

SE22 Piano School Grade 1 theory guide

Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music



THEORY EXAM TIPS, GRADE 1

ABOUT THE EXAM:

1. WHAT TO BRING TO THE EXAM

Two sharp pencils, an eraser and a pencil sharpener. You will be provided with a very small piece of scrap paper to use as you wish. See below for some suggestions of things that you would want to jot down on here.

2. HOW LONG IS THE EXAM?

The exam is 90 minutes long. This is quite a long time to go through a fairly short exam paper. You can leave after 30 minutes, but only do this if you have gone through the whole paper at least twice to check for errors and incomplete questions.

3. THE SCORING SYSTEM

The exam is usually 10 questions, each part worth 10 marks, totalling 100. A pass is 66/100, a merit is 80/100 and a distinction is 90/100.

4. TEST PAPERS

All the past exam papers are available to buy for £1.95 from the local music shop near the station, so do make sure that you have completed one test paper to get an idea of what to expect on the day. Grade 1 is a straightforward test and you will find it's a lot easier than the red theory workbook!

5. Read the question very carefully. It often has two-parts. The first part tells you what to do, then after the full-stop, it will tell you a further bit of information. The extra bit of information sometimes just says: "The first example has been done for you" which means have a look at how the first question has been answered, which is a great bit of help for you. The second bit of the question can also contain further instructions so make sure you complete as fully as possible.

5. KNOW YOUR SCALES!

Scales are the fundamental building blocks of many of the questions in the exam. See the glossary at the end of details of the scales you have to know for Grade 1.

6. KNOW YOUR ITALIAN WORDS!

Like the scales, this is one part of the exam you can't guess, so make sure you know pages 27 & 28 of your workbook thoroughly. Ask your parents to test you on these every day. Some of the words sound a bit like English e.g. accelerando sounds a bit like the English word accelerating, and it means 'getting faster'. A lot of the words do not have anything that sounds the same as an English word, so do make sure you know all of these!

6. AND FINALLY...

Marks are given for neatness. Any illegible or scruffy answers will be marked down.



USEFUL TIPS FOR THE EXAM:

I have ordered these in approximately the order that they appear in the exam.

1. INSERTING BAR-LINES INTO THREE SHORT PIECES OF MUSIC, USUALLY 4 BARS LONG. THE FIRST EXAMPLE HAS BEEN DONE FOR YOU.

This is a straightforward question as long as you remember to check your time signature. The choices available to you at Grade 1 are: 2, 3 or 4 beats in a bar.

The first bar is always quite complicated, so look to the end of the piece where there will be a much easier bar, usually it just has one or two longer note values, so it's easier to add up and figure out how many beats are in a bar. Double-check with a harder bar. It's sometimes worth lightly writing over each note how much it is worth, then adding it all up on your scrap bit of paper. Then, rub out your markings out on the actual exam paper.

Draw your bar-lines neatly, do not cross over or under the five lines of the staff. You are awarded marks for neatness.

2. COMPOSING AN ANSWERING RHYTHM.

The main rule for this exercise is to end on a strong beat.

If you have two beats in a bar, complete the last bar with a MINIM.

If you have three beats in a bar, complete the last bar with a DOTTED MINIM.

If you have four beats in a bar, complete the last bar with a SEMIBREVE.

You can also end with 2, 3 or 4 crotchets as this produces a strong ending.

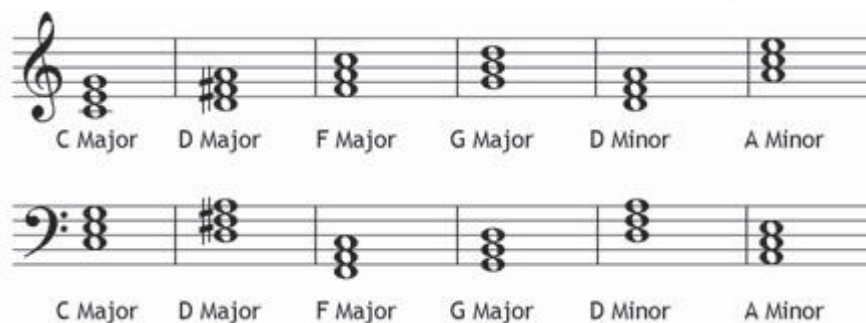
There will usually be one or two more bars to complete. As you have been given a rhythm for a couple of bars, why not try using the given rhythm in a different arrangement to complete your missing bars. You could reverse the rhythm i.e. write it out backwards in another bar, or use elements of the given rhythm to complete your empty bars.

Here is an incomplete rhythm, then the same one with the completed response.



3. TONIC TRIAD

A tonic triad is the 1st note, 3rd note and 5th note of a scale. So in C major, a tonic triad would be the notes: C E G. The notes are written in a stack on top of each other.



4. KEY SIGNATURES

There are 6 key signatures to learn for Grade 1. You must know these off by heart before going into the exam otherwise you will not be able to answer lots of the questions. See the glossary at the end.

5. NAMING THE DEGREES OF THE SCALE.

This is an easy one if you use your scrap paper. If you are given the key of C major and asked to name the degrees of the scale, then write out a little chart to help you.

Each scale has 7 notes in. In C major, C is the 1st note, or the 1st degree of the scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C	D	E	F	G	A	B

Here are the degrees of all your other scales:

G Major						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
G	A	B	C	D	E	F#

D Major						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#

F Major						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
F	G	A	Bb	C	D	E

A Minor						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	B	C	D	E	F	G#

D Minor						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D	E	F	G	A	Bb	C#



6. SEMITONES

A semitone is the closest distance from one note to another note. So again, if we play middle C on a keyboard and want to move one semi-tone to the right the note you should be playing is C sharp that is the black note between C and D. When you first look, at the C and D keys they might appear to be closest to each other but the black notes are placed between the white notes, which make them closer. Now starting from middle C again if you move one semitone to the left, you will notice there is no black key between the white keys so the closest key is B.

These are all semitones. See if you can play them on the keyboard in both bass clef and treble clef to see why they are semitones:

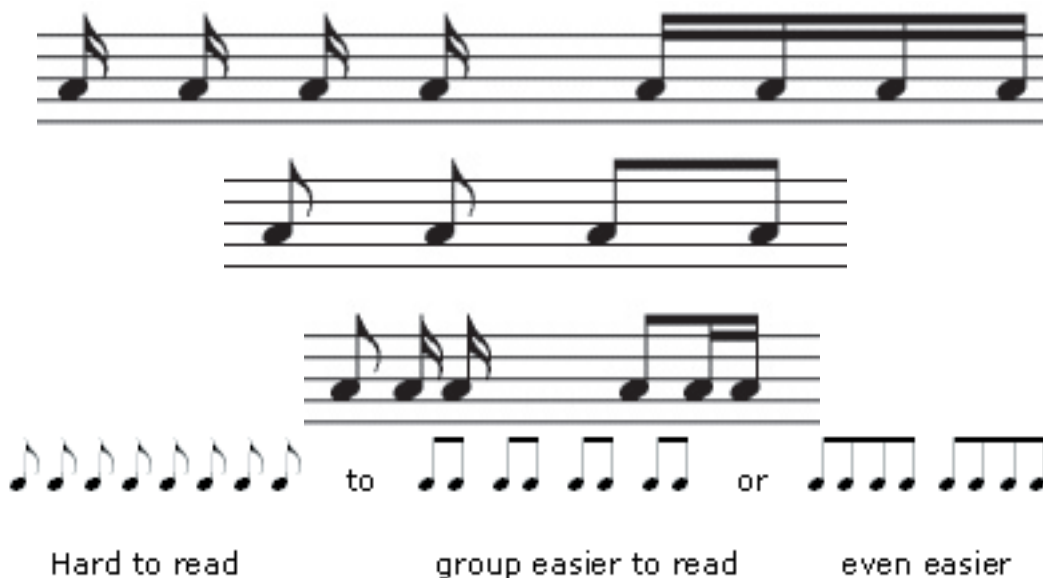


7. BEAMING NOTES

Beaming means joining up notes to make the music look tidier.

You can only beam two types of notes: Quavers and semiquavers. You can never beam crotchets, minims, dotted minims or semibreves.

Here are examples of notes that are displayed unbeamed, and then correctly beamed.



8. INTERVALS

The distance between notes is called an “interval.”

In C major, if we had the notes C&D, then these are a distance of a 2nd apart. You can count on your fingers the following distances. Make sure to always include C as the first note, otherwise your distances will not be correct:



GLOSSARY:

I. KEY SIGNATURES & SCALES

	C major		G major
	A minor		
	D major		F major
			D minor

SCALES GROUPED BY MATCHING KEY SIGNATURES AS ABOVE

No sharps or flats in the key signature:

C Major



Sheet music for the C Major scale, showing the treble and bass staves with fingerings (1-5) and slurs.

A Harmonic Minor



Sheet music for the A Harmonic Minor scale, showing the treble and bass staves with fingerings (1-5) and slurs.

One sharp in the key signature (F sharp)

G Major



Sheet music for the G Major scale, showing the treble and bass staves with fingerings (1-5) and slurs.

NB: You do not need to know the matching minor scale at Grade 1.

Continued on next page.



Two sharps in the key signature (F & C sharp)

D Major

Musical notation for the D Major scale, showing the treble and bass clef staves. The key signature is D Major (two sharps: F# and C#). The notation includes fingerings for each note.

NB: You do not need to know the matching minor scale at Grade 1.

One flat in the key signature (B flat)

F Major

Musical notation for the F Major scale, showing the treble and bass clef staves. The treble clef staff starts on F4 and the bass clef staff starts on F3. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below the notes.

2 D Harmonic Minor

Measures 2 and 3 of the D Harmonic Minor scale. Measure 2 contains the notes D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, and C5. Measure 3 contains the notes B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, and C4. Fingering is indicated by numbers 1-5 above the notes.

Tip:

Ascending means the scale is going UP the keyboard.

Descending means the scale is going DOWN the keyboard.

Here are where the semitones occur in the scales. Try marking them on the scales above.

C major - E&F, B&C *A minor* - B&C, G#&A

G major - B&C, F#&G

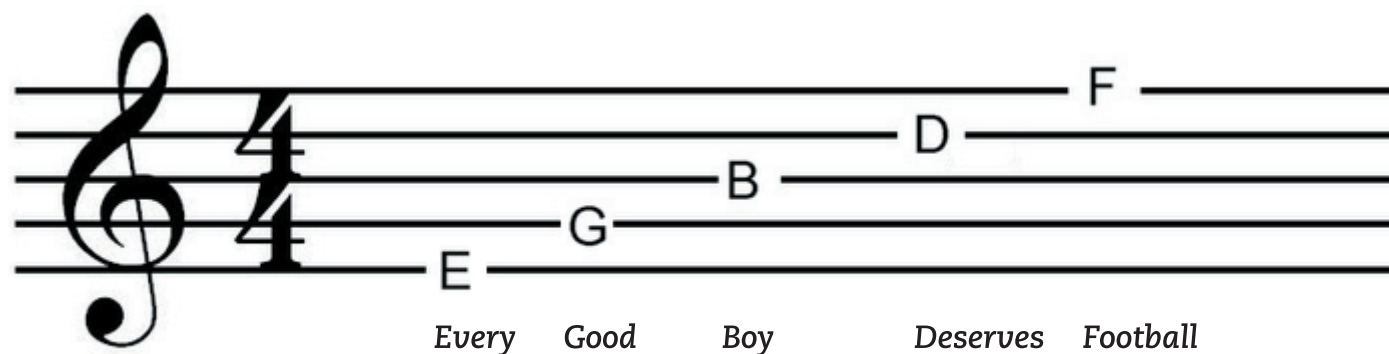
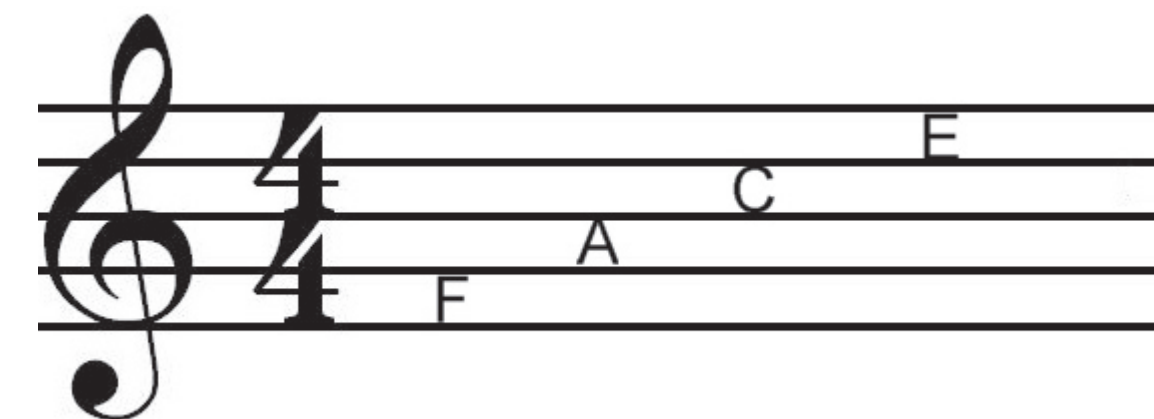
D major - F#&G, C#&D

F major - A&Bflat, E&F D minor - E&F, C#&D

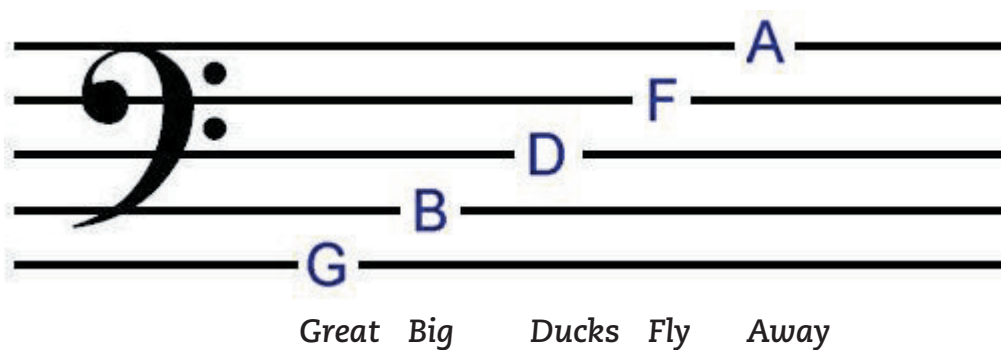
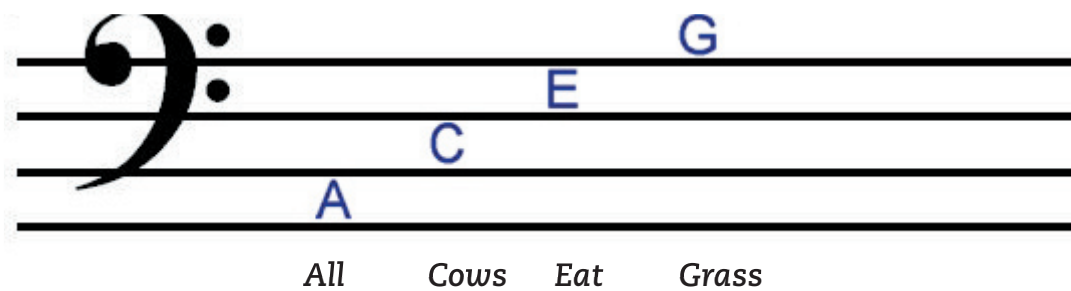


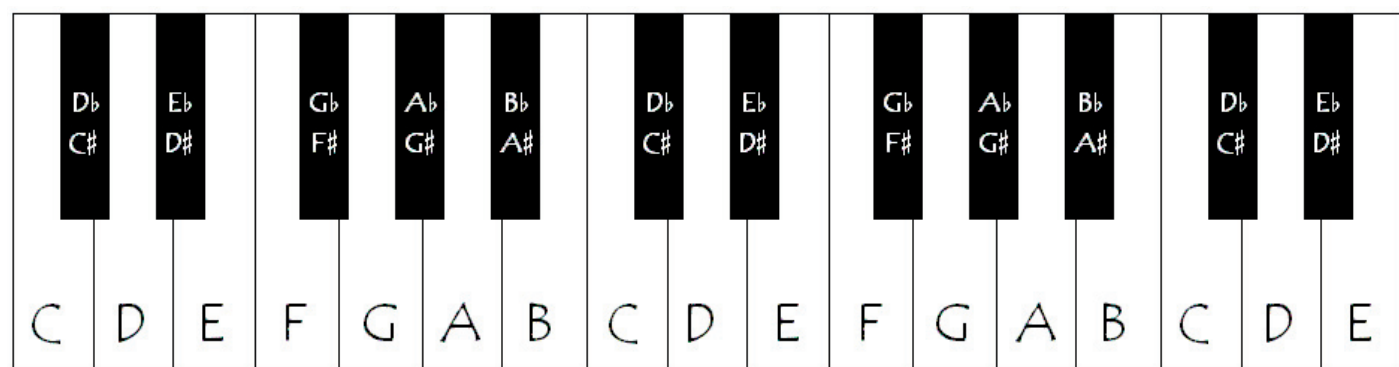
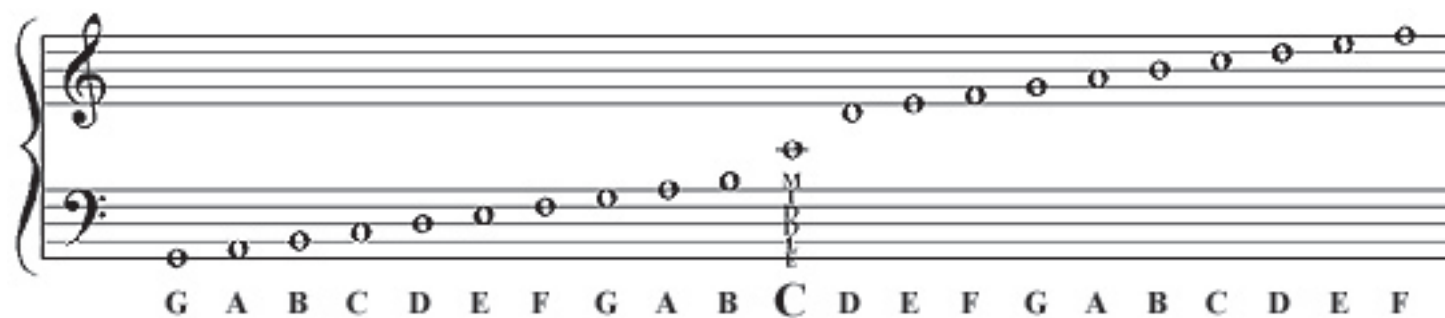
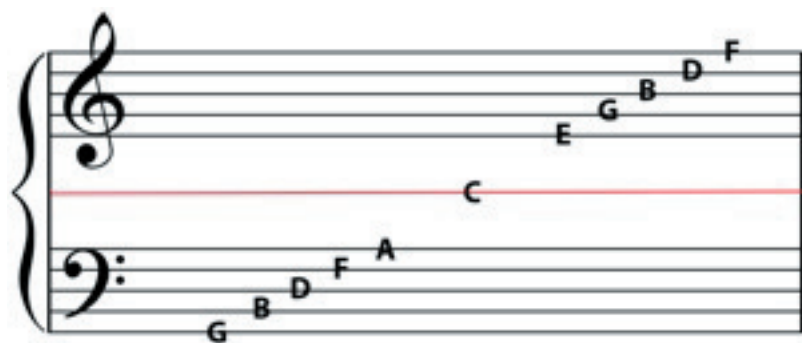
2. NOTE-NAMING RHYMES

Right Hand (Treble Clef)





Left Hand (Bass Clef)






3. NOTE VALUES


 = Semibreve : 4 beats, oval-shaped. Looks like a donut!


 = Dotted minim, 3 beats.

 = Minim: 2 beats.

 = Dotted crotchet. 1 and a half beats.

 = Crotchet: 1 beat.


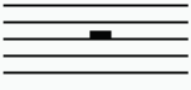

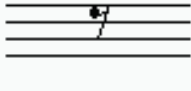
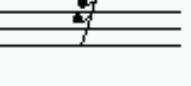
 = Quaver: 1/2 a beat. Add a flag to the stem.

 = Semiquaver: 1/4 beat. Add two flags to the stem.

Note values from large to small, left to right:



4. RESTS

	Semibreve rest, or a whole bar in ANY time signature	4 beats
	Minim rest	2 beats
	Crotchet rest	1 beat
	Quaver rest	1/2 beat
	Semiquaver rest	1/4 beat

5. THE ABRSM SYLLABUS

This is the official list of requirements. You will find that you have covered at least half of the requirements in your first two theory sticker books.

Theory GRADE 1

- 1 Note values of semibreve, minim, crotchet, quaver and semiquaver, and their equivalent rests (candidates may use the terms 'whole note', 'half note', etc.). Tied notes. Single-dotted notes and rests.
- 2 Simple time signatures of $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$, bar-lines and the grouping of the notes listed above within these times. Composition of a two-bar rhythm in answer to a given rhythm starting on the first beat of a bar.
- 3 The stave. Treble (G) and bass (F) clefs. Names of notes on the stave, including middle C in both clefs. Sharp, flat and natural signs, and their cancellation.
- 4 Construction of the major scale, including the position of the tones and semitones. Scales and key signatures of the major keys of C, G, D and F in both clefs, with their tonic triads (root position), degrees (number only), and intervals above the tonic (by number only).
- 5 Some frequently used terms and signs concerning tempo, dynamics, performance directions and articulation marks. Simple questions will be asked about a melody written in either treble or bass clef.





© Lorraine Liyanage 2010 - 2011
<http://www.se22piano.co.uk>

