooks?

No. The handbooks provide fingering for general guidance only. Alternative systematic and effective fingerings will also be acceptable.

Can I Enter Straight For Grade 8?

Yes. Candidates may enter for any examination without having taken any preceding examination. In other words, you don't need to have taken Grade 1 to enter for Grade 2. However, it is recommended that you work through all the handbooks to ensure that you develop your playing in a structured and comprehensive way.

Can I Enter More Than One Examination At The Same Session?

Yes. For example, you could take Grade 2 followed by Grade 3 on the same day.

Do I Need To have Lessons With An RGT Tutor Before I Can Enter An Examination?

No, you can enter whether you have a tutor or not - however tuition from a suitably experienced tutor would undoubtedly prove helpful in preparing for an examination.

What Do I Get When I Pass?

If you obtain the 65% pass mark you will be awarded an official Thames Valley University / London College of Music Examinations certificate for the relevant grade. This holds the same validity as those issued for classical music examinations. If you achieve 75% you will be awarded a Merit certificate. If you obtain 85% you will be awarded a Distinction certificate.

When Do Examinations Take Place?

In the UK examinations are held 3 times a year. The entry deadlines are: 1st February for the March/April 'Spring' exams; 1st May for the June/July 'Summer' exams; 1st October for the November/December 'Winter' exams. The examination dates within these periods are dependent upon the availability of the venue and candidates in each area and so the precise date cannot be determined until all candidates' entries are received and processed. Candidates will always be given a minimum of ten days advance notice of their examination date.

Where Are Examinations Held?

Examinations are held in a wide variety of venues. These may include rooms in schools, colleges, teachers' houses, rehearsal studios, guitar centres, arts centres and community halls.

Will I Have To Travel Far?

Not normally. There are examination centres spread widely across the UK. You will be assigned to the centre operating nearest to your home address, usually within one hour travelling distance. Whether a centre is operating in a particular session depends entirely upon the numbers of entrants from that area.

Do I Have To Live In The UK?

No. These examinations take place in many countries across the world. Special arrangements apply to non-UK examinations. Candidates should view the RGT website for more information or contact the RGT head office (or the local representative) prior to submitting an examination entry.

When The Exam Is Finished Will The Examiner Tell Me If I've Passed?

No. After the examination the examiner will write a full examination report for you. The report will highlight your strengths and weaknesses, and list the marks awarded for each section. This will normally be sent to you within four weeks. If you have passed, the certificate will follow within eight weeks. If you have been entered for the examination by your tutor, or if you have given the name of your tutor on your entry form, then all documentation will be sent direct to your tutor.

This syllabus was compiled on behalf of RGT by Tony Skinner with the advice and support of the RGT's Acoustic Guitar Syllabus Consultative Panel:

Stuart Ryan, Clive Carroll, Gordon Giltrap, John Renbourn, Terry Lees, Max Milligan, Al Summers, Laurence Harwood, Chaz Hart, David Millar, Colin Berrido, Lindsay Higgs, Graham Corbould, Carol Dale, Ruth Harry, Edward Lee, Darren Eve, Jim Newman, Andrew Deevey, Tony Rath, Roger Coombs, Andrew McBirnie, Andrew Hatt, Alan Brown, Merv Young.



RGT Acoustic Guitar Examination Handbooks

"This series of books forms an expertly structured and comprehensive method of studying acoustic guitar."

Get Qualified

Each book covers all the material needed for each RGT acoustic guitar examination, enabling you to study for an internationally recognised qualification.

Improve Your Playing

Even if you do not intend to take an exam, these books will help you achieve your full potential as a guitarist by developing all aspects of your guitar playing.

Easy To Use

- All music is written in easy-to-read TAB, as well as traditional notation.
- CD examples are provided so you can 'listen and learn'.
- The books are designed for both fingerstyle and plectrum players.

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