

Exams! They're a blessing...and a curse!

Everyone needs to have a goal to aim for, and for musicians, taking a practical music exam can be an important part of their learning, however there are some things you should bear in mind before you start.



Some students really rise to the occasion, whilst others find the whole process a bit daunting. It's natural to be nervous, so you need to be confident that you know your pieces and scales inside out. Then if you have a 'wobble' at least you'll know that if you lose a couple of points, it won't matter too much.

Many players learn their pieces really well but either forget about, or leave until the last minute, their scales practice. If you know your scales before you even enter for the exam, you'll find you're much more likely to get a decent mark.

Listen to your teacher's advice about entering for an exam. Often a teacher will hear the cry, 'I've passed my grade 3, can I take grade 4 next term?' if you go through your playing career having learnt just the three pieces you need for each exam, you will have missed so much of the repertoire for your instrument. Take your time and enjoy the journey – there is some lovely scenery to take in along the way!



It's nice to have something to show for your efforts, especially as you become older and may wish to apply for higher education. Having a grade exam shows that you've applied yourself to some independent study, and been able to organise your time to cover all the work. Even if they really don't enjoy exams, many students like to achieve the key targets of grade 5 and/or grade 8.

Taking every exam from 1 to 8 can be quite expensive! Do you really need to collect the complete set? Your teacher will be very aware of the cost – the entry fee, the music, plus a fee for an accompanist if you need one - so don't be surprised if he or she is not as keen as you are to plough straight on to the next grade.

In order to be successful, you'll need to organise your practice time to make sure that you cover everything. Have a look at our practice guide for advice on how to make the best use of your time <http://www.yorkmusicservice.co.uk/resources/downloads/Practice-advice.pdf>. You family can help by making sure you have a good space to practice in, and testing you on your scales. Make sure you

understand the different ways you might be asked to perform them (staccato, legato, tongued, slurred etc.), and that you have practised them all of these ways. Make yourself a checklist so that you cover them all.



Sight-reading is a skill that you can't suddenly develop 2 weeks before your exam. It needs to be a continual process. One of the best ways to do this is by playing in a group – a band or an orchestra – that uses notation. You can help yourself by trying out unfamiliar pieces at home. Maybe your tutor doesn't make you play every piece in your tutor book, so go back and play a few that you haven't done in your lesson.



The same is true of aural tests. It's no good being shy about your singing voice! The examiner is not expecting to hear the young choirboy or girl of the year. If you think this is a weak area for you, ask your teacher to help you with this.

Most of all make sure that you know what exactly you will need to do in the exam. You can get hold of a copy of the syllabus for free from the exam board website. There is also a very good book called *These Music Exams* available on the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music website (see link) which takes you through all of this in more detail.

Finally, try to remember that the examiner is keen for you to do your best. If you need him or her to repeat a question, just ask. Be confident that you've done your homework, and if you have, then you'll have nothing to worry about.



Links to the most popular exam boards.

<http://www.abrsm.org/en/home>

<http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/site/?id=1045>

<http://www.rockschool.co.uk/>

<http://www.abrsm.org/resources/theseMusicExams0607.pdf>