

Harmonica Graded Practical Examination Guide (2023-2025)

Exam Structure

There are 4 sections to the examinations.

- 1) 2 pieces to be played,
- 2) Scales and Arpeggios,
- 3) Sight-reading and
- 4) Aural Test.

Prerequisite

There is no prerequisite for Grade 1 to Grade 5 Harmonica Practical Examination.

1) Pieces Criteria

Musicians learn to play an instrument to explore and perform repertoire, which is why pieces are at the core of the exam – candidates are asked to present 2 pieces at each grade. The syllabus repertoire is organized into two lists that explore different traditions and styles, dating from the Renaissance period to the present day.

Choosing one piece from each list gives candidates the opportunity to play a balanced selection and demonstrate a range of skills. In this syllabus, the pieces are broadly grouped into lists by the characteristics of the music:

List A pieces require technical agility (focus mostly on harmonica movement and articulation) **OR** more expressive playing (focus mostly on breath control/ support and the sound made)

List B pieces reflect a wide variety of musical traditions, styles and characters.

Programme planning:

Every effort has been made to feature a broad range of repertoire to suit and appeal to candidates of different ages, backgrounds and interests. Certain pieces may not be suitable for every candidate for technical reasons, other pieces may not be suitable because of wider context (historical, cultural, subject matter, lyrics if an arrangement of a song, etc.). Pieces should be carefully considered for their appropriateness to each individual.

Harmonica Examination Book editions:

In the exam, the respective arrangement listed in the Harmonica Examination Book must be used.

Accompaniment:

No accompaniment (eg piano) is required for Grade 1 to Grade 5.

Interpreting the score:

Printed editorial suggestions such as metronome marks, realization of ornaments, etc. do not need to be strictly observed. Whether the piece contains musical indications or not, candidates are encouraged to interpret the score in a musical and stylistic way. Examiners' marking will be determined by the candidate's control of pitch, time, tone, shape and performance contributes to the overall musical outcome.

Repeats:

All repeats, da capo and dal segno indications must be followed according to the scores indicated.

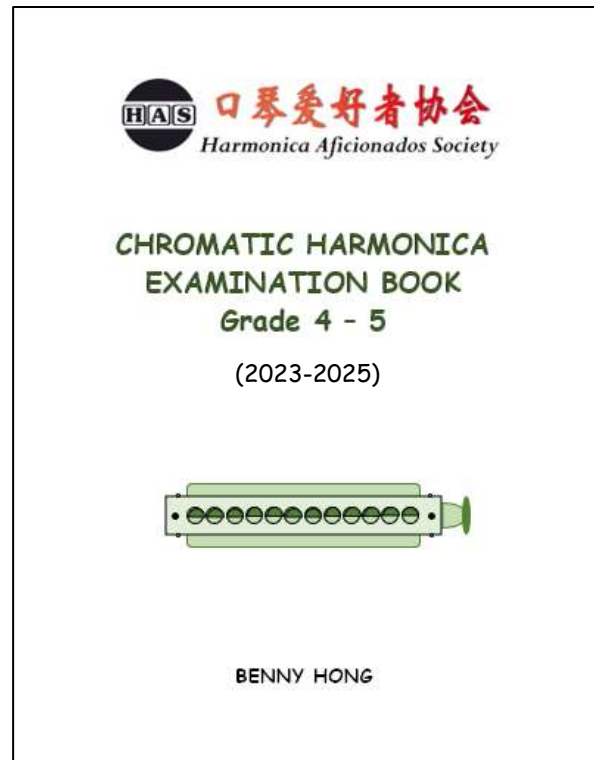
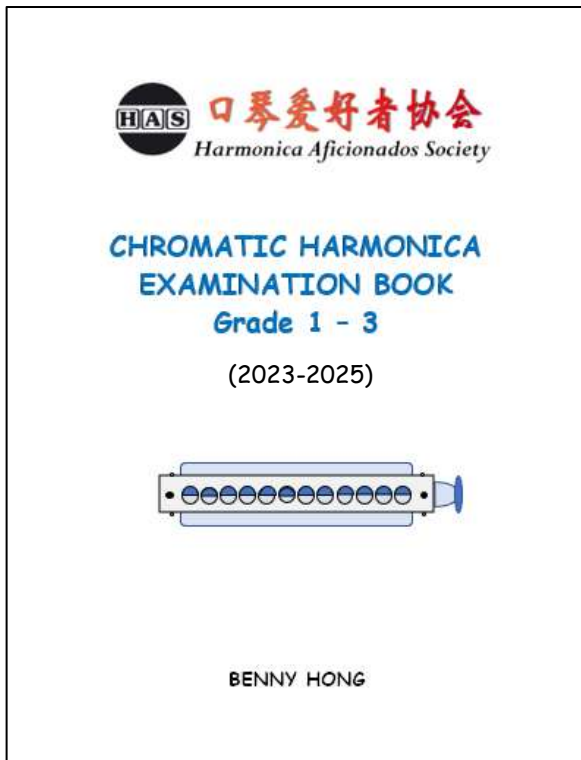
Performing from memory:

Candidates may perform any of their pieces from memory; if doing so, they must make sure that a copy of the music is available for the examiner to refer to. No extra marks are awarded for playing from memory.

Harmonica Examination Book:

Books to be purchased from HAS

- Harmonica Examination Book for Grade 1-3,
- Harmonica Examination Book for Grade 4-5.



Song List:

Grade 1

List A

- A-1 Rigaudon (Henry Purcel)
- A-2 Cradle Song (Johannes Brahms)

List B

- B-1 Scarborough Fair (Trad English)
- B-2 Jasmine Flower (Chinese Folk)

Grade 2

List A

- A-1 The Trout (Franz Schubert)
- A-2 The Elephant (Saint-Saëns)

List B

- B-1 Munnaeru Valibaa (Singapore Folk)
- B-2 Las Chiapanecas (Mexican Folk)

Grade 3

List A

- A-1 La Donna è Mobile (Giuseppe Verdi)
- A-2 Can Can (Jacques Offenbach)

List B

- B-1 The Miller of Dee (English Folk)
- B-2 Loch Lomond (Scottish Folk)

Grade 4

List A

- A-1 La Cumparsita (Gerardo M Rodríguez)
- A-2 Minuet in G Major (L van Beethoven)

List B

- B-1 The Lark in the Clear Air (Irish Folk)
- B-2 Violet Bamboo Tune (Chinese Folk)

Grade 5

List A

- A-1 La Cinquantaine (Jean Gabriel-Marie)
- A-2 Sicilienne (Gabriel Fauré)

List B

- B-1 Way Home (Tang Yuen Wai)
- B-2 Air Bandit (Benny Hong)

2) Scales and Arpeggios

Playing scales and arpeggios is important for building strong technical skills such as reliable instrument movement and fluency. It also helps to develop tone, pitch and interval awareness, and familiarity with keys and their related patterns. 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.

Memory:

All requirements must be played from memory.

Range:

All requirements must be played as written. They must ascend and descend according to the specified range (and pattern).

Rhythm:

All requirements must be played in even notes.

Patterns:

Arpeggios and dominant sevenths are required in root position only. All dominant sevenths must finish by resolving on the tonic.

Articulation:




Slurred requirements must be legato throughout. The choice of breathing place is left to the candidate's discretion, but the flow should be maintained as much as possible.

In the exam:

Examiners will usually ask for at least one of each scale/arpeggio (etc.) type. Where applicable, they will ask for majors followed by minors (all minor scales will be in harmonic form) within each type and will also ask to hear a balance of articulations across the requests as a whole.

Speed:

The following speeds are given as a general guide:

Grade / Speed						
	Pattern	1	2	3	4	5
Scales		♩ = 50	♩ = 56	♩ = 63	♩ = 72	♩ = 84
Arpeggios		♩ = 72	♩ = 84	♩ = 96	♩ = 108	♩ = 126
Dominant and Diminished 7ths		--	--	--	♩ = 54	♩ = 63

Grade 1

		Range (Octave)	Articulation
Scales	C major, A minor	1	tongued / slurred
Arpeggios	C major, A minor	1	

Grade 2

		Range (Octave)	Articulation
Scales	G, F majors / D, E minors	1	tongued / slurred
Arpeggios	G, F majors / D, E minors	1	

Grade 3

		Range (Octave(s))	Articulation
Scales	C, F, G majors / A, D, E minors	2	tongued / slurred
Arpeggios	C, F, G majors / A, D, E minors	2	
Chromatic	Starting from G	1	

Grade 4

		Range (Octaves)	Articulation
Scales	D, Bb, A major / B, G, F# minors	2	tongued / slurred
Arpeggios	D, Bb, A major / B, G, F# minors	2	
Chromatic	Starting from F	2	
Dominant 7th (resolving to tonic)	In the key of C	2	

Grade 5

		Range (Octaves)	Articulation
Scales	Eb, E, Ab majors / C, C#, F minors	2	tongued / slurred
Arpeggios	Eb, E, Ab majors / C, C#, F minors		
Chromatic	Starting from A and C	2	
Dominant 7th (resolving to tonic)	In the key of D and F	2	
Diminished 7th	In the key of G	2	

3) Sight-reading









Sight-reading is a valuable skill with many benefits. Learning to sight-read helps to develop quick recognition of keys, tonality and common rhythm patterns. Strong sight-reading skills make learning new pieces quicker and easier, and also help when making music with others, so that playing in an ensemble becomes more rewarding and enjoyable.

About the test:

Candidates will be asked to play a short unaccompanied piece of music that they have not seen before. They will be given 01 minute to look through and, if they wish, try out all or any part of the test before they are asked to play it for assessment.

Parameters:

The following tables show the elements that are introduced at each grade. These parameters are presented cumulatively, that is, once introduced they apply for all later grades (gradually progressing in difficulty).

	Length (bars)	Time	Other features that may be included
Grade 1	4	$\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •  note values;  rests • note tongued or with simple two-note slurs • dynamics (<i>f</i> and <i>mf</i>)
	6	$\frac{2}{4}$	
Grade 2	8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •  and  patters;  rests • tied notes • staccato • dynamics (<i>mp</i> and <i>cresc.</i>)
Grade 3	8	$\frac{3}{8}$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accidentals (within minor keys only) •  ;  ; simple semiquavers pattern;  rests • accents • dynamics (<i>p</i> and <i>dim.</i>)
Grade 4	c. 8	$\frac{6}{8}$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chromatic notes • anacrusis • tenuto • pause sign
Grade 5	c. 8 – 16		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • simple syncopation • slowing of tempo at the end • dynamics (<i>ff</i> and <i>pp</i>)

Keys:

(Majors, minors)

Grade	Keys		Grade	Keys
1	C, a		4	Bb, g
2	G, F		5	D, A, Eb, e, d
3	d		--	--

Ranges:

Grade	Range		Grade	Range
1	a' - c'''		4	f' - e'''
2	g' - d'''		5	e' - g'''
3	g' - d'''		--	--

Ranges are presented using the Helmholtz system:



4) Aural tests

Listening lies at the heart of all good music-making. Developing aural awareness is fundamental to musical training because having a ‘musical ear’ impact on all aspects of musicianship. Singing, both silently in the head and out loud, is one of the best ways to develop the ‘musical ear’. It connects the internal imagining of sound, the ‘inner ear’, with the external creation of it, without the necessity of mechanically having to ‘find the note’ on an instrument (important though that connection is). By integrating aural activities in imaginative ways in the lesson, preparation for the Aural tests within an exam will be a natural extension of what is already an essential part of the learning experience.

The tests are given by the examiner from the playing of a harmonica. For any test that requires a sung response, pitch rather than vocal quality is being assessed. The responses may be sung to any vowel (or consonant followed by a vowel) or hummed (and at a different octave, if appropriate).

Some tests allow for a second attempt or for an additional playing by the examiner, if necessary. The examiner will also be ready to prompt, where helpful, although this may affect the assessment.

Marks are not awarded for each individual test or deducted for mistakes; instead, they reflect the candidate’s overall response in this section.

Grade 1

- A. **To clap the pulse of a piece played by the examiner, and to identify whether it is in two time or three time.** The examiner will start playing the passage, and the candidate should join in as soon as possible, clapping in time and giving a louder clap on the strong beats. The examiner will then ask whether the music is in two time or three time. The candidate is *not* required to state the time signature.
- B. **To sing as ‘echoes’ three phrases played by the examiner.** The phrases will be two bars long, in a major key, and within the range of **tonic–mediant**. First the examiner will play the starting note (the tonic) and then count in two bars. After the examiner has played each phrase, the candidate should sing back the echo without a pause, keeping in time.
- C. **To identify where a change in pitch occurs during a phrase played by the examiner.** The phrase will be two bars long, in a major key, and the change will affect only one of the notes. First the examiner will play the tonic note and then count in two bars. The examiner will play the phrase twice, making the change in the second playing, after which the candidate should state whether the change was near the beginning or near the end. If necessary, the examiner will play both versions of the phrase again (although this may affect the assessment).
- D. **To answer questions about two features of a piece played by the examiner.** Before playing, the examiner will tell the candidate which two features the questions will be about. The first will be: dynamics (loud/quiet, or sudden/gradual changes); the second will be articulation (smooth/detached).

Grade 2

- A. **To clap the pulse of a piece played by the examiner, and to identify whether it is in two time or three time.** The examiner will start playing the passage, and the candidate should join in as soon as possible, clapping in time and giving a louder clap on the strong beats. The examiner will then ask whether the music is in two time or three time. The candidate is *not* required to state the time signature.
- B. **To sing as ‘echoes’ three phrases played by the examiner.** The phrases will be two bars long, in a major key, and within the range of **tonic–dominant**. First the examiner will play the starting note (the tonic) and then count in two bars. After the examiner has played each phrase, the candidate should sing back the echo without a pause, keeping in time.
- C. **To identify a change in either pitch or rhythm during a phrase played by the examiner.** The phrase will be two bars long, in a major key. First the examiner will play the tonic and then count in two bars. The examiner will play the phrase twice, making the change in the second playing, after which the candidate should identify the change by describing it, or singing/clapping. If necessary, the examiner will play both versions of the phrase again (although this may affect the assessment).
- D. **To answer questions about two features of a piece played by the examiner.** Before playing, the examiner will tell the candidate which two features the questions will be about. The first will be **one** of the following: dynamics (loud/quiet, or sudden/gradual changes), articulation (smooth/detached); the second will be tempo (becoming slower/faster, or staying the same).

Grade 3

- A. **To clap the pulse of a piece played by the examiner, and to identify whether it is in two time, three time or four time.** The examiner will start playing the passage, and the candidate should join in as soon as possible, clapping in time and giving a louder clap on the strong beats. The examiner will then ask whether the music is in two time, three time or four time. The candidate is *not* required to state the time signature.
- B. **To sing as ‘echoes’ three phrases played by the examiner.** The phrases will be two bars long, in a major or minor key, and **within the range of an octave**. First the examiner will play the starting note and then count in two bars. After the examiner has played each phrase, the candidate should sing back the echo without a pause, keeping in time.
- C. **To identify a change in either pitch or rhythm during a phrase played by the examiner.** The phrase will be up to four bars long, in a major or minor key. First the examiner will play the tonic and then count in two bars. The examiner will play the phrase twice, making the change in the second playing, after which the candidate should identify the change by describing it, or singing/clapping. If necessary, the examiner will play both versions of the phrase again (although this may affect the assessment).
- D. **To answer questions about two features of a piece played by the examiner.** Before playing, the examiner will tell the candidate which two features the questions will be about. The first will be **one** of the following: dynamics (loud/quiet, or sudden/gradual changes), articulation (smooth/detached), tempo (becoming slower/faster, or staying the same); the second will be tonality (major/minor key).

Grade 4

- A. **To sing or play from memory a melody played twice by the examiner.** The melody (8 to 10 notes) will be within the range of an octave, in a major or minor key with up to two sharps or flats. First the examiner will play the starting note and then count in two bars. (If the candidate chooses to play, the examiner will also name the key and the starting note). If necessary, the examiner will play the melody again and allow a second attempt (may affect the assessment).
- B. **To sing five notes from score in free time.** The notes will be within the range of a third above and below the tonic in the key of C, F or G major. The test will begin and end on the tonic and will not contain intervals greater than a third. First the examiner will name and play the starting note. If necessary, the examiner will help the candidate by playing and identifying the correct note if any note is sung at the wrong pitch.
- C. (I) **To answer questions about two features of a piece played by the examiner.** Before playing, the examiner will tell the candidate which two features the questions will be about. The first will be **one** of the following: dynamics, articulation, tempo, tonality; the second will be character.
- (II) **To clap the rhythm of the notes in an extract from the same piece, and to identify whether it is in two time, three time or four time.**
The examiner will play the extract twice, after which the candidate should clap back the rhythm. The examiner will then ask whether the music is in two time, three time or four time. The candidate is *not* required to state the time signature.

Grade 5

- A. **To sing or play from memory a melody played twice by the examiner.** The melody (10 to 12 notes) will be within the range of an octave, in a major or minor key with up to three sharps or flats. First the examiner will play the starting note and then count in two bars. (If the candidate chooses to play, the examiner will also name the key and the starting note). If necessary, the examiner will play the melody again and allow a second attempt (may affect the assessment).
- B. **To sing six notes from score in free time.** The candidate may choose to sing from treble or bass clef. The notes will be within the range of a fifth above and a fourth below the tonic, in a major key with up to two sharps or flats. The test will begin and end on the tonic and will not contain intervals greater than a third, except for the rising fourth from dominant to tonic. First the examiner will name and play the key and the starting note. If necessary, the examiner will help the candidate by playing and identifying the correct note if any note is sung at the wrong pitch.
- C. (I) **To answer questions about two features of a piece played by the examiner.** Before playing, the examiner will tell the candidate which two features the questions will be about. The first will be **one** of the following: dynamics, articulation, tempo, tonality; the second will be character.
- (II) **To clap the rhythm of the notes in an extract from the same piece, and to identify whether it is in two time, three time or four time.** The examiner will play the extract twice, after which the candidate should clap back the rhythm. The examiner will then ask whether the music is in two time, three time or four time. The candidate is not required to state the time signature.

5 Test Results

Marks Allocation

	Exam Component	Marks	Percentage
1a	Piece 1	30	30 %
1b	Piece 2	30	30 %
2	Scales and arpeggios	15	15 %
3	Sight-reading	15	15 %
4	Aural Tests	10	10 %
	Total	100	100 %

Results Categories

The result categories for Practical Grades are set as follows. **A Pass in each component of the exam is not required to pass overall.**

Result Category	Mark Band
Distinction	85 – 100
Merit	75 – 84
Pass	60 – 74
Fail	< 60

Synoptic assessment

Synoptic assessment is a form of assessment that requires candidates to demonstrate that they can identify and effectively use a selection of skills, techniques, concepts and knowledge to carry out a key task. Practical Grades allow candidates to demonstrate their ability to draw together different skills, knowledge and understanding – theory, notation, instrument control, listening skills, creative interpretation – and apply these across the individual components of the exam.

Awarding

An examiner’s assessment of a piece or any other component will be based on the performance given at that time towards the qualification for which the candidate has been entered. Prior performances of the same pieces or other components will not be taken into account for the qualification, nor will marking appeals be accepted on that basis.

Marking criteria

The tables below show the marking criteria used by examiners for Practical Grades in Harmonica. Examiners mark up or down from the pass mark for each component by balancing the extent to which the qualities and skills listed in the criteria (broadly categorized by pitch, time, tone, shape and performance) are demonstrated and contribute towards the overall musical outcome.

Marking Criteria (Pieces)

Grade 1 - 5	Pitch	Time	Tone	Shape	Performance
Distinction (26 – 30)	- Highly accurate notes and intonation	- Fluent, with flexibility where appropriate - Rhythmic character well conveyed	- Well projected - Sensitive use of tonal qualities	- Expressive, idiomatic musical shaping and detail	- Assured - Fully committed - Vivid communication of character and style
Merit (23 – 25)	- Largely accurate notes and intonation	- Sustained, effective tempo - Good sense of rhythm	- Mainly controlled and consistent - Good tonal awareness	- Clear musical shaping, well-realized detail	- Positive - Carrying musical conviction - Character and style communicated
Pass (18 – 22)	- Generally correct notes - Sufficiently reliable intonation to maintain tonality	- Suitable tempo - Generally stable pulse - Overall rhythmic accuracy	- Generally reliable - Adequate tonal awareness	- Some realization of musical shape and/or detail	- Generally secure, prompt recovery from slips - Some musical involvement
Below Pass (14 – 17)	- Frequent note errors - Insufficiently reliable intonation to maintain tonality	- Unsuitable and/or uncontrolled tempo - Irregular pulse - Inaccurate rhythm	- Uneven and/or unreliable - Inadequate tonal awareness	- Musical shape and detail insufficiently conveyed	- Insecure, inadequate recovery from slips - Insufficient musical involvement
0	No work offered	No work offered	No work offered	No work offered	No work offered

Marking Criteria (Scales & Arpeggios / Sight Reading)

Grade 1 - 5	Scales & Arpeggios	Sight Reading
Distinction (13 – 15)	- Highly accurate notes/pitch - Fluent and rhythmic - Musically shaped - Confident response	- Fluent, rhythmically accurate - Accurate notes/pitch/key - Musical detail realised - Confident presentation
Merit (11 – 12)	- Largely accurate notes/pitch - Mostly regular flow - Mainly even tone - Secure response	- Adequate tempo, usually steady pulse - Mainly correct rhythm - Largely correct notes/pitch/key - Largely secure presentation
Pass (9 – 10)	- Generally correct notes/pitch, despite errors - Continuity generally maintained - Generally reliable tone - Cautious response	- Continuity generally maintained - Note values mostly realised - Pitch outlines in place, despite errors - Cautious presentation
Below Pass (6 – 8)	- Frequent errors in notes and/or pitch - Lacking continuity and/or some items incomplete - Unreliable tone - Uncertain response and/or some items not attempted	- Lacking overall continuity - Incorrect note values - Very approximate notes/pitch/key - Insecure presentation
0	No work offered	No work offered

Marking Criteria (Aural Tests)

Grade 1 - 5	Aural Tests
Distinction (8 – 10)	- Accurate throughout - Musically perceptive - Confident response
Merit (7)	- Strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses - Musically aware - Secure response
Pass (6)	- Strengths just outweigh weaknesses - Cautious response
Below Pass (3 – 5)	- Weaknesses outweigh strengths - Uncertain response
0	No work offered

Infringements

It is important that candidates, and those preparing them for exams, read and follow the exam requirements as set out in the relevant Practical Grades syllabus. If the exam requirements are not met in any way, this could lead to a mark deduction or disqualification, at HAS's discretion. Examples of infringements include:

- Presenting repertoire not set on the syllabus for the respective grade.
- Presenting syllabus-listed repertoire, but not as specified (wrong version, present 2 songs from the same list, presenting 2 songs from different grades etc).
- Failure to bring the original Harmonica Examination Book (correct edition at time of exam).

The above list is not exhaustive.

Examiners report infringements to HAS who investigate and decide what action is to be taken. It should be noted that infringements identified in exams may delay the release of the exam result. HAS's decision on any infringement is final. Prior acceptance of an infringement without penalty does not set a precedent and appeals will not be accepted on this basis.

Harmonica Examination sub-committee:

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(2022)

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