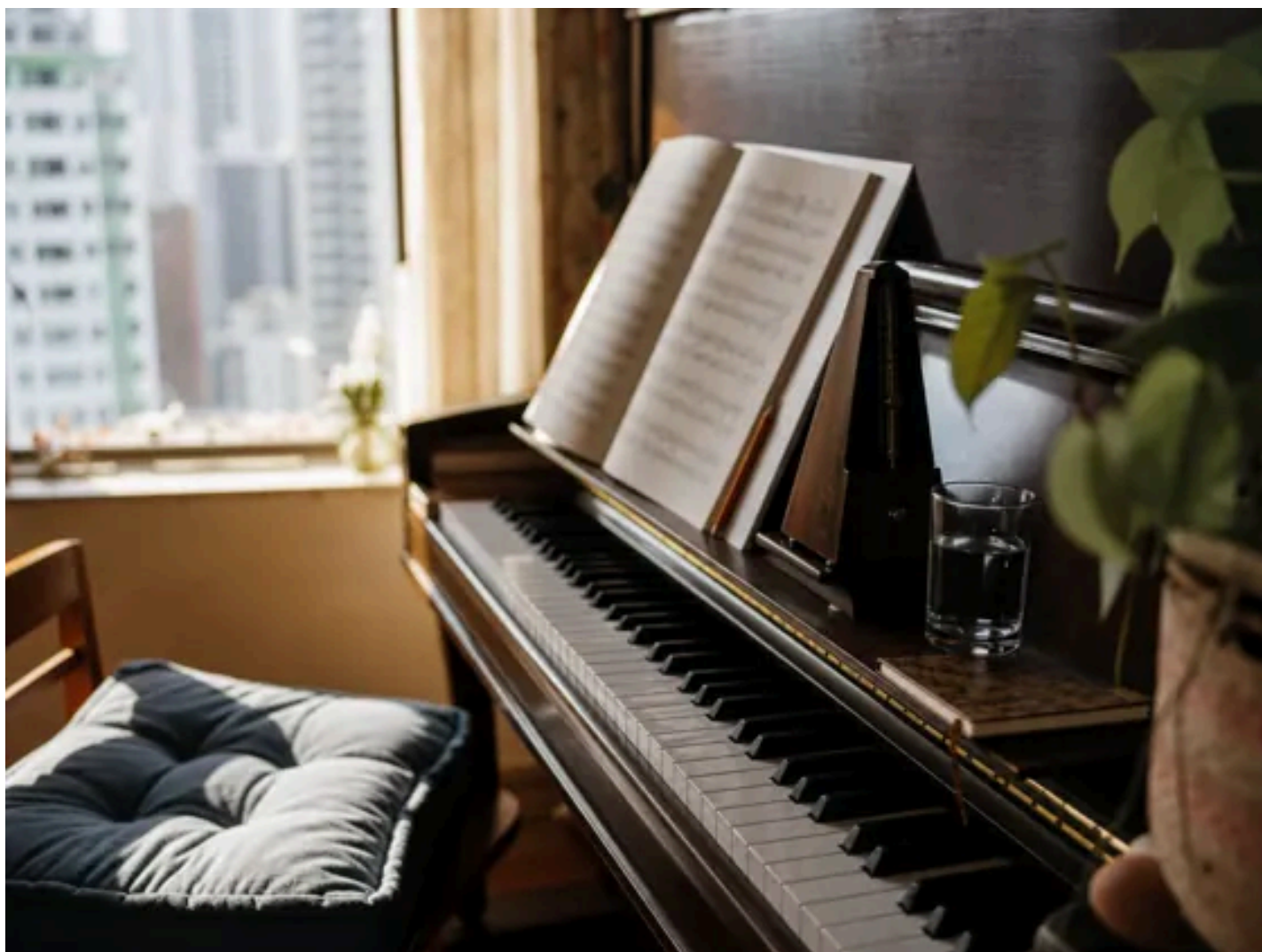


ABRSM Piano Grade Exams: Guide to the New 2027 & 2028 Syllabus, with Mock Aural Tests, Sight-Reading Drills and a 12-Week Plan

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Quick answer: ABRSM Piano Practical Grades run from **Initial Grade to Grade 8** and have four sections: **three pieces** (30 marks each, 90 in total), **scales and arpeggios 21 marks**, **sight-reading 21 marks** and **aural tests 18 marks** — 150 marks in total. Results are banded **130–150 Distinction**, **120–129 Merit** and **100–119 Pass**. To enter Grades 6 to 8 you must already hold Grade 5 (or above) Music Theory or an accepted equivalent. The **new Piano Syllabus 2027 & 2028** is out: the repertoire is refreshed for exams from **1 January 2027**, while **scales, sight-reading and aural tests are unchanged**.



Three pieces carry sixty per cent of the marks — choosing and pacing them matters more than two extra hours of drilling.

The exam at a glance (ABRSM piano, Practical Grades)

Section	Content	Marks	Share
Pieces (three)	One from each of syllabus Lists A, B and C (the repertoire is refreshed in the new syllabus)	30 × 3 = 90	60%
Scales and arpeggios	A selection asked for by the examiner; unchanged in the 2027 & 2028 syllabus	21	14%
Sight-reading	An unseen short piece after a brief preparation time (requirements unchanged)	21	14%
Aural tests	Pitch, pulse, rhythm, melody, harmony and other features (requirements unchanged)	18	12%
Total		150	—

Grades: Initial Grade to Grade 8 (Initial Grade is an entry-level qualification, not a performance diploma).

Result bands: Distinction 130–150, Merit 120–129, Pass 100–119. **Entry requirements:** none for Initial Grade to Grade 5; for Grades 6 to 8 you must have passed Grade 5 (or above) in Music Theory, Practical Musicianship or a Jazz Practical Grade, or hold an accepted equivalent.

The alternative: Performance Grades (digital, assessed from a recording) — four pieces: three from the syllabus lists and one own-choice, with no scales, sight-reading or aural tests. Piano candidates may also use **repertoire for one hand** (Grades 1 to 5, extended to Grades 6 to 8 in the 2027 & 2028 syllabus).

The syllabus timetable (where candidates slip up): the '2025 & 2026' syllabus is **valid until 31 December 2026**; the **2027 & 2028 syllabus applies to exams from 1 January 2027**. So you can still use the old repertoire during 2026, but from 2027 only the new syllabus is accepted. The repertoire changes — the scales, sight-reading and aural requirements do **not**.

What changed in the 2027 & 2028 piano syllabus

Item	Change
Repertoire	Refreshed lists for both Practical and Performance Grades, Initial Grade to Grade 8, for exams from 1 January 2027.
Scales, sight-reading, aural	No change — ABRSM states there are no changes to scales and arpeggios, sight-reading or aural tests for Practical Grades.
One-hand pieces	Performance Grade one-hand repertoire extended from Grades 1 to 5 to include Grades 6 to 8 .
Exam books	One <i>Piano Exam Pieces</i> book per grade, each with nine pieces and QR codes linking to the Piano Learning resources.
Learning resources	A free Piano Learning hub: performance videos, expert guidance, practice activities and listening recommendations, by grade.

Item	Change
Recordings	All pieces recorded by professional musicians and released on the major streaming platforms.

***What it means for preparation:** if you are sitting in 2027 or later, start learning the new repertoire now (the pieces carry 90 marks), while scales, sight-reading and aural work can continue with your existing materials — nothing needs replacing there.*

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How this practice paper was designed, and its copyright status

The exercises below were written by TutorZone tutors from publicly available ABRSM information (the Piano exam pages, the Practical Grades pages and the assessment/marking sections of the Practical Grades qualification specification) and the HKEAA's ABRSM pages. They are **not ABRSM past or specimen papers**. ABRSM's repertoire lists, sheet music and syllabus content are ABRSM copyright and **no music or list content is reproduced here**; the assessment facts quoted are public and every exercise is original to this paper. In any conflict, the ABRSM syllabus and Exam Regulations govern.

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The four sections, and how to practise them (piano)

Section	How to practise	What the examiner hears
Pieces, 90 marks	Keep the three contrasted (List A is usually classical, B lyrical, C rhythmic or modern). Settle the tempo you can play cleanly first, then nudge it up week by week.	Accuracy and tone, steadiness of pulse, voicing and pedal, phrase shape and dynamics, and the performance as a whole.
Scales and arpeggios, 21 marks	Hands separately and slowly, then together. Watch the evenness of the thumb turns. Use the metronome daily, slow to fast, and practise in random order.	Evenness, clarity of fingering, consistent tempo and clean starts. Requirements are unchanged, so existing materials remain valid.
Sight-reading, 21 marks	Use the preparation time for four things: time and key signature, the first and last bars, the hardest bar or two, and the starting tempo. Never stop and restart.	Whether the pulse survives and the playing stays connected; sight-reading tests the ability to keep going rather than perfection.
Aural tests, 18 marks	Five minutes a day: sing back intervals, clap rhythms, identify chord quality and cadences; record yourself and check.	Pitch accuracy, sense of pulse and musical perceptiveness; 17–18 is accurate throughout, 15–16 secure, 12–14 a cautious pass.

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Mock aural tests (10 questions, with answers)

1. (Pulse) A short phrase is played. Clap the strong beats — is it in two, three or four?
2. (Rhythmic memory) Two bars of rhythm are played. Clap them back, then clap again and name the time signature.
3. (Pitch and direction) Two notes are played. Is the second higher or lower, and by what interval?
4. (Melodic memory) A four-bar melody in C major is played. Sing it back on "lah" and describe its shape.
5. (Chords) A triad is played — major or minor, and how does the colour differ?
6. (Inversions) The same chord is played twice. Is the second one an inversion, and has the bass note changed?
7. (Cadences) Is the phrase ending a perfect or an imperfect cadence, and does it sound finished?
8. (Speed and dynamics) The same melody is played twice: which time was faster or louder, and in which bar did the change occur?
9. (Texture) Two short extracts are played. Which is homophonic (melody on top) and which is closer to polyphonic (parts imitating one another)?
10. (Combined) Listen to eight bars: name the time signature, major or minor, and the loudest phrase.

Answers and marking points

1. Correct time signature (1 mark) plus steady strong beats (1). 2. Rhythm accurate within an eighth note. 3. Direction first, then the interval name; direction alone earns half marks. 4. Accurate pitch and shape; more than a semitone out scores nothing. 5. Quality correct (major or minor); describing the colour earns credit. 6. Inversion identified and the changed bass note named. 7. Cadence named plus the finished/unfinished impression. 8. Which time and which bar. 9. Texture named plus one concrete reason (melody and accompaniment, imitation). 10. All three correct for distinction level.

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Sight-reading drills (three levels)

A (Initial–Grade 1 level) C major, 4/4, eight bars, single notes in each hand (crotchets and minims only), ♩ = 80, melody in the right hand with long notes in the left.

Purpose: build the routine — read, count, play — and keep the whole thing moving.

B (Grades 2–3) G major, 3/4, twelve bars, adding quavers and dotted rhythm, broken-chord accompaniment in the left hand and one mp → mf change.

Purpose: hold the pulse through rhythmic change instead of dragging at every dot.

C (Grades 4–5) F major, 6/8, sixteen bars, with accidentals, syncopation, a brief move to the relative minor and back, and double notes in the right hand.

Purpose: keep the overall shape when the notes are unfamiliar — better to thin an inner part than to stop and start again.

A suggested 20-second preparation routine

(1) Read the time and key signature and count two bars in your head; (2) look at the first and last bars; (3) scan the hardest bar or two and decide how to handle them; (4) breathe and play. **Once you start: no going back, only going on.**

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A twelve-week preparation plan (piano, Grade 3 shown)

Weeks	Pieces	Scales and technique	Sight-reading and aural
1–3	Play each piece through, fixing tempo and phrasing; slow hands-separate work on the two hardest bars daily	Ten minutes daily: hands separately, slow, even	Five minutes of rhythm clapping daily
4–6	Begin memorising (structure first, detail later); record and listen back for pedal and voicing problems	Raise the speed (♩ =60 → 80), add random testing	One sight-reading passage daily, taken at random
7–9	Mock exam: three pieces back to back with no break; try a different piano (school, music shop)	Someone else calls the keys and patterns	Full ten-question aural mock (section 05)
10–11	Error-prone passages only; settle the running order for the day	Maintain, do not increase, to avoid hand fatigue	Drill the habit of never restarting a sight-reading
12	Taper: one play-through a day, focused on stage presence and breathing	Light maintenance	Warm-up and rhythm work only

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Entering in Hong Kong (administered by HKEAA)

Item	Arrangement
Local administrator	The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) administers ABRSM theory, practical and digital performance exams in Hong Kong.

Item	Arrangement
Booking	Since 2021 (except group choirs and ensembles), applicants book and pay through ABRSM's online booking system .
Exam sessions	Several sessions run each year. In 2026, practical and digital performance exams were held in batches between late February and early August; dates and fees are published on ABRSM's site each year.
Grades 6–8 extra step	Grade 5 (or above) in Music Theory, Practical Musicianship or a Jazz Practical Grade (or an accepted equivalent) is required before booking.
Certificates	Results and digital certificates are issued through your ABRSM account; a paper certificate can be ordered and is posted within about four months.

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Where piano candidates lose marks

- **Muddy pedalling:** the pedal is not changed at harmonic changes, so the sound blurs. Examiners listen for layers, not volume.
- **Hands out of balance:** the left-hand accompaniment drowns the melody, or the melody line fails to sing (a common problem in lyrical List B pieces).
- **Unsteady tempo:** nerves push the speed up, especially in fast passages. Practise with the metronome holding you back.
- **Uneven scales:** accents or gaps at the thumb turns. Hands-separate slow practice is the only cure.
- **Memory lapses:** memorise the structure and harmonic direction, not finger patterns.
- **Wrong syllabus year:** from 2027 only the 2027 & 2028 repertoire is accepted.
- **Stopping in sight-reading:** sight-reading is 21 marks, the same as scales; one halt is visible loss.

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FAQ

At what age can my child take an ABRSM piano grade?

Entry is open at any age; Initial Grade to Grade 5 have no entry requirements. In Hong Kong most students start with Initial Grade or Grade 1 between the ages of five and seven.

Is Initial Grade worth taking?

It is a regulated qualification (Entry Level Award) and a gentle first exam experience. It is not a performance diploma, and candidates can move straight to Grade 1 or higher afterwards.

Do pieces have to be memorised?

Music may be used in the pieces (the examiner may check your edition), though many candidates memorise them to free up their expression. Scales and sight-reading are asked for on the day.

Can we use a digital piano?

The exam is for piano; a digital instrument must meet ABRSM's requirements for touch and pedalling, so check with HKEAA or ABRSM before booking.

Practical Grade or Performance Grade?

Choose Practical for all-round musicianship (scales, sight-reading, aural); choose Performance to focus on playing, or when the fixed exam session dates are hard to manage, since recordings can be submitted at a time you choose. The qualification at a given grade carries the same recognition.

Which repertoire applies to a 2027 exam?

From 1 January 2027 the new 2027 & 2028 syllabus applies; the 2025 & 2026 syllabus is valid only until 31 December 2026.

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Official sources to check against

Source	What to use it for
ABRSM — Piano exams (Hong Kong)	The 2027 & 2028 repertoire, exam books, the Piano Learning hub and exam requirements
ABRSM — Practical Grades	The 150-mark scheme, section marks, the Distinction/Merit/Pass bands and the Grades 6–8 entry requirement
ABRSM — instrument exam pages (clarinet shown)	Where to download qualification specifications for other instruments (they contain the marking criteria and exam timings)
HKEAA — ABRSM practical and digital performance exams in Hong Kong	Local booking, exam sessions, the Grade 5 theory requirement and certificates

Also in this series: [ABRSM Clarinet Grade Exams: Complete Guide](#). For piano or theory tuition, start with the [subject guides](#) and then get matched with a tutor.