
London College of Music Examinations

Rock Guitar

Handbook Grade 1

From 2019

Rock Guitar: Grade 1

This handbook is part of a progressive series of handbooks, primarily intended for candidates considering taking London College of Music examinations in rock guitar. The series provides a solid foundation of musical education for any rock guitar student, whether intending to take an exam or not. Candidates must always refer to the current Rock Guitar Syllabus: from 2019.

Syllabus validity

This handbook is valid for examinations from Summer 2019.

Entering for an exam

Exam entries can be made online at lcme.uwl.ac.uk/enter

Audio recordings

Audio recordings of the pieces and backing tracks are available from lcme.uwl.ac.uk

Cover design

Each LCME Rock Guitar handbook has a unique cover design. Designers MuirMcNeil used the instrument name to create a multi-layered typographic 'seed' composition, using interlocking fonts from their TwoPlus type system. This composition was then zoomed, cropped and modified by a colour palette specific to the instrument, generating a one-off cover design for each book. The seed composition is scaled in calibrated increments, the early grades zooming deep into the artwork, the higher grades revealing more of the typographic basis of the composition. As a result, bold, abstract, geometric cover designs develop progressively in their detail and complexity through the series.

Rock Guitar: Grade 1

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Introduction

Tuning

For exam purposes instruments should be tuned to concert pitch (A=440Hz). The use of an electronic tuner or other tuning aid is permitted. The examiner will offer an E or A note to tune to on request.

Notation

Fretboxes

Fretboxes are used to illustrate the chords required at this level. The vertical lines represent the strings (with the line furthest to the right representing the high E string); horizontal lines represent the frets. 0 above a string line indicates that an open (unfretted) string should be played. The numbers on the lines show the recommended fingering.

Tab

As well as traditional musical notation the pieces within this book are also notated using tablature. The horizontal lines represent the strings (with the top line being the high E string). The numbers on the string lines refer to the frets — 0 on a line means play that string open (unfretted). Tablature does not include rhythm notation, so you should look at the traditional notation and listen to the recordings to guide you.

Fingering and picking options

Throughout the exam, it is your choice whether to use a plectrum, fingers or a combination of both; a thumbpick can be used if desired. The fingerings given in this book are likely to be effective for a wide range of players, however any alternative fingerings that produce an effective musical result are acceptable.

Component 1: 60 marks

Prepared Performances

Requirements

Performance of two pieces, chosen from the list below:

Sunshine of Your Love — Cream
Smoke on the Water — Deep Purple
Smells Like Teen Spirit — Nirvana

Information

Obtaining the notation and audio

The notation and audio tracks for the pieces above are included in the book *Graded Guitar Songs: 9 Rock Classics for Beginning Level Guitarists* (Hal Leonard). These songs have been arranged to be suitable for this grade.

Backing tracks

The pieces at this level are to be performed along to set backing tracks; these backing tracks are on a CD which is included with *Graded Guitar Songs: 9 Rock Classics for Beginning Level Guitarists*. You do not need to bring these to the exam, as the examiner will provide the necessary backing tracks. Also included with the CD are recordings of the tracks performed in full for demonstration purposes.

Performance style

Performances should be accurate reproductions of the specially arranged versions of the pieces as notated and recorded in the book *Graded Guitar Songs — 9 Rock Classics for Beginning Level Guitarists*. Alternative fingerings and playing positions can be adopted if preferred, provided the overall musical result is not altered. Prior to the performance commencing, you will be allowed a brief soundcheck to choose your sound and volume level. A clean or a distorted sound can be used, and you can bring distortion or other effects units to the exam providing you can set them up promptly and unaided.

Performing from memory

You are encouraged to perform the pieces from memory, although this is not a requirement. If notation is used it should not detract in any way from the confidence and presentation of the performance.

Guidance

Performances should be fully accurate and very confidently presented. Timing, clarity and technical control should be totally secure throughout and some expressive qualities (such as varying the dynamics of the performance) should be displayed.

In performance

Sunshine of Your Love

The original Cream recording starts with a riff from the D blues scale, but this arrangement starts with a descending A blues scale riff, allowing for the use of open strings to make the piece more easily accessible to perform.

The double-stops that appear in bar 3 of the introduction and in the verse can be fingered in a number of ways. Those occurring in bars 3 and 5 can be played either with one finger holding down both strings, or by using two separate fingers. Whichever method is adopted, make sure that the riffs are played smoothly and fluently. The double-stops in bar 7 are trickier to execute, so try and adopt a fingering approach that allows the note transition to be smooth and cause the minimum of string noise.

The chorus features rests between the chords in bars 11 and 12. Look out for these when playing the chorus and make sure that strings are silenced between the chord changes.

The two bars of E5 that are played at the end of the chorus feature two different rhythms. Follow the notation and listen to the CD recording carefully to ensure that you capture these differing rhythms.

Smoke on the Water

This arrangement is in the original key of G minor. The double-stopped intro riff is arranged to be played starting with open strings, rather than fretted like the original Deep Purple recording, in order to make it more suitable for this grade. Care should be taken to adopt a fingering approach for the rest of the opening riff that allows it to be performed smoothly and fluently, particularly when moving between the pairs of notes on frets 3, 6 and 5 in bar 2.

The verse comprises G5 and F5 power chords with quaver rests appearing in a number of places. Practise this section carefully and make sure that the power chords are not allowed to ring out across these rests.

The jump between the two power chords in the chorus involves simultaneously changing strings and fret position, so it may need extra practice. Try to ensure that the C5 power chord rings out for the full 4 beats before changing to the A♭5 power chord.

Smells Like Teen Spirit

Instead of the key of F minor used in the original Nirvana recording, this arrangement is in E minor, making it more suitable for this grade, as the intro riff can then be played starting with open position power chords.

The main riff that features in the intro and the chorus has been slightly simplified from the original recording by omitting the ‘ghost’ notes and muted strings. You can include these into your performance if you wish, but the core rhythm and fluency of the riff are the most important elements to capture at this level.

The open-string notes that comprise the pre-verse and verse should be allowed to ring into each other as the notation indicates. Notice how the open-string riffs in these sections all start on beat 2 of the bar, rather than on the first beat.

The middle section features a jump from the low F note on the sixth string to the third string for a half-step (semitone) string bend. Some extra practice might be needed here to execute the string bend smoothly.

Component 2: 30 marks

Improvisation

Requirements

Lead and rhythm improvisations over a previously unseen chord progression

Information

In the exam

You will be shown an 8-bar chord progression in 4/4 time. This will be played five times without stopping (on a backing track). After the final playing, the backing track will end on the first chord of the progression played once.

Improvisation structure

- **Verse 1** (listening)
Listen and digest the chord progression, without playing
- **Verses 2 to 3** (lead playing)
A 4-beat count-in will be given and then during the next two verses you should improvise a lead guitar solo
- **Verses 4 to 5** (rhythm playing)
A 4-beat count-in will be given and then during the last two verses, you should improvise a rhythm guitar part

Preparation time

You will be given a short time to study the chord chart and will be allowed a brief soundcheck with the track, prior to the performance commencing, to choose your sound and volume level. A clean or a distorted sound can be used, and you can bring distortion or other effects units to the exam providing you can set them up promptly and unaided.

Backing track

The backing track will include drums, bass and rhythm guitar for the first three verses, but in the last two verses the recorded rhythm guitar part will be omitted so you can perform your own rhythm guitar part. The rhythm guitar part recorded on the backing track gives an indication of the standard that is expected. Your rhythm playing should be stylistically appropriate and with a feel

that is in keeping with the backing track.

Chords

The following chords may occur in the chord progressions — open position chords are expected for all except for those marked * :

- Major chords: G C D
- Minor chords: Am Em
- Dominant 7th chords: D7
- 5th (power) chords: A5 B5* C5* D5 E5 F5* G5*

Scales

To ensure accuracy it is essential to select the most appropriate scale to improvise with. At this grade the first chord in the progression will be the key chord — it will indicate the scale that would generally be best to use for improvising a lead solo. Although other scale options and improvisation approaches are acceptable, the scales listed below will provide a core foundation for improvisation at the appropriate level of technical development. At this grade, improvisation using 2-octave scales is expected.

Scale	Use over progressions featuring these chords
G pentatonic major (open position)	G Am C D D7 Em
E blues (open position)	E5 G5 A5 B5 C5 D5
A pentatonic minor (fretted)	A5 C5 D5 E5 F5 G5

Sample tests

Included at the end of this chapter are examples of the style and standard of the tests that will be given at this grade. Above each chart is a suggestion of a scale that could be used for improvisation. These are given for guidance in this book; they will not appear in the examination. Audio recordings of these, with backing tracks in the style of those that will be used in the exam, can be downloaded from the LCME website.

Guidance

Performance advice

The examiner will be looking for accuracy and confidence in the execution, with a high level of clarity and fluency. There should be clear evidence of stylistic interpretation, inventiveness and creativity that is maintained throughout the track. Dynamic markings are not included, to enable you to display your own dynamic interpretation.

Lead playing techniques

The improvised solo should be accurate in terms of note selection and timing in relation to the accompaniment with some evidence of melodic phrasing and shaping. The use of specialist techniques such as string bending, slides and slurs can be attempted if you wish, but are not expected at this grade. Keep an awareness of where you are in the chord chart during the lead section, so

that the 4-beat count-in to commence your rhythm playing doesn't take you by surprise — the examiner will not restart the backing track once it is underway.

Rhythm playing techniques

Rhythmic security and fluency are expected. When switching to rhythm playing, consider quickly adjusting the volume on your guitar in a controlled manner, as the settings you have used for lead playing may overpower the accompaniment if used for rhythm playing. At this grade, the most straightforward methods of adjusting the volume are:

- Turn down the volume control on your guitar.
- Use the pick-up selector on your guitar to switch to a pick-up with a lower output, or (if your guitar has more than one volume control) to a pick-up that you have pre-adjusted to a lower volume setting.
- If you are using your own distortion/overdrive unit for lead playing, turn this off and use a quieter clean sound for rhythm playing.

Chords

G major

C major

D major

A minor

E minor

D dominant 7

A5

Musical staff: Treble clef, two open circles on the 3rd and 4th strings.
Guitar neck: 6 strings (T, A, G, D, B, E). Fret 1: 1 (3rd string), 0 (4th string). Fret 2: 2 (5th string). Fret 0: 0 (6th string).

B5

Musical staff: Treble clef, one open circle on the 3rd string, one sharp sign on the 5th string.
Guitar neck: 6 strings (T, A, G, D, B, E). Fret 1: 1 (3rd string). Fret 2: 4 (5th string). Fret 0: 2 (6th string).

Diagram showing a guitar neck with 6 strings. Fret 1: 1 (3rd string). Fret 3: 3 (5th string).

C5

Musical staff: Treble clef, two open circles on the 3rd and 4th strings.
Guitar neck: 6 strings (T, A, G, D, B, E). Fret 1: 1 (3rd string). Fret 3: 3 (5th string). Fret 0: 3 (6th string).

Diagram showing a guitar neck with 6 strings. Fret 1: 1 (3rd string). Fret 3: 3 (5th string). 3rd fret: 1 (3rd string).

D5

Musical staff: Treble clef, one open circle on the 3rd string.
Guitar neck: 6 strings (T, A, G, D, B, E). Fret 2: 2 (5th string). Fret 0: 0 (6th string).

Diagram showing a guitar neck with 6 strings. Fret 1: 1 (3rd string). Fret 2: 2 (5th string). Fret 0: 0 (6th string).

E5

Musical staff: Treble clef, two open circles on the 3rd and 4th strings.
Guitar neck: 6 strings (T, A, G, D, B, E). Fret 1: 1 (3rd string). Fret 2: 2 (5th string). Fret 0: 2 (6th string).

Diagram showing a guitar neck with 6 strings. Fret 1: 1 (3rd string). Fret 2: 2 (5th string). Fret 0: 2 (6th string).

F5

Musical staff: Treble clef, two open circles on the 3rd and 4th strings.
Guitar neck: 6 strings (T, A, G, D, B, E). Fret 1: 1 (3rd string). Fret 3: 3 (5th string). Fret 1: 1 (6th string).

Diagram showing a guitar neck with 6 strings. Fret 1: 1 (3rd string). Fret 3: 3 (5th string). Fret 1: 1 (6th string).

G5

Musical staff: Treble clef, two open circles on the 3rd and 4th strings.
Guitar neck: 6 strings (T, A, G, D, B, E). Fret 1: 1 (3rd string). Fret 3: 3 (5th string). Fret 5: 5 (6th string).

Diagram showing a guitar neck with 6 strings. Fret 1: 1 (3rd string). Fret 3: 3 (5th string). Fret 5: 5 (6th string). 3rd fret: 1 (3rd string).

Scales

G pentatonic major

0 0 0 0 0
2 2 2
3 3 3

E blues

0 0 0 0 0 0
1
2 2 2
3 3 3

A pentatonic minor

5fr. 1 1 1 1 1 1
3 3 3
4 4

Sample tests

Example 1 (G pentatonic major scale could be used to improvise over this progression)

| **4 G** | **G** | **Am** | **Am** |

| **D** | **D** | **Em** | **Em** |

Example 2 (E blues scale could be used to improvise over this progression)

| **4 E5** | **E5** | **G5** | **G5** |

| **A5** | **A5** | **B5** | **B5** |

Example 3 (A pentatonic minor scale could be used to improvise over this progression)

| **4 A5** | **A5** | **D5** | **D5** |

| **G5** | **G5** | **E5** | **E5** |

Example 4 (G pentatonic major scale could be used to improvise over this progression)

| **4 G** | **G** | **D** | **D** |

| **Em** | **Em** | **C** | **C** |

Example 5 (E blues scale could be used to improvise over this progression)

| **4 E5** | **E5** | **A5** | **A5** |

| **B5** | **B5** | **G5** | **G5** |

Example 6 (A pentatonic minor scale could be used to improvise over this progression)

| **4 A5** | **A5** | **C5** | **C5** |

| **D5** | **D5** | **G5** | **G5** |

Component 3: 10 marks

Aural Assessment

Requirements

A series of aural tests, designed to assess your listening ability and musicianship

Rhythm test

A 2-bar riff will be played three times via a recording. During the third playing you will clap along with the exact rhythm of the riff.

The time signature will be 4/4. Note durations in the first bar will be limited to three crotchets (quarter notes) and two quavers (eighth notes), whilst the second bar will contain only one note.

Some examples of the type of riffs that will occur at this grade are shown overleaf, with the rhythm to be clapped indicated below the tab.

Pitch test

The same riff will be played two further times, with a click track. A gap will be left after each playing so you can practise the riff. You will then be asked, after a 1-bar count-in, to play along with the click track, accurately reproducing the riff on the guitar.

The riff will start and end on the keynote and the examiner will state which scale the riff is based on. The range of scales from which the riff will be derived is limited to G pentatonic major, E blues and A pentatonic minor.

Example 1 (A pentatonic minor)

T
A 7 7 5 7 5 7
B 1 1 2 1 2 1

Example 2 (E blues)

T
A 0 3 0 2 3 0
B 0 3 0 2 3 0

Example 3 (G pentatonic major)

T
A 0 2 0 0 2 0
B 0 2 0 0 2 0

Example 4 (A pentatonic minor)

T
A 5 5 8 5 8 5
B 5 5 8 5 8 5

Chord recognition test

The examiner will play a short chord progression once. Without using the guitar, you will be required to state whether it contained either all major chords or all minor chords.

The range of chords used in this test is limited to:

G C D Am Em

Below are examples of the type of chord progressions that will occur at this grade in the chord recognition tests.

Example 1 (major)

| **4 C** | **G** | **C** ||

Example 2 (minor)

| **4 Am** | **Em** | **Am** ||

Example 3 (major)

| **4 D** | **G** | **D** ||

Example 4 (minor)

| **4 Em** | **Am** | **Em** ||