

Fair access information for candidates with dyslexia, dyspraxia or other learning difficulties

Our policy

We endeavour to make our exams as accessible as possible to all candidates, regardless of sensory impairments, learning difficulties or particular physical needs. Special arrangements, including extra time and alternative tests are put in place as appropriate. In addition to the general provisions described below, we are happy to consider each person individually if their needs are not covered by our standard arrangements. It's important to understand, however, that whilst we are able to make provisions for the administration of the exam, e.g. extra time or alternative tests, we are not able to make any concessions in the marking – all candidates will be assessed equally.

Preparing for the exam

Using the information below, decide which tests and provisions will work best for you. If you need further information or advice, please refer to page 6 for relevant contact information.

	Provision	Practical: extra time	Theory: extra time
D	Extra time	5 minutes (including up to 3 minutes for sight-reading)	Grades 1–3: 30 minutes Grades 4–5: 40 minutes Grades 6–8: 60 minutes
N	Extra time and large notation sight-reading/ Quick Study test	5 minutes (including up to 3 minutes for sight-reading)	
	Extra time and large text and staff notation		Grades 1–3: 30 minutes Grades 4–5: 40 minutes Grades 6–8: 60 minutes
P	Extra time and modified staff notation sight-reading/ Quick Study test	5 minutes (including up to 3 minutes for sight-reading)	
	Extra time and modified text and staff notation		Grades 1–3: 30 minutes Grades 4–5: 40 minutes Grades 6–8: 60 minutes
A	Extra time and an amanuensis		Grades 1–3: 30 minutes Grades 4–5: 40 minutes Grades 6–8: 60 minutes

Entering for the exam

- Once you are sure of what's needed for the exam, select the correct Specific Needs code when you make your exam entry. In order for the correct provisions to be made, it is important that the correct code is used each time a candidate is entered for an exam. Where additional arrangements are needed, these must be discussed and agreed with ABRSM before entry.
- Any candidate who has been diagnosed as having a specific learning difficulty must send an official document to support this diagnosis. This is used to confirm the candidate's needs and the support they are likely to require, eg extra time, enlarged sight-reading tests or use of a scale book for reference purposes.
- On occasion, none of the Specific Needs codes will be relevant, in which case you should include a covering letter with your entry form or send an email to accesscoordinator@abrsn.ac.uk once you have submitted your online entry. Alternatively, you may wish to select one of the codes below and send a covering letter or email to give us more detailed information. The more information you can provide the better.
- We provide all examiners who are scheduled to examine candidates with dyslexia, dyspraxia or any other learning difficulties with general guidelines about what to expect when examining a candidate with these Specific Needs. If there is any particular information you feel it would be useful for the examiner to be aware of, please let us know at the time of entry, in order for us to inform the examiner in advance of the exam.

The supporting document

In accordance with the British Dyslexia Association's advice, we require supporting documentation to be up-to-date; signed and dated within the last three years. This document can be:

- an assessment from an educational psychologist or specialist teacher. The summary pages usually provide enough information for the purposes of our exams, but please ensure it includes information about recommended support or arrangements for exams.
- a letter from the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) or head teacher at the school, on headed paper.
- a letter from the Local Education Authority (LEA), on headed paper.

Once we have a document on file, providing it includes sufficient information to support the concessions requested for the individual, you will not need to send another one until three years from the date of issue, at which point we will ask to see an updated version. If you are unable to provide us with an up-to-date document, we may not be able to issue the exam results as promptly as usual and we ask you to take this into account before making an exam entry.

Adult candidates

We recognise that adult candidates may find it difficult to provide a supporting document when they are no longer in the education system. In this case, please send the most recent document you have, with a covering note to explain the situation, and we will contact you. An alternative option for adults without an up-to-date supporting document is to complete a dyslexia screening test (see the BDA for further information).

Practical exams

Prep Test Candidates who have particular problems with short-term memory will not be required to perform their exercises from memory. Written permission must be obtained from ABRSM in advance for this provision. Where appropriate, a letter will be issued to take to the exam for verification purposes.

Sight-reading

Extra time: Despite National guidelines suggesting that an additional 25% of time should be allowed for candidates with specific learning difficulties, we recognise that sight-reading poses the most significant challenge for candidates with a formal diagnosis. Therefore, an additional five minutes will be allowed across the entire exam, including up to three minutes to prepare the sight-reading/Quick Study test, rather than the usual half a minute – representing a far greater increase than 25%.

Large notation sight-reading tests: These tests are available on request and are produced as standard on A3 cream paper at 200% larger than the standard tests.

Modified stave notation sight-reading tests: These tests are available on request. Rather than a straightforward enlargement, the test can be precisely modified, e.g. with larger note-heads and beaming, or a larger font for performance directions. Candidates who require modified stave notation should send a covering letter at the time of entry along with a sample of the notation required. Please include details of all typographical specifications required. Musical examples written in Sibelius can be emailed to us at: accesscoordinator@abrsm.ac.uk. Please be aware that we can produce papers on either A4 or A3, but you will need to consider how the font and staff size will impact on the paper size needed.

Tinted overlays/coloured paper: Candidates who have difficulty reading from white paper are welcome to bring tinted overlays with them. These can be used during any part of the exam. If the sight-reading is required on coloured paper, three sheets of paper in the correct colour and of the required size should be provided at the time of entry.

Aural repetition: This test may be a more suitable alternative for some candidates with dyslexia, dyspraxia or other learning difficulties, although we advise that you consult the sample tests before opting for this, as depending on the student's aural memory, this might not always be a suitable option. The aural repetition test consists of a short passage played three times on the piano by the examiner, who will first play and name the key-chord and starting note, and indicate the tempo before asking the candidate to repeat the passage on his/her instrument. Candidates will be given a short amount of time to try out the test following the second and final playing. Sample tests can be obtained from Allegro Music (see page 6 for contact details).

This alternative is not a standard arrangement and is considered on an individual basis. If your candidate would like to be considered for this concession, you will need to include the standard 'D' code on the entry form and then send an email requesting this provision to the Access Coordinator (see page 6).

Organ, trumpet, horn and harpsichord exams: These exams involve either a transposition exercise or a figured bass realisation. The extra three minutes will be split between the sight-reading and these additional tests.

Scales

Replays: Examiners will be aware that a candidate may forget which scale they are playing, and a replay will therefore be allowed. Examiners will also be aware that candidates may need some processing time to recall the key signature and finger patterns required. No penalty will be made for a lack of 'prompt' responses. If candidates need to replay numerous scales, however, this may impact on the mark awarded.

Scale book: Candidates who have particular problems with short-term memory – and therefore with memorising scales – may take their scale book into the exam for reference purposes only. This means that the candidate may have the scale book open on a music stand close to them and can glance at it if they have particular difficulties recalling a pattern. If candidates appear to be reading from the scale book, they will not be disqualified, but this may be reflected in the assessment.

This is not a standard arrangement and therefore advanced written permission must be obtained from ABRSM. If permission has not been gained in advance, examiners will request for the scale book not to be used in the assessment.

Right and left: Examiners have been asked not to refer to 'right' or 'left' hand scales but to 'this hand' or 'the other hand', demonstrating if necessary.

Aural tests

Every examiner will follow the rubric printed in the new Specimen Aural Tests books, thus avoiding any variations in the way in which the aural tests are delivered. For tests requiring candidates to remember what they have been asked before the playing of a musical extract (as in the C or D test, depending on the grade), candidates are allowed to take a pencil and piece of paper into the exam room to make a note of which features they need to listen for – making them less reliant on their short term memory. This piece of paper would need to be given to the examiner at the end of the assessment and should not be removed from the exam room.

Additional attempts: Examiners are asked to allow an additional attempt at the aural tests, where relevant, with no penalty. Any further attempts may be allowed at the examiner's discretion. Where there is significant hesitation on the part of the candidate, the examiner will be ready to prompt, where appropriate, though this will affect the assessment.

Large notation tests: Candidates who have requested large notation sight-reading will also automatically receive large notation aural tests.

Order of the exam

Examiners will be aware that the order of the exam may affect the performance of those with learning difficulties. The elements of the exam will be accepted in any order, provided that it is logistically feasible – for example, it is much better that elements which require an accompanist are adjacent, to cause minimum disruption. Even though examiners are trained to expect the exam to be in any order, as desired by the candidate, if a particular order is required, it is advised that you give written notice of this either to the Access Coordinator at ABRSM or to the steward on the day of the exam to avoid any unnecessary anxiety for the candidate.

On the day

Some candidates with learning difficulties may feel especially nervous or anxious in an exam situation and examiners will be aware of this. Similarly, examiners know that some learning difficulties, such as dyspraxia, may mean that candidates have difficulty with coordination and concentration. The extra time allowed will help examiners to take the time to ensure that candidates do not feel rushed.

Examiners have been asked to:

- Speak slowly, clearly and concisely, allowing time for candidates to process the information and instructions.
- Repeat any instructions if asked, or, if candidates are slow in responding, to allow five seconds before prompting.
- Understand that candidates can become muddled with their own words when asked to respond to questions.
- Be aware that memory lapses may occur in any section of the exam.

Singing exams

Copies of the words: Candidates who have particular problems with short-term memory and therefore the memorising of their words, may take a copy of their words of the songs into the exam for reference purposes only. This means that the candidate may have the words on a music stand close to them and glance at it if they have specific difficulties recalling the words. Candidates who require this provision should be aware that reference to the words in a way which is deemed to inhibit communication would mean that the highest marks could not be achieved for their songs.

This is not a standard arrangement and therefore advanced written permission must be obtained from ABRSM. If permission has not been gained in advance, examiners will request for the words not to be used in the assessment.

Written comments

The marks must always reflect the standard of the candidate's performance in accordance with ABRSM's published marking criteria. Examiners will aim to avoid any comments which directly relate to the above-mentioned points or would seem to emphasise them. Nevertheless, if there is a persistent reason for higher marks not being appropriate, the examiner will need to refer to this on the mark form in order to fully justify and explain the marks awarded.

Performance Assessment

Candidates with learning difficulties, whose needs cannot be met within the graded exam system, may take the Performance Assessment. In this assessment candidates can play their own choice of repertoire and will receive a written report containing constructive comments and advice from a member of the examining panel; there is no pass or fail for this assessment, nor any assessment criteria. A written statement should accompany the entry detailing the specific needs of the candidate (this is essential if the candidate is under 18) so that the information can be passed on to the examiner. For further information, please contact the Access Coordinator for a leaflet or visit our website:
<http://www.abrsm.org/?page=exams/performanceAssessment>

Written exams

Accuracy

Candidates will not lose marks for incorrect spelling or punctuation, providing the meaning is clear.

Lower grades: Examiners are aware that copying out poses particular difficulties for some candidates with learning difficulties, but at the lower grades where this skill itself is assessed, all candidates are asked to manage as best they can.

Higher grades: Where the skill being assessed is primarily that of continuing a melody based on a given opening, the instruction to copy out the given material may be ignored without penalty.

Coloured and enlarged papers

Candidates who have difficulty reading from white paper and who would therefore benefit from working theory papers printed on non-white paper, may request a paper to be printed on blue, green, pink or yellow paper. Any requests for coloured paper should be made at the time of entry. In addition to this, large print papers are available in A3 format and come, as standard, on white paper.

Amanuensis

Candidates who are unable to access printed material, or are unable to write down their answers may use an amanuensis to act as a reader, a scribe or both. Candidates must make their own arrangements. If an amanuensis is required, this person may not be their Music Theory teacher or a close relative. However, anyone acting as an amanuensis needs to be musically literate to the level of the demands of the grade. Candidates who require an amanuensis must contact the theory team (+44 (0)20 7467 8270; theory@abrsm.ac.uk) prior to entry. A covering letter or email must also be submitted with every entry form.

Diploma exams

Written Submissions/Programme Notes

Spelling and grammar: We are aware that candidates with some learning difficulties may have particular problems with spelling and punctuation or 'getting things the wrong way round' and 'word blindness', when writing prose and music. It is also understood that some candidates do not always use conventional sentence structure. At diploma level, however, we expect candidates to have checked their submissions thoroughly (another person is allowed to help with these matters, provided the content is solely the candidate's work). All Submissions will be marked to the same criteria, although the examiner will be made aware of any specific needs. No major penalty will be incurred provided the content of the work and candidate's intentions are clear.

Quick Study

Extra time: Candidates with learning difficulties will be allowed twelve minutes rather than the usual five to prepare the Quick Study section. Examiners will be aware that memory lapses may occur and that candidates may have particular problems re-finding their place in the music, but examiners are required to mark this section in line with the same published marking criteria for all candidates.

Aural repetition: This test may be a more suitable alternative for some candidates with dyslexia, dyspraxia or other learning difficulties, although depending on the student's aural memory, it might not always be a suitable option. The aural repetition test consists of a short passage of music (approximately 16 bars long) recorded onto CD. The CD will be recorded on the instrument being assessed and will be given to the candidate to study, with 15 minutes preparation time. Candidates may use the recording any way they wish in this time. Singing candidates will be required to incorporate the lyrics in their performance of the test and will be given the usual choice of singing in either Italian or English. Language preferences should be stated at the time of entry. Singers will be provided with a full recording of the score, a recording of the lyrics only, a recording of the lyrics only, a recording of the melody sung to 'la' with the accompaniment and a recording of the melody, including the lyrics.

Please note that candidates are responsible for providing their own CD player, which they are familiar with and should be reliable, reasonably portable, have a sufficiently long mains lead and be quick to set up. Further information and indicative tests can be requested from the Access Coordinator.

Be aware that this option is not a standard arrangement and is considered on an individual basis. If your candidate would like to be considered for this alternative arrangement, you will need to select the relevant box on the entry form and then send an email requesting this provision to the Access Coordinator (see page 6).

Tinted overlays/coloured paper

Candidates who have difficulty reading from white paper are welcome to bring tinted overlays into the exam for use in the Quick Study and any other section of their exam if needed. Large notation and/or coloured paper Quick Study tests can be supplied for candidates who have visual sequencing difficulties. ABRSM must be informed in advance if coloured paper is required – please see 'sight-reading' (page 2) for further details.

Viva Voce

Promptness of responses: Examiners will be aware that candidates with sequencing difficulties may require a few moments processing time before answering some questions. Candidates with learning difficulties will not incur a penalty purely for not being prompt with answers. Examiners will endeavour to speak slowly and clearly, and will be prepared to repeat or re-phrase questions, again without penalty, if necessary.

Further information

If you require any further information, please contact the Access Coordinator in one of the following ways:

Access Coordinator

ABRSM, 24 Portland Place, London, W1B 1LU

T: +44(0)20 7467 8247

T: +44(0)20 7637 2582 (textphone)

E: accesscoordinator@abrsm.ac.uk

W: www.abrsm.org/specialneeds

For specimen aural repetition tests contact:

Allegro Music

T: +44(0)1885 490375

E: sales@allegro.co.uk

W: www.allegro.co.uk

Further information on getting hold of a supporting document can be obtained from:

The British Dyslexia Association

T: +44(0)845 251 9002

W: www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/

Dyslexia Action

T: +44(0)1784 222300

W: www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/

Fair access information is also available for deaf and hearing impaired candidates, blind and partially sighted candidates, candidates with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and candidates with physical disabilities

Candidates with a dual sensory impairment should make sure they have a copy of both sets of relevant guidelines.

This information has been produced in consultation with the British Dyslexia Association and is correct at the time of going to publication.