

CERTIFICATION: PREPARING FOR THE CERTIFICATION EXAMINATION

(Everyone, degree or not, must take this or else submit a portfolio)

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The format of the Certification Exam, unlike the proficiency exams, is that of an essay test. On each page, you are given a few choices of which questions you would like to answer, and then you choose one or two (the instructions will tell you how many to choose,) and proceed to spill out as much information as you possibly can onto your answer book. This is not a test you can study for, per se. Rather, it will draw on the sum total of your experiences as a piano teacher. To prepare for it, you may find it useful to do the following:

Read up on the issues in the field. For example, there will be a question about non-traditional students—the early beginner or the adult beginner, etc. *Clavier*, *Keyboard Companion* and the *AMT* often have articles about these subjects. Try to read through one magazine per week or so. This would be excellent preparation.

Make a list of the repertoire you use most often in your teaching. Many questions ask you to cite specific examples of what pieces you would use for what type or level of student. Try to commit to memory a short list (3-5 pieces per level) of pieces and their composers that you have found most useful.

Review or write your studio policies down. Some questions ask what you do from the business standpoint with problem students. You have probably developed strategies for this already. Many of these issues should be addressed in your studio policy sheet.

Review a good book about child development or general learning theories. Many abound. I like “Teaching with the Brain in Mind” or “Teaching Music with the Brain in Mind” both by Eric Jensen. This review will help you rethink your own teaching strategies and help focus your beliefs about learning and teaching.

Besides the essay questions, you will have to conduct an analysis of a one-page excerpt of a famous piano piece. You will be asked multiple-choice questions about it. You will need to be able to identify cadence points, Roman numeral chords, key changes, form questions (like question-and-answer phrase structure), and other items. “Music Theory” by George Thaddeus Jones, pub. HarperCollins, is a good book that can help you brush up on your analysis skills. (In fact, this book is overkill—perhaps just a review will do with some of your own old pieces that you once analyzed.)

Last of all, RELAX! I see most candidates working themselves up to a tizzy, when in fact they are well prepared. This test is not designed to fail people. You need only a 70% to pass. You cannot go in totally unprepared thinking you will do fine, but the vast majority of candidates I have seen go in almost over-prepared. You will do better if you can stay calm and use smart test-taking strategies: Answer the questions you feel the most confident about first, then go back and do your best on those you feel less prepared for. Take breaks to drink some water or stretch. Remember this test takes most people 2-3 hours, so pace yourself.

I am very proud of how many teachers are rising to the challenge of certification. It raises the level of our profession when we commit to a standard of excellence in our personal learning and our teaching of others. Good Luck!

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Piano Pedagogy/Final Certification Study Materials

Suggested Texts:

- Bastien, James; Gregory Nagode. *How to Teach Piano Successfully*. San Diego, CA: N. A. Kjos Music Co. 1995-1998.
- Uszler, Marianne, Stewart Gordon and Scott McBride Smith. *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, 2nd edition. New York: Schirmer Books, 2000.
- Baker-Jordan, Martha. *Practical Piano Pedagogy*. Miami, FL: Warner Bros. Publications, 2003.
- Albergo, Cathy and Reid Alexander. *Intermediate Piano Repertoire: A Guide for Teaching*, 4th edition. Mississauga, Ontario, Canada: The Frederick Harris Music Co., Limited, 2000.
- Magrath, Jane. *The Pianist's Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature*. Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1995.
- Music Teachers National Association, *American Music Teacher*. Vol. 51, No. 5, "Composer Classification List." Cincinnati, OH: Music Teachers National Association, 2002.
- "Keyboard Companion" magazine
- Agay, Denis, editor. *Music for Millions, Volume 37*. Amsco Publications

Weekly, prepare a typed answer (may be done in outline form) for each question assigned. In addition, complete one harmonic/score analysis from *Music for Millions* per week.

1. Plan a program for a 12-year old boy who is playing the Clementi Sonatina, Op. 36, No. 1.
 - A. List 5 repertoire selections representative of the four musical periods.
 - B. Discuss the rationale for your choices.
 - C. Identify possible trouble spots for each selection, and
 - D. Suggest practice strategies for each selection.
2. Write your teaching philosophy.
3. What items should be included in a studio policy?
4. Suggest a curriculum for the first year of lessons for an average 8-10 year old beginner.
 - A. Cite specific books, supplementary music, and/or sets of material you would choose.
 - B. List ten musical concepts you would expect a student to experience/master in the first year of study.
5. Compare and contrast four types of counting approaches used in method books and list at least one method book for each type of counting approach. What are ways to teach strong rhythmic development?
6. Discuss pros and cons of the different approaches used in beginning method books.
 - A. Discuss three of the following four approaches. Include specific reference to at least one method book that uses the approach you are discussing.
 - Rote
 - Middle C
 - Intervallic
 - Multikey
 - B. Tell which method series you prefer and why.
 - C. Explain strengths of different reading approaches and counting approaches for an older beginner.
7. Compare and contrast: 1. teaching techniques, and 2. teaching materials for teaching an adult beginner and an average beginner.
8. Design a plan for an independent teacher to produce income of \$30,000 per year.
9. Discuss pros and cons of group teaching.

10. *Discuss techniques and materials for teaching preschool music.*
- 11A. *List as many sources as possible for finding repertoire for a pre-college piano student.*
- B. *List 10 specific works by 20th Century composers for students of these levels: 1. Beginner, 2. Intermediate, 3. Early Advanced.*
- C. *Make a list of 3 pieces you would use to teach the following concepts, and describe why you selected each piece.*
1. *Legato touch*
 2. *Staccato touch*
 3. *Dynamic contrasts*
 4. *Voicing a lyrical, melodic line*
 5. *Strong rhythmic pulse*
12. *Outline your methods for developing a strong technical foundation for students from the elementary through the intermediate level.*
- A. *Identify the components of a healthy technique.*
 - B. *Suggest books or exercises you would or would not recommend.*
13. *Outline possible causes, solutions and exercises to explain how you work to improve the sound produced by a student who plays with:*
- A. *Weak tone with many inaudible notes*
 - B. *Extremely harsh tone*
14. *How soon do you begin ear training with your students? Outline a comprehensive program for an elementary level student that will help develop aural skills.*
- 15A. *Discuss the differences between an urtext edition and a student edition. What edition would you select for a student to use and why?*
- B. *In terms of recent study, name the most accurate edition for the following composers:*
- Bach*
 - Scarlatti*
 - Brahms*
 - Debussy*
16. *Describe effective techniques for teaching transfer students. (Consider reading, rhythm, technical development, performance ability, musicality, practice skills, etc.)*
17. *Discuss ways technology can be utilized in piano teaching (software, digital pianos, computers, drum machine, videos, tape recorder, etc.)*
18. *Name 10 ways teachers can work to prevent high dropout rates among students.*