

“A” is for Honours



The AMEB grading criteria for A+ (High Distinction) and A (Honours) require candidates to demonstrate an ‘outstanding’ or ‘superior level of achievement ... in all sections.’ Many students presenting for examination perform their pieces very well but appear under prepared in the areas of Technical Work, Sight Reading, Aural Tests and/or General Knowledge. There are, however, many ways in which this can be avoided.

Technical Work

It is advisable to encourage students’ familiarity with a wider selection of scales and arpeggios than those actually required by the syllabus. Of the prescribed parallel keys, for example, relative majors and minors might be added, and/or keys of the selected repertoire. Nearer to the time, ‘exam scales’ may then be polished so that absolute fluency and correct tempi are attained.

Sight Reading

Please note Anna Lester’s very helpful advice on the next page. Remember, sight reading is easily practised in association with the learning of new pieces, where unfamiliar passages can be read hands separately, with the teacher playing the other stave. Much can also be achieved by encouraging students to (1) maintain a strict, slow tempo, (2) keep their eyes on the music (i.e. measuring distances without looking at the keyboard), and (3) start a piece from any given point, thus preventing over-reliance on muscle memory.

Aural Tests

For those weak in this area training should occur regularly, beginning with tests less difficult than those required for the Grade in question. In order to prevent students from believing that they are incapable or inadequate, one might begin by repeating tests which they can easily pass.

General Knowledge

Keys and modulations are best discussed in the early stages of preparation, and should be understood as an integral part of the learning process. In cases where these are explained or written in by the teacher at the last minute, students can experience an aversion to theoretical analysis instead of strengthening their aural perception.

Dr Diana Weekes
AMEB Piano Examiner