

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

A Level

- *A Level:* The letter “A” is attached to any number level (Example 5A) to indicate that a student is taking the same level of exam for a second time. Different material from the same level may be used allowing more time for maturing in any one level. Additionally, ASTACAP recognizes that taking the exam on a different level each year does not coincide with the rate of musical growth of all students. The built-in flexibility that is provided by the stretching of levels over multiple years is an important tool to be used by teachers when appropriate. Standards for passing the exam whether with or without “A” are the same and the same fees apply.

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 the state ASTA 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
 - a) 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

- a) 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. (See **A Level**, above).
- *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 (Information)

- *What is the best way for a teacher to get acquainted with the Certificate Advancement Program (ASTACAP) and to test it?* Read [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#) of the Handbook carefully, 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.
- If your state or area has no program, read [Part 3](#) and [Part 4](#) for information on how to organize exams. For any other information, call ASTA at (703) 279-2113 or visit the web site at www.astaweb.com.

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.
- *Is there any informational material for parents?* Yes. The ASTA [ASTACAP Brochure](#) can be downloaded or it is available from ASTA by calling (703) 279-2113. Additionally, use the "[Letter to Parents](#)". It is recommended that teachers hand them out to all parents explaining the benefits of the program in person.