

Before the exam

As your teacher, I will usually make the first move in suggesting an exam and once the student has been encouraged to practise hard, and really wants to succeed, the stage is set for the work ahead.

Experienced teachers are familiar with the length of time it takes to prepare for each exam and the care needed to ensure that the most appropriate and appealing selection of pieces is presented. The wide choice available in the syllabuses makes it particularly easy to choose a programme well suited to each candidate and so the time spent in preparation will pass enjoyably and productively. Once the entry has been made, there is a real sense of purpose in the preparation for the big day.

Parents are particularly important at this stage in giving continual support, encouragement and praise for regular effort. Sometimes the pressure of a forthcoming exam causes parents to go into 'teacher mode', which is usually not appreciated either by their children or by the teachers themselves. A regular timetable for practice and plenty of praise is much more helpful than extra pressure at home. Additionally, a calm, cheerful attitude right up to the start of the exam is of the greatest importance. I often arrange for my students to play for each other and in recitals before exams come around, giving valuable performance experience. Preparing for exams takes careful planning and an awareness of the importance of including all aspects of the exam in the lessons on a regular basis. If scales, sight-reading and aural tests are all left to the last minute, disastrous results are likely.