

# Guide to Grades

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## What is a music grade?

Taking a grade on an instrument is a way of marking your progress as a musician. Each grade level sets clear goals, helping you learn songs, build technique, and develop confidence.

These days, graded exams aren't just about scales and exercises – many of the pieces you'll learn are **well-known songs by classic and modern bands**. For example:

*Seven Nation Army* – The White Stripes, *Sweet Child O' Mine* – Guns N' Roses, *Do I Wanna Know?* – Arctic Monkeys, *Come As You Are* – Nirvana, Plus songs by The Beatles, The Black Keys, and many more.



# Exam Boards I Use

## Trinity Rock & Pop

If you love the idea of playing **classic rock and pop songs**, this is the exam route for you. Trinity focuses on real tracks by legendary artists – from The Rolling Stones and Queen to contemporary bands like Black Keys. It's all about performing music you know and enjoy, while building essential skills like riffs, improvisation, and playback.

Lots of great information can be found in the link below:

<https://www.trinityrock.com>

## London College of Music (LCM)

LCM is the best choice if you're an **acoustic guitar player**, or if you're drawn to styles like **blues, classical, or jazz**. Their syllabus offers a balanced mix of performance pieces, technical work (scales and chords), and musical knowledge. It's ideal for students who want to develop a broad foundation and explore both traditional and modern repertoire.

Lots of great information can be found in the link below:

<https://lcme.uwl.ac.uk/our-exams/guitar-ukulele/acoustic-guitar/>

# Why take an exam?

Exams aren't essential, but they can really help students:

- Give clear goals to work towards.
- Build a sense of achievement at each stage.
- Develop stronger technique and musical skills.
- Gain recognised qualifications (Grades 6–8 carry UCAS points and well as DoE work).
- Grow confidence in performance.

# Books for Exams

Every grade requires a book with the set pieces and exercises.

Official links:

Trinity

<https://www.trinityrock.com/store>

LCM

<https://www.musicroom.com/london-college-of-music-examinations>

Books are also available from other music retailers such as Amazon, WOB or your local music shop.

## Levels & Progression

Exams start at Initial (or Step) and go up to Grade 8.

- **Initial/Step** – great for beginners.
- **Grades 1-2** – build core skills and musical confidence.
- **Grades 3-5** - In this middle section theres a lot of fun music and solid playing skills to be learnt
- **Grades 6-8** – advanced playing, performance, and UCAS points.

Your teacher will advise the right starting point and when you're ready to enter for an exam.

## What's Expected When Preparing for an Exam

Preparing for an exam is a team effort between student, teacher, and parent. Success comes with:

- **Regular practice** – little and often works best.
- **Staying focused** on the material set each week.
- **Parental support** – encouraging practice at home, listening to performances, and helping build a routine.
- **Lesson preparation** – bringing books, instrument, and being ready to learn.

With consistent effort, exams can be both achievable and enjoyable.

Trinity Rock and Pop

Students are required to learn three songs, two must be from the book and one can be a “free choice”, the free choice song must be to the grade level. One of the pieces from the book must be technical focus.


## LCM

Students are required to learn two or three pieces from the book (grade depending) and scales, chords and technical exercises.

## What to Expect in an Exam

Most music exams today are taken as **digital video submissions**. Students record their performance in **one continuous take**, playing their songs, technical work, and other requirements in the order set out by the exam board. The video is then uploaded to the exam board’s online system, where it is marked by an examiner. This approach makes exams flexible and convenient, while still feeling like a live performance.

**In-Person Exams:** For students who prefer the traditional experience of playing directly to an examiner, in-person exams can still be arranged.

 Listen Learn Play – Zachary John Moore