

ASTA Certificate Advancement Program (ASTACAP)

Evaluation and Grading System

Each category of the yearly examinations that consists of scales, etude, solo(s), and sight-reading is evaluated based on tone, intonation, stance, technique, rhythm, musicality, memorization, and stage presence using the following grading:

V (very good), S (satisfactory), or N (needs improvement). Plus signs (+) and minus signs (-) are added as shadings of the grades. Five N's in any one category such as scales, etude, or solos (sight-reading excepted) indicate that that part of the exam should be retaken at a later date.

Honors: Honors is considered when a student performs a solo or solos from a higher level than the level chosen or if a cadenza is played with a concerto. To be awarded *Honors*, all of the material played, including scales and etude, must have earned an overall rating by the examiner of "V". Teachers wishing their student to be considered for *Honors* should check Honors on the exam application. If awarded Honors, Honors is checked on the Evaluation Form and Honors is written with the level achieved on the Certificate of Achievement.

Comments Only: This classification is for students who prefer to receive written comments rather than grades. Comments Only is checked at the top of the Evaluation Form to alert the examiner that no grades should be given. This designation provides latitude for the student whose exam program is not complete, where memorization is marginal, or for students who fear grades but desire feedback on their performance. Comments Only can be requested of the site chair as late as the last minute before the exam begins. Regular fees apply. No Certificate of Achievement is awarded.

Memorization: Memorization as set forth in each level is a requirement for passing the examination. A student receives "N" if he needs music to perform the required scales or solos, except in those cases where memory is not required (see Exam Rules). When there are only a few memory stumbles, a passing grade of S- or higher should be awarded in the memory category.

Accompaniment

Must a student be accompanied if an accompaniment is written for the piece? While it is an educationally sound practice to include accompaniment if it is written for a work, accompaniment is not required. Accompaniment is at the discretion of the teacher and student. No deduction in the score is made for lack of accompaniment.

May a student's teacher play the piano accompaniment? Yes.

May a member of the student's family play the accompaniment? Yes.

May the accompanist be in the exam room for the entire exam? No. An accompanist should be in the exam room only for solos that he/she accompanies.

Cadenzas

Do cadenzas have to be played with concertos? No. Cadenzas are optional. However, a cadenza played for an exam in addition to the concerto movement qualifies a student for consideration for Honors (see **Honors** below).

Comments Only

When should a student play for Comments Only? This option is available to encourage participation by the student who is worried about being graded, and for the student who has not memorized or prepared adequately all the material as required but who would like the benefit of the examiner's suggestions. No Certificate is awarded. Same fees apply.

Editions

Must the pieces played be the editions that are listed in the Handbook? No. Editions are listed only to help in finding and buying the works. Teachers may select any edition that serves their purpose.

Enrollment

Who should enroll in the ASTACAP? Both high-achieving and average students benefit from the rigors of the program and the written appraisals of the examiners.

What happens if a teacher registered the student for the wrong level? If the repertoire doesn't match the level, the exam organizer will notify the teacher of the option to change the repertoire, correct the level, or to play for Comments Only.

Can repertoire be changed after the application has been submitted? No, except in unusual circumstances. Discuss this with the exam organizer.

Family Members

May a member of the student's family sit in on the exam? May a member of the student's family accompany? The evaluations are not public and the rooms are not set up for an audience. Family members usually do not listen to the examinations. Exceptions are at the discretion of the exam organizer.

A family member may play the accompaniment but is expected to step out of the room for the rest of the examination.

Fees

To whom should the check for the application fee be made out? Student checks should be made out to their teacher. The teacher should make out one check to "ASTA MD/DC Chapter" for the total fees and send this and all applications collected to the exam organizer.

Honors

What is Honors? Honors denotes that a student is performing a work from a higher Level than required or that a student is performing his concerto movement *and* the cadenza of his concerto. Honors is granted when, in addition to one or both of the above, the performance of all requirements is given an overall rating of "V".

To be considered for Honors, the teacher checks Honors on the Application. If Honors is awarded, it is checked on the Evaluation Form and noted on the Certificate of Achievement.

Memorization

Must everything be memorized? No. While everything can be memorized with no deduction in score, etudes do not have to be memorized. In Levels 7 – 10, Classical period and later sonatas written for string instrument and piano may be played from music. Scales and all other repertoire pieces must be memorized. Follow the specific instructions on memorization as listed in each level.

What if a student does not have everything (that is required) memorized? Memorization as described above is a requirement to pass each level. If the student plans to use music for scales and solos (except those noted above), he should play for Comments Only. He may change to Comments Only as late as the day of the exam by conferring with the exam organizer.

Passing the Exam

What happens if a student plays below acceptable standards? Does he/she fail? Teachers should acquaint themselves with the standards of performance necessary for a successful exam so that they send students who are well prepared. Very rarely, a student falls short. If a student does not pass, the Overall Impression grade will be "N", and he does not earn the Certificate of

Achievement. However, it is recommended that he retake the exam after additional study. A new exam can be arranged by his teacher and the exam organizer. A new exam fee is required. The Certificate of Achievement will then be awarded if the student passes all categories.

The following are no-pass situations:

1) One or more solos not memorized.

If the student receives one or more N's (Needs Improvement) for memorization of his solo piece(s), he will not pass, even if the grades in other categories are S- or higher, since memorization of solo pieces is required. An Overall Impression grade of "N" will be given and no Certificate of Achievement will be awarded. If retaking the exam, the student is required to play a complete exam for that level. New material may be performed, if desired.

2) Five N's in one or more categories.

If a student receives 5 N's in any one category, such as scales, etude, or one of the solo pieces, he will not pass the exam, even if the grades in other categories are S- or higher. An Overall Impression grade of "N" is given on the exam form and he will not receive a Certificate of Achievement. However, it is recommended that he retake the exam in the category that earned 5 N's. The Certificate of Achievement will be awarded upon successful completion of that portion of the exam. If the student receives 5 N's in each of two or more categories, an Overall Impression grade of N will be given and no Certificate of Achievement will be awarded. Retaking the complete exam is recommended.

Pieces/Repertoire

Can a student play a piece for the examination that is not listed in the Examination Requirements and Curriculum Guide? Yes. The student may play any piece for the exam so long as it corresponds in difficulty to those listed in the Examination Requirements and Curriculum Guide for that level of exam. This freedom in selection of exam material is one of the hallmarks of the ASTACAP.

How does one know for sure if a piece that is not listed in the Examination Requirements and Curriculum Guide is appropriate for the certain level? If there are any doubts, check with your exam organizer as early as possible. This person may consult other exam organizers or with the state ASTACAP chair. The response of your state's exam organizer is final.

Preparation for the Exam

How do I know if my student is prepared enough to receive the certificate for the level applied for? The expectations are the same as for any public performance or audition. The student should be able to play the material with confidence, with good intonation and the facility necessary for the chosen repertoire. Occasional lapses in intonation and some technical or musical shortcomings might be noted but will not prevent successful completion of the level (see **Passing the Exam**, above).

Repeating Material or Levels

Must a student complete a level each year? No. The rate of progress varies from student to student and often in the course of the same student's development.

Is it acceptable to repeat a level? Yes. Often a student benefits from learning more of the literature in a level before proceeding to the next.

May a student play the same material a second year? Whereas a minority of students may need to play the same material two exams in a row, the playing of new material, even at the same level, is strongly encouraged as it promotes growth in the student.

Repeats

What about repeats? In the interest of time, long repeats should not be made.

Scales

Do scales have to be played at the tempos listed? Scales should be played within the range listed, but a slight deviation is acceptable. Aim for good intonation, a clear and full tone, security in shifting, if applicable, and fluency appropriate to each level.

Skipping a Level

Is it acceptable to skip a level? Students may play at any level the teacher judges to be appropriate.

Learning about the ASTACAP

What is the best way for a teacher to get acquainted with the Certificate Advancement Program (ASTACAP) and to test it? Read the above, become familiar with the repertoire for each Level, talk to your state ASTACAP chair, and most importantly, participate by enrolling a few students or acting as a monitor at exams. First-hand experience has served many well.

How do I convey to my students the benefits of the ASTACAP?

Explain to students that preparing for the ASTACAP evaluation is no different than preparing for a studio recital, a youth orchestra audition or a festival except that the ASTACAP exams are noncompetitive and are not public.

Participation in the ASTACAP Exams will make future auditions and performances more successful.

Tell your students that if they practice, you will make sure that no one goes to the exams unprepared and that they will get a well-deserved *Certificate of Achievement* as they complete each level.

Most students will participate, just as they participate in year-end recitals.

After the first time, the ASTACAP becomes an expected annual activity for all students, crowning the progress made each year.

How do I convey to parents the benefits of the ASTACAP?

Parents are happy when their child practices and makes progress, something that happens in preparing for the exams. They also have more confidence in the teacher's efforts when they see outside validation of work done well.

Tell parents that preparing for the ASTACAP exams is one of the best ways to motivate students to practice and to bring scales and etudes as well as solo pieces to a polished level.

The written evaluations and the granting of the Certificate of Achievement after each level by ASTA, a national organization, is recognition of high standards of teaching and progress.

Parents should look forward to more and more universities recognizing these standards, as well.

Exam Rules

- Entrance may be at any level and skipping levels forwards or backwards is allowed. Levels may be played again.
- Memorization: In general, memory is required for all examination material, except etudes and sight-reading. Exceptions: Levels 7 – 10 Classical period and later sonatas that are written for a string instrument and piano; they may be played from music. Follow the specific instructions on memorization as listed in each level.
- Accompaniment is optional but recommended as an educationally sound practice. No grade deductions are made for a lack of accompaniment. The student may be accompanied on the piano by his teacher or parent. Accompanists are required to step out of the exam room when not actually accompanying.

- Students may use editions listed or any other editions that serve their purpose. Legally downloaded editions are permitted. Photocopies are not allowed unless the music is out of print. If the student uses unauthorized copies, he/she is automatically moved to Comments Only. No grade and no certificate will be awarded.
- Participating teachers must be current members of ASTA at application and exam time. See www.astaweb.com for membership details. Participating students must study with a current member of ASTA.
- Teachers are required to assist on the exam day to assure that exams run smoothly and efficiently.
- The examiner's decisions are final.