

New Jazz Improvisation Requirements

As I write this article, I would first like to thank those who came before us that helped to create and establish jazz as a vital part of NYSSMA and its evaluation process. None of this would ever have been possible without your vision and commitment to jazz education. I would also like to thank my colleagues who contributed to these revisions for their professionalism and caring commitment to our students; Charlie Sarling, Peter Frutkoff, Larry Ballestra, and Jonathon Holford. I would also like to recognize 2nd V.P. Michael Salzman, President David Gaines and AFC Chairperson George Smith for all their support in this process.

The improvisation requirements have been an ongoing debate for some time now and we wanted to try and create revisions that were sequential, and educationally made sense.

From the beginning, we had two major goals. The first goal was to revise the level IV requirements (ii-V-I) cadences that were far too difficult at that level and did not have a specific tune attached to play. The second goal was to reexamine level VI/AS, eliminate the standard simple Blues tunes and require jazz standards that included more complex chord changes. The committee originally thought that was all we wanted to accomplish but once we got started, we found ourselves looking further into the requirements and how we could improve upon them as a whole.

We agreed that students should have clear and specific instructions on each level that included selected tunes and the amount of improvisation choruses they should play. In the end, we decided to give each level at least one tune/melody to play with instructions that included playing the head of the tune once, then playing a certain number of choruses of improvisation (depending on the level) and finally, playing the head of the tune again to end.

The committee tried their best to come up with a sequential progression of improvisation levels in mind as students moved along from levels I-VI. In addition, we also agreed that additional choruses should be required and stated clearly in the instructions for each level in a sequential manner.

There was a great deal of debate about the selections of the tunes and how the levels should be categorized. Although we may not have all agreed 100%, I can say we are happy with the results, and that we believe that it has accomplished our original goal.

Below, I have attached the original chart that the committee worked from. This includes the current improvisation requirements, the proposed revisions and the reasons why we felt these changes should be considered. We realize that they are not perfect, but we do think that they are an improvement and address most of the major concerns that we have all heard before. Please notice that we also stream lined the number of Abersold volumes that you and your students would need to purchase. We hope that you find that these revisions are in the best interest of our students to provide them with an educationally sound NYSSMA evaluation.

Lastly, I would ask that your share this information with anyone and everyone who might be affected by these revisions, colleagues, private teachers, students, administrators or parents. A major change like this always has its causalities and most of the time it is the students who suffer because of a teacher not being aware of the change in policy. Anything you can do to help spread the word would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you again to everyone involved in this process and if you have any questions or comments please feel free to share them with me. I would welcome your input.

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Level	Current Requirements	Current Instructions	Proposed Changed Requirements	Proposed Changes to Instructions	Reasoning
I	Volume 24-Major and Minor -Track 1, Bb Major	Play 24 Measures	Volume 54 -Maiden Voyage Track 3, Shuffle Time	Students should play the head of the tune once and then one chorus of improvisation and then play the head of the tune to end.	The reason for this change is to provide the student with a specific tune to play and improvisation requirements.
II	Volume 1 -How To Play Jazz and Improvise -Track 7, Blues in Key Bb	Play 24 Measures	Volume 1 -How To Play Jazz and Improvise Track 7, Blues in Key of Bb choose one of the following "Hub Cap" "Pentatonic Blues" "The Roving Third"	Students should play the head of the tune once and then one or two choruses of improvisation and then play the head of the tune to end.	The reason for this change is to provide the student with a specific tunes to play and improvisation requirements.

III	Volume 1 -How to Play Jazz and Improvise -Choose One -Track 8, Blues in Key of F Concert or Track 7 Blues in Key of Bb	Play through Once.	Volume 1 -How to Play Jazz and Improvise Track 8, Blues in Key of F choose one of the following "Five O'clock Blues" "Slippery Blues"	Students should play the head of the tune once and then two choruses of improvisation and then play the head of the tune to end.	The reason for this change is to provide students with specific tunes to play instructions for their improvisation and one additional chorus for the adjudicator to truly evaluate the student's ability to improvise.
IV	Volume 1 -How to Play Jazz and Improvise -Track 6 Four Measure cadences	Play one of the Blues Melodies and then improvise one chorus in the chosen key	Volume 54 -Maiden Voyage Track 6, Watermelon Man Track 11, Cantaloupe Island	Students should play the head of the tune once and then two or three choruses of improvisation and then play the head of the tune to end.	The reason that this change would be made is that the II-V-I progressions are the most difficult out of all the improvisation requirements. The blues Volume 54 only uses the, I, IV and V, chords and does not use any ii-V-I turnarounds. Students can focus on melodic development, as well as focusing on 3 tonal centers. Also the tempo of this is slower so students will have a chance to think and hear. We are also giving the students specific instructions for their improvisation and one or two additional choruses for the adjudicator to truly evaluate the student's ability to improvise.
V	Volume 54 -Maiden Voyage Choose any one selection Except the last one	Play Melody/Head then improvise one chorus	Volume 54 -Maiden Voyage Track 5 Solar(Slow Version) Track 7, Song For My Father Track 8, Satin Doll Track 14, Autumn Leaves	The students should play the head of the tune as written and then three choruses of improvisation and then play the head of the tune to end.	These are all standard jazz tunes with more complex chord changes than a traditional blues. In addition we are also giving the students specific instructions for their improvisation and two additional choruses for the adjudicator to truly evaluate the student's ability to improvise.
VI	Choose anyone selection (track) marked with an "*" below: Volume 6- "All-Bird" * Track 2, Billies Bounce or Now's the Time Volume 7 -"Miles Davis" * Track 10 Tune Up (Fast Version) Volume 8 - "Sonny Rollins" Track 2 Doxy, Track 3, St. Thomas, Track 4, Tenor Madness Volume 14-"Benny Golson" Track 9, Blues March	Play melody/head then improvise two choruses	Volume 7 – Miles Davis Track 1, Four (Slow Version) Track 4, The Theme (Slow Version) Track 7, Milestones (old) Track 10, Tune Up (Fast Version)	The student should play the tune as written and then three or four choruses of improvisation and then play the head of the tune to end.	These are all standard jazz tunes with more complex chord changes than a traditional blues. We are also limiting the selections so the All State adjudicators for the most part are hearing the same improvisation requirements. In addition we are also giving the students specific instructions for their improvisation and two or three additional chorus for the adjudicator to truly evaluate the student's ability to improvise. Students should have to demonstrate mastery of harmonic language at this level. Students should not be able to get away with just playing the blues scale.