

ROCK AND POP DIPLOMAS

WHY PARAMETERS?

Trinity College London first launched its Rock & Pop grades in 2012, and we are delighted that we will now be adding diploma exams to our offer.

Within the context of Trinity's 150-year history, it's fair to say that the assessment of Rock and Pop music is relatively new and not without challenges! Traditionally, contemporary styles have been communicated through live performances and recordings, rather than through notation. Musicians are free to interpret, embellish and personalise songs, particularly when working at an advanced level: Rock & Pop diplomas allow performers to showcase their musical and technical skills in an authentic manner, while gaining a regulated qualification. To enable a free choice of repertoire with no requirement for prior approval, our set list parameters indicate the technical skills and musical challenges that should be demonstrated to access the full range of assessment criteria.

Note that these are **set list** parameters; when you are choosing your songs, you should think about meeting the parameters across the whole set, rather than in each individual song.

Each instrument has a dedicated set of parameters at each level, broken into the following sections:

BASS

- ▶ Range and register
- ▶ Tone and technique
- ▶ Articulation and effects
- ▶ Musical attributes

DRUMS

- ▶ Time signatures and tempi
- ▶ Techniques
- ▶ Articulation and effects
- ▶ Musical attributes

GUITAR

- ▶ Range and register
- ▶ Tone and techniques
- ▶ Articulation and effects
- ▶ Musical attributes

KEYBOARDS

- ▶ Techniques
- ▶ Articulation and effects
- ▶ Musical attributes

VOCALS

- ▶ Range, registration and breath management
- ▶ Tone and techniques
- ▶ Articulation and effects
- ▶ Musical attributes

While many parameters speak to the instrument, some aspects are common to all, for example:

- ▶ Demands on stamina
- ▶ Variation of tempi
- ▶ Changes of key and meter
- ▶ Rhythmic independence and complexity
- ▶ Variation of tone, articulation and dynamics

The ability to perform advanced repertoire for a lengthening period (ATCL 32-38 minutes, LTCL 37-43 minutes and FTCL 42-48 minutes) forms part of the increasing challenge across the diploma levels. Similarly, there is progression in the parameters: for example, on the Vocals syllabus, one ATCL parameter is to include 'simple riffing and ad libs', whereas at FTCL candidates are required to demonstrate 'complex, extended riffing passages'. At ATCL, the drum parameters require 'four-way coordination/independence with some integration of left foot into rhythms', while at FTCL, this extends to 'four-way coordination, including completely independent left-foot rhythms'.

Each instrument includes a list of techniques; here is the ATCL guitar list:

Songs must demonstrate a range of different techniques, which can include (but are not limited to) items from the list below:

- hybrid picking
- tremolo picking
- fingerstyle
- two-handed tapping
- percussive acoustic style
- natural and artificial harmonics
- whammy bar
- bottle-neck slide
- unison bends
- octaves

Notice that it states that songs **must** demonstrate a range of techniques, while the techniques listed are suggestions of what might be included. Some techniques are more common to certain genres than others and there is no expectation that candidates will demonstrate everything on the list. However, candidates should ensure that they demonstrate enough variety to meet the assessment criteria. In the next section, we will look at how the parameters and assessment criteria work together in determining the outcome of a performance.

THE PARAMETERS ARE INTEGRAL TO THE ASSESSMENT

Examiners consider many aspects of performance and the assessment criteria for ATCL and LTCL are broken into 3 areas: Fluency and Security, Technical Assurance and Application and Musical Sense and Communication: each section is marked out of 32.

FLUENCY AND SECURITY

	Pass	
	23-25 marks	19-22 marks
Fluency & security	<p>Very good fluency.</p> <p>There are some errors, but a very good level of security.</p>	<p>Good fluency.</p> <p>There are some errors, but a good level of security overall.</p>

In this section, we assess fluency, integrity of pulse and the security of notes and rhythms. Across all instruments, the parameters ask for various musical demands to be met that relate to these criteria: tempi, rhythmic/melodic complexity, tonality, metre. When applying these criteria, examiners consider whether the musical demands of the parameters have been met within the repertoire, alongside how fluent and secure the performance of that repertoire is. If the music itself does not meet the parameters, this will impact the marks awarded.

TECHNICAL ASSURANCE AND APPLICATION

In Technical assurance and application, examiners consider the ability to navigate the technical and stylistic demands of the music performed. To access the full range of marks across the criteria, candidates must demonstrate 'control, flexibility and variety of tone', alongside 'expressive, stylistic use of articulation, phrasing and detail'. Drawing on the list of guitar techniques from the ATCL parameters once again, we see that, to access the full spectrum of marks, we must ensure we demonstrate a wide variety of techniques within the set. Similarly, we will need to consider whether we are meeting the parameter's demands for dynamics, articulation and musical detail. Hence, the parameters and assessment criteria go hand in hand.

Let's compare the criteria wording between below pass and distinction.

	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
	10-18 marks	1-9 marks
Technical assurance & application	<p>Unreliable technical facility.</p> <p>Inconsistent control, flexibility and variety of tone.</p> <p>Stylistic or expressive use of articulation, phrasing and detail is not persuasive.</p>	<p>Technical facility is not in evidence.</p> <p>Limited control, flexibility and variety of tone.</p> <p>Little stylistic or expressive use of articulation, phrasing and detail.</p>

	Distinction	
	30-32 marks	26-29 marks
Technical assurance & application	<p>Completely assured technical facility.</p> <p>Exceptional control, flexibility and variety of tone.</p> <p>Fully expressive, stylistic use of articulation, phrasing and detail.</p>	<p>Assured technical facility.</p> <p>Excellent control, flexibility and variety of tone.</p> <p>Highly expressive, stylistic use of articulation, phrasing and detail.</p>

Performances that do not demonstrate the technical skills outlined in the parameters and are unable to use a variety of qualities within the music offered, will not reach a pass level: to access the upper levels of the assessment criteria, candidates will need to demonstrate an assured level of the technical skills set out in the parameters that allows for exceptional control over the idiomatic use of tone and musical detail. Once again, if the set list parameters are not met, the marks will be affected.

MUSICAL SENSE AND COMMUNICATION

	Pass	
	23-25 marks	19-22 marks
Musical sense & communication	<p>A very good level of idiomatic engagement and musical sensitivity.</p> <p>Effective communication of the set list.</p> <p>Persuasive, convincing performances.</p> <p>Largely secure stage presence and delivery.</p>	<p>A good level of idiomatic engagement and musical sensitivity.</p> <p>Generally effective communication of the set list.</p> <p>Generally persuasive, convincing interpretations overall.</p> <p>Mostly secure stage presence and delivery.</p>

While the criteria for grades are used independently of each other, diplomas are assessed holistically and examiners consider how one area impacts the others: for example, for a song to be fluent at this level, this will be underpinned by a secure technique, with both elements leading to effective communication of the set. Examiners consider the overall musical outcome, and Musical sense and communication is where everything comes together; by offering a fluent, technically secure performance, we are able to demonstrate idiomatic, communicative and persuasive performances. Although each section of the criteria is awarded an individual mark, the three are intrinsically linked.

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