

Piano (MM in Performance) Comprehensive Exam Guide
School of Music
University of Missouri
(last update: August 2023)

I. Goals and Purpose of the Exam

Oral comprehensive examinations provide a forum for MM and MA students to demonstrate:

- A command of content in the major area of study.
- An ability to apply appropriate historical knowledge and theoretical skills to the major area of study.

They are normally taken during the fourth semester of full-time study, before a panel of at least three faculty members from the major area of study. A common element of all exams will be responding to a small selection of score excerpts, which students will receive immediately before the exam, and approximately half of the exam time will be devoted to these excerpts.

Exams will be one hour in length and will be scheduled in advance, during several of the convocation hours in March and April (Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:00 PM). Fall exams will be scheduled as necessary. Exams will be graded pass/fail, and no follow-up projects to remedy weaknesses exhibited during the exam will be permitted. If a student does not pass the exam, he/she will be allowed one retake in a subsequent semester.

II. Take-Home Assignments/Preparation

See IV. Oral Exam, B. History of Keyboard Literature below for details about what to prepare prior to the day of the exam

III. Before the Exams (30 minutes beforehand)

Score Excerpts: You will be given three solo piano scores to evaluate. You will be able to take the scores to a practice room piano, and you may make notes on the scores to bring with you to the exam. You may not access the internet, the library, the ped library, or other reference sources (cell phones & computers will be collected when scores are given to you).

IV. Oral Exam (60 minutes)

A. Score Evaluation (20-25 min): You will be expected to speak perceptively for about 6-7 minutes on each piece, providing this information:

- 1) Place in a stylistic or historic period, explaining what elements led you to this decision
- 2) Identify any performance practice or technical issues that might be unique to the piece

- 3) Discuss the structure of the piece in terms of form, harmony, texture, rhythm, phrasing, and any other salient features
- 4) Name the genre of composition and guess the composer
- 5) The committee may ask follow-up questions about your remarks.

B. History of Keyboard Literature (20-25 min): You will be asked to trace the history of one of the primary genres of the keyboard literature. You should study by genre the historical, stylistic, theoretical (harmony, melody, structure, forms), technical, and performance practice aspects. Be prepared to speak without notes for approximately 20 minutes on each topic. You do not need to memorize specific dates like composer birth and death dates, but you do need to know which composers are in which style period and the details of how their contribution to the genre changed or developed that genre. Be prepared to mention specific examples of the pieces you use; keys or titles of pieces that you want to use by a certain composer will help to identify them. For example, you could mention the Chopin Ballade in G Minor, or the Couperin Pieces de clavecin, or the Beethoven Pathetique Sonata. You will be evaluated on the accuracy of your information, the clarity of your ideas, the organization of the response, and the completeness of your topic. Be sure to know the earliest examples of your genre and the most recent. You will not know until you reach the exam which one has been chosen for you; you must be prepared to speak about any of them.

Possible Piano Genres:

- solo sonata
- concerto with orchestra
- theme and variations
- dances and dance suites
- character piece and sets of character pieces

C. (10 min) Members of the committee may ask additional summarizing questions about your presentations.

V. Results

Exams will be graded pass/fail, and no follow-up projects to remedy weaknesses exhibited during the exam will be permitted. If a student does not pass the exam, he/she will be allowed one retake the next semester (not including summer).