



Guidelines for candidates with disabilities & their teachers

Our policy

Each year the Associated Board examines candidates with a huge range of different needs and abilities. Because our candidates' needs differ so widely we treat each person individually, considering their needs in terms of physical access to the exam room; extra time; alternative tests; alternative formats; visual aids; communication aids and so on.

These guidelines cover several case studies, explaining the needs of the individual candidates and the provisions which people have found helpful in the past. The suggestions made are by no means exhaustive, but are simply a guide to the sorts of provisions that may be appropriate.

In addition to these guidelines the Associated Board has a specific policy for candidates with learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, and sensory impairments. Guidelines are available from the Access Coordinator (see page 4).

It is important to understand that while we are able to make provisions for the administration of the exam, e.g. extra time or alternative tests, we do not make any concessions in the marking of the exam – all candidates are treated equally.

Entering for the exam

- If you are entering for the first time it may be a good idea to speak to the Access Coordinator (see page 4) to discuss any concerns or questions you may have and agree on the best way forward.
- You need to make sure that you contact us with full details of exactly what is needed for the exam, including extra time, any alternative test formats and whether you will be bringing an extra person to help with mobility or communication. This should ideally be done before entry, and by the closing date at the latest.
- The Associated Board will then write back to you, explaining whether your requests can be met and confirming that the examiner will be fully briefed on any details we have been given.

Doctor's notes

- If you are asking for special provisions and the disability is not obvious – for example Chronic Fatigue Syndrome or Attention Deficit Disorder – you may be asked to provide a doctor's note for our records.
- Once you have provided a note we will keep a record on file and you will not be asked to provide one again.

Exam centre access

- It's a good idea to inform the Associated Board on entry if you anticipate problems with physical access to the exam centre. We will then contact you to discuss your requirements, and will advise you on the most appropriate local exam centre.

Arthritis

Arthritis can affect all kinds of people, from adult candidates to children. Candidates tend to find that arthritis affects their playing mainly in the scales and any faster pieces.

What we can do:

- Most of the time, the candidate's main concern is that the examiner should understand the challenge that they face. We are happy to pass this kind of information on to an examiner, and the examiner is always pleased to have the full picture.
- Sometimes candidates find it helpful to rest between pieces and/or scales, particularly if their arthritis is causing them pain. In such cases we are able to give 5 minutes of extra time, to allow for rest breaks.
- Finally, if stamina is an issue, a candidate might like to get the part of the exam they find most physically difficult over with first. Again, this is absolutely fine – simply let the examiner know on the day.

Fingers and hands

We have examined a significant number of candidates at the lower grades who either do not have a right or left hand, or who are missing one or more fingers on one or both of their hands. We have also heard from candidates who have conditions such as syndactyly, which can limit their finger mobility. Each individual person and their particular disability will be different, and while for some candidates Grade 1 will be the highest level they can attain, others may be able to progress to further exams.

What we can do:

- We will pass on any details you provide us with to the examiner. Examiners always appreciate having this kind of information in advance, particularly when they may need to be sensitive towards terminology during the exam or while writing the mark form.
- Candidates are welcome to bring someone with them to assist with their music books or any page turns, as long as the Associated Board is informed in advance.
- If a point is reached where it is not possible to play the syllabus repertoire at the required speed or with the right legato effect, it is possible to enter for the Performance Assessment instead. Further information is available online or from the Access Coordinator (see page 4).

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) or ME

We are aware that candidates with CFS or ME can have difficulty sustaining their performance for the full duration of the exam.

What we can do:

- The most common request is for 5 minutes of extra time, to allow the candidate to rest whenever needed. We are happy to arrange this, providing we receive the request on entry.
- We will pass on any details you provide us with to the examiner. Examiners always appreciate having this kind of information in advance, particularly when they may need to be sensitive while writing the mark form – for example, avoiding undue reference to stamina if this seems inappropriate.

Cerebral palsy

We have examined a small but significant number of candidates with cerebral palsy and have suggested changes to the administration of the exam to provide greater access.

What we can do:

- Candidates are welcome to bring someone with them to assist with mobility, both in entering and leaving the exam room, and throughout the exam if needed. You will need to inform the Associated Board in advance in this case.
- Some people with cerebral palsy find that their motor control becomes more difficult when they are under the stress of exam conditions. To accommodate this we can allow 5 minutes of extra time to allow the candidate to rest between sections if required.
- Some piano players may appreciate a chair with a back rather than a stool. If we are informed in advance we will do our best to provide this, although we cannot guarantee that it will be height-adjustable, so it may be best to bring the chair which is normally used to the exam.

Pedalling difficulties for pianists

Some piano candidates find that they are not able to use the pedals for various reasons, such as height, limited mobility, limb deficiency or amputation. With careful repertoire selection this should not be an issue until around Grade 5, where pedalling is expected. From this point on it will become increasingly difficult to communicate the composer's intentions without use of the pedal.

What we can do:

- We do have some information on pedal extensions, and various adaptations which may allow a candidate to operate the pedal with some other part of the body. Please contact the Access Coordinator for further information (see page 4).
- We will pass on any details you provide us with to the examiner. Examiners always appreciate having this kind of information in advance, particularly when they may need to be sensitive while writing the mark form.

Selective Mutism and Elective Mutism

Each session we examine some candidates who do not feel able to talk to the examiner. Whilst this is not an issue during most sections of the exam it can cause difficulty during the aural tests as candidates are normally required to give an oral response. At the lower grades we are able to make some adjustments to enable access to the exam. However, at the higher grades this becomes more difficult, as a greater and more extended oral response is needed.

What we can do:

- We will discuss the aural tests for the relevant grade with you and do our best to find an individual solution based on your needs. It is important to contact the Access Coordinator to have this discussion on or before entry as the examiner will need to know what has been decided.
- We will pass on any information you can provide to the examiner so that they are kept informed. We are happy to pass on any individual requests; for example, some candidates with this condition feel more comfortable if the examiner uses their name as much as possible, whereas others prefer not to be directly addressed in this way.
- If requested we can also inform the steward of the situation so that they know what to expect.

Performance Assessment

The Performance Assessment is designed for adults and for younger musicians who are unable to access graded exams. It is an opportunity to have prepared work assessed by a professional musician, and to receive a constructive written report immediately after the assessment. The Performance Assessment is ideal for candidates who are unable to take an exam for reasons of fatigue or anxiety, or who are physically unable to fulfil the syllabus requirements.

For further information on this assessment please visit our website or contact the Access Coordinator for a leaflet.

Further information

Access Coordinator, ABRSM, 24 Portland Place, London W1B 1LU

telephone: +44 (0)20 7467 8247

textphone: +44 (0)20 7637 2582

e-mail: accesscoordinator@abrsm.ac.uk

Guidelines are also available for blind and partially sighted candidates, deaf and hearing impaired candidates, candidates with dyslexia or other learning difficulties and candidates with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD).

Useful contacts

A-Leg-Gro PED (footrest/pedal makers)
+44 (0)20 8954 4058

Arthritis Research Campaign (ARC)
+44 (0)870 850 5000
+44 (0)1246 558033

Limbless Association
+44 (0)20 8788 1777 Ext. 25

ME Association
+44 (0)870 444 1835

Reach – The Association for Children
with Hand or Arm Deficiency
+44 (0)845 1306225

Remap – equipment for disabled people
+44 (0)845 1300456

Scope
+44 (0)808 800 3333

Tourette Syndrome Association
+44 (0)845 458 1252

All information correct at time of going to press. Updates will be posted on the website at www.abrsm.org