Getting that “Plus” grading (A+, B+, C+)

Originally presented at AMEB Information Day 2018. Updated for the 2020 syllabus with the addition of Level 3 information.

Jane Burgess

Music does not excite until it is performed – Benjamin Britten, composer
PRACTICAL EXAMINATIONS
Levels 1, 2 and 3 Assessment

The syllabus objectives introduce each of the three levels of the syllabus. They specify the required areas of achievement within each syllabus and are the basis upon which candidates and teachers work and upon which candidates can expect to be assessed. The detailed Grading Descriptors report the candidate’s achievement against the objectives for the level and the specific syllabus requirements for the grade.

(Found on page xviii-xix of the 2020 syllabus)
Level 1 and 2 Objectives consist of three sections:

Section I. Technical Work.

Section II. Studies and pieces and Extra Lists.

Section III.

1. Aural Tests

2. Sight reading

3. General Knowledge
# Piano Third Grade

The University of Adelaide, South Australia, Australia

## Subject Code 1614

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate No.</th>
<th>Teacher's Code</th>
<th>Examiner Code</th>
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### Technical Work

#### Section I. Technical Work

**LMT A**

### Studies and pieces and Extra lists

#### Section II. Studies and pieces and Extra lists

**LMT B**

**LMT C**

**LMT**

### Extra List

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<th>Aural Tests</th>
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<td>Sight Reading</td>
<td>Sight Reading and General Knowledge</td>
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### General Remarks

#### A+ High distinction

A High Distinction

B+ High Credit

B Credit

C+ Pass with Merit

C Pass

D Not Satisfactory

**Result**

Examiners Signature:

Date: ************

[Note: After approval of this report, the teacher is required to hand it to the candidate]

### Grading Descriptors

#### HIGH DISTINCTION

A+ In addition to satisfying the requirements for an A grading (below), the candidate demonstrates outstanding achievement in meeting the syllabus objectives in all Sections, including performance flair, consistent technical fluency and penetrating stylistic insight.

#### HONOURS

A The candidate demonstrates an overall superior level of achievement in meeting the syllabus objectives in all Sections, in terms of musicianship, security of technique (including intonation, tone, phrasing, articulation, rhythm), and stylistic awareness.

#### CREDIT

B+ In addition to satisfying the requirements for a B grading (below), the candidate demonstrates meritorious achievement against most of the syllabus objectives.

B The candidate demonstrates an overall creditable level of achievement with appropriate development of musicianship, technique and stylistic awareness in accordance with the syllabus objectives. Some unevenness of achievement in meeting the syllabus objectives or between different Sections of the examination may be apparent.

#### PASS

C+ In addition to satisfying the requirements for a C grading (below), the candidate demonstrates more than adequate achievement against some of the syllabus objectives in each Section.

C The candidate demonstrates an overall adequate level of achievement in musicianship, technique and style in accordance with the syllabus objectives. Considerable unevenness of achievement in meeting the syllabus objectives, or between different Sections of the examination, may be apparent.

#### NOT SATISFACTORY

D The candidate demonstrates an overall inadequate level of musicianship, technique and style and does not satisfy the syllabus objectives. Often this has resulted from inadequate preparation. Presentation is often hesitant, evidencing technical errors and/or an inappropriately servile style.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Grading Descriptors Levels 1 and 2</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary of Descriptors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>HIGH DISTINCTION A+: In addition to satisfying the requirements for an A grading (below), the candidate demonstrates outstanding achievement in meeting the syllabus objectives in all sections, including performance flair, consistent technical fluency and penetrating stylistic insight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>HONOURS A: The candidate demonstrates an overall superior level of achievement in meeting the syllabus objectives in all sections, in terms of musicianship, security of technique (including intonation, tone, phrasing, articulation, rhythm), and stylistic awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>HIGH CREDIT B+: In addition to satisfying the requirements for a B grading (below), the candidate demonstrates meritorious achievement against most of the syllabus objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CREDIT B: The candidate demonstrates an overall creditable level of achievement with appropriate development of musicianship, technique and stylistic awareness in accordance with the syllabus objectives. Some unevenness of achievement in meeting the syllabus objectives or between different Sections of the examination may be apparent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>PASS WITH MERIT C+: In addition to satisfying the requirements for a C grading (below), the candidate demonstrates more than adequate achievement against some of the syllabus objectives in each Section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>PASS C: The candidate demonstrates an overall adequate level of achievement in musicianship, technique and style in accordance with the syllabus objectives. Considerable unevenness of achievement in meeting the syllabus objectives, or between different Sections of the examination, may be apparent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Level 3 Objectives consist of two sections:

Section I. Pieces.

Section II. General Knowledge
Level 3 Grading Descriptors

Associate Diploma (AMusA)

Award with Distinction
To qualify for an award with distinction, the candidate must fulfil the criteria for a pass award and in addition demonstrate performance flair, consistent technical and musical command and penetrating stylistic insight.

Award
To qualify for an award at Associate level, the candidate must fulfil the syllabus objectives to a level that meets the technical and musical demands of the repertoire and produces a satisfying musical performance overall.

Licentiate Diploma (LMusA)

Award with Distinction
To qualify for an award with distinction, the candidate must fulfil the criteria for a pass award and in addition demonstrate performance flair, consistent technical and musical command and penetrating stylistic insight.

Award
To qualify for an award at Licentiate level, the candidate must fulfil the syllabus objectives, reaching a level of achievement that meets the technical and musical demands of the repertoire and produces a coherent and accomplished musical performance overall.
Grading Distribution for AMEB exam candidates in 2019 Levels 1 and 2
Syllabus objectives outline the “what” the “aim” or the “target”.

Level 1 Piano objectives for grades Preliminary to grade 4 are found on page 58 of the 2020 syllabus

Level 2 Piano objectives for grades 5-8 and Certificate of Performance are found on page 70 of the 2020 syllabus

Level 3 Piano objectives for Diploma exams AMUSA and LMUSA are found on page 83 of the 2020 syllabus
Objectives Section I: Technical Work Level 1 and Level 2 Piano

All technical work should be performed promptly, accurately and according to the tempo specifications.

Scales and arpeggios must be performed from memory. Exercises may be played from the score.

In addition, the candidate is required to demonstrate:

- Comfortable and well-balanced seating position
- A stable, relaxed hand shape with secure and efficient shifts between positions
- A clear and expressive tonal quality (Level 1 only)
- Systematic fingering in scales and arpeggios
- Smooth passing of the thumb under the hand in scales and arpeggios and a flexible crossover in the reverse direction
- Clear finger work, with effective coordination between fingers, hand and arm
- A clear, even legato touch
- A crisp, clear and even staccato touch
- Secure coordination between the hands
- Increasing dynamic range, with controlled contrasts and graduations (Level 2 only)
- Observance of dynamic and articulation markings in exercises
Broad Summary of Section I: Technical Work Objectives for Piano

The candidate is required to demonstrate:

1. Accurate, prompt performance at the indicated tempo specifications
2. Fluency - clear even articulation of the notes
3. Controlled co-ordination of the hands
4. Control of dynamic and tonal contrast

Candidates who perform technical work to a high standard are more likely to achieve those “Plus” grades.
Section II: Studies, pieces
Objectives common to both for Level 1 and Level 2 Piano

Through a program of three works (preliminary to grade 4) or four works (grade 5 to grade 8) drawn from the lists, the candidate is required to demonstrate:

- A secure and fluent performance with accurate notes and note values
- Rhythmic and metric stability
- An expressive tonal quality in *legato*, non-*legato* and *staccato* touches as required
- A feeling for phrase units and the ability to shape phrases expressively
- Controlled variations in tone, touch and tempo
- The ability to vary the dynamic relationship between the hands and to differentiate tonally between melody and accompaniment
- Execution of ornaments according to the stylistic conventions
Objectives Section II: Studies and pieces continued...

Differences between Level 1 and Level 2

The candidate is required to demonstrate:

• Developing awareness of the dynamic range of the piano and the ability to introduce dynamic variety into the performance (Level 1)
• Exploration of the full dynamic range of the piano and the ability to introduce dynamic variety into the performance (Level 2)

• Understanding of the style and expressive character of each work (Level 1)
• Understanding of the style and expressive character of each work and the ability to project them with confidence (Level 2)

• Legato pedalling is not assessed objective at Level 1. Occasionally, however works may be encountered that invite other forms of pedalling as a source of particular tonal effects. If such works are presented for examination, the use of pedal will be assessed within the context of this objective. (Level 1)
• Exploration of specific colours and textures through the effective use of the sustaining pedal and, where appropriate the una corda pedal. (Level 2 only)
• Effective legato pedalling with precise coordination between the hands and foot. (Level 2 only)
Section II. Studies and pieces objectives – A Broad Summary

1. Accuracy and fluency of notes, rhythms and metre
2. Musical phrasing and punctuation
3. Balance between the hands
4. Effective use of dynamic variation
5. Understanding the style and character appropriate to each work

Candidates who perform their pieces to a high standard are more likely to achieve those “Plus” grades.
Objectives Section I: Pieces Level 3

The candidate should demonstrate:

• A concept of the work as a whole, performed with an understanding of the structure and the musical content of each together with those elements which give them a particular unity or character.
• Mastery of technical and musical elements resulting in a fluent, expressive and coherent performance.
• The maintenance of unity and continuity in multi-movement works, including appropriate timing between, and linking of movements.
• Familiarity with the accompanying part in items requiring accompaniment, with a consistent and integrated sense of ensemble between soloists and associate artist.
• Command of contemporary techniques appropriate to the instrument.
• Understanding of performance conventions relevant to the works being performed, and an ability to differentiate between a range of musical styles.
• A sense of professional presentation, with attention to posture, appearance and normal performance conventions.
• Performance from memory according to the requirements of the specific syllabus.

Candidates who perform their pieces to a high standard are more likely to achieve an Award with Distinction.
Objectives Section I: Extra Lists Grades 2 - 7 only

The candidate is required to demonstrate:
Familiarity with Extra list pieces by performing the whole or part of them at the discretion of the examiner.

Candidates who perform extra list pieces to a high standard are more likely to achieve those “Plus” grades.
Section III. Aural Tests Grades Preliminary to Grade 8

A full description of all the aural tests are found on pages xi - xii of the 2020 syllabus

General Summary:
Perform promptly and accurately aural tests involving:
• Beats (preliminary)
• Rhythm patterns and pitching melodic phrases (preliminary to grade 2)
• Metre and intervals (grades 3 – 6)
• Triads (grades 4- 7)
• Cadences (grades 6-8)
• Memory of a melodic phrase (grades 7- 8)
• The lower part of a two-part phrase (grade 8)

There are a range of useful resources that give graded examples.

Begin working on aural tests early!

Candidates who perform aural tests to a high standard are more likely to achieve those “Plus” grades.
Section III. Sight Reading Preliminary to Grade 8

Objectives
• Accuracy of notes, time and rhythm Level 1 and 2
• Fluency (Level 1) at the indicated tempo (Level 2)
• Dynamics articulation and style as indicated (Level 2)
• Use of sustaining pedal where appropriate (Level 2)

Many students are not natural sight readers.

Sight reading skills can be developed with regular practise.

There are a range of useful resources that give graded examples.

Challenge: Encourage students to become excellent sight readers!

Candidates who perform sight reading to a high standard are more likely to achieve those “Plus” grades.
Section III. General Knowledge Levels 1 and 2

The Full list of guidelines are found on pages xiii of the 2020 syllabus

Guideline summary:
• Name and/or explain any notes, rests sign, terms, its title and its key/tonality (Preliminary to Certificate of Performance (CP))
• Identify key changes (grade 2- CP)
• Explain Form (grades 5 - CP) with grades 7- CP requiring detailed structural analysis and knowledge of other movements
• Knowledge of the period, style, composer and influences and of the genres typical of that period (Grade 7 – CP)
• Knowledge of the composers of each of the pieces being presented, in particular relating to their works and musical influences, is expected. (CP)

From Level 2 candidates are expected to be able to:
• Discuss style by showing how the piece exemplifies typical features of its period.
Section II. General Knowledge Level 3

Found on Page xiii of the 2020 Syllabus

Candidates are expected to demonstrate a mature understanding of the structure, style and historical background of the repertoire that is performed and to use this as a basis for discussing the perspective choices that they make.

Questions, which will be asked from the full piano score, will focus on the following areas:

• Terminology, including the significance of titles and the meaning of all markings contained in the score.
• Composers: relevant biographical information, sources of influence, impact upon later generations of composers and repertoire output (both in the discipline being examined and more broadly).
• Historical and stylistic context: how each work relates to the period from which it arises, considering both its compositional style and the performance conventions of the time.
• Structure: formal layout, keys, melodic/harmonic language and the identification of climax points.
• For instrumentalists, the construction and development of the instrument, with special consideration given to any implications this may have upon the repertoire that is performed.
General Knowledge

General Knowledge information, is more likely to be internalized and synthesized when it is taught during the process of learning a piece.

There are a range of useful resources available.

Candidates who can apply and discuss General Knowledge understanding about the pieces they are performing are more likely to achieve those ”Plus” grades or an Award with Distinction.
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<td>A+</td>
<td><strong>HIGH DISTINCTION A+:</strong> In addition to satisfying the requirements for an A grading (below), the candidate demonstrates outstanding achievement in meeting the syllabus objectives in all sections, including performance flair, consistent technical fluency and penetrating stylistic insight.</td>
<td>Outstanding in all sections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td><strong>HONOURS A:</strong> The candidate demonstrates an overall superior level of achievement in meeting the syllabus objectives in all sections, in terms of musicianship, security of technique (including intonation, tone, phrasing, articulation, rhythm), and stylistic awareness</td>
<td>Superior in all sections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td><strong>HIGH CREDIT B+:</strong> In addition to satisfying the requirements for a B grading (below), the candidate demonstrates meritorious achievement against most of the syllabus objectives.</td>
<td>Mostly meritorious some unevenness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td><strong>CREDIT B:</strong> The candidate demonstrates an overall creditable level of achievement with appropriate development of musicianship, technique and stylistic awareness in accordance with the syllabus objectives. Some unevenness of achievement in meeting the syllabus objectives or between different Sections of the examination may be apparent.</td>
<td>Overall creditable some unevenness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td><strong>PASS WITH MERIT C+:</strong> In addition to satisfying the requirements for a C grading (below), the candidate demonstrates more than adequate achievement against some of the syllabus objectives in each Section.</td>
<td>Sometimes more than adequate considerable unevenness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td><strong>PASS C:</strong> The candidate demonstrates an overall adequate level of achievement in musicianship, technique and style in accordance with the syllabus objectives. Considerable unevenness of achievement in meeting the syllabus objectives, or between different Sections of the examination, may be apparent.</td>
<td>Overall adequate with considerable unevenness</td>
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Found on page xviii-xix of the 2020 AMEB syllabus and on the back of the report sheets.
Level 3 Grading Descriptors

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Licentiate Diploma (LMusA)

Award with Distinction
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Award
To qualify for an award at Licentiate level, the candidate must fulfil the syllabus objectives, reaching a level of achievement that meets the technical and musical demands of the repertoire and produces a coherent and accomplished musical performance overall.

Further support information about the Licentiate Diploma can be found at www.ameb.edu.au/lmusap-practical
How would you grade these performances?

Two performances of Kabalevsky’s Toccatina No 12 Opus 27 appear in the links below. This piece features in the Piano syllabus grade 3 list C manual list and in the Piano for Leisure syllabus.

Download the Grading Activity Sheet and AMEB Grading Descriptors from the links below. Use the Grading Descriptors to measure each candidate’s achievement against the syllabus objectives and grade each performance.

Grading Activity Sheet
Grading Descriptors

Kabalevsky Toccatina video 1
Kabalevsky Toccatina video 2
Magical music never quite leaves the memory
Sir Thomas Beecham, conductor

Thank you for attending