

<https://gb.abrsm.org/pt/exam-booking/specific-needs/dyslexia-dyspraxia-or-other-learning-difficulties/>

Dyslexia, dyspraxia or other learning difficulties

These guidelines contain information for candidates with dyslexia, dyspraxia or other specific learning difficulties (SpLD). For convenience we use the term 'SpLD' throughout these guidelines to cover people with dyslexia, dyspraxia, Irlen syndrome, processing difficulties and other specific learning difficulties.

Before reading these guidelines, we recommend you also read our [general information for candidates with specific needs](#).

ABRSM established these provisions for candidates with SpLDs in consultation with the [British Dyslexia Association](#), who have also provided valuable suggestions for the revision of these guidelines.

Preparing for an exam

You should review the information in these guidelines before making an exam entry.

If you have questions or specific requirements that are not catered for in these guidelines, please [contact the access coordinator](#).

Examples of reasonable adjustments

Typical reasonable adjustments for candidates with SpLDs include:

- Five minutes of extra examining time to be used as necessary
- Of these five minutes, up to three minutes to study the sight-reading test
- Use of the scale book or lyrics for reference purposes
- Alternative arrangements for aural tests if required
- Extra time in Theory exams

All ABRSM examiners have access to basic information relating to SpLDs and how this might affect a candidate taking an exam. In addition, you are welcome to supply any further information you think would be helpful for the examiner to know in advance.

It is important to understand that while we are able to make provisions for the administration of the exam, e.g. extra time or alternative tests, we are not able to make any concessions in the marking – all candidates will be treated equally.

Entering for the exam

Please ensure you select the most relevant access code on the entry form. You can see a full list of

available access codes on the specific needs page. The most common access codes for candidates with SpLD are shown below.

It is important that you select the relevant access code for each exam even if you have requested access arrangements or reasonable adjustments previously.

If none of the access codes cover your specific needs or you have questions about the reasonable adjustments to which you are entitled, please [contact the access coordinator](#) as early as possible.

Please note that ABRSM cannot guarantee to provide reasonable adjustments where we are notified after the published closing date.

Access codes

D – candidates who have an SpLD

N – candidates who have an SpLD and who require an enlarged sight-reading test

P – candidates who have an SpLD and who require a modified print sight-reading test

Supporting evidence

In order to grant reasonable adjustments, ABRSM requires appropriate supporting evidence. Please review the requirements for supporting evidence in our [general information for candidates with specific needs](#).

General

On the day

Some candidates with SpLDs may feel especially nervous or anxious in an exam situation and examiners will be aware of this. Similarly, examiners know that some SpLDs may mean that candidates have difficulty with coordination and concentration. The extra time allowed will help examiners to take the time to ensure that you do not feel rushed.

Examiners have been asked to:

- Speak slowly, clearly and concisely, allowing time for candidates to process the information and instructions
- Repeat any instructions if asked or, if candidates are slow in responding, to allow five seconds before prompting
- Understand that candidates can become muddled with their own words when asked to respond to questions
- Be aware that memory lapses may occur in any section of the exam

Time

Examiners will be aware that candidates may either need reassurance that there is plenty of time for the exam, or alternatively may need firm guidance regarding time remaining. You may bring a timer of your choice to the exam if needed.

Written comments

Marks will always reflect the standard of your performance. However, examiners will aim to avoid comments that may draw undue attention to your specific needs and any access arrangements.

Graded music exams

Extra time

You will have an extra five minutes added to the exam to use as necessary.

Extra time for sight-reading

You may use up to three minutes of the extra time to study the sight-reading test instead of the usual half-minute. You are welcome to indicate that you are ready to play before the three minutes has elapsed, but the examiner will not ask you to play before this time.

Supporting evidence for this reasonable adjustment will be required.

Enlarged print tests

ABRSM produces enlarged tests with a 14mm stave on cream paper by default.

Modified print tests

Rather than a straightforward enlargement, ABRSM can make further modifications, e.g. larger note-heads and beaming, or a larger font for performance directions.

If you require modified stave notation, you should send a covering letter at the time of entry along with a sample of the notation required. Please include details of all typographical specifications.

You can email musical examples written in Sibelius to accesscoordinator@abrsm.ac.uk.

Please be aware that we can produce papers on either A4 or A3, but you will need to consider how the font and staff size will impact on the paper size needed. Further information on modified stave notation (MSN) can be found in the contact information on this page.

- Candidates who have an SpLD and who require enlarged print should select code **N**
- Candidates who have an SpLD and who require modified print should select code **P**

Sight-reading tests on coloured paper

If you require tests on coloured paper you should indicate this by [contacting the access coordinator](#) before the published entry deadline. You will need to post three sheets of the required paper to ABRSM at the time of entry.

Sight-reading tests on separate sheets

If you require tests reproduced on a separate sheet of paper, you should indicate this by [contacting the access coordinator](#) before the published entry deadline.

Tinted overlays

You are welcome to use a tinted overlay for any part of the exam. Examiners will be aware that candidates may lose their place and have particular difficulty finding their place again.

Use of enlarged or modified scores in exams

You are welcome to use your own enlarge or modified print copies in the exam provided you bring the original with you. This provision is made under the [Code of Fair Practice published by the MPA](#), which allows you to make an accessible copy for your own use. No prior permission is required.

Aural repetition in place of sight-reading

This test may be a more appropriate alternative for some candidates with severe learning difficulties. We advise that you consult the specimen tests before selecting this provision to ensure that this is a suitable option.

The aural repetition test consists of a short passage played three times on the piano by the examiner, who will first play and name the key-chord and starting note, and indicate the tempo before asking you to repeat the passage on your instrument. You will be given a short amount of time to try out the test following the second and final playing. You can obtain specimen tests from the [access coordinator](#).

This alternative is not a standard arrangement and is considered on an individual basis. If you would like to be considered for this alternative, you will need to include the standard D code on the entry form and then send an email requesting this provision to the access coordinator. Supporting evidence will be required for this reasonable adjustment.

Organ, Trumpet, Horn and Harpsichord exams

These exams involve either a transposition exercise or a figured bass realisation. The extra time will be split between the sight-reading and these additional tests.

Scales

Scale book

Candidates who have an SpLD may take the scale manual into the exam room for reference only. This means that you may have the scale book open on a music stand and glance over if necessary. If the examiner deems you to be reading from the music, you will not be disqualified but neither will you be able to achieve full marks for this section. No prior permission is required.

Replays

Examiners will be aware that a candidate may forget which scale they are playing, and will allow you a replay. Examiners will also be aware that candidates may need some processing time to recall the key signature and finger patterns required. No penalty will be made for a lack of 'prompt' responses. If you need to replay numerous scales, however, this may impact on the mark awarded.

Right and left

Examiners have been asked not to refer to ‘right hand’ or ‘left hand’ scales but to ‘this hand’ or ‘the other hand’, demonstrating if necessary.

Aural tests

Consistency

Every examiner will follow the rubric printed in the new *Specimen Aural Tests* books, thus avoiding any variations in the way in which the aural tests are delivered.

Making notes

For tests requiring candidates to remember what they have been asked before the playing of a musical extract (as in the C or D test, depending on the grade), you will be allowed to take a pencil and piece of paper into the exam room to make a note of which features you need to listen for – making you less reliant on your short-term memory. The examiner will collect this piece of paper at the end of the exam.

Additional attempts

Examiners may allow an additional attempt at the aural tests if they consider there is reason to do so, with no penalty. Any further attempts may be allowed at the examiner’s discretion. Where there is significant hesitation on the part of the candidate, the examiner will be ready to prompt, where appropriate, though this will affect the assessment.

Large or modified print tests

If you have requested large or modified print notation sight-reading, you will automatically receive aural tests in the same format.

Order of the exam

Examiners will be aware that the order in which the various sections of the exam are attempted may affect candidates with an SpLD. You may notify the examiner on the day of your preferred order, provided that it is logistically feasible – for example, it is better that elements requiring an accompanist are adjacent to cause minimum disruption to both candidate and examiner.

Singing exams

Candidates with an SpLD may bring a copy of the words of their songs for reference only. Please be aware that reference to the words that is deemed to inhibit communication will mean that you may not be able to achieve the highest marks for your songs. Supporting evidence for this reasonable adjustment is required.

Prep Test

Candidates with an SpLD will not be required to play their exercises from memory. No prior permission is required for this provision.

Music Theory

Extra time

Candidates with an SpLD are entitled to additional time for the completion of each exam as follows:

Grades 1–3 30 minutes extra

Grades 4–5 40 minutes extra

Grades 6–8 60 minutes extra

Supporting evidence for this reasonable adjustment is required.

Coloured papers

You may request a Theory paper printed on blue, green, pink or yellow paper. If you require this, you should indicate this by [contacting the access coordinator](#) before the published entry deadline.

Accuracy

Candidates with an SpLD will not lose marks for incorrect spelling and grammar, providing the meaning is clear.

Lower grades

Examiners are aware that copying out poses particular difficulties for some candidates with SpLDs, but at the lower grades where this skill itself is assessed, all candidates are asked to manage as best they can.

Higher grades

Where the skill being assessed is primarily that of continuing a melody based on a given opening, you may ignore the instruction to copy out the given material without a penalty.

Amanuensis

Candidates who are unable to access printed material or write down their answers may use an amanuensis to act as a reader, a scribe, or both. Please review the information in our [guidelines for candidates using an amanuensis](#).

If you require this reasonable adjustment, please ensure you add code A to the entry form.

If you require an amanuensis, you must contact the Theory team by phone on +44 (0)20 7467 8270 or [send them an email](#) prior to entry. You must include a covering letter with the entry form.

Performance Assessment

Candidates whose needs cannot be met within the graded exam system may take the [Performance Assessment](#). In this assessment, you can play your own choice of repertoire and will receive a written report containing constructive comments and advice from an examiner.

There is no pass or fail for this assessment, and no assessment criteria. You should include a written statement with the entry detailing your specific needs (this is essential if the candidate is under 18) so that the information can be passed on to the examiner.

ARSM

ARSM involves no supporting tests or anything that requires candidates to respond to questions from the examiner, so extra-time allowances for candidates with an SpLD are not normally needed.

However, if you have access requirements that the examiner should be aware of, please [contact the access coordinator](#) at the time of entry with the relevant details. We will then liaise with the applicant, the examiner and the exam venue to ensure that all appropriate arrangements are made.

Diplomas (DipABRSM, LRSM and FRSM)

Quick Study

Candidates with an SpLD are entitled to 12 minutes rather than the usual five minutes extra time for the Quick Study. Supporting evidence for this reasonable adjustment will be required.

Aural memory test in place of Quick Study

This test may be a more appropriate alternative for some candidates with severe learning difficulties. We advise you to practise this way of working before selecting this provision to ensure that this is a suitable option.

The aural memory test consists of roughly 16 bars of music recorded onto CD. The CD will be recorded on the instrument being assessed and will be given to you to study with 15 minutes preparation time. You may use the recording any way you wish in this time. You will be expected to sing or play the test on your chosen instrument from memory.

If you are taking a Singing diploma, you will be required to incorporate the lyrics in your performance and will be given the usual choice of singing in either Italian or English. You should state your language preferences at the time of entry. Singers will be provided with a full recording of the score, a recording of the lyrics only, a recording of the melody sung to 'la' with the accompaniment, and a recording of the melody including the lyrics.

Please note that you are responsible for providing your own CD player with which you are familiar. It should be reliable, reasonably portable, have a sufficiently long mains lead and be quick to set up. You can [request further information and indicative tests from the access coordinator](#).

This alternative is not a standard arrangement and is considered on an individual basis. If you would like to be considered for this, you will need to include the standard D code on the entry form and [send an email requesting this provision to the access coordinator](#). Supporting evidence will be required for this reasonable adjustment.