

Voice for Life Chorister Awards

Guidance on choosing suitable hymns

In the syllabus, a broad range of hymnody is allowed at each of Bronze, Silver and Gold levels, with the main difference being the number of permissible lines per verse (4 at Bronze, 6 at Silver and 8 at Gold). In answer to various questions as to suitability, this document seeks to answer your questions regarding numbers of lines/syllables and text repetition.

Number of lines and syllable count

Occasionally, and often for poetic reasons, a hymn can be set out in more than one way, altering the number of lines and syllables and, potentially, making it eligible or ineligible at a particular level. In the following examples, hymn verses in the left hand column are set out as the poet intended and clearly do not fulfil the Silver level criteria of 6 line verses with a minimum of 12 syllables per 2 lines.

15	<i>All my hope on God is founded; He doth still my trust renew.</i>	<i>All my hope on God is founded; He doth still my trust renew.</i>	15
15	<i>Me through change and chance he guideth, Only good and only true.</i>	<i>Me through change and chance he guideth, Only good and only true.</i>	15
3	<i>God unknown,</i>	<i>God unknown, he alone</i>	14
3	<i>He alone</i>		
8	<i>Calls my heart to be his own</i>	<i>Calls my heart to be his own</i>	
12	<i>Ye holy angels bright, Who wait at God's right hand,</i>	<i>Ye holy angels bright, Who wait at God's right hand,</i>	12
12	<i>Or through the realms of light Fly at your Lord's command,</i>	<i>Or through the realms of light Fly at your Lord's command,</i>	12
4	<i>Assist our song,</i>	<i>Assist our song, for else the theme</i>	16
4	<i>For else the theme</i>		
4	<i>Too high doth seem</i>	<i>Too high doth seem for mortal tongue.</i>	
4	<i>For mortal tongue.</i>		

However, as shown in the right hand column, the verse could easily be re-cast into 6 line verses with sufficient syllables per pair of lines to fulfil the criteria. As such, these hymns would be acceptable to be used at Silver level.

Choir trainers are asked to use their common sense in selecting items suitable for the candidate. There are, after all, a great many suitable hymns from which to choose.

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Text repetition

Occasional repetition of common words will not be an issue in the exam room. Our aim is to avoid hymns where repetition forms a considerable part of the text. Here are some examples to help you decide.

Examples of hymns that would be unacceptable and why

¾ of each verse is one repeated line and the remaining line is identical in every verse

*Kumbaya my Lord, kumbaya
Kumbaya my Lord, kumbaya
Kumbaya my Lord, kumbaya
Oh Lord, kumbaya*

*Someone's singing Lord, kumbaya
Someone's singing Lord, kumbaya
Someone's singing Lord, kumbaya
Oh Lord, kumbayah*

One line is short and repeated three times, leaving the final pair of lines adding up to only 11 syllables

*Lo! He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluia (x3)
God appears on earth to reign.*

*Every eye shall now behold him
Robed in dreadful majesty'
Those who set at naught and sold him,
Pierced and nailed him to the Tree,
Deeply wailing (x3)
Shall the true Messiah see.*

Each pair of lines has only 11 syllables and, therefore, does not qualify for use.

*King of glory, King of peace,
I will love thee;
And, that love may never cease,
I will move thee,
Thou hast granted my request,
Thou hast heard me;
Thou did'st note my working breast,
Thou hast spared me.*

*Wherefore with my utmost art
I will sing thee,
And the cream of all my heart
I will bring thee.
Though my sins against me cried,
Thou did'st clear me,
And alone, when they replied,
Thou did'st hear me.*

¾ of each verse is one repeated line and the remaining line is identical in every verse

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble,
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

*Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?
Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble,
Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?*

The final pair of lines in each verse is identical

*O come, O come Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear:
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel*

*O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell thy people save,,
And give them victory o'er the grave:
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel*

The last line of 4 verses is identical and that of the remaining 2 verses is different but also repeated

*Gracious spirit, Holy Ghost,
Taught by thee, we covet most
Of thy gifts at Pentecost,
Holy, heavenly love.*

*Love is kind, and suffers long,
Love is meek, and things no wrong,
Love than death itself more strong;
Therefore give us love.*

*Prophecy will fade away,
Melting in the light of day;
Love will ever with us stay;
Therefore give us love.*

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Examples of hymns that have some repeating text but which would be acceptable

Every 1st and 3rd line begins with the word "Alleluya", but that is the only repetition.

*Alleluya, sing to Jesus,
His the sceptre, his the throne;
Alleluya, his the triumph,
His the victory alone:
Hark the songs of peaceful Sion
Thunder like a mighty flood;
Jesus, out of every nation,
Hath redeemed us by his blood.*

*Alleluya, not as orphans
Are we left in sorry now;
Alleluya, he is near us,
Faith believes, nor questions how;
Though the cloud from sight received him
When the forty days were o'er,
Shall our hearts forget his promise,
"I am with you evermore"?*

Every verse begins with the words "Lord of...", but that is the only repetition.

*Lord of beauty, thine the splendour
Shown in earth and sky and sea,
Burning sun and moonlight tender,
Hill and river, flower and tree:
Lest we fail our praise to render
Touch our eyes that they may see.*

*Lord of wisdom, whom obeying
Mighty waters ebb and flow,
While unhasting, undelaying,
Planets on their courses go:
In thy laws thyself displaying,
Teach our minds thyself to know.*

4 of the verses start with the words "Tell of his..." but that is the only repetition.

*We have a gospel to proclaim,
Good news for all throughout the earth;
The gospel of a Saviour's name:
We sing his glory, tell his worth/*

*Tell of his birth at Bethlehem
Not in a royal house or hall
But in a stable dark and dim,
The Word made flesh, a light for all.*

*Tell of his death at Calvary,
Hated by those he came to save,
In lonely suffering on the cross;
For all he loved his life he gave.*

Every 3rd line begins with the words "Praise for the...", but that is the only repetition.

*Morning has broken, like the first morning;
Blackbird has spoken, like the first bird.
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!
Praise for them, springing fresh from the Word!*

*Sweet the rain's new fall sunlit from heaven,
Like the first dewfall on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden,
Sprung in completeness where his feet pass.*