

Part Two:

How To: Introduce, Organize, and Administer ASTACAP Exams

2.1 Introducing ASTACAP to Your Studio

Students reap the maximum benefit from ASTACAP when their teachers thoroughly familiarize themselves with the program and can effectively communicate its value to students and their parents. To become better acquainted with ASTACAP, it is recommended that teachers:

- Read the ASTACAP Handbook carefully
- Talk to the local ASTACAP exam organizer
- Volunteer as a monitor at an exam
- Use the Handbook as a guide in the studio
- Enroll students in an exam

If no ASTACAP exam is scheduled in your area, consider organizing an event yourself, or use the online exam option. Communicate with your ASTA state chapter board about the need and read this portion of the Handbook for step-by-step instructions.

2.2 Preparation for an ASTACAP Exam

Preparation for the ASTACAP exam is similar to preparation for a studio recital or an audition for a youth orchestra or college. However, ASTACAP exams are non-competitive and are not public.

A student's level on the application is determined by matching the student's playing level to a level listed in the "Instrument Specific Guidelines, Requirements and Repertoire" section of this Handbook. The level most closely resembling the student's level BEFORE the exam determines the level that should be chosen. Those students playing pieces significantly more demanding than those listed in Level 10 have the option of trying for Level 10 Honors. All materials played in any exam must be at or above the level sought.

What happens if a teacher registers a student for the wrong level? For the in-person exam, if the repertoire on the application does not match the level, the exam organizer will notify the teacher. The teacher can then choose to change the repertoire, correct the level, or opt for Comments Only. For the online exam, an online exam coordinator will review the repertoire on the application in advance and notify the teacher if there are any discrepancies.

2.3 Introducing ASTACAP to Students and Parents

It is important to encourage parents to enroll their children in ASTACAP. Part Four of this Handbook contains a "Letter to Parents," which describes the benefits of participation and which can be personalized. Teachers may also download the ASTACAP brochure available on ASTA's website, www.astastrings.org, or make up their own informational handout.

The list below describes the benefits of the program that can be used to personalize the letter. Benefits:

- Students practice more intently as they prepare for the exam.
- Scales, etudes, and solo piece(s) are polished to a higher level.
- Parents recognize that their child is studying with a teacher who respects outside input and that ASTACAP exposes students to a greater music community.
- Students are encouraged by feedback from an outside source.
- Students who pass their exams gain recognition from a national organization.
- ASTACAP provides a national standard for musical achievement that will be recognized when a participating student applies to universities, music schools, youth orchestras, and summer camps.
- ASTACAP achievements add strength to résumés and applications.

Organizing and Administering an In-Person Exam

2.4 Preparing a Budget

The size of the budget needed to run an examination depends on the scope of the program. A rough estimate can be determined by comparing the number of students per hour against the cost of an examiner per hour. Count on an average of 70 percent of the players being in Levels 1–5. Additional expenses, such as mailings, photocopying, and site rental can be estimated as well, but are usually much less than the examiner fees. If the fee guidelines in this Handbook are followed, the program will pay for itself. Liability insurance coverage for the event is available through the ASTA national office (see Forms in Part Four) and is free.

2.5 Setting the Examiner Fee

The examiner fee is flexible and is set by each state. Examiners should generally be paid at least the average hourly rate private teachers receive in the same geographical area. Examiners should be current ASTA members, except in rare circumstances.

2.6 Setting the Application Fees

Application fees for in-person exams will be set by each state. When setting the fees, keep in mind that they should cover all costs associated with running the ASTACAP exams, including the \$10 per applicant that is sent to the ASTA national office.

2.7 Selecting an Examination Site

- The minimum physical requirements for running an examination are:
 - A registration area
 - One exam room with a piano
 - Two warm-up rooms, or one large one
- Larger exams will require multiple examination rooms with pianos, as well as multiple warm-up rooms.
- Plan for about 25 students per room per 6-hour exam period.
- Suggested venues include: public and private schools, music schools, universities, community centers, and religious institutions. If the examination is small, a private home may be used.

2.8 Setting the Examination Date

The ASTACAP exams can be held at any time of the year. Music schools using the exams as juries typically hold examinations at the end of a term. Check school calendars to avoid orchestra, SAT/ACT testing, and holiday conflicts.

2.9 Setting the Application Deadline

For the application deadline, choose a weekday at least one month to six weeks ahead of the exam.

2.10 Publicizing the Examinations

Submit date(s), location(s), and deadline(s) to the ASTA national office for publicizing your exam. Email a copy of the ASTACAP brochure to your state membership. Make additional announcements at teacher meetings, conferences, festivals, on the state chapter website, and through email and social media. Consider announcements in other music association publications as well. Make sure that your state chapter newsletter announces the exams and that application instructions or forms are included in as many announcement formats as possible.

2.11 Selecting and Preparing the Examiners

Selection and training of examiners for in-person exams is the responsibility of each individual state program. For guidance email asta@astaweb.com. If at all possible, examiners must be current ASTA members. If you are interested in participating as an online examiner, please contact ASTA at the national office.

2.12 Exam Monitors and Assistants

ASTACAP organizers depend on help from monitors and assistants. Teachers are required to assist at the exam. Monitor and assistant duties are filled by teachers whose students participate in the ASTACAP exams. The amount of time each teacher serves is usually in proportion to the number of students they enroll, and it may range from half an hour to several hours. Duties might include:

- Monitoring exam rooms
- Registering exam takers at the exam site
- Paperwork
- Bringing refreshments
- Cleaning up the exam site after the exams

If possible, ASTA state presidents and other board members should assist the ASTACAP organizer in running the event. High school or college students of participating teachers, ASTA student chapters, or high school music service groups also can be called upon to help the exam organizer, if needed.

2.13 Scheduling Monitors and Assistants

Below are useful tips for monitors and assistants.

- Assign assistants to be registration desk personnel, runners, and warm-up room supervisors.
- Calculate the total playing time of the students of each teacher. Teachers enrolling many students should volunteer for several hours.
- Enter teachers' names and their assigned duty on the Master Schedule.
- For order, safety, and to assist in tuning, assign a monitor to oversee any large warm-up area.

2.14 Reviewing the Applications

Site coordinators need to be certain that every submitted application is complete. Ensure that all scales, etudes, and solos fall within the level indicated on the form. If something is missing or incorrect, contact the teacher as quickly as possible. As soon as the applications have been counted (two weeks to one month before the exams take place,) order certificates from the ASTA national office. Assign a code (e.g., A, B, C) to each teacher, then assign a number to each teacher's students (e.g., A1, A2, B1). Place these code numbers on the corresponding application and evaluation forms, as well as the master schedule. The codes serve to maintain teacher anonymity as well as help sort exam results.

2.15 Ordering the Certificates

Certificates are obtained from the ASTA national office by filling out the State Enrollment Form and mailing the form, along with a check (\$10.00 per exam taker) to the national office. The certificates are either given or mailed to the participating teachers, following the exam, along with a copy of the Evaluation Form for each of their students. Keep the originals.

2.16 Obtaining Sight-Reading Selections

Sight-reading selections should be ordered from the national office at the same time that the certificates are ordered (see 2.15). Prepare enough copies of each sight-reading selection so that each examiner has two copies (one for the student and one for the examiner). Keep a spare copy at the registration desk in case copies are accidentally lost. Collect all sight-reading selections at the end of the exam as these are sensitive materials.

2.17 Scheduling Students' Exam Times

Begin the process of scheduling when all the applications are in. Note any scheduling requests. Schedule players based on:

- Instrument and type of room needed (e.g., with or without piano or easy access for bass, cello, harp, etc.)
- Grouping siblings or students sharing the same accompanist
- Group similar levels whenever possible to make the examiner's job easier

Table 1 provides the exam timing schedule. Allow a 10-minute break for the examiners after each 60 to 90 minutes of adjudication.

Table 1. Exam Timings

EXAM LEVEL	DURATION (MINS.)
Levels F and 1	8
Levels 2 and 3	10
Levels 4 and 5	15
Level 6	17
Levels 7 and 8	20
Level 9	25
Level 10	30

2.18 Creating Exam Schedules

1. Master Schedule

Create a Master Schedule for each examination room including student numbers, teacher codes, exam times, student names, instruments, levels, examiner, room, monitors, teachers, breaks, accompanists, and any special notes about the student. (See sample in the supplemental material). The Master Schedule is posted at the main desk and is used by the room monitors.

2. Examiner Schedule

Create a schedule for each examiner including room number, student number, student name, instrument, level, and exam time. Examiners should not know the name of the teacher.

2.19 Sending Teacher Packets (pre-exam)

When the exam schedule is ready, mail or email each teacher the following (see supplemental material “Letter to Teachers”):

- Exam information and monitoring assignment
- Copy of the exam evaluation forms (see supplemental material)
- List of his/her students’ names, date, location of exam and exam times
- “Letter to Students” (see supplemental material) with specific information about the exams
- Exam site address with directions and parking details, as appropriate

2.20 Sending the Examiner Packets (pre-exam)

Mail or email each examiner (see supplemental material):

- Exam site address with directions as appropriate
- Sample evaluation forms (see supplemental material)
- “Instructions to Examiners” form (see supplemental material)

2.21 Creating Signage

To guide participants to the examination site, post signs at the drive entrance, at the parking lot, the walkway, the building entrance, and the registration desk. Also post signs inside the site to assist in locating exam rooms, break room, rest rooms, warm-up rooms, etc.

2.22 Preparing Evaluation Forms

Evaluation Forms for bowed strings are found in two sections of the Handbook, the “Instrument Specific Guidelines, Requirements and Repertoire” section and supplemental material. Harp Evaluation Forms can be requested from the ASTA national office. The repertoire portion may be filled out by the site organizer or by the teacher as part of the application process. Check to see if the student program is legible and complete. Fill in the student number. Be certain that requests for Honors or Comments Only designations are duly noted. Arrange the evaluation forms in the order the examiner will hear the students and place them in the Examiner’s Packet.

2.23 Examiner Packets (exam day)

Provide each examiner with a packet containing:

- Evaluation Forms for that examiner arranged in exam order
- Examiner Schedule and “Instructions to the Examiner”
- A copy of each of the relevant “Instrument Specific Guidelines and Requirements” pages from the Handbook
- Several sharpened pencils
- A thank you note with the check enclosed
- Sight-reading selections (two sets for each instrument to be examined)

Instruct each examiner to return ALL materials to the exam organizer, particularly the completed Evaluation Forms and sight-reading materials, which are sensitive.

2.24 After the Exam

- Submit bills and all receipts to the state chapter.
- Submit a report and photos to the state chapter.
- Send thank you letters or emails as appropriate.
- Make a copy of each completed Evaluation Form (include no-shows) and retain originals for your records.
- Collect the correct number of certificates for each teacher for the teacher to fill in and distribute.
- Instruct teachers to sign the certificates noting Honors or Distinction for Memorization, as appropriate.
- Date and make copies of the “Letter to Teachers” (see supplemental material).
- Students who played for Comments Only receive a copy of their evaluation form, but no certificate.
- Mail or distribute these last four listed materials to each teacher.

2.25 An Organizational Timeline for the In-Person Exam

The following timeline will help ensure a successful event. The forms and sample letters mentioned can be found in supplemental material.

2.26 Nine to Twelve Months Prior to an In-Person Exam

- Contact the national office for an ASTACAP mentor if needed.
- Prepare a budget and present it to your state chapter. Ask the state chapter to contribute to the cost of running the exam.
- Approach the chapter president and offer to handle the organization and publicity for the examination. Starting a program in your state or locality might be more attractive to your state board if you offer to organize it yourself.
- Remember to retain all receipts so your state chapter can reimburse you for costs incurred.
- Remind the state chapter president to submit the Intention to Apply for Liability Coverage form (see supplemental material or download from the ASTA website at www.astastrings.org).
- Talk to teachers and colleagues about participation in ASTACAP.

2.27 Six to Nine Months Prior

- Find exam location(s) and set exam date(s).
- Send the date(s), site location(s), and application deadline(s) to the ASTA national office to be published on the ASTA website.
- Email announcements to your state membership and download a program brochure from www.astastrings.org for emailing and posting in music schools, academies, and at conferences or festivals.
- Ask the state webmaster to post exam information and application materials on the state chapter website as appropriate. Consider an online application submission process; otherwise applications can be downloaded and mailed.

2.28 Three to Six Months Prior

- Copy and mail the application to teachers who requested hard copies.
- Continue to publicize the event and begin contacting potential examiners so they can reserve the date.

2.29 Around the Application Deadline (four to six weeks prior)

- Review exam applications and check that the applicant's proposed repertoire falls in the appropriate level according to the "Instrument Specific Guidelines, Requirements and Repertoire" section of the Handbook.
- Complete the State Enrollment Form (see supplemental material)
- Upon receipt of all applications, send \$10.00 for each applicant to the ASTA national office to order certificates.
- Request sight-reading samples from the ASTA national office.
- Make an exam schedule.
- Mail (or email) the pre-exam Teacher Packet to each participating teacher.
- Confirm the examiners. Email them a copy of the Examiner Instructions, a copy of the ASTACAP Handbook with reference to pertinent sections, and sample Evaluation Forms. Include the examiner's time assignments and other instructions.
- Prepare the Evaluation Forms.
- Confirm teacher volunteers and solicit additional volunteers as needed.
- Follow the information on the State Enrollment Form to secure liability insurance for the event (see supplemental material).

2.30 One to Two Weeks Prior

- Send application fees collected from teachers to the state chapter.
- Ask your state treasurer to prepare checks for the examiners to be handed out on the day of the exams.
- Make directional signs as needed at the exam site.
- Prepare examiner packets for the exam day.
- Make arrangements and assign duties for lunch, snacks, and drinks for the examiners and monitors.
- Prepare the signs and schedules needed for exam day

2.31 The Day of the Exams

- Allow time to post signs, arrange rooms, and orient the examiners.
- Bring examiner packets, signs, office materials, schedules, cell phone, food, and drinks. Take photos for your state newsletter, if possible. Remember to obtain permission to post photographs of minors.
- Be prepared for contingencies, e.g., late-arriving students, late-arriving examiners, unexpected room changes, and emergency schedule changes. An extra room set aside for unexpected changes can be very helpful.

2.32 After the Exams

- Mail copies of all evaluation forms and retain the originals for your records for 3 years.
- Mail the appropriate number of certificates and copies of the examiner evaluation forms to each participating teacher.
- Submit bills and receipts to the state chapter.
- Submit a report and photos to the state chapter.
- Send thank you letters as appropriate.

2.33 Participating in Online Examinations

Students and their teachers have the option to participate in either the in-person format or online format. Although the in-person exam is the preferred option, some students and teachers interested in the ASTACAP program may live in regions that do not yet sponsor in-person exams. In this case, students may participate online or the teacher may organize a local in-person exam with the help of ASTA (see 2.4).

In the online version of ASTACAP, students will record and submit their performances which will be evaluated by an experienced examiner, all via the ASTA website. Written comments and awards will be mailed to each student's teacher within thirty days of the end of the examination period.

For an online exam, the student's recorded program can be submitted in up to four audio-video clips. The recordings should be made back-to-back, as if the student were playing in a continuous live setting. The student agrees to these conditions when submitting the online exam. Please use a high-quality camera and microphone in order to record good sound quality, and please portray the action of the left and right hands and bow arm in as much detail as possible.

Furthermore, to demonstrate memorization in an online exam, the recording clearly must capture the student and show the surrounding area to be void of a musical score when memorized pieces are performed. If a music stand is used for the etude or any other non-memorized portions of the program, it must be removed or turned to face backwards during the memorized portion, away from the view of the player in a position that is indicative of non-functionality. Please have the student read and recognize the significance of the statement below:

“ASTACAP Academic Integrity Statement”

I promise that I have presented my recorded submission honestly, and that I have not plagiarized my submitted recording nor submitted work that is not my own. I have presented my memorized performance according to the rules for submission. If a judge feels I have falsely represented myself, my playing, or playing from memory, I am prepared to forfeit my certificate and payment for this ASTACAP session.

If a teacher wishes to have students participate in the online examination:

- Send the “Letter to Parents” well ahead of the exam period (see supplemental material).
- Send the “Online Exam Application Form” (see supplemental material) both in an explanatory email and a week or two later as a hard copy. Be sure to allow enough time to meet the deadline.
- Fill out the Application Form with the student.
- Before recording the videos, check the current recording protocols at www.astastrings.org.
- Set a date to record the videos. Recordings are best made in the teacher’s studio so the teacher can assist and monitor as needed. Keep the videos short so they upload more easily. Save videos to a hard drive or thumb drive in an appropriate format.
- When the videos are ready to submit, go to www.astastrings.org, and follow the online submission protocols.
- Each exam submission will be assigned to a qualified examiner to review. Please allow thirty days after the close of the exam period to receive results. The results are sent to the teacher who then goes over them with each student.
- The teacher will receive certificates for all passing students. Fill out and award the certificates, preferably in a public setting, such as a recital, to celebrate the students’ successes.