

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO PREPARING STUDENTS FOR DIGITAL EXAMS



INTRODUCTION

Entering candidates for digital music and drama exams may be a new experience for teachers, and many students have never filmed their work for assessment before. So how can you both get the best from digital exams, particularly if you won't be there in-person before or during the filming?

We asked drama teacher Kate Somerby and music teacher Marie McNally – both experienced Trinity examiners – to share their expert advice on entering candidates for Digital Grades and Diplomas. Follow their guidance to help your students feel comfortable and confident about the new digital exams, perform to the best of their ability and shine even if you aren't there for the recording.



TWELVE TOP TIPS FOR TEACHERS

We asked Kate and Marie for their advice on entering candidates for Digital Grades and Diplomas. Here are their top tips:

1. Read the syllabus and instructions carefully – and discuss the key points with the candidate – to be sure they can meet all the exam criteria and guidelines for recording and uploading.
2. Encourage the candidate to try different devices, if they have them (e.g. smartphone, tablet, webcam) in advance to see which gives the best recording of their performance.
3. Make sure the candidate, and anyone helping them, is familiar with their chosen recording device before the planned filming session, and that it has plenty of battery life and storage capacity.
4. Suggest that the candidate, and whoever is supporting them, has some practice recording sessions at least a week beforehand. Encourage them to watch the videos back and share them with you to identify areas for improvement, both in their performance and in their use of recording technology. A final run-through before the planned filming session can be helpful too.
5. Candidates can film their performance anywhere (COVID restrictions permitting) – at home, school, a hall or a teacher's studio. They should choose a place with sufficient space to perform and a non-distracting background, where they won't be disturbed by other family members, pets or background noise.
6. Make sure the performance space is well lit. Examiners need to see faces, hands and musical instruments clearly.
7. An exam performance must be filmed in one continuous take, so candidates should have everything they might need with them before they start recording – perhaps a drink, clock and any props for a drama exam, or sheet music and a stand for a music exam. Turn all mobile phones off.
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. There's no need to rush. Although candidates need to keep the camera running throughout the recording, they can pause between each piece to gather their thoughts, check their posture, take a breath, sip some water, or simply smile!
10. It's fine to start the recording again if something doesn't go to plan, but students don't need to do dozens of takes. Examiners aren't looking for perfection; they want to see a student's potential.
11. The candidate and an adult supporting them should watch the entire examination recording back before uploading, to make sure it meets all the rules ('Recording and submission requirements' below). Label the recording and supporting documents properly so the examiner can easily see who they're watching and what exam they're taking.
12. Enjoy the process! Digital exams may not be what most of us are used to, but there's something magical about capturing a performance and sharing it with others, and it's a key part of being a performer in the 21st century.

'Digital performance is here to stay, and the benefits are huge. There's rich experience to be gained from engaging in video and online performance, so encourage your students to take every opportunity.'

*Marie McNally,
Trinity music examiner*

WHAT TEACHERS ARE ASKING ABOUT DIGITAL EXAMS

Q. Do I have to be with my students when they're filming their exam performances?

A. No. Often the teacher isn't present during the filming session, especially if the student is at home. 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 manage the exam space.

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

Q. Is there a specific order that candidates have to perform their pieces and technical work in?

A. Candidates for Music Digital Grades and Diplomas can choose to start with either their pieces or technical – just indicate the order they choose on the 'Submission Information' form. Drama candidates should follow the structure laid out in the specification - performance pieces, Key Skills

Tasks and finally the Reflection task questions. The candidate may choose which order their performance pieces should go and this needs to be indicated on the 'Submission Information' form.

Q. What if my student's usual accompanist can't be at the filming?

A. Although we generally recommend live accompaniment for Classical, Jazz and musical theatre grades, commercial backing tracks or pre-recorded accompaniment are allowed if government restrictions prevent an accompanist from attending the filming. Check the Special Arrangements guidelines on the website to make sure you understand what you're allowed to do.

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 a range of tools and apps available to compress files.

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 supporting tasks, 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 – see left).
- ▶ 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.

THREE KEY POINTS FOR DRAMA DIGITAL GRADES AND DIPLOMAS



1. Every two-weeks we share Key Skills Tasks for Trinity's drama Digital Grades and Diplomas on our website at www.trinitycollege.com/qualifications/digital/digital-grades-diplomas/digital-drama-grades-key-skills-tasks. Candidates must respond to the tasks posted on the site in the two-week period that they record and upload their exam performance. You can work through the fortnightly tasks with your students in the run up to entering them, as part of their exam preparation.
2. As in face-to-face drama exams, candidates in digital exams are expected to reflect on the performances they have just given and offer impromptu responses to set questions. Prepare for this reflection task using questions found in the 'Exam guidance' section of each Digital graded exam syllabus specification, available to download from www.trinitycollege.com/qualifications/digital/digital-grades-diplomas/drama-grades-and-certificates.
3. Encourage the candidate to practice performing to the whole room, not just the camera. They might prefer to have one or more people in the room to be their audience during the recording, with the camera placed centrally.
www.trinitycollege.com/qualifications/digital/digital-grades-diplomas/record.

'As examiners, we're using exactly the same standards, assessment criteria and attainment descriptors in these new digital exams as we do in face-to-face exams.'

*Kate Somerby,
Trinity drama examiner*



FIVE KEY POINTS FOR MUSIC DIGITAL GRADES AND DIPLOMAS

1. When candidates are recording their performance, make sure that they have their book(s) in front of them where it can be seen from the camera and also make sure they have everything they might need before they start recording – perhaps some water, and a clock for example.
2. Any accompaniment or backing track needs to be in the right position and at the right volume for the candidate's 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.
3. Technical exercises for Classical and Jazz 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 the candidate understands them too. 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
4. 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. Discuss the guidance in advance with the candidate, and whoever will be supporting them to film their performance, to make sure they can meet all the requirements.
5. 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 the candidate. We have a useful blog post that explains how this is assessed at www.trinitycollege.com/page/digital-grades-diplomas/overall-performance-criteria

Together, 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 the candidate will be required to perform from memory, with their music closed and music stand set aside. In this situation it's fine to have a reference sheet

Want to know more about Trinity's Digital Grades and Diplomas?

Visit www.trinitycollege.com/dgd and follow the links for detailed information about music and drama Digital Grades and Diplomas.

