

Improvisation Tests from 2007

Improvisation

According to the candidate's choice, the examiner will tap the rhythm or play the pitches or chords on the piano, and will also show a notated copy of the relevant test to the candidate. In this way both auditory and visual learners will be assisted to produce their best possible response.

Accommodation will be made for all transposing instruments. In pitched tests the examiner will play the test in the sounding key. Candidates will not be required to transpose at any stage in the Improvisation option.

For keyboard instruments, candidates selecting the chord based option will be given a copy of the chord symbols, which will first be played through by the examiner. They may then improvise, accompanying themselves by playing simply the bass note, or more of the notes of the chords, according to grade and ability. As an alternative, candidates playing keyboard instruments may ask the examiner to play the chord pattern, whilst they improvise a melodic line higher up the keyboard.

In every case the stimulus has been designed to allow a genuinely free creative improvisation and to avoid the implication of a "mirror image" response. At all grades the stimuli seek to provide a wide range of improvisatory possibilities, whilst avoiding excessive complication within themselves. The greatest credit will be given for candidates who most effectively incorporate elements of the stimulus into their improvisation, showing creativity and good instrumental knowledge and ability.

The parameters are given in the chart below.

Format

Candidates may select any one of the following types of test:

either melodic: based on a series of pitches

or rhythmic: based on a rhythmic idea

or chordal: based on a set of chord symbols in Jazz notation.

Melodic Tests

The examiner will tell the candidate the starting note and will then play twice a short series of notes, each lasting for about 2 seconds. The candidate plays the notes back to the examiner. The candidate then has 30 seconds to prepare a short phrase incorporating these notes, which is then performed. The candidate may play during the preparation time.

Rhythmic tests

The examiner will give the candidate a written version of an opening rhythm and then play it twice. Candidates will then repeat it on their instrument using one pitch (on snare for Drum Kit players). They then have 30 seconds to develop a piece of music based on this rhythm and then adding melodic material, fills etc as appropriate. Instrumental range used should reflect the parameters for Melodic tests in the chart below. (Drum Kit Grades 1-3: on at least bass, snare & hi-hat, Grades 4-5: on at least bass, snare, 2 tom-toms and hi-hat, Grades 6-8: on whole kit)

Chordal Tests

The examiner will give the candidate a copy of a score containing blank bars with chord symbols printed above and will play it through twice, with one chord per bar at a moderate pace. The candidate then has 30 seconds (60 seconds for Grades 6 to 8) in which to prepare a short improvisation over the given chords. Candidates can choose to use the tempo and time signature which the examiner played, or can choose to vary this if they prefer.

The examiner will then play the sequence as before (unless requested to change speed or time signature), while the candidate improvises above it. The phrase may be repeated 2 or 3 times, depending on length and speed, but the examiner will inform the candidate how many times the sequence will be played. Pianists, keyboard players, guitarists and players of other chordal instruments have the option to perform this test solo, improvising over the chord symbols and displaying a knowledge of the harmony implied.

Notes

- Marks are given for planning, structure, form, melodic, harmonic & rhythmic creativity, inventiveness and logical progression, appropriate length and full use of instrumental resources.
- Candidates should regard the note values and ranges given as the minimum that will be expected, but may extend these if they wish.
- Pianists and players of other chordal instruments taking the melodic test may play chords if they wish, and will receive credit for their appropriate use, but they are not obligatory, and the test is essentially of melodic invention.
- This key scheme will be valid for most instruments. For those with a different range alternatives will be given.
- The length of the response is given as a guide only, and the candidate should aim to perform a musically satisfying and balanced response.

Parameters for Improvisation Tests

Grade	Melody tests: Max. range of given motif	Melody tests: Suggested length of response	Rhythm tests	Rhythm tests: Suggested length of response	Chord tests Phrase played round twice
Initial	3 stepwise notes	2 - 4 bars	In 4/4 2 bars crochets minims	approx 2 bars	4 bar phrase Major key I/V 2 bars per chord
1	3 notes - one step one leap - up to 4 th		In 4/4 2 bars crochets minims, quavers		4 bar phrase Major key I/V 1 chord per bar
2	4 notes - range up to 5 th	approx 4 bars	As above with dots	approx 4 bars	4 bar phrase Major key I/IV/V
3	5 notes - range up to 6 th		As above with ties		4 bar phrase Major key I/IV/V/ii 1 chord per bar
4	Octave (diatonic)	Two phrases approx 8 bars	In 2/4,3/4 or 4/4 plus semiquavers	Two phrases approx 8 bars	4 bar phrase Minor key I/IV/V 1 chord per bar
5	Octave (simple chromaticism)				4 bar phrase Minor key I/IV/V/vi 1 chord per bar
6	Twelfth (chromatic)	3 - 4 phrases	Plus 6/8	3 - 4 phrases 8 - 12 bars	8 bar phrase Major key I/ii/IV/V and 7ths 1 chord per bar
7			Plus triplets		8 - 12 bar phrase Major or Minor key I/ii/iii/iv/V/VI and 6ths/7ths 1 or 2 chords per bar
8			4 - 6 phrases	Plus 7/8	4 - 6 phrases 12 - 16 bars