

Study Guide for **AGO Colleague Certification**

Committee on Professional Certification



American Guild of Organists
475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1260
New York, NY 10115
Phone: 212-870-2310 | Fax: 212-870-2163
Email: info@agohq.org | Web site: www.agohq.org

Copyright © 2017 American Guild of Organists

From the President

Founded as an educational organization in 1896, the American Guild of Organists (AGO) is chartered under the Board of Regents of the State of New York. AGO certification has long been regarded widely as an assurance of musical skill and understanding. One of the five levels of certification, the Colleague of American Guild of Organists certification (CAGO) is awarded upon successful passage of the Colleague Examination, which is offered twice annually, in the autumn and the spring.

We are delighted that you have decided to prepare for certification as a Colleague of the American Guild of Organists. We have developed these Study Guidelines to assist you in that preparation, either privately, with a small study group, or with a teacher. The individual chapters of this manual relate respectively to each section of the CAGO Examination. Because the skill addressed within each chapter is distinct rather than building sequentially, all chapters may be studied simultaneously, moving slowly and with patient repetition to develop facility in all suggested exercises. Well-prepared musicians can attain these levels of expertise by purposeful application; no well-trained musician need fear these tests, which measure knowledge and ability by national standards of excellence.

Dr. Charles S. Brown, FAGO, ChM, the first National Councillor for Education, prepared the earliest editions of the Guidelines. Several sections of that 1981-1982 edition are incorporated into this present booklet because of their continuing appropriate qualities and usefulness.

The following three paragraphs from the 1981-1982 edition are worth repeating here:

The Guidelines are an experimental venture.... In every part, the examination candidates should understand that these are only guidelines, that they only offer models, procedures, and suggestions for the kinds of study and practice which [each] candidate must develop [individually].

Nor do the Guidelines stand alone. Candidates should procure from the National Office of the Guild copies of past examinations as well as requirements for the incoming tests. Other materials, especially articles from The American Organist, are cited in the course of the Guidelines....

The Guidelines can be used in a variety of ways: as a study guide for individual preparation; as a resource for small-group study sessions, where two-five persons meet ... in a cooperative study program; as a resource packet or text for courses organized by local Guild chapters or college music departments; and as a resource on which single-topic chapter programs or study courses may be based, whether or not these lead to preparations for the examinations.

The American Guild of Organists wishes you the great joy of success as you accomplish the skills which are detailed in these Guidelines.

John Walker, FAGO, DMA
December 2015

How to Use This Book

This book is not a “walkthrough” of the CAGO examination; it is not something to be pored over and then dutifully given back on an exam. The examination does not quiz you on points made or factoids announced in these pages. Nor does this study guide contain tips, tricks, tidbits, or ways around the system. We offer you something better and more enduring.

The best way to prepare for a Guild exam is to *commit* to it, to master what is required, to “see and raise” the exam so you bring to it, not only yourself, but a new and altogether more skillful self. Experience shows that it’s easy not to change, but also unfulfilling. It’s hard, and incredibly fulfilling, to set a goal and meet it. May this study guide set you firmly on the path of meeting the high goal of achieving Guild certification.

Jonathan B. Hall, FAGO, ChM, DM
Director, Committee on Professional Certification
Editor
December, 2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface and Introduction		
Chapter 1	Repertoire (exam item C1)	1
Chapter 2	Accompaniment of Chorus and Vocal Solo (exam items C2 and 3)	2
Chapter 3	Hymn Playing (exam item C4)	4
Chapter 4	Sight-Reading (exam item C5)	6
Chapter 5	Harmonization (exam item C6)	8
Chapter 6	Transposition (exam item C7)	13
Chapter 7	Improvisation (exam item C8 a, b, or c)	20
Bibliography		26
Appendix		34

Carlton T. Russell, "An Organist's Introduction to Service Playing,"
Music/The AGO-RCCO Magazine, October 1977.

I. REPERTOIRE (exam item C1)

The prescribed repertoire for the exams is published in the July edition of *The American Organist*, and is usually retained for two years. Articles to aid in preparation of this repertoire may be found in many issues throughout the year. Your goals should include the following:

1. To perform the music with authority, communicating to the listener your understanding of and involvement with the music.
2. To choose a registration, tempo, and articulation which are appropriate to the style and expressive content of the piece.
3. To develop, as a result of the examination process, your own learning approach and musical voice.

LEARNING A PIECE OF MUSIC: SOME IDEAS

1. Always listen, first to what the music says to you, then for the effect you wish your listeners to experience. Recordings may help.
2. Familiarize yourself with the background of the work.
3. Analyze the piece, understanding its purpose, form, style, rhythmic patterns, melodic content, harmonic progressions, texture, and the use of contrapuntal techniques and other devices. Get the “big picture” of its form and its emotional import.
4. Develop the technical security to play the piece as you wish: exact rhythmic control, fingering and pedaling, and an overall comfort level. A satisfying performance depends on placing the fingers and feet effortlessly on the proper keys and listening for the sounds to begin and end at the proper time, yielding both accuracy and expression. A consistent practice routine will help.
5. Give (almost) free rein to your imagination. Think and hear each sound as expressive and unforced. Strive for living, breathing phrases. Make the individual parts flow together to produce a musical whole.

6. In an age of free online public-domain scores, learn to proofread, and learn how to evaluate your sources.

II. ACCOMPANIMENT OF CHORUS AND VOCAL SOLO (exam items C2 and C3)

You are asked to play the accompaniment to a choral piece, and to a vocal solo, on the organ. Your goals should include:

1. To *suggest* (not carbon-copy) the effect of an orchestra; so that the accompaniment is an equal and worthy partner of the imagined chorus or soloist. Or, to suggest the effect of a piano or other keyboard at the organ, to the same standard.
2. To bring color shading through registration and dynamics, including the use of the expression pedal or, more subtly, control of touch. Remember that touch at the organ is about timing, not force.
3. To maintain control of tempo. Flexibility of tempo will probably relate mainly to the shaping of phrases and especially cadences. This is largely a matter of the period and style of the piece.

HOW TO PRACTICE A CHORAL/VOCAL ARRANGEMENT: SOME IDEAS

The ideas mentioned in “Learning a Piece of Music: Some Ideas” in the Repertoire section apply here as well.

If you are practicing a choral work with a composed organ part—not an arrangement—you must add to your standard organ-bench work a sensitivity to the choral or solo phrases, especially the need for singers to breathe. (Don’t you play the solo repertoire like that?) Often an organist will practice a vocal piece very conscientiously, only to find that the singer or choir is simply not comfortable. You may hear a complaint about “rigidity” or “stiffness.” There is a subtle art to the yielding of time and to breathing with the human voice. Consider taking voice lessons if you have not.

Listen to art songs and opera. Spending time as a studio accompanist will teach you that the metronome is not always the final word. Music is always a communal effort, even for a soloist.

But for a true arrangement or reduction of an orchestral or chamber work