

THE BASIS OF JAZZ ASSESSMENT

The tables on pp. 48–51 contain minimalist ‘criteria’ statements, giving clear guidance as to what the examiner is looking for in the various sections of the exam. Every performance is unique and jazz examiners arrive at the marks by balancing the various qualities in the playing, using the skill that comes from training and experience.

ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES

ABRSM’s jazz exams aim to give students opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding to perform jazz with control, technical fluency and musical awareness. Candidates are assessed on their ability to perform the set tunes with:

accuracy, continuity and fluency

accuracy encompasses the technical control and co-ordination required to produce: appropriate rhythm and groove (including continuity of performance); convincing tempo and feel (including consistency of the chosen speeds and feels); clearly audible observance of performing directions; and accurate pitch (including well-centred intonation where appropriate). Slips from basically secure intonation are not as serious as an inability to centre the pitch precisely, causing a loss of tonality.

tonal awareness

tonal awareness covers the way an instrument is used and includes situations where a poor instrument may be skilfully managed. It encompasses: the ability to produce focused and consistent tone where required; the ability to control and contrast dynamics, attack and other aspects of articulation as appropriate to the musical context; and the ability to grade musical tone into phrases and to vary colour and phrasing in ways that enhance rhythmic character. Pedalling for pianists is an extra tonal refinement that is welcomed at all stages but not expected until Grade 5.

musical character and a sense of performance

musical character arises from the imaginative application of technical skills in ways that will most vividly convey the mood and feel of the tune to the listener. A sense of performance encompasses the degree of engagement with the music, including the level of commitment and conviction evident in the playing as well as in the embellishment of the head and improvisation.

choice and manipulation of musical resources in improvising

choice of musical resources encompasses the need to decide in the moment which of a number of pitch, rhythm and harmonic options to use. Manipulation of those resources involves the creation of coherent structures by, for example, repeating ideas, varying the spaces between them and developing them motivically or rhythmically.

Candidates will also be assessed on their ability:

- to perform the prescribed technical exercises for the grade (e.g. scales and arpeggios) with fluency, accuracy, evenness and musical shape
- to perform a quick study test with accuracy, control, continuity, attention to expressive detail and an appropriate improvised response
- to respond to prescribed aural tests accurately, promptly, with musical perception and with an appropriate improvised response

Not all of the assessment objectives will necessarily be met in order for a candidate to pass. Weakness in some of the assessment objectives may be balanced by better performance in others. The mark awarded will depend in practice on the extent to which the candidate has met the assessment objectives overall.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA TUNES

The following table illustrates the basis of marking within the broad result bands. Each tune will be assessed independently using the principle of marking from the required pass mark negatively or positively, rather than awarding marks by deduction from the maximum or addition from zero. In awarding marks, examiners will balance the extent to which the cumulative qualities and abilities listed below are demonstrated and contribute towards the overall result.

MARKS	GRADES 1-4	GRADE 5
Distinction: 27-30	<p>Technical fluency</p> <p>Easy manipulation of musical material</p> <p>Confident performance with convincing feel</p> <p>Phrasing and dynamics adding rhythmic movement and melodic shape</p> <p>Embellishments effectively varying the given material</p> <p>Inventive, perhaps surprising, improvisation, with rhythmic and melodic shapes used flexibly, with clarity and, <i>at Grade 4</i>, some recognition of style and some account taken of the harmonic context</p>	<p>Technical fluency</p> <p>Easy manipulation of musical material</p> <p>Confident performance with convincing groove</p> <p>Vivid phrasing and dynamics</p> <p>Stylish embellishments effectively varying the given material</p> <p>Well-shaped, imaginative and inventive improvisation, with clear rhythmic and melodic shapes and voicings, some use of repeated motives, a clear recognition of style, and account taken of the harmonic context, including characteristic details of the chord sequences sometimes being incorporated</p>
Merit: 24-26	<p>Technical security</p> <p>Phrasing and dynamics provide basic contrast</p> <p>Evidence of tonal awareness and control</p> <p>Suitable and sustained tempo</p> <p>Good sense of feel</p> <p>Given material is accurately reproduced and sometimes used flexibly</p> <p>Embellishments provide some variety</p> <p>Improvisation shows control over the flow of ideas with varied use of short rhythmic phrases, and, <i>at Grade 4</i>, with some understanding of rhythmic and melodic styles</p>	<p>Technical security</p> <p>Phrasing and dynamics well-judged</p> <p>Evidence of tonal awareness and control</p> <p>Suitable and sustained tempo</p> <p>Good sense of feel</p> <p>Given material is accurately reproduced and used flexibly within the style</p> <p>Embellishments provide variety within the style</p> <p>Generally inventive improvisation shows consistency and confidence within the rhythmic and melodic aspects of the style, with account taken of the harmonic context</p>

MARKS	GRADES 1–4	GRADE 5
<p>Pass: 20–23</p>	<p>A controlled performance Mostly even pulse Generally correct feel</p> <p>Evidence of careful preparation Prompt recovery from any slips The main elements of the given material are in place Simple embellishments present Improvisation has a basic flow of indicated length, with simple phrasing and, <i>at Grade 4</i>, some stylistic features</p>	<p>A controlled performance Mostly even pulse Generally correct feel in both head and solo</p> <p>Evidence of careful preparation Prompt recovery from any slips The main elements of the given material are in place Simple embellishments present Improvisation has a basic flow of indicated length, with some recognition of style and some account taken of the harmonic context</p>
<p>Below Pass standard</p>	<p>18–19: Just under the acceptable standard generally; <i>at Grade 4</i>, lack of stylistic features</p> <p>16–17: Serious difficulties present; breaks in continuity</p> <p>10–15: Frequently halting or incomplete performance</p> <p>0: No work offered</p>	<p>As listed for Grades 1–4, but also:</p> <p>Unsuitable or unsustained tempo Absence of dynamics and phrasing Important elements of given material missing or unclear Embellishments obscure the given material or not attempted Improvisation lacks continuity Melody ignores harmonic context</p>

SCALES AND ARPEGGIOS/BROKEN CHORDS

ABRSM publishes specimen scales and arpeggios/broken chords for all grades of jazz. The same marking scheme is applied to all grades, with a pass mark of 14 and a maximum mark of 21.

MARKS	ALL GRADES
19-21	Quick response Fluent and musically presented Confident and even tempo
17-18	Prompt response Well prepared Technically mostly secure and even Few small slips or corrections
14-16	Cautious response Moderate tempo Keys known, despite some errors Momentum generally maintained
Below Pass standard	
11-13	Poor response Slow and inconsistent tempo Frequent errors Some incomplete items
7-10	Very poor or incomplete response Extremely sporadic and uneven playing Very slow tempo Technically inadequate
0	No work offered

QUICK STUDY

ABRSM publishes specimen quick study tests for all grades of jazz. The same marking scheme is applied to all grades, with a pass mark of 14 and a maximum mark of 21.

MARKS	ALL GRADES
19-21	Fluent Attention given to detail Musically aware Well-shaped and imaginative improvised response
17-18	Mostly accurate Usually steady pulse At the given tempo Improvised response is controlled and fluent

QUICK STUDY *(cont.)*

MARKS	ALL GRADES
14-16	Outline in place, despite errors Momentum generally maintained Some awareness of key and time signatures Improvised response has continuity
Below Pass standard 11-13	Poor reproduction/recognition of rhythm and pitch Lack of continuity Inconsistent awareness of key Uncontrolled improvised response
7-10	Very poor reproduction/recognition of rhythm and pitch No continuity Complete disregard for key Improvised response incomplete or absent
0	No work offered

AURAL TESTS

ABRSM publishes specimen aural tests for all grades of jazz. The same marking scheme is applied to all grades, with a pass mark of 12 and a maximum mark of 18.

MARKS	ALL GRADES
18	Quick, accurate and perceptive response Imaginative improvisation
15-17	Good response Minor errors or hesitation Musical improvisation
12-14	Approximately half the tests correctly answered Evidence of awareness, despite hesitation and error Basic improvisation
Below Pass standard 9-11	Slow and uncertain responses Inaccuracy in parts of all tests Poor improvisation
6-8	Very slow and mostly incorrect responses All tests entirely inaccurate Ineffective improvisation
0	No work offered