From Your Board of Directors

How Do You Become an Examiner?

By Marc Poulin, RPT, PTG President and Dave Davis, RPT, Examinations and Test Standards Committee Chair

This is such a common question, and there is no simple answer. We are hoping to shed a little light on the subject to clear the air and provide direction for those who may be pondering this question.

If you just wish to help with RPT exams, you do not need to be certified as a technical examiner (TEC) or a tuning examiner (CTE). All RPTs are welcome to assist with all three exams. All you need are a willingness to volunteer, the ability to follow policies and directions of the examiner in charge, and the desire have fun! Assisting with exams can be an education program all on its own. At a convention several years ago, the RPT “assistants” for the master tuning were Jim Coleman, Sr. and Michael Travis. As a first-year, full-time CTE, working with technicians of this caliber for four hours on a master tuning was a training opportunity that you couldn’t ever pay for.

Examiners come in three types: Written, Technical, and Tuning. Each of the disciplines has differing requirements to qualify for training as well as different training programs to complete your certification. The one thing all three have in common is simple: You must be a Registered Piano Technician to administer the RPT exams and become certified as an examiner.

Written Examiner

There are no requirements for RPTs, all having passed the written exam at a certain percentage above 80%. You need to have an interest in encouraging and helping those who want to begin their journey on the exam process and an internet-capable computer, tablet, or smartphone, as the written exam has moved online. The traditional paper version is expected to be phased out by 2023.

Any Registered Piano Technician can sign up to be a written examiner by going through the home office and requesting access to proctor an exam. There is a short tutorial process for the examiner to demonstrate how the program works. The exam covers four sections of piano technology: tuning theory, regulation and action function, repairs and voicing, and general information. The written exam is a timed test that consists of 100 questions. The online exam automatically scores the results and provides instant feedback to the proctor, ETSC designees, and the Home Office. The examiner is encouraged to review the questions and provide feedback to assist in furthering the path to RPT and the career of the examinee.

It’s simple and straightforward. The key element here is humanistics: acting as someone who can teach and encourage examinees regardless of the results, so that they come away with good educational experiences.

Certified Technical Examiner (TEC)

As with the written exam, there is no requirement for having passed your technical exam at a certain percentage. You just need to have interest in the technical exam and the means for you, your chapter, or your exam site sponsor to purchase and maintain the required exam equipment.

We are going to cheat a little bit and copy directly from the horse’s mouth, the TEC manual, for the wording of the training process:

“The minimum requirement for certification is to assist a TEC on one complete technical exam and to lead the administration of one complete technical exam under the supervision of a designated trainer TEC. However, you cannot be certified until a trainer TEC signs off on all items in your TEC Trainee Proficiency Record. Therefore, it is helpful to volunteer as an assistant examiner at as many exams as possible, and get as much experience as possible with various aspects of exam setup, procedure, scoring, record-keeping, etc. You can keep track of your own progress on the TEC Training Log and Self Evaluation. When your TEC Trainee Proficiency Record is complete, contact your regional TEC or the ETSC Technical Exam Subcommittee Chair in order to complete your certification.”

Technical exams are fast-paced and involve lots of moving parts. Because of the jig preparation required to execute the exam, examiners are either working through scoring criteria or quickly preparing a jig for the next section of the exam. There is little down time in the span of the four-plus hours of the exam. Becoming a TEC requires you to work efficiently and be organized in your processes. Perhaps most importantly, TECs must
be articulate teachers. Regardless of the outcome of the exam for the examinee, the technical exam is a place that highlights areas that can be improved. The TEC plays a huge role in helping examinees sharpen their skills as technicians. Doing this well can turn even a failed exam into a positive experience for the examinee.

Simple, right? For some people it can be, depending on personality, organizational skills, availability of a trainer and active exam site, etc. This is an individual endeavor, so it will be different for each trainee. Finding opportunities to assist and train are paramount. Attending a regional conference or annual convention are the easiest ways to get a large volume of experience in a short period. It is not unusual for a new TEC candidate to become certified during a convention week.

The areas of focus that must be performed to the satisfaction of a TEC skills reviewer are:

- Master Regulation – vertical
- Master Regulation – grand
- Deregulation – Vertical
- Deregulation – Grand
- Repair Jig Preparation – stringing
- Repair Jig Preparation – hammer
- Repair Jig Preparation – key
- Repair Task Preparation - pinning
- Measurement Technique
- Vertical Regulation Scoring
- Grand Regulation Scoring
- Repair Scoring
- Instructing and Handling Examinee (Humanistics)
- Record Keeping and Forms Distribution
- Overall Test Management and Attention to Detail

Certified Tuning Examiner (CTE)

Becoming a CTE is a little more complicated than the other two disciplines. Anyone can begin to train as an examiner or participate as an assistant after becoming a registered technician. A solid grasp of aural tuning techniques and aural checks is paramount to your success as an RPT assistant or as a CTE. To be certified as a CTE, you must pass the current RPT tuning exam aurally at 90% or above in all sections, with no retakes or second chances on setting pitch. The basis for this is a firm grasp of aural skills, checks, and the ability to reason out the validity of potential errors quickly and confidently during aural verification. If you pass at this level during your RPT exam, you need not repeat another tuning exam to qualify. If you are an RPT and wish to take a qualification exam, you may take the qualification exam three times within a five-year period, free of charge. This is also open to any RPT who wishes to see a skills snapshot measured by the current exam.

Once again, we will take an excerpt from the CTE manual:

“As you begin your training, you are asked to read this manual and thoroughly familiarize yourself with all aspects of administering this exam. Naturally, you should always have it on hand during exam sessions for a ready reference. Along with that, you will need to become accurate and efficient with the use of one or more scoring programs, including handscoring. Much practice with a scoring device (or small hand calculator if you do handscoring) will make your proficiency high and help to keep the exam sessions running smoothly. It is a good idea to practice at home on your own or borrowed equipment. It may be that you will be asked only to be an observer the first few times you attend an exam session. If you are experienced with machinery, your help will be much more valuable to those in charge. When there is a heavy exam schedule, it is often not possible to give a trainee the time necessary for a first experience in reading an exam or figuring out how to do the scoring. It is suggested that you attend exams as often as possible, since memory dims if long periods go by between sessions. Another important facet of your skill development and maintenance is participating in master tunings.

“Though time consuming, the task keeps you on your toes, builds skills for aural verification, and develops confidence based on experiences that are reality checked. Working together with other technicians who strive for excellence in this way is something you should seek out more than once in your training.

“What determines your readiness to be appointed depends mostly on you. It is you who will have to pursue opportunities to practice and gain experience by attending annual, regional, and local meetings where exams are being offered. As your progress is observed by a Skills Reviewer, also ask for feedback and discuss any areas where you have questions with other examiners. There is no set number of exams you must participate in to be certified. Rather, you should be so skilled in all procedures that you are capable of training others when you are recommended to become a CTE. An annual convention will give you the opportunity to work with other very experienced CTEs at eight or more exams. This kind of intense experience can very quickly lead to your recommendation for certification. Your appointment as a Certified Tuning Examiner is recommended by one or more CTEs you have worked with, who will forward their recommendation to the Examinations and Test Standards Committee (ETSC) Chair. We strongly advise that more than one CTE be involved in your training before your name is submitted for approval. The Chair then sends a list including your name to the board of directors, who vote on the appointments at their meetings.
To be certified as a tuning examiner, an RPT member trainee must gain experience by assisting several times on teams administering the tuning exam. Tuning exams are administered by many chapters and area exam boards, and at regional conferences, and the annual PTG convention. Inquiries about specific exam sites and schedules may be directed to a member of the Examinations and Test Standards Committee listed with the PTG Home Office, or by visiting the Certifications page in the Member Area at www.ptg.org. As the trainee assists with exams, various CTEs will observe the trainee’s performance, evaluate his or her proficiency, and sign in the appropriate space on the CTE Trainee Proficiency Record when it is judged that the trainee is competent in a procedure. The last item, ‘overall exam management and attention to detail,’ must be evaluated by a CTE Skills Reviewer who observes the trainee run a full exam. A list of current CTE Skills Reviewers can be obtained from the Tuning Subcommittee Chair, or the PTG Home Office. The PROFICIENCY RECORD is to be retained by the trainee until the complete list of procedures has been signed off by CTEs. (A visually impaired trainee is adequately trained when all procedures not requiring eyesight are mastered and the trainee knows the proper sequence of steps in conducting an examination.)

The areas of focus that must be performed to the satisfaction of a CTE are:

- Master Tuning
- Piano Preparation
- Record and Adjust Master Tuning
- Detuning
- Humanistics: Examinee Instructions, Oversight, and Rapport
- Instrument Operation (Specify Instrument)
- Scoring: Handscoring (required) Accu-tuner (optional) Reyburn CyberTuner (optional) Verituner (optional) Tunelab (optional)
- Aural Verification
- Unison Test
- Stability Test
- Overall Test Management and Attention to Detail (only by CTE Skills Reviewer)

The most challenging of these areas for CTEs and TECs both has historically been overall test management and attention to detail, as well as instructing and handling examinees (humanistics). To be the “Examiner in Charge” you must have a working knowledge of the entire exam at your fingertips, be able to answer most questions in a timely manner, and be able to administer the exam to the standard PTG expects from our examiners. It can be a daunting amount of knowledge to learn and mentally organize. Humanistics is the catch-all word used for examiner/examinee relations. The exam process can be extremely stressful for many of our members, and humanistics skills are vital to helping them through the process — being able to maintain calm and pass on that feeling to the examinee, dealing with disappointment, anger, sadness, all possible emotions that come to the fore during an exam. Some trainees handle this easily, others may struggle. The examiner trainers will try their best to work with you on these skills.

Once you become a certified examiner, the real work begins. However, there are requirements for things you should (and shouldn’t) be doing as an examiner, again stolen from our voluminous examiner manuals:

“What Is Expected of Examiners (and what isn’t...)

1. An examiner is expected to administer exams within a reasonable time frame of being asked to do so.
   a. An examiner is not required to administer exams on demand.
   b. A “reasonable” time frame can be considered within two to three months of a request – unless the examiner in question offers exams on a regular schedule, or has recently administered exams.
   c. Examiners should not feel obliged to administer exams more than twice per year – but are free to do so if they wish.
   d. Examiners should make all reasonable efforts to schedule partial retakes to enable examinees to meet any deadlines.

2. An examiner is expected to maintain contact with the Examinations and Test Standards Committee (ETSC) by:
   a. Carefully reading the examiner newsletter and all other communications from ETSC.
   b. Subscribing to the examiner community list.
   c. Promptly and thoroughly responding to all inquiries from ETSC members or PTG Home Office personnel.

3. An examiner should refer all questions about testing equipment and procedures or disagreements between examiners on interpretation to ETSC by one of the following means:
   a. Posting on the examiner community list – if possible.
   b. Direct inquiry through the regional examiner or directly to the Exam Subcommittee Chair – if posting is impossible or inadvisable because of privacy or confidentiality concerns. (Contact information is available on the PTG website or from the Home Office).

4. An examiner should inform ETSC any time he or she observes or becomes aware of major violations of proper exam procedures.

5. An examiner should maintain their program’s exam equipment in good condition by:
   a. Making repairs and replacements as necessary.
   b. Securing sufficient funding from his or her testing program for replacement parts or jigs/models/equipment.
c. Making any modifications to the equipment required by exam requirements – if necessary.
d. Monitoring the needs of the testing program and seeing to the replacement of worn equipment or the purchase of additional equipment when necessary.

6. An examiner should promptly forward all exam score forms and other exam records to the PTG Home Office.
7. An examiner may not be compensated for administering exams but is to be reimbursed for travel and other expenses necessary for administering the exams. It is up to the examiner to ascertain beforehand what the reimbursement policy of the test sponsor might be and provide all required receipts for reimbursement.
8. An examiner may not advertise his or her status as examiner to clients or potential clients or use it in job applications or resumes. The highest professional status that may be advertised by PTG members is RPT – TEC or CTE are not to be used as professional classifications or qualifications.
9. An examiner should carefully keep a log of all exams he or she administers, and file for re-certification in a timely manner – at least 6 months before the end of the last (fifth) year of certification.
10. An examiner, to the best of his or her ability, should publicize the exams, encourage members to prepare for and take the exams and help members as much as possible in their exam preparations.
11. An examiner should seek out candidates for examiner training and encourage them to undertake training and certification.

“Recertification is required for examiners every 5 years (becoming inactive in year 6), which consists of a review of your exams administered, a written test, and in some cases an observed exam dependent on how many exams you have administered over the preceding 5 years. If your examiner certification has lapsed, you may become current by recertifying and running an observed exam.

“As an examiner for a chapter or exam site, your expenses may be reimbursed if prior arrangements are made for this. When you act as an examiner for a regional conference your room, a per diem, and/or registration MAY be covered by the event sponsor. If you are selected as a full-time examiner for the annual convention (usually ETSC members and Skill Reviewers) your travel, room, and a per diem are provided by PTG as an ETSC Committee expense). RPT assistants and trainees have a portion of their registration and a per diem paid on a sliding scale of how many exam periods you assist.”

Hopefully this answers many of the questions and dispels some of the misinformation that is passed along regarding the process required to become an examiner. The examiner pool is the backbone of the RPT exam program and by extension the foundation of PTG itself. Becoming an examiner is not only educational but is also the best continuing education and network sharing group that money cannot buy. If you have any questions, as always you can email ETSC@ptg.org or call the Home Office to have staff there assist with finding the right person.