



2020 Piano Syllabus: What to Expect at the Exam

Preparing students for piano exams for the first time might seem a daunting task, but if you follow a few very straightforward steps, the exam experience can run smoothly for both the teacher and the student. The biggest questions that may run through the teacher's mind are, "Am I teaching my students the right things?" and "How can I prepare my students so they are ready on time without stressing them out?"

As for the first question, the first step is this: Let the syllabus be your guide. Read and re-read the guidelines for the level you have chosen, and go to the MMTA website to see if there are any corrections that pertain to that level. The second step: Find a mentor, that is, a teacher who is experienced in preparing students for exams. Most experienced teachers will gladly help another teacher get started because they are so enthusiastic about the program themselves. Don't hesitate to contact this person with questions, even if you think they are stupid. There are no stupid questions when it comes to exams. It is better to get it right than not to be sure.

The second question on how to prepare the student can be dealt with in a variety of ways:

1. Start early. If you think a student is ready to prepare for a spring exam, begin preparing in the fall. The keyboard skills for the level you have chosen can be continually perfected throughout the year. Some of the repertoire can be started in the fall. If your precocious student learns it quickly, it can be set aside and brought out again when it is needed. There is nothing so confidence-building for a student as bringing out an old favorite and realizing how quickly it comes back.
2. Try to choose pieces that might be used for other purposes, as well. For example, if your student has a Contest piece, you may also be able to use it as an exam piece. If your students are involved in the Federation Festival, they might be able to use one of their exam pieces as their "choice" piece for Federation.
3. Build their confidence. Students who know exactly what to expect experience less anxiety and conversely, more confidence. At some point before the final preparation begins, make sure they have the "Piano Exam Preparation Sheet" and, for level three or above, the "Oral Questions Worksheet". Both of these resources can be found in the **2020 Piano Syllabus: Preparation Book**. In the last month before the exam, do a series of mock exams in the piano studio so the students know exactly how it will be conducted (keyboard skills first, then repertoire, questions, and finally sight reading). Make sure to place the "Keyboard Skills Practice Test" in front of them during these mock exams, because it will be placed in front of them during the real exam.

4. Explain to your exam candidates that there is only going to be one person listening to them during the exam, and that person is also a piano teacher, so in a way it is almost like going to a piano lesson.

5. Prepare them for the little things that might go wrong (what to do if they get stuck in the middle of their piece, what to do if the piano isn't to their liking, etc.), but more importantly, prepare them for what you know is going to go right: that is, in this exam there are no surprises. What they experience in their exam preparation with you in your studio is the same as what they will experience in the exam itself. And of course, one of the most important things that will go right is the learning that will have taken place, and the feeling of accomplishment in having developed skills they might not have developed without this worthwhile goal.

by Kathleen Teuber Younker