



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™

Hello!

As Music Theory Coordinator in the Music Department at Mississippi State University, I want to welcome you to our music program, and to share information that will help you prepare for a great start when you arrive.

All universities try to assure new students that they are ready for success in studies they want to undertake, as well as in the competitive careers they seek to enter. For instance, some music departments at other schools in our state require all students transferring in from other institutions to retake their second-year music theory and ear training sequences. However, *we* recognize that automatically retaking equivalent classes isn't always necessary. So for many years have administered our Music Theory Upper Division Theory Proficiency Examination to *every* student, including those who began their education at MSU, to determine where they stand via the same measure.

The Upper Division Theory Proficiency Examination in Music Theory consists of the final exams given in the fall semester of the second-year music theory and ear training classes, as well as an equivalent set of tests given *before* the start of the fall semester for transfer students and those who still need to pass them. Specifically, there is a written music theory test, an aural dictation test, and a musicianship skills test. These tests must be passed with a minimum score of 70% by *all* MSU music majors to fully satisfy the Music Theory UDPE requirement.

Transfer students who already have had four semesters of music theory and ear training, and who pass all three parts of the Music Theory UDPE, are welcome to take more advanced music theory courses that provide professional skills used by teachers and creative musicians, like Composition (MUA 1810) and Orchestration (MU 3333), as well as Form and Analysis (MU 4313). Students who do not earn a minimum score of 70% on the written theory test then retake Music Theory III in the fall semester to improve. Those who do not earn a minimum combined score of 70% on the aural dictation and musicianship skills tests then retake Ear Training III to remediate. All then re-attempt the corresponding UDPE tests again at the end of the fall. Fortunately, students who already have taken four semesters of music theory and ear training and earned good grades in those classes can pass these third-semester tests on the first try *if* they prepare well over the summer. The rest of this letter will suggest how to review and practice for those three tests.

The written music theory test begins with items that address fundamentals, like scales, intervals, chords, key signatures, meter, and rhythm. It also includes a modulating figured bass to be realized according to conventional tonal voice-leading practice and analyzed using standard Roman numerals and inversion symbols. There also are three-chord harmonic progressions to realize, expressed by Roman numerals and other symbols, which may include secondary dominants, augmented-sixth chords, and other common chromatic harmonies, and which require an appropriate resolving chord. Finally, there will be a short musical excerpt for analysis, with selected chords to analyze, items on the score to identify by name, and statements about the music to complete with the best possible term. All of this is designed to be finished in an hour, but two hours will be available.

So... how to prepare for the written music theory test? Re-study your theory book, especially the parts dealing with figured bass and how chromatic chords resolve, and review the homework assignments you did, correcting any parts that could be improved. If there are any exercises in your book or workbook that your professor didn't assign, you could do them and check to make sure that there are no parallel P5s or P8s, that leading tones resolve up at cadences while harmonic sevenths resolve down, that chords are spelled right, and that the lines move well. A sample of the written theory test can be downloaded at: <http://www.music.msstate.edu/areas/theory/theory/>. The creative imagination measured here continues to be developed in Composition, Orchestration and Form classes through composing, arranging, and writing – skills that successful teachers and performing musicians commonly exercise – so preparing for the Music Theory UDPE prepares you for those activities too!

The aural dictation test of the Music Theory UDPE involves identifying and notating melodic and harmonic intervals up to the octave, as well as chords – triads and sevenths – in all inversions. It also includes four-measure rhythmic and melodic dictations, plus a short harmonic progression in four parts to hear, notate, and analyze using Roman numerals and inversion symbols. The perceptual and cognitive skills involved here are the same ones that

enable performers to learn music more quickly, surely, and confidently, as well as shape, correct, and enhance their playing, so students to develop them through dictation become more independent and expressive. And the more perceptive your hearing, the more you can learn from your instrument or voice teacher!

So... how to prepare for the aural dictation test? If your ear training classes required a textbook accompanied by CDs, or software like *Practica Musica*, your review for the aural dictation test should start there. However, the *ideal* way to prepare would be to use the *MacGAMUT 6* computer program (<http://www.macgamut.com/>), which can be had for just \$40. Required at MSU, it is the *very best* ear training software available, and our ear training courses focus on the skills it develops. Beyond that, it has several components that enable you to practice music fundamentals, like spelling intervals, scales, and chords, so it can help you in those areas too.

The musicianship skills test measures musicality through performance and examines some of the same skills measured by aural dictation. But unlike the other tests, students know what will be on 92% of this test a month before it is given, because essential preparatory materials will be published on the MSU Music Department's website so they can be practiced in advance. We know that certain kinds of musical skills, like those revealed in solo recitals and ensemble concerts, need practice to develop and display, and the same is true of fundamental musical aptitudes. These skills reflect a musician's ability to understand and learn from musical notation, as well as hear it in his or her "mind's ear." When developed, these aptitudes increase the speed of learning pitches and rhythms. In turn, musicians who develop these skills enable their ensemble directors and studio teachers to spend less time drilling on notes and rhythms, and more time on expression and style – all crucial to great performances!

In this musicianship skills test, students sing the examiner's choice of: 1) an ascending and a descending simple interval on *la*; 2) a major or a minor scale, plus one of the modes, using *solfège*; 3) a prepared given arpeggiated harmonic progression (e.g., I – IV – ii – V = *do, mi, sol, mi, do – fa, la, do, la, fa – re, fa, la, fa, re – sol, ti, re, ti, sol*); 4) a brief unfamiliar melody using *solfège*; 5) a melody prepared from those given; 6) one part of a given duet using *solfège* while the examiner plays the other part; 7) prepared given one-part and two part rhythms; and 8) one of two prepared given "Sing & Plays" – short melodies to be sung using *solfège* with your own piano accompaniment. All of these items appear on the final exam of Ear Training III at MSU, and when students have properly practiced the preparatory materials, they take no more than fifteen minutes to demonstrate.

So, how to prepare for the musicianship skills test? You might start by keeping your *solfège* fluent by singing scales and modes, as well as melodies from the singing text used in your ear training classes. Most importantly, you should download the preparatory material from the Music Department website in mid-July and practice it till you're confident. And if "Sing & Plays" are unfamiliar, devote extra time to them, because the skill will help you in *all* advanced courses. Indeed, you should keep up and develop your keyboard skills over the summer. The Piano area administers entrance exams to place students in appropriate piano classes, as well as a Piano UDPE, and we know that well-developed piano skills are essential to successful conductors, singers, instrumentalists, and composers... indeed every good musician!

Looking forward to meeting you in August – if you have questions before then, just contact me via e-mail!



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