

Mississippi State University Music Theory Curriculum

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Introduction

Currently the student body of music majors served by the Music Department of Mississippi State University numbers approximately 150. A majority of these are pursuing the Bachelor of Music Education degree, while others are pursuing Bachelor of Arts in Music degrees in piano, vocal, and instrumental performance. In addition, some students minor in music. To maximize their potential for success, the MSU Music Theory Area faculty implements the following curriculum.

Our objectives include:

- introduction to and continual reinforcement of basic music theory concepts and skills
- cultivation of tonal voice-leading skills
- fostering of musical creativity
- acquisition of analytical skills
- practice of communication skills
- establishment and refinement of aural acuity
- enhancement of vocal, rhythmic, and related musicianship skills
- integration of conceptual knowledge and its application with performance and creativity
- nurturing independent learning, self-discipline, and personal responsibility
- preparation for the upper division proficiency examination given in the second year of the theory sequence, as well as for advanced studies in music
- exposure to and experience with concepts of 20th and 21st century music
- development of advanced skills in orchestration, formal analysis, and composition

Our instruction features:

- *active* classroom learning, with emphasis on in-class doing, evaluating, and discussing
- required reading assignments, supported by in-class surveys, discussion, and quizzes
- out-of-class exercises, complemented by in-class critical evaluation and discussion
- creative and analytical assignments, with opportunities for in-class presentation
- regular in-class student recitation and response on required readings and assignments
- one-on-one consultation with professors via office hours and e-mail
- regular testing cycles and timely grade reporting via the MSU *myCourse* system

Detailed information pertaining to content, procedures, and policies of Music Theory Curriculum courses is specified in corresponding course syllabi, available from professors of record, which are understood to represent implicitly agreed-upon contracts between professors and students.

With the exception of Music Fundamentals, MSU Music Theory Area courses are understood to be music major courses, designed to prepare would-be music professionals for the competitive arena they wish to enter. Non-music majors should recognize that course standards, intended to maximize the potential for success of future music professionals, cannot be relaxed for those not intent on pursuing music careers.

The following pages provide a survey of the MSU Music Theory Area's course offerings and policies. More details are available from the Music Theory Coordinator, Dr. James Sobaskie.

Placement and Upper Division Proficiency Examinations

Music Theory Placement Examination

- Students entering the MSU Music Department as freshmen take a diagnostic examination, administered at the second meeting of Music Theory I, which will determine their readiness for that course. Test items determine note-naming ability using treble and bass clefs, recognition of simple key signatures, familiarity with common musical symbols, comprehension of basic rhythmic and metric concepts, and the ability to distinguish half from whole steps. Students earning 70% or higher on this test continue in Music Theory I and Ear Training I. Students earning 69% or lower on this test should disenroll in Music Theory I AND Ear Training I and enroll in Music Fundamentals in preparation for enrollment in and successful completion of Music Theory I AND Ear Training I the following academic year.

Upper Division Proficiency Examination

- In preparation for Upper Division coursework in the MSU Music Department and satisfaction of degree requirements, all students take an Upper Division Proficiency Examination (UDPE) in Music Theory that consists of separate tests in: 1) written music theory (fundamentals, figured bass, harmonic progressions, and analysis), 2) ear training (aural perception and dictation), and 3) musicianship skills (vocal, rhythm, and vocal/piano “Sing & Plays”), equivalent to final exams administered in Music Theory III and Ear Training III. Satisfactory passage of the Music Theory UDPE requires a 70% or higher score on the written theory test (100 points) *and* a 70% or higher score on the combined ear training (50 points) and musicianship skills (50 points) tests.
- The MSU Music Department Student Handbook states:

"Passing the U.D.P.E. will be a requirement for the following courses: 3000 level applied study, MU 4313 Form & Analysis, MU 3442 Conducting, MUE 3333 Introduction to Piano Pedagogy, MUE 3243 Planning in Music, MUE 3253 Performance Assessment in Music, MUE 4886, 4896 Student Teaching, and MUE 4873 Student Teaching Seminar."
- For MSU students enrolled in Music Theory III and Ear Training III, the final examinations given in those courses are equivalent to the Music Theory UDPE.
- For transfer students who have completed at least three semesters of a music theory sequence *and* corresponding ear training courses at other institutions, as well as MSU students who did not fully satisfy the Music Theory UDPE tests given in their Music Theory III and Ear Training III courses, the Music Theory UDPE tests are offered just twice year. As stated in the MSU Music Department Student Handbook, the Music Theory UDPE tests are offered in August, prior to the start of the Fall Semester, and in December at the end of the Fall semester (administered in conjunction with the final examinations of Music Theory III and Ear Training III). Students who need to take the Music Theory UDPE can check the Music Department’s Departmental News page to learn when the tests are offered, and may contact Dr. James Sobaskie with questions. All should remember that fully passing the Theory UDPE means passing *both* the written theory *and* the aural/skills tests.
- Students may attempt the three Music Theory UDPE tests three times. Students who attempt the Music Theory UDPE tests three times without fully passing will need re-take Music Theory III and Ear Training III in order to re-attempt the Music Theory UDPE.

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- Information regarding the Music Theory UDPE is available on the MSU Music Department website.

Music Theory Area Attendance Policy

In order to acquire the discipline, knowledge, and skills necessary for success in the music profession, students are expected to attend all scheduled Music Theory and Ear Training class sessions. Here are the essential components of the MSU Music Theory Area Attendance Policy:

- Attendance will be taken during the first five minutes of class. Any class member not present during that time will be considered absent. The classroom door will be closed after attendance is taken, and students will not be allowed to enter or interrupt the class after it has started. Tardiness is understood to be disruptive and disrespectful.
- Absence due to illness, extreme circumstances, or official University academic or musical activities *may* be excused upon the presentation and acceptance of appropriate documentation, which may include letters of explanation from professional medical personnel (i.e., a doctor or a nurse), law enforcement officials, and University professors. Student or parent phone calls or e-mails are not acceptable for absence documentation. Absences for other reasons, such as duties of a part-time job, fraternity/sorority activities, studying for a test in another class, oversleeping, a family vacation, possession of a plane ticket, etc., will be considered unexcused.
- Students who accumulate more than four (4) unexcused absences in Music Theory classes should expect that their final course grade will be lowered by one grade level.
- Students who accumulate more than three (3) unexcused absences in Ear Training classes should expect that their final course grade will be lowered by one grade level.
- The differing numbers of unexcused absences specified above is due to the differing numbers of weekly meetings (and total number of meetings) of Music Theory and Ear Training classes.

Music Theory Area Examination Policy

In order to acquire the discipline, knowledge, and skills necessary for success in the music profession, as well as for reasons of fairness, students are expected to take *all* Music Theory and Ear Training examinations at their scheduled times. Evaluated exams will be returned and discussed in a timely manner. Here are the essential components of the MSU Music Theory Area Exam Policy:

- Alternative or “make-up” exams will not administered after a class’s exams have been evaluated and returned, and will not be possible for any reason.
- Failure to take a scheduled exam due to an unexcused absence will result in a score of 0 for that exam.
- In the event of unexcused absence at the administration of an exam, the equivalent grade earned on the final exam (adjusted accordingly, given the number of points assigned to each) will replace the missing exam grade (0) after the final exam has been graded at the end of the semester.
- In the event of two or more missed exams in Music Theory III or IV, *only one* missing exam grade will be replaced by a final exam grade, and the other(s) will remain at 0.
- Unexcused absence at the final exam will earn a 0 for that exam, and an “Incomplete” will not be awarded.

Music Theory Area Progress, Achievement, and Disability Policies

A grade of **C** is required by the MSU Music Department for Music Theory Area courses to count toward a music degree, and a grade of **C** is required for progress to the next course in each sequence. Students who earn grades lower than **C** are welcome to re-attempt the corresponding course at its next regularly scheduled offering.

The Music Theory Area observes the MSU policy regarding academic achievement for potential student teachers. According to the Bulletin of Mississippi State University:

“To be eligible for student teaching, the student must have completed a minimum of 18 semester credit hours in the major subject with a minimum of a 2.50 G.P.A. or higher at the time of application. Final eligibility (2.50 G.P.A.) is determined through screening at the end of the semester prior to student teaching. The student must also have completed all professional education and methods courses with a minimum grade of “**C**” prior to student teaching.”

Students are encouraged to request an appointment with their professor to discuss their current achievement in their classes. Grades are recorded in a timely manner and available for review within MSU’s *myCourses* system.

Students with a recognized learning disability and desirous of official academic accommodation should provide their professor with appropriate notification and documentation by the end of the second week of classes. For more information on this subject, see the MSU website <http://www.msstate.edu/dept/sss/disabilities/>.

Music Fundamentals (MU 1003)

The MSU Music Fundamentals course is designed for students who wish to be MSU music majors, but need to develop foundational skills that will enable them to succeed in Music Theory I. It also is open as an elective to non-majors who wish to acquire those same skills.

Music Fundamentals offering training in note-reading, key signatures, interval identification, and chord-spelling, aural skills, and musicianship skills, among many other things.

Music Theory Sequence

The MSU Music Theory Sequence, which includes the courses of Music Theory I, II, III, and IV, each of which carries three credits, provides training in music fundamentals and tonal voice-leading, plus opportunities to develop communication, creative, and analytical skills, as well as the discipline essential to success in the music profession. The four courses in this sequence are coordinated with the four courses of the Ear Training sequence (described below), and the corresponding courses are co-requisites. That is, Music majors and music minors enrolled in a Music Theory Sequence course are required by the Music Department to be simultaneously enrolled in, or have already earned a **C** in, the corresponding ear-training course. Thus, registration in this course without concurrent registration in or prior completion of its co-requisite *is not* an option. Music Theory II, III, and IV prerequisites include successful completion of the previous course(s) in the sequence with a **C** or better.

Required textbooks for the MSU Music Theory Sequence include *The Musician’s Guide to Theory and Analysis* textbook and workbook (Clendinning /Marvin).

Each course in the MSU Music Theory Sequence includes an analytical essay assignment and a creative composition assignment, the latter of which may involve classroom performance.

Music Theory I (MU 1213)

Music Theory I will draw upon the professor's choice of materials from among Clendinning/Marvin textbook and workbook chapters 1–11.

Music Theory I stresses concepts and skills pertaining to:

- pitch
- rhythm
- meter
- keys
- scales
- intervals
- chords
- harmonic analysis
- 2-voice species counterpoint

Music Theory II (MU 1413)

Music Theory II will draw upon the professor's choice of materials from among Clendinning/Marvin textbook and workbook chapters 12–20.

Music Theory II stresses concepts and skills pertaining to:

- fundamentals review
- the phrase model
- four-part voice-leading
- cadences
- melodic embellishment
- melody harmonization
- figured bass
- phrase expansion
- phrase relationships
- sequences
- tonicization
- harmonic elaboration
- phrase structure
- motivic analysis

Evaluation Criteria for Music Theory I and II

The components of Music Theory I and II are weighted according to the following 100-point scale:

- 80% for 4 exams of 20% each exam
- 10% for homework, class work, pop-quizzes, quizzes etc...
- 10% for the assignments: 5% written (analytical) and 5% compositional

Music Theory III (MU 2613)

Music Theory III will draw upon the professor's choice of materials from among Clendinning/Marvin textbook and workbook chapters 21–26, following review of earlier chapters.

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Music Theory III stresses concepts and skills pertaining to:

- music fundamentals (review)
- figured bass
- tonicization
- modulation
- analytical techniques
- hierarchical aspects of structure (linear progressions, expanded arpeggiations, etc.)
- binary and ternary forms
- chromaticism
- pop song structure
- art song structure
- variation structure
- rondo structure

Evaluation Criteria for Music Theory III

The components of Music Theory III—which differ from those of Music Theory I, II, and IV because of differences in pedagogical objectives—are weighted according to the following 500 point scale:

- 62% (310 points) for 4 exams distributed in the semester
- 20% (100 points) for homework
- 5% (25 points) for quizzes
- 6% (30 points) for an analytical essay
- 7% (35 points) for a composition project

Music Theory IV (MU 2813)

Music Theory IV will draw upon the professor's choice of materials from among Clendinning/Marvin textbook and workbook chapters 27–37.

Music Theory IV stresses concepts and skills pertaining to:

- figured bass
- hierarchical aspects of structure (linear progressions, expanded arpeggiations, etc.)
- sonata form
- advanced chromaticism
- modern modality
- non-diatonic scales
- set theory and analysis
- atonality
- serialism
- 20th and 21st century topics relating to rhythm, timbre, texture, performance, techniques, contextual processes, and new sonic resources

Evaluation Criteria for Music Theory IV

The components of Music Theory IV—which differ from those of Music Theory I, II, and III because of differences in pedagogical objectives—are weighted according to the following 500 point scale:

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- 50% (250 points) for 3 exams distributed in the semester
- 20% (100 points) for homework
- 5% (25 points) for quizzes
- 10% (50 points) for an analytical essay
- 15% (75 points) for a composition project

Ear Training (Musicianship): Aural, Vocal, Rhythmic, and Related Skills

The MSU Ear Training sequence, which includes Ear Training I, II, III, and IV, each carrying one credit, offers opportunities to develop musicianship skills in the aural, vocal, rhythmic, and related domains. The four courses in this sequence are coordinated with the four courses of the Music Theory sequence (described above). Ear Training II, III, and IV prerequisites include successful completion of the previous course(s) in the sequence with a C or better.

Required textbooks for the entire sequence include: *A New Approach to Sight Singing* (Berkowitz, Fontrier, and Kraft), and *Rhythm Reading* (Kazez). Also required for the entire Ear Training sequence is the *MacGAMUT* computer program (Blombach).

Recognizing that each Ear Training class carries only one credit, the four courses of the Ear Training Sequence all emphasize the following essential musicianship skills:

- music fundamentals practice
- interval identification and dictation
- chord identification and dictation
- rhythmic dictation
- melodic dictation
- harmonic dictation
- transcription
- prepared one- and two-part rhythms
- rhythmic duets
- interval, scale, mode, and arpeggiated chord progression singing
- prepared solfège
- unfamiliar (sight-sung) *sofège*
- variation singing with *sofège*
- duet part-singing with *sofège*
- Sing & Plays (*sofège* with student- prepared piano accompaniment)

MacGAMUT proficiencies enable all students to reach equivalent levels of achievement, given innate abilities and applied time. Achievement of specified levels by specified times is understood to correspond to the acquisition of *discipline*, one of the Music Theory Area's primary educational objectives, and students are expected to develop personal systems for success. Students also are expected to maintain their own current backups of their *MacGAMUT* .mgs record-keeping files for the ongoing demonstration of their aural achievement.

Ear Training I (MU 1321)

Ear Training I aural skill development stresses two types of activities focusing on vocal and rhythmic skills::

- listening, which includes: dictation, recognition or musical perception
- performance, which includes: sight-reading, prepared performance, and conducting

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Exams will reflect in class activities involving listening and performance, the later with prepared and unfamiliar vocal and rhythmic exercises.

Ear Training I required *MacGAMUT* mastery level achievements include the three following proficiencies:

- I: Aural Intervals 1; Written Intervals 2; Aural Scales: 1; Rhythmic: 1; Melodic: 1
- II: Aural Intervals 2; Written Intervals 4; Aural Scales: 2; Rhythmic: 2; Melodic: 2
- III: Aural Intervals 3, Written Intervals 6; Written Chords: 2; Rhythmic: 4; Melodic: 3

Ear Training I vocal skill development will draw upon the professor's choice of materials from among the following Berkowitz chapters:

- Berkowitz Chapter One (Melodies) Section I
- Berkowitz Chapter Two (Duets) Section I
- Berkowitz Chapter Three (Sing and Play) Section I
- Berkowitz Chapter Four (Themes and Variations) Section I
- Berkowitz Chapter Five (Melodies) Section I

Ear Training I rhythmic skill development will proceed from the professor's choice from among the following Kazez chapters distributed in four exams:

- I: Chapter 1
- II: Chapter 1
- III: Chapter 2
- IV: Chapter 3

Ear Training II (MU 1521)

Ear Training I aural skill development stresses two types of activities focusing on vocal and rhythmic skills:

- listening, which includes: dictation, recognition or musical perception
- performance, which includes: sight-reading, prepared performance, and conducting

Exams will reflect in class activities involving listening and performance, the later with prepared and unfamiliar vocal and rhythmic exercises.

Ear Training II required *MacGAMUT* mastery level achievements include the three following proficiencies:

- I: Aural Intervals 4; Aural Chords: 1; Rhythmic: 5 Melodic: 4; Harmonic 1
- II: Aural Intervals 5; Aural Chords 2; Rhythmic: 6; Melodic: 5; Harmonic 2
- III: Aural Intervals 6; Aural Chords 3; Rhythmic: 7; Melodic: 6; Harmonic 3

Ear Training II vocal skill development will proceed from the professor's choice from among the following textbook chapters:

- Berkowitz Chapter One (Melodies) Section II
- Berkowitz Chapter Two (Duets) Section II
- Berkowitz Chapter Three (Sing and Play) Section II
- Berkowitz Chapter Four (Themes and Variations) Section II
- Berkowitz Chapter Five (Melodies) Section II

Ear Training II rhythmic skill development will draw upon the professor's choice from among the following Kazez chapters distributed in four exams:

- I: Chapter 4
- II: Chapter 5
- III: Chapter 6
- IV: Chapter 7

Evaluation Criteria for Ear Training I and II

The components of Ear Training I and II—which differ from those of Ear Training III and IV because of differences in pedagogical objectives—are weighted according to the following 100 point scale:

- 80% (80 points) for 4 aural skills and musicianship exams distributed in the semester (4 exams of 20% each exam)
- 5% (5 points) for all *MacGAMUT* proficiencies distributed in the semester
- 5% (5 points) for 1 transcription project
- 10% (10 points) for all prepared and unfamiliar musicianship exercises distributed in the semester done in class

Ear Training III (MU 2721)

Ear Training III *MacGAMUT* achievement requirements include three separate proficiencies distributed in the semester, each expected to be successfully completed by every student. Evaluation procedures—which differ from those of Ear Training I and II because of differences in pedagogical objectives—are as follows. In Ear Training III, five (5) points are earned for the achievement of each specified level at the specified time, and zero (0) points are earned for non-achievement of specified levels at the specified times, in support of pedagogical objectives associated with Ear Training III. All students are obliged to meet these levels, and transfer students are *strongly* encouraged to obtain and work with the *MacGAMUT* program before beginning Ear Training III in order to achieve the mastery levels associated with Ear Training II. The specified mastery levels for each of the three Ear Training III proficiencies include:

- I: Aural Intervals 7; Aural Chords 4; Rhythmic 8; Melodic 7; Harmonic 4
- II: Aural Intervals 8; Aural Chords 5; Rhythmic 9; Melodic 8; Harmonic 5
- III: Aural Intervals 9; Aural Chords 6; Rhythmic 10; Melodic 9; Harmonic 6

Ear Training III vocal skill development will proceed from the professor's choice from among the following textbook chapters:

- Berkowitz Chapter One (Melodies) Section III
- Berkowitz Chapter Two (Duets) Section III
- Berkowitz Chapter Three (Sing and Play) Section III
- Berkowitz Chapter Four (Themes and Variations) Section III
- Berkowitz Chapter Five (Melodies) Section III

Ear Training III rhythmic skill development will draw upon the professor's choice from among the following Kazez chapters distributed in four exams:

- I: Chapter 8
- II: Chapter 9

- III: Chapter 10
- IV: Chapter 11

Ear Training IV (MU 2921)

Ear Training IV *MacGAMUT* achievement requirements include three separate proficiencies distributed in the semester, each expected to be successfully completed by every student. Evaluation procedures—which differ from those of Ear Training I and II because of differences in pedagogical objectives—are as follows. In Ear Training IV, five (5) points are earned for the achievement of each specified level at the specified time, and zero (0) points are earned for non-achievement of specified levels at the specified times, in support of pedagogical objectives associated with Ear Training IV. All students are obliged to meet these levels, and transfer students are *strongly* encouraged to obtain and work with the *MacGAMUT* program before beginning Ear Training IV in order to achieve the mastery levels associated with Ear Training III. The specified mastery levels for each of the three proficiencies of Ear Training IV include:

- I: Aural Intervals 10; Aural Chords 7; Rhythmic: 11; Melodic: 7; Harmonic 7
- II: Aural Intervals 11; Aural Chords 8; Rhythmic: 12; Melodic: 8; Harmonic 8
- III: Aural Intervals 12; Aural Chords 9; Rhythmic: 13; Melodic: 9; Harmonic 9

Ear Training IV vocal skill development will proceed from the professor's choice from among the following textbook chapters:

- Berkowitz Chapter One (Melodies) Section IV
- Berkowitz Chapter Two (Duets) Section IV
- Berkowitz Chapter Three (Sing and Play) Section IV
- Berkowitz Chapter Four (Themes and Variations) Section IV
- Berkowitz Chapter Five (Melodies) Section IV

Ear Training III rhythmic skill development will draw upon the professor's choice from among the following Kazez chapters and supplementary materials distributed in four exams:

- I: Chapter 12
- II: Chapter 13
- III: Chapter 14
- IV: Chapters 15 & 16

Evaluation Criteria for Ear Training III and IV

The components of Ear Training III and IV—which differ from those of Ear Training I and II because of differences in pedagogical objectives—are weighted according to the following 500 point scale:

- 40% (200 points) for 4 aural skills exams distributed in the semester
- 15 % (75 points) for 3 *MacGAMUT* proficiencies distributed in the semester
- 5% (25 points) for 1 transcription project
- 40% (200 points) for 4 musicianship skills exams distributed in the semester

Advanced Courses in Music Theory

Advanced courses in the MSU Music Theory Area include Orchestration (MU 3333), Form and Analysis (MU 4313), Composition (MUA 1810), and Advanced Composition (MUA 3810). The following summaries offer essential information about each of these classes. More specific details are available from the Music Theory Area Coordinator, Dr. James Sobaskie.

Orchestration requires prior successful completion of Music Theory IV, or an equivalent transfer course. Orchestration is a 3-credit course offered during fall semesters that stresses listening, independent study, and creativity. Its required textbook is *The Study of Orchestration*, 3rd ed. (Adler). Class activities include required readings, listening exercises, quizzes, ten scoring exercises, an essay project, a class presentation, an orchestration project, two mid-semester exams, and a final examination.

Form and Analysis requires prior satisfactory passage of Music Theory IV, or an equivalent transfer course, *and* requires prior satisfactory passage of the Music Theory UDPE. Form and Analysis is a 3-credit course offered during spring semesters that stresses listening, independent study, and argumentation. Its required textbook is *The Analysis of Music Form* (Mathes); also required is an aural adjunct, a subscription to *classical.com*, that enables online listening to textbook examples *and* includes 30 free downloads, available for six months through the publisher with the textbook through special educational packaging. Class activities include required readings, listening exercises, quizzes, eight analytical exercises, a term paper project, a class presentation, two mid-semester exams, and a final examination.

Composition (MUA 1810) is offered *only* with professor permission, and requires prior satisfactory passage of the Music Theory II *and* Ear Training II, or equivalent transfer courses. Composition (MUA 1810) is a one-credit course in which students meet one-on-one (or two-on-one) for one-half hour (or one hour) with the professor to further develop their creative skills via self-designed and self-executed projects involving different media, means, and moods. Normally, three projects are undertaken, at least one of which *must* involve voice or voices, at least one of which *must not* involve piano, and at least one of which *must* be performed publicly during the semester at a professor-approved event, preferably at a *Wednesday's @ 2*, and preferably involving the composer's own performance or direction. Composition may be repeated with the professor's permission.

Advanced Composition (MUA 3810), which requires prior satisfactory passage of the Music Theory UDPE, satisfactory completion of Music Theory IV or an equivalent transfer course, *and* satisfactory completion of Composition (MUA 1810), is a one- or two-credit course involving at least two (for one credit) or more (for two credits) relatively extended, self-designed, and self-executed projects involving different media, means, and moods, at least one of which *must* be performed publicly during the semester at a professor-approved event, preferably at a *Wednesday's @ 2*, and preferably involving the composer's own performance or direction. Advanced Composition may be repeated with the professor's permission.