

A close-up photograph of a violin and its bow resting on a wooden surface. The violin is made of polished wood and has four strings. The bow is made of wood with white hair. The background is a dark blue gradient.

MUSIC  
TEACHERS'  
BOARD

# MTB SaPa Marking Criteria

Carnatic Practical Examinations

**Grades 1-8**

October 2025



Subramaniam  
Academy of  
Performing  
Arts

# MTB SaPa MARKING CRITERIA CARNATIC PRACTICAL EXAMINATIONS

## Contents

- Important Notes Page 2
- Assessment Categories Page 3
- Recital Section Page 6
- Technical Section Page 7
- Musicianship Section Page 8
- Discipline-Specific Technique Page 10

## Award Categories

The examination is marked out of 100 with a pass mark of 60. Award categories are as follows:

87-100	Distinction
75-86	Merit
60-74	Pass
45-59	Blue
0-44	White

## Important Notes

1. The guidelines mentioned below are structured and colour-coordinated by our award categories. These give an indication, within each section of the exam, of the trajectory towards your final result.
2. Terms used in the tables should be interpreted appropriately for the level of the examination. The terminology used in the assessment categories and marking tables carries different expectations at each grade.
3. A mark of 0 is only awarded if the section is not performed at all.
4. Each category will be assessed based on several constituent elements, as applicable. Examiners award marks, giving due weight to all these elements, and/or any others that may arise from time to time.
5. If you feel your result is incorrect, you may appeal through the MTB SaPa appeals process ([Appealing an Assessment Result](#)). To learn more about the "Appeals Policy", click [here](#). While MTB SaPa welcomes feedback, we do not discuss individual marks or marksheets outside this process.

## Assessment Categories

<b>Accuracy</b>	
<b>Key Areas</b>	<b>Key Elements</b>
<b>Rhythm</b>	Control of pulse Control of rhythm Rhythmic character Fluency Clarity of accents (when appropriate)
<b>Pitch</b>	Accuracy of notes Intonation Maintaining tonality (when appropriate)
<b>Fluency</b>	Sense of fluency regarding notes and rhythm Sense of musical fluency Ability to maintain a flowing musical line Ability to recover quickly from slips or from hesitations due to loss of control or losing place in the music

<b>Expression</b>	
<b>Key Areas</b>	<b>Key Elements</b>
<b>Phrasing</b>	Expressive Well-realised detail
<b>Musicality</b>	Understanding of the music being performed Avoid 'musical awkwardness' that might arise from gaps in technical facility Flow of music with a sense of musical logic (that is, subsequent material is influenced appropriately by that which precedes it) Ability to command the expressive elements in the music Confidence An assured performance Ability to engage the listener in the performance Vivid communication Creative ideas of interpretation and the ability to incorporate these

<b>Technique</b>	
<b>Key Areas</b>	<b>Key Elements</b>
<b>Tempo</b>	Establish a clear tempo Maintain <i>kala pramaanam</i> (fixed tempo) and a consistent <i>layam</i>
<b>Control</b>	Ability to control technical elements in order to present musical ideas with conviction Appropriate word-splitting and breath control Accurate phrasing and bowing
<b>Tone quality</b>	Projection Secure control over tone quality Maintain consistency of tone quality Aware of tone quality while singing or playing and vary it appropriately Ability to establish, maintain, and contrast a wide range of tone colours

## RECITAL SECTION (60 marks)

**Categories being assessed:** Accuracy, expression, and technique

Pieces	Accuracy (6 marks)	Expression (7 marks)	Technique (7 marks)
<b>Distinction</b> [18-20 per piece]	Completely/almost completely accurate, only inconsequential faults or errors across elements which do not affect the overall performance	Excellent expression, any missing elements do not affect the success of the overall performance	Excellent technique, only inconsequential technical deficiencies across elements which do not affect the overall performance
<b>Merit</b> [15-17 per piece]	Predominantly accurate, minor faults or errors across elements which have only a limited effect on the overall performance	Good expression, some missing elements which have a limited effect on the success of the overall performance	Good technique, minor technical deficiencies across elements which have a limited effect on the overall performance
<b>Pass</b> [12-14 per piece]	Reasonably accurate, several faults or errors across elements which affect the overall performance	Reasonably expressive, several missing elements which affect the success of the overall performance	Reasonable technique, several technical deficiencies across elements which affect the overall performance
<b>Blue</b> [9-11 per piece]	Significant inaccuracies, many faults or errors across elements which significantly affect the overall performance	Lacking expressive elements which significantly affect the success of the overall performance	Insecure technique, significant technical deficiencies across elements which significantly affect the overall performance
<b>White</b> [0-8 per piece]	Fundamental inaccuracies with numerous serious faults or errors across elements which substantially undermine the overall performance	Little or no attention to expression, significant missing elements which substantially affect the success of the overall performance	Serious technical insecurity, serious deficiencies across elements which substantially undermine the overall performance

## TECHNICAL SECTION (25 marks)

**Categories being assessed:** Relevant elements of accuracy, technique, and expression (phrasing, dynamics, articulation as appropriate)

The table below refers to the technical section as a whole. Although the technical section for most instruments includes scales and technical exercises, some instruments have specific, tailored content.

Technical Section	Marked out of 25
<b>Distinction</b> [22-25]	Completely/almost completely accurate Only inconsequential faults or errors across elements All, or nearly all fluent and at the correct tempo Excellent technique & relevant elements of expression
<b>Merit</b> [19-21]	Predominantly accurate Only minor faults or errors across elements Predominantly fluent and nearly at the correct tempo Good technique & relevant elements of expression
<b>Pass</b> [15-18]	Reasonably accurate Several faults or errors across elements Reasonably fluent and somewhat under tempo Reasonable technique & relevant elements of expression
<b>Blue</b> [12-14]	Significant inaccuracies Significant faults or errors across elements Lacking fluency and significantly under tempo Insecure technique & lacking relevant elements of expression
<b>White</b> [0-11]	Fundamental inaccuracies Many significant faults or errors across elements Very hesitant and slow Serious technical insecurity & little or no relevant elements of expression

## MUSICIANSHIP SECTION

### Musicianship Skills

Performers are expected to build two skills - Listening and Reading (which will also have an improvisational element in the higher grades). The level-wise expectations are outlined below:

Levels	Listening Skills	Reading Konnakol and Improvisation
<b>Grade 1</b>	Listen to the rhythms and repeat the rhythmic phrases (by clapping).	Recite the Konnakol exercises (as mentioned in the SaPa MTB Grade 1 book) in two speeds. Each phrase should be repeated twice in the first speed, and then twice in the second speed.
<b>Grade 2</b>	Listen to the rhythms and repeat the rhythmic phrases (by clapping).	Recite the Konnakol exercises (as mentioned in the SaPa MTB Grade 2 book) in two speeds. Each phrase should be repeated twice in the first speed, and then twice in the second speed.
<b>Grade 3</b>	Listen to the rhythms and repeat the rhythmic phrases (by clapping).	Recite the Konnakol exercises (as mentioned in the SaPa MTB Grade 3 book) in two speeds. Each phrase should be repeated twice in the first speed, and then twice in the second speed.
<b>Grade 4</b>	Listen to audio clips and identify the <i>ragam</i> .	Recite the Konnakol exercises comprising groups of 3, 5, 7, and 9 syllables (as mentioned in the SaPa MTB Grade 4 book). The exercise starts on the beat. Note that, in the first speed, there is 1 syllable in 1 beat; in the second speed, there are 2 syllables in 1 beat; in the third speed, there are 4 syllables in 1 beat.
<b>Grade 5</b>	Listen to audio clips and identify the <i>ragam</i> .	Recite the exercises, comprising groups of two <i>korvais</i> in <i>Adi talam</i> and two <i>korvais</i> in <i>Rupaka talam</i> (as mentioned in the SaPa MTB Grade 5 book). Improvise for about one minute around the <i>charanam</i> line ' <i>Sannuthaanga</i> '. The exercise starts on the beat.
<b>Grade 6</b>	Listen to the phrases and sing or play them on the instrument.	Recite the exercises, comprising two <i>korvais</i> in <i>Khanda Chapu talam</i> (as mentioned in the SaPa MTB Grade 6 book). The exercise starts on the beat. Take the first line of ' <i>Raghunayaka</i> '. Improvise around that line (one <i>avartanam</i> ) for a minute. Remember that since ' <i>Raghunayaka</i> ' starts six <i>aksharams</i> after the downbeat, you must also finish each improvisation six <i>aksharams</i> after the downbeat.
<b>Grade 7</b>	Listen to the phrases and sing or play them on the instrument.	Recite the exercises comprising two <i>korvais</i> in <i>Mishra Chapu talam</i> (as mentioned in the SaPa MTB Grade 7 book). The exercise starts on the beat. Take the first line of ' <i>Shiva Shiva Shiva</i> '. Improvise around that line (two <i>avartanams</i> ), for a minute. Following this, play a longer improvisation for about 45 seconds.
<b>Grade 8</b>	Listen to the phrases and sing or play them on the instrument.	Recite the Konnakol exercises comprising groups of 4, 5, 7, and 9 syllables in <i>Tishra nadai</i> (as mentioned in the SaPa MTB Grade 8 book). The exercise starts on the beat. Note that, in the first speed, there is 1 syllable in 1 beat; in the second speed, there are 2 syllables in 1 beat; in the third speed, there are 4 syllables in 1 beat. Take the first line of ' <i>Paridaanamichite</i> '. Improvise for one <i>avartanam</i> and two <i>avartanams</i> , for a minute. Subsequently, play a longer improvisation for about a minute; finish with a simple <i>korvai</i> .

## MUSICIANSHIP SECTION (15 marks)

### Categories being assessed for each option

<b>Reading Skills</b>	Accuracy is assessed. Reading skills are marked as a whole, not individually. The descriptors below apply to the overall impression of the exercises.
<b>Listening Skills</b>	Accuracy and relevant elements of expression are assessed. Listening skills are marked as a whole, not individually. The descriptors below apply to the overall impression of the exercises.
<b>Improvisation</b>	Relevant elements of accuracy, expression, and technique are assessed with a focus on maintaining the <i>ragam</i> , <i>talam</i> , and <i>gamakams</i> , and using <i>korvais</i> , where applicable.

Musicianship Marked out of 15	Reading Skills (Compulsory) Marked out of 7	Listening Skills (Compulsory) Marked out of 8	Improvisation (Compulsory) Marked out of 8
<b>Distinction</b> [13-15]	Completely/almost completely accurate with only inconsequential errors	Completely/almost completely accurate with only inconsequential errors	Completely/almost completely accurate <i>ragam</i> and <i>talam</i> with only inconsequential errors
<b>Merit</b> [11-12]	Predominantly accurate with only minor errors	Predominantly accurate with only minor errors	Predominantly accurate <i>ragam</i> and <i>talam</i> with only minor errors
<b>Pass</b> [9-10]	Reasonably accurate with some errors	Reasonably accurate with some errors	Reasonably accurate <i>ragam</i> and <i>talam</i> with some errors
<b>Blue</b> [7-8]	Significant inaccuracies/errors	Significant inaccuracies/errors	Significant inaccuracies/errors
<b>White</b> [0-6]	Fundamental inaccuracies with serious errors	Fundamental inaccuracies with serious errors	Fundamental inaccuracies with serious errors

## Appendix: Instrument Specific Technique

The examples given below are discipline-specific technical elements. This list is not exhaustive, and technical aspects relevant to the repertoire will also be considered within the technical assessment criteria. It should be noted that not all of the following would be expected at every grade; only those technical elements which are appropriate to the level will be assessed.

### **Singing**

Breath control, support, accurate word splitting, intonation, technical facility, maintaining a stomach voice for the majority of the singing, and smooth movement to the chest register where applicable, smooth and clear *janti* technique, use of *akaaram*, *ookaaram*, and *eeakaaram*; ability to match pitches to the appropriate *swarams*

### **Violin**

Shifts, string crossing, intonation, vibrato, technical facility, technical aspects relevant to the repertoire, smooth and clear *janti* technique, clear and in-tune *gamakam* technique

### **Veena**

Shifts, string crossing, intonation, technical facility, technical aspects relevant to the repertoire, and clear and in-tune *gamakam* technique by pulling strings appropriately

### **Flute**

Breath control, quality of articulation, intonation, pitching, stamina, range, quality of sound at extremes of registers, technical facility, technical aspects relevant to the repertoire, clear and in-tune *gamakam* technique, closing and half-closing holes to ensure smooth *gamakams*, smooth and clear *janti* technique