

# Diploma Exam: Study Guide

For the examination, you will be expected to engage in intelligent conversation about your pieces with the examiners. You need to be able to give extended (i.e. more than just one or two word) answers to questions on the following topics:

- The title of each piece, including any subtitles or identification numbers.  
Did the composer write other pieces for your instrument with this title? In this key?  
Which other composers have written works with this title?
- The key and formal structure (including modulations and treatment of main themes) of each piece. Is there anything unusual about the formal structure?
- Any signs or terms used in each piece.
- The life of each composer (including places of residence, training or other influences, positions held, significant personal events, etc.).
- The repertoire of each composer, with particular focus on works for your instrument, as well as significant works of other genres. Where does this piece fit into the overall output of the composer (is it an early, middle or late work)?
- Characteristics of the composer's style.  
Is this piece typical?
- The period and stylistic characteristics of each piece.  
Is this piece typical of the general style of the period?
- The historical development of the your instrument.  
If the piece was composed for an older instrument, how would that instrument differ from the modern version?

To do this, you need to study the score of each piece very carefully, and also research the following areas:

- Composers.
- Musical periods and their stylistic characteristics.
- Development of your instrument.

You should use the following sources:

- General encyclopaedias.
- Music dictionaries - *The New Grove* is a very good source of information on the composers' repertoire.
- Text books from your school music courses.
- CD liner notes and concert program notes.
- The internet (but don't believe everything you read!).

# Important points for exam preparation

- Read as widely as you can, and analyse the pieces in as much detail as you can. But don't get too bogged down in small details. Make summaries of the most important things you want to be able to mention (no more than 6 points per topic area).
- Try to show that you understand what you are talking about, rather than just repeating information you have read somewhere. Use your own words if possible.
- Always relate what you have read back to the pieces that you are playing. The music will be in front of you when you are discussing each piece. Use concrete examples rather than abstract generalisations.
- Practise discussing the main features of the form (keys, themes, etc.) of each movement or piece in about five sentences. Be clear about what you think are the most important details to point out. Try to have someone listen to you do this, or else record yourself.

## What should be memorised?

- Bar numbers? The examiners are not interested in you memorising bar numbers - show on the music the passage you are talking about.
- Dates? You should memorise key dates such as composer's birth/death, and if possible the year your piece was written. Other dates, including birth/death of contemporary composers, don't need to be memorised (though they help to put your composer/piece in context, so don't ignore them altogether).
- Cadences? The examiner will probably not ask you specific or detailed questions about the cadences in your pieces. You certainly won't be expected to point out every cadence. But you should be aware of where they occur, because they often mark important structural points or key changes. Cadences provide the proof that the music has arrived in a new key.
- Special chords and harmonic techniques? Even more important than being able to name the chord or technique is being able to explain why it was used. For instance:
  - Chromatic chords like Neapolitan or Augmented 6ths add richness to the harmony, and usually lead to the dominant (or the tonic), so they give the harmony a clear sense of direction.
  - Chords that move in a circle of 5ths also give the harmony a clear sense of direction.
  - Diminished 7th chords might be used to create a sense of drama or mystery.
  - Dominant pedal points create a sense of excitement or expectation.
  - Tonic pedal points clarify the harmony.
  - Suspensions make the music more expressive by creating then releasing tension.
- Older instruments? Unless you are technically minded, you don't really need to go into great technical detail about older instruments. Be able to explain the main differences in construction and tone if you are playing a piece that would have been written for an older instrument. It is only necessary to discuss instruments that relate to the pieces you are playing.
- Repertoire? This is an area that lets a lot of students down. Make sure you have memorised the other important works that the composer wrote for your instrument (try to be able to list at least 6, especially for the major composers). Also be aware of their other important works, particularly for Licentiate students.
- Stylistic characteristics? Another important area that can be difficult. Think about what are the main features that distinguish each piece you play from the others.