



Tips for general knowledge

General Knowledge, for some teachers, can be a vexing part of exam preparation.

There is the uncertainty of what level of detail needs to be prepared, how much detail the student will retain, and what and how much the examiner will ask the student. It's my practice to encourage my own students, no matter what age or level of experience, to understand and be able to explain everything on the page.

For examination purposes the expectations are listed on page xiv of the *Manual of Syllabuses*. Remember that General Knowledge is not examinable on Extra List pieces and for non-pianists the questions will be taken from the soloist's part in Level 1 and the accompanist's part at Level 2.

Examination requirements aside though I tend to teach, as many do, more than syllabus requirements. To begin I find it helpful to have students look at the title of the piece and consider how it is reflected in the music. That helps develop knowledge of not only the meaning of titles, but also what the implications of the title are in terms of musical characteristics, especially the form of the piece. Regarding form, students should also know where sectional divisions are and how they are articulated musically. Some pieces may have two or three sections but might not necessarily be in binary or ternary form. I think this is an important distinction. In grades 2, 3 and 4 students will need to know the form and how it breaks down in terms of sections. However, I have found it helpful to explain set forms as early as possible simply because students encounter them so often.

Knowledge of keys is important, but working through technical work and theory makes the subsequent understanding of modulations, and for example use of modes and pentatonic scales much easier. Even though not immediately examinable I have found it helpful for young students to be taught about scales other than diatonic scales from the outset.

Ultimately of course students need to be able to tell the examiner the nationality and the time in which the composer lived; explain dynamics, time signatures, signs and terms, ornaments and where dance forms are used and a little about the character of each dance. The distinguishing features of the Baroque, Classical or Romantic periods are also eventually examinable together with biographical knowledge of composers and a steady accumulation of such knowledge is very rewarding and more likely to be remembered.

In trying hard to keep students engaged with music it can help tremendously if they have the deeper understanding of the pieces they are playing and that deeper understanding often tends to spring from their general knowledge.

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