

Music Theory

Course Length: Full Academic Year

Credit: 1.0 High School Credit

Prerequisites: Music History



Course Description

Music Theory provides a comprehensive introduction to the fundamental concepts and practices of Western music theory. The course develops students' ability to read, understand, analyze, and create music while connecting theoretical concepts to music encountered through listening and performance. Students begin with the fundamentals of musical notation, pitch, rhythm, meter, scales, and key signatures before progressing to intervals, chords, harmonic function, voice leading, musical form, and introductory composition. Students apply theoretical concepts through written exercises, score analysis, listening activities, keyboard exercises, and short composition projects. The course emphasizes both conceptual understanding and practical application. By the end of the course, students should be able to read and interpret standard musical notation, identify important musical structures aurally and visually, analyze basic tonal compositions, construct scales and chords, understand common harmonic progressions, and apply music-theory principles to original compositions.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Read and interpret standard musical notation in treble and bass clefs.
2. Identify and correctly notate pitches, rhythms, rests, meters, and key signatures.
3. Explain the organization of pitch within major and minor tonal systems.
4. Construct and identify major and minor scales.
5. Identify and construct melodic and harmonic intervals.
6. Construct and analyze triads and seventh chords.
7. Use Roman-numeral notation to identify chords and harmonic functions.
8. Recognize common chord progressions and cadences.
9. Apply fundamental principles of voice leading.
10. Analyze melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, and form in selected musical works.
11. Recognize common musical forms, including binary, ternary, rondo, theme and variations, and basic sonata form.
12. Apply music-theory principles to short original compositions and arrangements.
13. Develop basic aural-analysis and sight-singing skills.
14. Use appropriate music-theory terminology when discussing and analyzing music.

TEXTBOOKS AND COURSE RESOURCES

Open Music Theory, Version 2. Mark Gotham, Kyle Gullings, Chelsey Hamm, Bryn Hughes, Brian Jarvis, Megan Lavengood, and John Peterson. Open Music Theory covers notation, rhythm, meter, scales, intervals, triads, seventh chords, Roman numerals, harmony, form, and related subjects. The text also

contains an integrated workbook, musical examples, listening materials, and interactive resources that are appropriate for independent or homeschool instruction.

Tonal Harmony: With an Introduction to Post-Tonal Music. Kostka, Stefan, Dorothy Payne, and Byron Almén. McGraw Hill.

Selected introductory readings and exercises may be used to supplement the primary text, particularly for harmony, chord progressions, voice leading, and musical analysis.

Additional Materials

- Manuscript/music staff paper
- Piano or electronic keyboard
- Selected printed and digital musical scores
- Recordings of representative musical works
- Music notation software as available
- Instructor-selected worksheets and theory exercises

WORK SCHEDULE

UNIT 1 — Fundamentals of Musical Notation (weeks 1-3)

This unit introduces the written language of music. Students learn how pitch, rhythm, meter, dynamics, articulation, and other musical information are represented in standard notation. Particular attention is given to fluent reading of treble and bass clefs and to the mathematical relationships among rhythmic values.

Topics

- Musical alphabet and pitch
- Staff, clefs, and ledger lines
- Treble and bass clefs
- Grand staff
- Keyboard organization
- Accidentals
- Enharmonic equivalents
- Note and rest values
- Dotted notes
- Ties
- Simple and compound meter
- Time signatures
- Measures and bar lines
- Tempo markings
- Dynamics
- Articulation and expression markings
- Orchestral / Choral Arrangement

Textbook Reading

Open Music Theory - Selected sections addressing:

- Introduction to Western Musical Notation
- Notes, Clefs, and Ledger Lines
- Reading Clefs
- Keyboard and Grand Staff
- Half Steps, Whole Steps, and Accidentals
- Rhythmic and Rest Values

- Simple Meter
- Compound Meter
- Other Aspects of Musical Notation
- Orchestras and Choral Organization

Music Assignments

1. Label pitches in treble and bass clefs.
2. Write specified pitches on the staff.
3. Identify half steps and whole steps on a keyboard and staff.
4. Complete measures using correct note and rest values.
5. Rewrite rhythmic passages using equivalent notation.
6. Identify meter and time signatures in selected scores.
7. Notate a short 8-measure rhythmic composition.
8. Locate examples of dynamics, articulations, and expressive markings in a published musical score.

Assessments

Quiz 1: Pitch, clefs, keyboard, and accidentals

Quiz 2: Rhythm, note values, rests, and meter

Unit 1 Exam: Written examination covering notation, pitch, rhythm, meter, and musical terminology

UNIT 2 — Scales, Keys, and Intervals (weeks 4-6)

Unit Description

Students investigate the organization of pitch within tonal music. The unit introduces major and minor scales, key signatures, the circle of fifths, scale degrees, intervals, consonance, and dissonance. Students learn to recognize these structures both visually and aurally.

Topics

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|---|--|
| • Major scales | • Chromatic scale |
| • Natural, harmonic, melodic minor scales | • Interval number and quality |
| • Tetrachords | • Major, minor, perfect, augmented, and diminished intervals |
| • Key signatures | • Simple and compound intervals |
| • Circle of fifths | • Consonant and dissonant intervals |
| • Relative and parallel keys | • Interval inversion |
| • Scale-degree names | |

Textbook Reading

Open Music Theory

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|------------------|----------------------|
| • Major Scales | • Intervals |
| • Minor Scales | • Interval Quality |
| • Key Signatures | • Interval Inversion |
| • Scale Degrees | |

Music Assignments

1. Construct major scales in multiple keys.

2. Construct natural, harmonic, and melodic minor scales.
3. Complete and label the circle of fifths.
4. Identify major and minor keys from key signatures.
5. Determine relative and parallel major/minor relationships.
6. Identify written intervals by number and quality.
7. Construct specified intervals above and below a given pitch.
8. Identify selected intervals aurally.
9. Analyze the key and scale material of selected short compositions.

Assessment

Quiz 3: Major/minor scales and key signatures

Quiz 4: Intervals and interval quality

Unit 2 Exam: Scales, keys, circle of fifths, and interval identification/construction

UNIT 3 — Triads, Seventh Chords, and Harmonic Function (weeks 7-11)

Unit Description

This unit introduces harmony and chord construction. Students learn how chords are constructed from scales and how chords function within tonal music. Students begin using Roman numerals to analyze harmonic relationships.

Topics

- Triad construction
- Major, minor, diminished, and augmented triads
- Root, third, and fifth
- Root position and inversions
- Figured bass
- Diatonic triads
- Roman-numeral analysis
- Tonic, predominant, and dominant functions
- Seventh chords
- Dominant seventh chord
- Chord symbols
- Basic harmonic progressions

Textbook Reading

Open Music Theory

- Triads
- Seventh Chords
- Inversion and Figured Bass
- Roman Numerals
- Diatonic Harmony
- Harmonic Function

Music Assignments

1. Construct major, minor, diminished, and augmented triads.
2. Identify triads from written musical examples.
3. Write triads in root position and inversion.
4. Construct diatonic triads in major and minor keys.
5. Label chords using Roman numerals.
6. Construct dominant seventh chords.
7. Analyze chords in selected hymns, songs, and classical excerpts.
8. Create an 8-measure chord progression using tonic, predominant, and dominant functions.

Assessment

Quiz 5: Triads and inversions

Quiz 6: Seventh chords and Roman-numeral analysis

Unit 3 Exam: Chord construction, inversion, Roman numerals, and harmonic function

UNIT 4 — Harmony, Voice Leading, Cadences, and Non-Chord Tones (weeks 12-15)

Unit Description

Students expand their understanding of tonal harmony by examining how individual chords connect to form coherent musical phrases. The unit introduces basic four-part writing, voice-leading principles, cadences, non-chord tones, and common harmonic progressions.

Topics

- SATB writing
- Voice ranges
- Voice spacing
- Doubling
- Contrary, oblique, similar, and parallel motion
- Parallel fifths and octaves
- Common-tone voice leading
- Harmonic progression
- Authentic cadences
- Half cadences
- Plagal cadences
- Deceptive cadences
- Phrase structure
- Passing tones
- Neighbor tones
- Suspensions
- Anticipations
- Appoggiaturas

Textbook Reading

Open Music Theory — Diatonic Harmony

- SATB Chord Construction
- Voice Leading
- Harmonic Function
- Harmonic Progressions
- Cadences
- Embellishing and Non-Chord Tones

Music Assignments

1. Identify types of melodic motion.
2. Complete basic SATB voice-leading exercises.
3. Identify and correct common voice-leading errors.
4. Harmonize short progressions using I, IV, ii, V, and vi.
5. Identify cadences in musical scores.
6. Label non-chord tones in selected passages.
7. Analyze the harmonic progression of a chorale, hymn, or song.
8. Write a short four-part harmonic passage.

Assessment

Quiz 7: Voice-leading principles

Quiz 8: Cadences and non-chord tones

Unit 4 Exam: Harmonic analysis, voice leading, cadences, and non-chord tones

UNIT 5 — Melody, Musical Form, and Analysis (weeks 16-19)

Unit Description

Students examine how composers organize musical ideas into phrases, sections, and complete works. Students apply their knowledge of rhythm, melody, harmony, and cadences to the analysis of musical form in repertoire from different historical periods and styles.

Topics

- Motive
- Melodic contour
- Sequence
- Repetition and contrast
- Phrase and period
- Antecedent and consequent phrases
- Cadential organization
- Binary form
- Ternary form
- Rondo
- Theme and variations
- Introduction to sonata form
- Musical texture
- Monophony
- Homophony
- Polyphony
- Score analysis

Textbook Reading

Open Music Theory — Form

Selected sections addressing:

- Motives and Melodic Organization
- Phrases
- Periods
- Formal Functions
- Binary Form
- Ternary Form
- Rondo
- Sonata Form

Supplemental instructor-selected readings on musical form and analysis.

Music Assignments

1. Identify motives and phrases in short musical excerpts.
2. Label antecedent and consequent phrases.
3. Locate and identify cadences within complete musical phrases.
4. Diagram the form of selected compositions.
5. Analyze examples of binary and ternary form.
6. Compare formal structures in classical and popular music.
7. Complete a written analysis of one selected musical work.
8. Create a short composition in binary or ternary form.

Assessment

Quiz 9: Phrase structure and musical texture

Quiz 10: Binary, ternary, rondo, and other formal structures

Unit 5 Exam: Musical form, phrase analysis, texture, and score analysis

UNIT 6 — Composition, Aural Skills, and Applied Music Theory (weeks 20=23)

Unit Description

The final unit integrates the theoretical concepts studied throughout the course. Students apply their knowledge through composition, listening, score analysis, and performance-based activities. Introductory aural skills reinforce the connection between written notation and actual musical sound.

Topics

- Melodic composition
- Harmonic progression
- Phrase construction
- Melody and harmony relationships
- Rhythmic development
- Motive and thematic development
- Transposition
- Basic arranging
- Sight singing
- Rhythmic dictation
- Melodic dictation
- Interval recognition
- Chord recognition
- Cadence recognition
- Comprehensive score analysis

Textbook Reading

Open Music Theory

Selected review and application sections from:

- Fundamentals
- Diatonic Harmony
- Form
- Popular Music

Selected workbook exercises are used for cumulative review and applied analysis.

Music Assignments

1. Perform or sing major scales and selected intervals.
2. Complete basic rhythmic dictation exercises.
3. Complete short melodic dictation exercises.
4. Aurally identify selected intervals and chord qualities.
5. Transpose a short melody into a different key.
6. Harmonize a given melody using appropriate diatonic chords.
7. Analyze a complete short musical composition.
8. Complete a final original composition of approximately 16–32 measures.

Final Composition Project

Students compose an original short work demonstrating:

- A clearly established key
- Correct musical notation
- Appropriate meter and rhythmic organization
- A coherent melody
- At least two musical phrases
- Functional harmonic progression
- Appropriate cadences
- Deliberate use of repetition and contrast
- Recognizable musical form
- Appropriate dynamics, articulation, and expression markings

- The student submits the completed score together with a brief written analysis identifying the key, form, principal chords, cadences, and important compositional techniques.

Assessment

Quiz 11: Aural skills and applied theory

Quiz 12: Comprehensive theory review

Unit 6 Exam: Cumulative written and listening examination

Final Composition Project: Original composition and theoretical analysis

COURSE ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

Assessment Category	Weight
Theory Exercises and Music Assignments	30%
Quizzes	20%
Unit Examinations	30%
Composition and Analysis Projects	15%
Aural Skills/Participation	5%
Total	100%