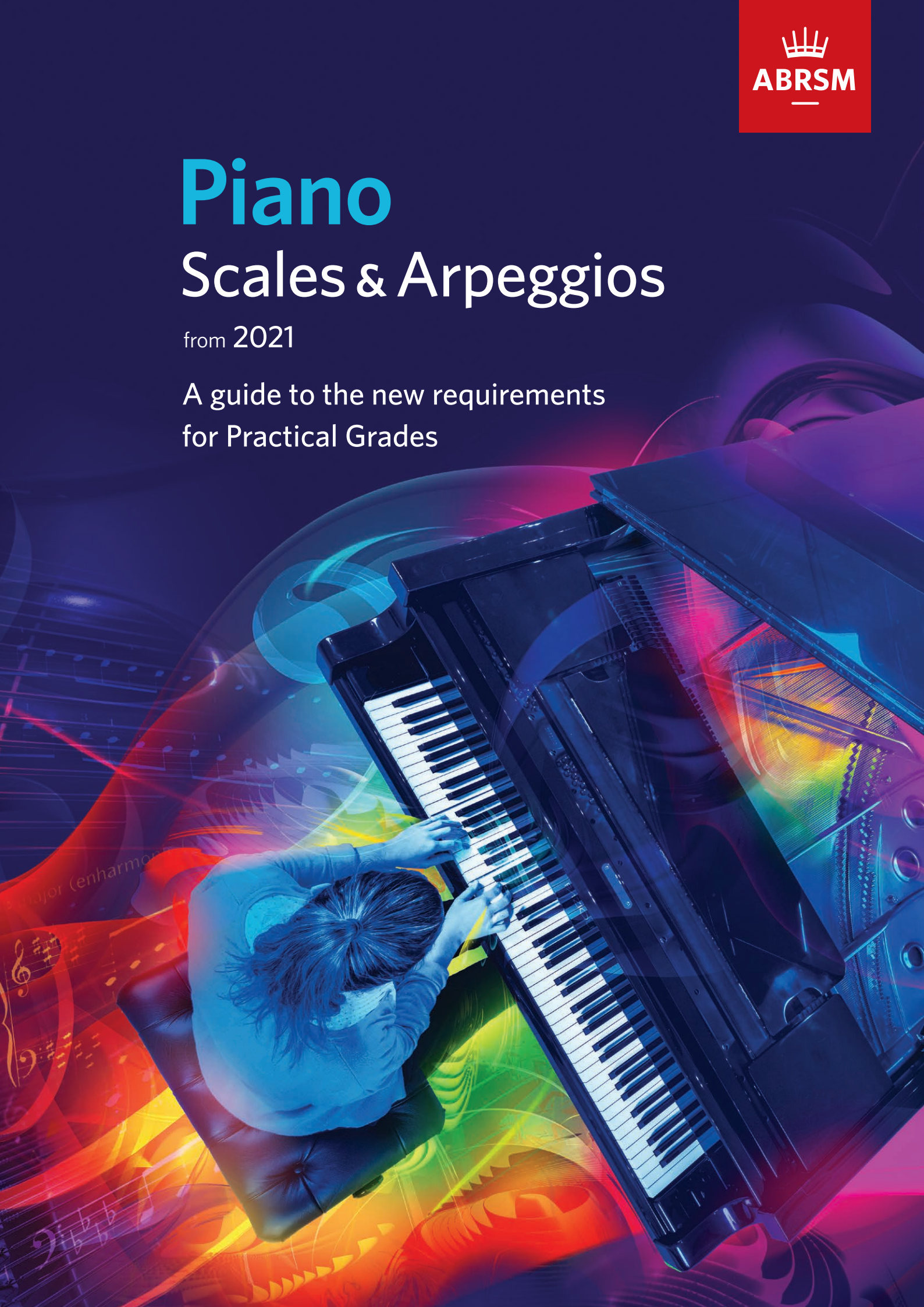


Piano

Scales & Arpeggios

from 2021

A guide to the new requirements
for Practical Grades



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Piano Scales and arpeggios from 2021: An introduction

Piano teachers who regularly use ABRSM exams have come to expect revised syllabuses every two years, with a 100% change of repertoire each time. The 2021 & 2022 syllabus, published in July 2020 for exams from 1 January 2021, is no exception. Significantly on this occasion, the new Practical Grades syllabus also includes a complete update of the scales and arpeggios requirements, the first since 2009.

Benefits of scales and arpeggios

Playing scales and arpeggios, whether tested in an exam or not, is important for building strong technical skills such as reliable finger movement, hand position, co-ordination and keyboard fluency. Playing them also helps to develop pitch and interval awareness, familiarity with keys and their related patterns, and control of tone. This leads to greater confidence and security when sight-reading, learning new pieces and performing – from a score or from memory, as a solo musician or with others.

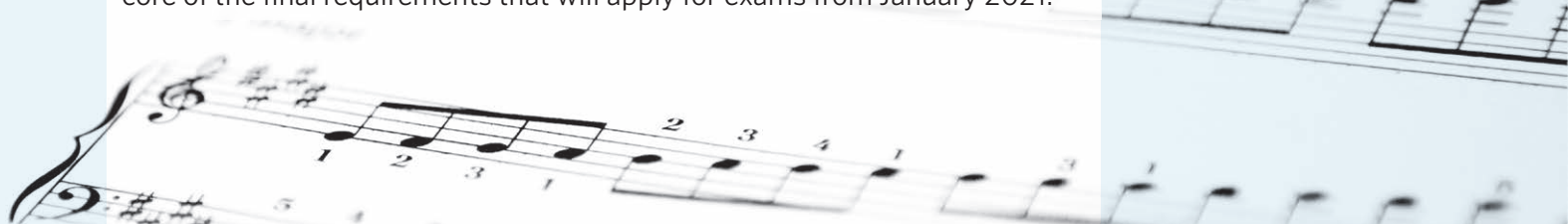
Research and consultation

The changes that we've made are the result of collaboration and consultation with piano teachers at all levels from across the globe. The new requirements are the result of three years of development work and form part of our ongoing programme of evaluation and improvement of our exams.

The process began in March 2017 with a consultation meeting involving leading piano educationalists and ABRSM examiners, as well as a team of ABRSM staff. Over a number of months, proposals were developed and refined by a team of consultants leading to a first, draft, set of requirements. In that draft, we took the opportunity to test some quite different approaches – the proposals were shared widely with teachers using ABRSM piano exams, for consultation and feedback (November 2017).

We received approximately 1,000 very helpful responses (from teachers in 44 countries) to the first set of proposals via our survey. All the feedback was reviewed and analysed in detail and our consultants responded by further developing and refining the requirements, where there was clear consensus amongst teachers that changes were needed. This led to a second draft set of requirements that was again shared with teachers for further feedback (April 2019).

The consultation on the second set of proposals resulted in responses from approximately 1,500 teachers from 58 different countries. There was an overwhelmingly positive response to these and, while some further adjustments were made in response to feedback, they went on to form the core of the final requirements that will apply for exams from January 2021.



Aims of the revision

The main aim of the revision was to arrive at a set of requirements that are realistic and manageable in terms of preparation and assessment load, and that follow a clear, logical and gradual progression through the grades.

We have worked to focus on requirements that are appropriate to the grade in their rigour and level of demand, moving away from a situation where a large part of the challenge has been about the volume of requirements to prepare. The reduction in volume has primarily been achieved by removing requirements already tested in earlier grades, reducing the number of requirements that duplicate finger patterns, and no longer asking for requirements to be prepared hands separately and hands together at the same grade. The reduction also means that a greater percentage of the work prepared will be assessed in the exam.

We have also worked to make sure there is coherence across the different types of requirements set at each grade, for ease of preparation. This means that contrary-motions, chromatics, diminished sevenths etc. all tend to start from the key note of scales set for the grade.

Another aim of the revision was to achieve parity, where appropriate, with the requirements set for other instruments, e.g. the grade when types of requirements are introduced. However, the demands, both technical and physical, of playing individual requirements on the piano was the final decider when determining what should be set at any grade.

There are many different types of useful exercises for developing technique that could have been included in the syllabus but haven't been. That is not to suggest they are not important or beneficial activities for developing pianists, simply that their inclusion on the syllabus might not necessarily result in any more meaningful assessment. It is hoped that a range of other exercises and approaches to practising scales will be covered in lessons outside of exam preparation. Our focus has been on designing a set of requirements from Initial Grade through to Grade 8 that is appropriate for assessment purposes. While there is an underlying progression route through the grades in the design of the syllabus, it is not intended to act as a teaching curriculum.



Overview of changes

The following are the main changes and design principles that teachers and learners will find in the new set of requirements.

- New keys are generally introduced hands separately (only) and are then set hands together (only) on the following grade. Requirements are no longer to be prepared both hands separately and hands together.
- A selection of keys is set at each grade (there is no longer an 'all keys' requirement at Grades 5 and 6). This helps to improve the progression through the grades and brings the piano requirements into line with other instruments, particularly strings and wind.
 - importantly, all keys are still covered across Grades Initial-5 and again across Grades 6-8
- All candidates prepare, and are assessed on, the same set of requirements - there are no options, except the minor form for scales up to Grade 5.
- There are no requirements set over three octaves.
- At Grades 6-8, all requirements are based on four key-centres/note-centres at each grade.
- Dominant sevenths are now required to resolve on the tonic, to encourage a greater understanding of the harmonic function of the chord (and matching requirements for string and wind players).
- Some keys and requirement types appear earlier than in the previous syllabus, and others later; a small number of requirements have been removed entirely.
- A new Initial Grade is introduced. Requirements for this pre-Grade 1 exam have been developed as part of the overall process and lead naturally into the new Grade 1 requirements.

A more detailed, grade-by-grade description of the new requirements can be found on pages 7-16.



Syllabus overlap

We understand that it can take time for teachers and learners to adapt to new requirements, particularly if they have already begun preparing for an exam, and so the following arrangements will be in place:

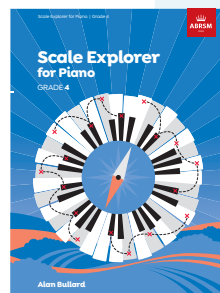
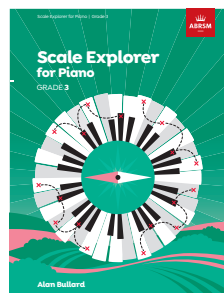
- An overlap period of a full year will apply worldwide (i.e. including the UK & Ireland).
- The overlap period will apply to both Pieces and Scales and arpeggios for Practical Grades exams.
- Candidates may present their three Pieces and Scales and arpeggios from the 2019 & 2020 syllabus or from the 2021 & 2022 syllabus. All the pieces and the scales must be from the same syllabus – presenting a mixture from old and new will not be allowed.

We hope that these arrangements will allow for a smooth transition from the old to the new requirements.

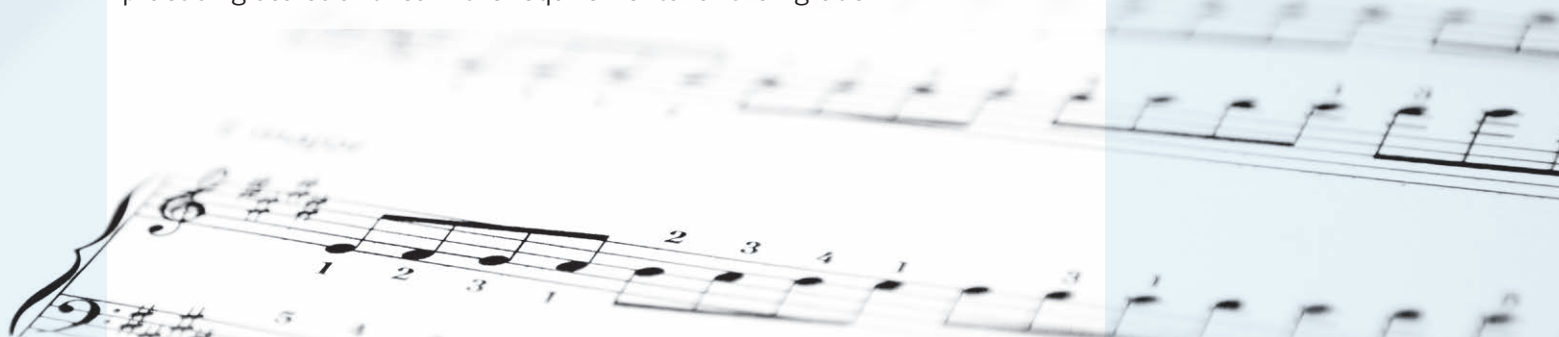
Supporting resources

The new requirements are supported by two suites of publications from ABRSM. Our *Piano Scales & Arpeggios* series has been fully updated to reflect the new requirements. There is one book per grade, including the new Initial Grade.

Additionally, *Scale Explorer* by Alan Bullard is our new resource for learners practising their scales and arpeggios. The series consists of five books covering the new requirements for Grades 1–5. These books include engaging activities that bring scales and arpeggios to life through exercises, improvisation, composition and creative short pieces built on the scale and arpeggio patterns for the grade.



ABRSM's revamped *Piano Scales Trainer* app is an all-in-one companion for practising scales, covering all the requirements at Grades 1–5 from the new syllabus. Available for iOS and Android, the app features an extensive set of resources to help learners have fun practising scales and learn the requirements for their grade.





The new requirements: grade by grade

In this section, the new requirements are presented grade by grade, with notes explaining their design and highlighting changes from the previous syllabus. The detailed information is included in order to help teachers and learners understand the rationale behind the changes as well as the underlying design across the grades as a whole.

Requirements should be played from memory, legato (unless specified staccato, or both) and in even notes. When preparing for an exam, it is also important to refer to the Scales and arpeggios requirements and information in the syllabus (pages 14-15 of the 2021 & 2022 Practical Grades syllabus).

Initial Grade

	RANGE	REQUIREMENTS
SCALES		
C major		
D minor (natural <i>or</i> harmonic <i>or</i> melodic, at candidate's choice)	1 oct.	hands separately
CONTRARY-MOTION SCALE		
C major	a 5th	hands starting on the tonic (unison); as pattern below
		
ARPEGGIOS		
C major		
D minor	a 5th	hands separately; as pattern below
		

Explanatory notes for Initial Grade

- Two scales – one major, one minor – are set, each to be played hands separately. These prepare for the one-octave hands-together and two-octaves hands-separately scales at Grade 1.
- An option of playing any form of the minor scale is offered, and the minor key has been chosen to ensure candidates play a scale that includes a black key (no matter which form is chosen).
- A contrary-motion scale is set in the same key as the major scale. It is set to a fifth only to avoid the challenge of turning the thumbs under while playing with both hands, and leads to the well-established one-octave requirement at Grade 1.
- Arpeggios are set to a fifth only (hands separately, keys matching the scales), establishing the sound world of the arpeggios while taking into account the hand size of most learners at this level. This leads to one-octave arpeggios at Grade 1.
- In an exam, candidates will generally be asked to play all five requirements. Examiners will specify which hand to use for each of the scales and arpeggios.

Grade 1

	RANGE	REQUIREMENTS
SCALES (SIMILAR MOTION)		
C major	1 oct.	hands together
G, F majors		
A, D minors (natural <i>or</i> harmonic <i>or</i> melodic, at candidate's choice)	2 oct.	hands separately
CONTRARY-MOTION SCALE		
C major	1 oct.	hands starting on the tonic (unison)
ARPEGGIOS		
G major		
A minor	1 oct.	hands separately

Explanatory notes for Grade 1

- A one-octave hands-together scale is included, building on the Initial-Grade requirement (same key but hands separately).
- The D minor scale, which is introduced at Initial Grade, is now required hands separately over two octaves, as are the three new keys of G major, F major, and A minor.
- An option of playing any form of the minor scale is offered, as on the previous syllabus and matching other instruments at Grades 1 and 2.
- The C major contrary-motion introduced at Initial Grade is extended to cover the full octave range here (as on the previous syllabus).
- One-octave hands-separately arpeggios have been included instead of the broken-chord pattern on the previous syllabus. These arpeggios build on the pattern covered at Initial Grade and prepare the way for Grade 2 (where putting the thumb under is required).
- To ensure a gradual progression in the number of requirements, and new keys added at each grade, D major is no longer required at Grade 1. The number of arpeggios set has also been restricted to two, G major and A minor, avoiding the duplication of finger patterns (since G=F=C and Am=Dm).

Grade 2

	RANGE	REQUIREMENTS
SCALES (SIMILAR MOTION)		
G, F majors		
A, D minors (natural <i>or</i> harmonic <i>or</i> melodic, at candidate's choice)	2 oct.	hands together
D, A majors		
E, G minors (natural <i>or</i> harmonic <i>or</i> melodic, at candidate's choice)	2 oct.	hands separately
CONTRARY-MOTION SCALE		
C major	2 oct.	hands starting on the tonic (unison)
CHROMATIC SCALE		
starting on D	1 oct.	hands separately
ARPEGGIOS		
D, A majors		
E, G minors	2 oct.	hands separately

Explanatory notes for Grade 2

- The design principle of introducing scales as hands-separately requirements and then consolidating them, hands together (only), on the following grade is firmly established here. The hands-separately scales from Grade 1 are now to be prepared hands together over the same range. Four new keys (two major, two minor) are set hands separately.
- The contrary-motion scale covered at Grade 1 is now extended to cover two octaves.
- A first chromatic scale is introduced – hands separately.
- Arpeggios are extended to cover two octaves but remain hands separately (as on the previous syllabus). Four keys are set, matching the hands-separately scales.

Grade 3

	RANGE	REQUIREMENTS
SCALES (SIMILAR MOTION)		
D, A majors	2 oct.	hands together
E, G minors (harmonic <i>or</i> melodic, at candidate's choice)		
B \flat , E \flat majors	2 oct.	hands separately
B, C minors (harmonic <i>or</i> melodic, at candidate's choice)		
CONTRARY-MOTION SCALE		
E major	2 oct.	hands starting on the tonic (unison)
CHROMATIC CONTRARY-MOTION SCALE		
starting on D	1 oct.	hands starting on the stated note (unison)
ARPEGGIOS		
D, A majors	2 oct.	hands together
E, G minors		
B \flat , E \flat majors	2 oct.	hands separately
B, C minors		

Explanatory notes for Grade 3

- The arpeggios now join the scheme of consolidating and developing keys from the previous grade, with the hand-separately keys from Grade 2 to be prepared hands together here. Four new keys are covered within the scales and arpeggios (hands separately).
- A fifth new key (E major) is covered as a contrary-motion scale. Like C major played at previous grades, this uses mirrored finger patterns but is more challenging because the distances between the keys are spaced differently in each hand.
- The chromatic scale is now tested as a one-octave contrary motion. This comes earlier than in the previous syllabus but as this example starting on D uses mirrored finger patterns it is an accessible way into playing chromatics hands together. A pattern of setting similar-motion and contrary-motion chromatics on alternate grades starts from here.
- The option of playing the natural form of the minor scale no longer applies from this grade on (this is consistent with other instruments).

Grade 4

	RANGE	REQUIREMENTS
SCALES (SIMILAR MOTION)		
B \flat , E \flat majors	2 oct.	hands together
B, C minors (harmonic <i>or</i> melodic, at candidate's choice)		
B, F \sharp , A \flat majors	2 oct.	hands separately
F \sharp , F minors (harmonic <i>or</i> melodic, at candidate's choice)		
CONTRARY-MOTION SCALES		
E \flat major	2 oct.	hands starting on the tonic (unison)
C harmonic minor		
CHROMATIC SCALE (SIMILAR MOTION)		
starting on F \sharp	2 oct.	hands together
ARPEGGIOS		
B \flat , E \flat majors	2 oct.	hands together
B, C minors		
B, F \sharp , A \flat majors	2 oct.	hands separately
F \sharp , F minors		

Explanatory notes for Grade 4

- Five more new keys are covered within the scales and arpeggios. Two previously covered keys, the related pair of E \flat major and C minor, are also set as contrary-motion scales.
- At this grade, the chromatic is tested as a similar-motion hands-together scale (the hands now use an asymmetrical finger pattern). F \sharp is set as the starting note as it begins comfortably, with a run of alternating black and white notes.
- Everything is now required over a two-octave range, as on the previous syllabus.

Grade 5

	RANGE	REQUIREMENTS
SCALES (SIMILAR MOTION)		
A, E, B, F \sharp , D \flat majors	2 oct.	legato; hands together
F \sharp , C \sharp , G \sharp , E \flat , B \flat minors (harmonic <i>or</i> melodic, at candidate's choice)		
STACCATO SCALES		
A \flat major	2 oct.	staccato; hands separately
F minor (harmonic <i>or</i> melodic, at candidate's choice)		
CONTRARY-MOTION SCALES		
D \flat major	2 oct.	legato; hands starting on the tonic (unison)
C \sharp harmonic minor		
CHROMATIC CONTRARY-MOTION SCALE		
starting on F \sharp (LH) and A \sharp (RH)	2 oct.	legato; hands starting a major third apart
ARPEGGIOS		
A, E, B, F \sharp , A \flat , D \flat majors	2 oct.	legato; hands together
F \sharp , C \sharp , G \sharp , E \flat , F, B \flat minors		
DIMINISHED SEVENTH		
starting on B	2 oct.	legato; hands separately

Explanatory notes for Grade 5

- The 'all keys' requirement of previous syllabuses no longer applies here. This brings piano into line with other instruments, helps improve the progression through the grades, and addresses teachers' concerns about the preparation load at this level. The focus is now on requirements that are at an appropriate level of demand for the grade rather than volume of requirements (many of which would be repetitions from earlier grades). The expectation that candidates should be familiar with all keys by Grade 5 remains, however, and is built into the key scheme across Grades Initial–5 where every key is covered at least once.
- As at Grade 4, all requirements are set over two octaves.
- In order to ensure that all keys are covered by Grade 5, there are five new keys set here (D \flat major, C \sharp minor, G \sharp minor, E \flat minor and B \flat minor). At this point the syllabus moves away from the early-grade design principle of setting new keys/requirements hands separately first. All legato scales and arpeggios are to be prepared hands together.
- Overall, there is a set of six related major and minor keys set here for teachers and learners to work with. They are made up of the keys consolidated from Grade 4, the five new keys and two keys repeated from earlier grades (A and E majors).
- One related pair of keys is to be prepared with staccato articulation (hands separately). Staccato playing comes a grade earlier than the previous syllabus.
- Following on from Grade 4, another two contrary-motion scales are required (one major, one minor). The examples are drawn from the set of scale keys for this grade and move away from the mirrored finger patterns of previous grades.
- For the chromatic scale, a contrary-motion starting from different pitches in each hand but with a symmetrical finger pattern is set.
- A hands-separately diminished seventh is introduced. Both diminished and dominant sevenths are appearing in this syllabus one grade earlier than in the previous one, to bring piano requirements closer to those for other instruments. Unlike other instruments, diminished sevenths are being set for piano before dominant sevenths, taking into account that they are physically more comfortable for the hand with their smaller and even intervals (all minor thirds).

Explanatory notes covering Grades 6–8

- In a change from the previous syllabus, a key-centre/note-centre approach is applied at Grades 6–8. A range of activities are set in the same group of four keys, or starting from the four key-notes (or a subset of them), at each grade. All twelve possible key centres are covered across the three grades, which is similar to the approach taken at these grades for string and wind instruments. The groups of keys at each grade have been built on diminished seventh chords.
- All minors are required in both harmonic and melodic forms, as in the previous syllabus and as for other instruments.
- Most requirements are required over four octaves, as in the previous syllabus (the exceptions are contrary-motion scales, and scales in thirds or sixths).
- Hands-separately requirements do not appear (except for scales in thirds or sixths); this helps to keep the preparation load for teachers and candidates at a reasonable level.

Grade 6

	RANGE	REQUIREMENTS
SCALES (SIMILAR MOTION)		
D, F, A \flat , B majors	4 oct.	legato <i>or</i> staccato, at examiner's choice; hands together
D, F, G \sharp , B minors (harmonic <i>and</i> melodic)		
CONTRARY-MOTION SCALES		
D, F, A \flat , B majors	2 oct.	legato; hands starting on the tonic (unison)
D, F, G \sharp , B harmonic minors		
CHROMATIC SCALES (SIMILAR MOTION)		
starting on G \sharp	4 oct.	legato <i>or</i> staccato, at examiner's choice; hands together
starting on B		
ARPEGGIOS		
D, F, A \flat , B majors	4 oct.	legato; hands together (root position)
D, F, G \sharp , B minors		
DOMINANT SEVENTHS (resolving on tonic)		
in the keys of D, F, A \flat and B	4 oct.	legato; hands together; as pattern below
DIMINISHED SEVENTHS		
starting on G \sharp	4 oct.	legato; hands together
starting on B		

Explanatory notes for Grade 6

- Following the introduction of staccato scales at Grade 5, all similar-motion scales here are to be prepared legato and staccato (hands together).
- Given the similarities between all chromatics, only two are required, covering a black-note and a white-note start. In a change from the previous syllabus, they are to be prepared both legato and staccato.
- Having been introduced hands separately at Grade 5, the diminished sevenths are now required hands together. One starts on a white note, the other on a black note. The starting notes chosen are the same starting notes as the chromatic scales and are restricted to two for the same reason.
- Dominant sevenths are introduced at this grade (see also the Grade 5 notes - final bullet point), hands together only in common with all other requirements at this grade.
- In a change from the previous syllabus, dominant sevenths are to resolve on the tonic, to encourage a greater understanding of the harmonic function of the chord (and to match what is now required of string and wind players).

Grade 7

	RANGE	REQUIREMENTS
SCALES (SIMILAR MOTION)		
D \flat , E, G, B \flat majors	4 oct.	legato <i>or</i> staccato, at examiner's choice; hands together
C \sharp , E, G, B \flat minors (harmonic <i>and</i> melodic)		
SCALES A THIRD APART		
D \flat , E, G, B \flat majors	4 oct.	legato <i>or</i> staccato, at examiner's choice; hands together
C \sharp , E, G, B \flat harmonic minors		
CONTRARY-MOTION SCALES		
D \flat , E, G, B \flat majors	2 oct.	legato <i>or</i> staccato, at examiner's choice; hands starting on the tonic (unison)
C \sharp , E, G, B \flat harmonic minors		
LEGATO SCALE IN THIRDS		
G major	2 oct.	legato; hands separately
STACCATO SCALE IN THIRDS		
G major	2 oct.	staccato; hands separately
CHROMATIC CONTRARY-MOTION SCALE		
starting on C \sharp (LH) and E (RH)	2 oct.	legato <i>or</i> staccato, at examiner's choice; hands starting a minor third apart
ARPEGGIOS		
D \flat , E, G, B \flat majors	4 oct.	legato; hands together; first inversion only
C \sharp , E, G, B \flat minors		
DOMINANT SEVENTHS (resolving on tonic)		
in the keys of D \flat , E, G and B \flat	4 oct.	legato; hands together; as pattern below
DIMINISHED SEVENTHS		
starting on B \flat	4 oct.	legato; hands together
starting on E		

Explanatory notes for Grade 7

- Thirds is a theme running through the design of the Grade 7 requirements with scales a third apart, legato and staccato scales in thirds, and a chromatic contrary motion starting a minor third apart all included.
- The staccato scales in thirds and sixths appear in this syllabus a grade later (at Grades 7 and 8 respectively) than in the previous one. This allows for a smoother progression and places them amongst other requirements based around the intervals of a third (Grade 7) and a sixth (Grade 8).
- All hands-together scale types are now expected legato and staccato.
- Arpeggios are only required in first inversion (root-position playing has been well established at earlier grades).
- Like at Grade 6, two diminished sevenths, with a black-note and a white-note start, are set.

Grade 8

	RANGE	REQUIREMENTS
SCALES (SIMILAR MOTION)		
C, Eb, F#, A majors	4 oct.	legato <i>or</i> staccato, at examiner's choice; hands together
C, Eb, F#, A minors (harmonic <i>and</i> melodic)		
SCALES A SIXTH APART		
C, Eb, F#, A majors	4 oct.	legato <i>or</i> staccato, at examiner's choice; hands together
C, Eb, F#, A harmonic minors		
CONTRARY-MOTION SCALES		
C, Eb, F#, A majors	2 oct.	legato <i>or</i> staccato, at examiner's choice; hands starting on the tonic (unison)
C, Eb, F#, A harmonic minors		
LEGATO SCALE IN THIRDS		
E♭ major	2 oct.	legato; hands separately
STACCATO SCALE IN SIXTHS		
C major	2 oct.	staccato; hands separately
CHROMATIC SCALE A MAJOR SIXTH APART		
starting on E♭ (LH) and C (RH)	4 oct.	legato <i>or</i> staccato, at examiner's choice; hands together
WHOLE-TONE SCALES (SIMILAR MOTION)		
starting on E♭	4 oct.	legato <i>or</i> staccato, at examiner's choice; hands together
starting on C		
ARPEGGIOS		
C, Eb, F#, A majors	4 oct.	legato; hands together; second inversion only
C, Eb, F#, A minors		
DOMINANT SEVENTHS (resolving on tonic)		
in the keys of C, Eb, F# and A	4 oct.	legato; hands together; as pattern below
DIMINISHED SEVENTHS		
starting on E♭	4 oct.	legato; hands together
starting on C		

Explanatory notes for Grade 8

- Requirements based on the interval of a sixth are a focus at this grade, with scales a sixth apart, a staccato scale in sixths and a chromatic a sixth apart included. The chromatic a major sixth apart replaces the requirement a minor third apart on the previous syllabus.
- Unlike the previous syllabus at Grade 8, contrary-motion scales feature here. This means that all major and minor keys are played in contrary motion across Grades 6–8 in these requirements.
- A single legato scale in thirds is set, further developing the activity introduced at Grade 7. A staccato scale in sixths is also included, a grade later than in the previous syllabus (see also the Grade 7 notes – second bullet point).
- The whole-tone scale is covered (as in the previous syllabus), but both possible patterns are now set and are to be prepared legato and staccato, for completeness and consistency with other requirements at this grade.
- Following the established pattern of setting arpeggios in one position only, arpeggios are only required in second inversion here.
- As at Grades 6 and 7, two diminished sevenths are set, with a black-note and a white-note start.

The new requirements: key scheme

New keys are generally introduced hands separately (only) and are then set hands together (only) on the following grade. All keys are covered across Grades Initial-5 and again across Grades 6-8.

	GRADES									
	Initial	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
<p>CM = contrary motion only First use of key Subsequent use of key (to Grade 5) Use of key across Grades 6-8</p>										
Major keys	Initial	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
F# major										
B major										
E major				CM						
A major										
D major										
G major										
C major				CM						
F major										
Bb major										
Eb major										
Ab major										
Db major										
Minor keys	Initial	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
G# minor										
C# minor										
F# minor										
B minor										
E minor										
A minor										
D minor										
G minor										
C minor										
F minor										
Bb minor										
Eb minor										
	Initial	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Number of keys	2	5	9	9	9	12	12	12	12	
Number of new keys	2	3	4	5	5	5	4	4	4	

Note: In the above table harmonic and melodic minors forms have been counted as separate 'keys' at Grades 6-8, as both forms must be prepared (leading to 36 'keys' in total rather than 24). For the purposes of these calculations, an assumption has been made that only one form of the minor scale will be prepared by candidates up to Grade 5. It is acknowledged that this won't always be the case and that teachers will take a variety of approaches to teaching minor scales.



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