

## **DMA PIANO LITERATURE EXAM: STUDY GUIDE - PAGE 1/3**

### **TO THE DMA CANDIDATES IN PIANO PERFORMANCE:**

Under the guidelines of the DMA Program at Peabody Conservatory, the Piano Literature Exam fulfills the Major Field Exam portion for DMA candidacy. This exam will assess your recognition and general knowledge of a broad range of piano literature beginning with Baroque keyboard works to more frequently programmed works for piano by contemporary composers of today. Preparation for this exam will ideally reinforce your knowledge of mainstream literature and widen your exposure to more diverse repertoire. The exam is divided into three parts: Short Answer, Listening, and Score Identification. You will have three hours to take this exam. The exam is scored on a Pass/Fail basis (75% and above = Pass). There is no limit to the number of times that you can take this exam.

The amount of music for piano is certainly daunting and vast, but the purpose of this exam is not to force you to research every corner of obscure piano repertoire and memorize trifling facts. Rather, it is to broaden your expertise in the field through a comprehensive survey of the literature and prepare you for making musically informed decisions. Ideally, the knowledge you gain from the preparation for this exam will be of practical service to you as you embark on your careers—whether that means judging a competition, assigning repertoire, deciding on your own program, or teaching a course on piano literature. This guide explains the structure of the exam along with tips for studying. Accompanying the guide are a repertoire list and sample exam to aid you in your preparation.

Happy studying!

Piano Department  
Peabody Conservatory

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## **EXAM STRUCTURE AND TIPS**

(REFER TO SAMPLE EXAM FOR INSTRUCTIONS AND TYPES OF QUESTIONS)

### **Part One - Short Answer**

Below are some of the most common types of questions that appear on the Short Answer portion of the Piano Literature exam. In general, you will either be asked to provide facts in the form of short answers based on the given information or to generate a list of answers based on the given parameters. For example:

1. Identify the **composer**, given a selection of pieces, which may include the title, key of work, and/or number of works in a particular genre.
2. Identify the **keys** of certain movements and/or works, given the title/genre of the work.
3. List the **titles** of major works/selection of works by a composer.
4. List the **catalog numbers** of works/selections of works by a composer.
5. List **composers** who were *contemporaries* of each other in any time period.
6. List **works** of a certain time period or by a certain group of composers.
7. List **editors** (not publishers) of a composer's works.

### **Part Two - Listening**

1. Excerpts are played only once.
2. Excerpts are not random segments of a piece. They are chosen to exhibit characteristics of the work that enable identification. In other words, you can expect to hear main themes (though not always from the first movement) and/or idiosyncrasies of the composer's pianistic writing/compositional techniques.
3. Depending on the relative importance of the work in the literature, the excerpt may be shorter or longer. For example, for a Chopin etude, you can expect to hear 5 to 10 seconds of the excerpt, though not necessarily starting from the beginning. With a more difficult work to identify (e.g. Bartok's Second Piano Concerto), you may hear 20 to 30 seconds of the excerpt with several iterations of the main themes to help you identify the work.

### **Part Three - Score ID (identification)**

1. In order to work efficiently, it is highly suggested that you scan all the scores and answer the ones that you can immediately identify. After this, go back and study the excerpts for which you have an idea but are not completely sure. Leave the excerpts unknown to you for last, and always attempt to make your best educated guess. Answers that are incorrect but demonstrate stylistic knowledge may receive partial credit.

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2. For scores completely unknown to you, try to identify the most general musical elements that you see. What are the stylistic characteristics of the excerpt (e.g. romantic, neoclassical, atonal, etc.)? What is the musical texture (e.g. polyphonic, melody/accompaniment, etc.)? How is the pianistic writing (e.g. sparse, virtuosic, etc.)? Answering these types of questions will help you narrow down the possibilities. The better you get at identifying and describing the musical elements of the excerpt, the closer you are to making an educated guess.

### **General Study Tips**

1. Make a timeline of composer dates, their nationalities, and composition dates of significant piano works from the repertoire list. Historical and stylistic contexts are just as useful as knowing individual facts.
2. Create questions for yourselves that involve generating lists of titles of works, catalog numbers, composers, editors, etc. Create parameters for these questions, i.e. time periods, genre, keys, etc., in order to simulate the types of questions you may be asked. For example, name all the keys of the Rachmaninoff works for piano and orchestra. Or, name 15 piano works by at least 10 living composers.
3. Study in groups and prepare blind listening and score identification examples for each other.
4. Practice making educated guesses about blind musical examples by using what you already know about musical style and compositional characteristics of individual composers. Being able to infer answers and justify your arguments are at the heart of succeeding on this exam since you will most certainly come across questions for which you have no concrete answer.
5. Avoid leaving questions blank. Partial credit may be given if some of the answer that you provide is correct.
6. **Above all, study at the piano the pieces in bold type on the Repertoire List. This will help you immensely for the Listening and Score ID sections.** Only by playing the work can you become familiar with the music and the composer's idiomatic writing.

### **Repertoire List**

The repertoire list attempts to be comprehensive in terms of standard repertoire for pianists. It consists of solo (listed first), concerto, and in some instances, two-piano works. It also includes composers who may only have written a few works or are less played, but yet who made a significant contribution to the repertoire and development of piano music. Over time, this list will be updated and revised. All pieces in **bold** type are listed first and may appear on the Listening and/or the Score ID sections. Pieces in both bold and regular fonts may appear on the Short Answer section. You will not be asked to identify pieces in regular font in either the Listening or Score ID, but you should study them for the Short Answer section. **N.B.** For composers for whom only "various works" is listed, you should still acquaint yourselves with their dates, nationality, significant works, and genres.