TRINITY
COLLEGE LONDON

A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO PREPARING FOR DIGITAL MUSIC EXAMS

INTRODUCTION

Entering for digital music exams is a whole new experience for most students who have probably never filmed their work for assessment before. So how can you get the best from digital exams, especially if you can't meet with your teacher in-person before or during the filming?

We asked some students who have taken digital music exams to share their advice on preparing for a submission for Digital Grades and Diplomas. Follow their guidance to help yourself feel comfortable and confident about digital exams, perform to the best of your ability and shine even when your teacher can't be there.

FIFTEEN TOP TIPS FOR STUDENTS

We asked the students for their advice on entering for Digital Grades & Diplomas. Here are their top tips:

1. Check out your syllabus to make sure you have completed everything you need for your exam. You can find these on the website: **trinitycollege.com/dgd**

2. Try filming your exam on different devices, if you have them (e.g. smartphone, tablet, webcam) to see which captures the best recording of your performance. Make sure that you, and anyone helping you, are familiar with the chosen recording device and that it has plenty of battery life and storage capacity.

3. Try doing some practice recording sessions at least a week beforehand. Watch the videos back so you can review your performance and make any changes you want to before you record your final take.

4. Make sure the performance space is well lit. Examiners need to see faces, hands and musical instruments clearly. Make sure your instrument is in full view and that your hands and feet can be seen (if you are using them).

5. You can film your performance anywhere (COVID-19 restrictions permitting) - at home, school, a hall or in your teacher's studio. Make sure though that it's a place with sufficient space to perform and film your performance and a place where you won't be disturbed by other people or background noise.

Recording your exam

6. Your exam performance must be filmed in one continuous take. It's fine to start the recording again if something doesn't go to plan, but you do not need to do dozens of takes. Examiners are not looking for perfection; they want to see your performance.

7. Make sure that you have your book(s) in front of you where it can be seen from the camera and also make sure you have everything you might need before you start recording – perhaps some water, and a clock for example.

8. Candidates should treat the recording device as a member of their audience. The examiner isn't looking for the specialised techniques of 'performing for camera' and candidates do not need to focus their performance on the camera alone: play to the room!

9. You can have an audience if you would like - but remember they must remain silent throughout the recording. Don't forget to turn off all mobile phones too.

10. There's no need to rush. Although you need to keep the camera running throughout the recording, you can pause between each piece to gather your thoughts, check your posture, take a breath, sip some water, or to simply smile! Remember it's like being on stage - so enjoy the performance and capture your audience's imagination.

Uploading your exam

11. Now that you have recorded your exam this is a good time to apply for your exam - check out how to apply on our website **trinitycollege.com/dgd**

12. Within a week after applying for the exam you will receive an email with your login details, so you can upload your exam for your examiner. Once you receive these please login to your exam portal.

13. You (and if you are under 18 the adult supporting you) should watch the recording back before uploading, to make sure it meets all the rules (see the Recording and submission requirements).

14. Label the recording and complete the submission information form properly so the examiner can easily see who they're watching and what exam is being taken.

> "Digital exams offer an exciting new way to complete your exam for the teacher and the student. It's great to be able to review the video with your teacher before you submit, and you can also learn so much from seeing your performance!"
>
> *Peter Buckby ,*
> *Piano and singing teacher*

15. Now it is time to upload your performance - follow the onscreen guidance or take a look at our YouTube channel, **www.youtube.com/TrinityVideoChannel** where you will not only find help on how to upload but also lots of other great resources to watch.

WHAT STUDENTS ARE ASKING ABOUT DIGITAL EXAMS

Q. Do I have to be with my teacher when I'm filming my exam performance?

A. No. Often the teacher isn't present during the filming session. Candidates can record their exam performance independently, although most prefer to have someone (usually a parent, sibling, friend or teacher) with them to assist with recording, play accompaniment or backing tracks, give verbal prompts during technical exercises or to manage the exam space.

In fact, depending on the syllabus they are taking, candidates can have more than one person supporting them (COVID-19 restrictions permitting). For music grades this could be someone to operate the recording equipment alongside an accompanist. It doesn't matter if any helpers are in shot, as long as the candidate can be clearly seen throughout the video.

Q. What if I'm nervous of being on camera?

A. It's definitely a new world for us all, using video to communicate in many more ways than before. If you are nervous on camera perhaps ask someone to try recording you when you are not expecting it - then you can look back at the video and you may surprise yourself with how well you have done when you were not aware of the camera! As you record more you will grow in confidence and you may find in time that the camera doesn't bother you at all.

Q. When I try and record I keep making mistakes that I don't normally make. Do you have any advice?

A. Often your best recording comes in your earlier takes. Try not to do dozens of recordings as often this is not helpful. If it's not going well as you record maybe take a break or plan to record another day. Remember examiners are not looking for perfection, so don't stress.

Q. Do I have to get dressed-up when doing my recording?

A. There is no requirement to get dressed-up for the exam, but you are welcome to if you want to. Just make sure you feel comfortable and relaxed for the performance, that's more important.

Q. What does the examiner need to be able to see on the film?

A. The examiner needs to be able to see you and your instrument, if you are using one. For example, if you are playing drums the examiner needs to see your hands but also your footwork too. Try to film from an angle where your performance is clear - for example when playing piano - make sure all the keys can be seen or when you are playing violin make sure that the whole instrument, including the bow is clear for the examiner to see.

Q. What if the video recording of the exam performance exceeds the 1GB limit?

A. If your recording is larger than 1GB, it can easily be compressed using any compression tool or app. There are lots available, including:

- VLC media player: **www.videolan.org/vlc**
- Video Transcoder, from the Google Play App Store for Android devices,
- Compress Videos and Resize Video, from the Apple App Store for iPhone, iPad or iOS.

Q. How long will it be before I receive my result?

A. Your result will be on your portal within around 2 weeks* of the date you submitted your video. Don't forget to check your portal to get your result.

*referrals will take longer

RECORDING AND SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Before a candidate's exam video is uploaded to the Trinity website, you or another adult should watch it back to check:

- It is one continuous recording of all performance pieces and exercises, with no pauses, edits or post-production effects

- The candidate remains in shot at all times, with their face, hands and any musical instrument clearly visible

- The candidate's performance is audible throughout and they can be seen clearly at all times

- The recording file is labelled with the candidate's name, subject (and instrument for music) and grade/diploma level

- The file size is not more than 1GB (larger videos can be compressed using a compression tool or app).

- Every candidate must also complete and return a 'Submission Information' form. For some exams they need to supply other documentation too. Consult the relevant subject or syllabus overview pages via **www.trinitycollege.com/dgd** for the full checklist of items to submit.

FOUR KEY POINTS FOR MUSIC DIGITAL GRADES AND DIPLOMAS

1. Any accompaniment or backing track needs to be in the right position and at the right volume for your performance to be heard by the examiner. Experiment in advance by making recordings using different positions and volume levels to decide which will work best for the exam.

2. Technical exercises for Classical and Jazz Digital Grades may be a little different to those you're used to in face-to-face exams, so familiarise yourself with them and make sure you understand what is required. Our website has downloadable PDFs of the exercises for each instrument: **www.trinitycollege. com/qualifications/music/digital-music-grades/ classical-jazz-digital-grades/technical-work**

   Choose a selection of technical exercises and practise these for the exam. It's important to carefully review the particular requirements for the exercises as in some situations you will be required to perform from memory, with your music closed and music stand set aside. In this situation it's fine to have a reference sheet of the requirements in view; just make sure to show it clearly to the camera before starting.

3. We've developed specific filming guidance for each instrument, detailing, for example, how to film fingers on a keyboard or hands and feet at a drum kit. Find the relevant guidance for your instrument in the Digital Music Grades section of the Trinity website at **www.trinitycollege.com/resource/?id=9163**. Read the guidance in advance of filming and share with whoever will be supporting you to film your performance, to make sure you can meet all the requirements.

4. Whilst there are no required supporting tests or session skills for the Classical and Jazz and Rock & Pop Digital Grades, it is important to remember that the underlying musicianship skills for these tasks are still being assessed under the new 'Overall Performance' criteria and are worth up to 20 marks to candidates. We have a useful blog post that explains how this is assessed at **www.trinitycollege. com/page/digital-grades-diplomas/overall-performance-criteria**

> **Want to know more about Trinity's Digital Grades and Diplomas?**
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> Visit **www.trinitycollege.com/dgd** and follow the links for detailed information about music Digital Grades and Diplomas.

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