

10 Tips for selecting a piano diploma programme

1. Listen widely. Not just to the selected piano works on the repertoire lists, but to a large range of music, in order to assimilate styles and genres; the more you know about styles and periods, the easier it is to decide which you would prefer to tackle. YouTube is your friend (although aim to select 'professional' performances wherever possible), however, it's helpful to just 'log on' and listen.
2. Programmes must be 'well-balanced', which means works should not ideally hail from the same period, although it's possible to select several pieces from similar historical eras, as long as stylistically they are quite different. It's not essential to represent every genre or style.
3. Decide whether you prefer to select a group of shorter pieces, or one longer work with a few smaller additions.
4. Once you have elected a few appealing composers (appealing to you!), listen to all the offered options on the list written by those composers; for well-known composers such as Mozart and Beethoven, there will be many pieces from which to choose.
5. When selecting, imagine playing the piece and ask yourself the following questions: Can I really manage those intricate passages under pressure? Will I be able to play it up to speed? Is it a style I am familiar with, or will I need to become acquainted with it? Does it move or affect me emotionally? The last question is undoubtedly the most important. It can be a good plan to immediately delete works which are too challenging, gradually reducing the size of the list.
6. If four works are chosen, how will they be programmed? You don't have to play them in chronological order. You should endeavour to present them in an order with which you feel comfortable. It can be interesting starting with a Contemporary work, for example.
7. Before learning begins, do your research and find out as much as you can about your chosen composers; you will probably need this information for the Viva Voce (question and answer session which takes place after your recital) anyway. Dates of birth, style, genre, amount and type of piano repertoire, and for which instrument(s) the works were originally written (if applicable), should all be very familiar to you.
8. Know why you have selected your pieces. This will help clarify the selection process.
9. Speak to your teacher (if you have one) at length and maybe seek other opinions and ideas from music professionals. It can be enlightening to hear what others say, in order to devise a well-rounded recital.
10. The last tip is, for me, the most important. Never select works which reveal your shortcomings (everybody has them). A diploma is not the place to learn technique; this must be done in private on suitable studies or other repertoire.



