

Music Theory and Aural Skills

Music theory is the study of musical structure: what makes musical compositions work. The goal of music theory studies is to provide a formal description of the musical intuitions of a listener who is experienced in a musical idiom. Or, to put it another way, the goal of music theory is to find a good way to hear music, and to communicate that way of hearing to other people.

Undergraduates at Schwob complete a four-semester core sequence of music theory with further opportunities for advanced study in upper-level offerings. The focus of the four-semester core is musicianship, which is taught as an integrated approach consisting of three inseparable components: technique, knowledge, and expression. Aural Skills courses are an essential component of integrated musicianship, and students enroll in the four-semester Aural Skills sequence concurrent with the Music Theory sequence. In addition, all undergraduate majors must complete a proficiency course in piano, which typically involves four semesters of class piano. The fourth semester comprises the proficiency exam period.

For questions regarding the Music Theory, Aural Skills, or Keyboard areas, please contact [Dr. James Ogburn](#).

[Music Theory & Aural Skills Courses](#)

Student Theory Resources

Information for New Students

The purpose of the following is to help entering music majors better prepare themselves for freshman level music classes. While much of this material will be discussed and reviewed in classes, it is in the student's best interest to have a working knowledge and familiarity with some theory, terminology and music history.

Entering students should be familiar with following tasks:

1. Reading both treble and bass clefs;
2. Understanding basic rhythmic notation for both notes and rests;
3. Knowing major and minor key signatures;
4. Understanding whole- and half-steps as they relate to scales (scale patterns);
5. Understanding simple triads (three-note chords);
6. Understanding basic musical terminology as related to tempo, style and performance;
7. Understanding a brief overview of musical periods and a basic knowledge of significant composers from each era.

For additional references, please consult from among the following sources:

Text sources:

Clendinning, Jane and Marvin, Elizabeth *The Musician's Guide to Fundamentals* (Book & CD-ROM). W.W. Norton & Company; ISBN: 978-0393928747

Henry, Earl, Snodgrass, Jennifer, and Piagentini, Susan *Fundamentals of Music: Rudiments, Musicianship, and Composition* (6th Edition). Pearson; ISBN: 978-0205118335

Houlahan, Michael and Tacka, Philip *From Sound to Symbol: Fundamentals of Music*. Oxford University Press, USA; ISBN: 978-0199751914

Electronic sources:

eTheory: Music Theory Fundamentals in Four Weeks

eTheory is the Eastman School of Music's online course, which can be used by non-Eastman students for an introduction to theory fundamentals, including intervals, counterpoint, chords and figured bass, and phrase models. The online course includes over 200 sets of writing, playing, listening, singing, and conducting exercises, and provides immediate feedback on all new concepts.

To sign up for the online course, visit the Institute for Music Leadership's eTheory page: <http://www.esm.rochester.edu/theory/etheory/>

[Musictheory.net](http://musictheory.net) provides free content—lessons and exams—for the content listed in the numbered bullets (#1-6) shown above.

[Online Music Theory Flash Cards](#) are helpful with testing yourself on music rudiments.

Peer Tutoring

There are many ways you can get help in Music Theory, Aural Skills, and Keyboard.

Peer Tutoring

Students within the Schwob School of Music volunteer to tutor their peers at no charge. Those interested in tutoring must have received an A in the class they wish to tutor, and should contact Dr. Fred Cohen to arrange to be put on the tutoring list.

If you need help in one of your music academic courses, check the list below. Generally peer tutors are contacted via email (or pick a tutor you know and simply ask them). Students can meet with tutors for help in understanding class topics, for assistance in proof-reading assignments or papers, and for assistance in reviewing for exams.

Peer tutoring Do's and Don'ts:

Don't ask your tutor to meet with you every day for five hours. They have a life too. Don't expect your tutor to know without your telling them what the assignment is that you want help with. Don't blow off your tutoring appointment (but do let Dr. Cohen know if your tutor stood you up). Do bring your textbook, assignments, and other materials to a tutoring session. Do spend time before going to a tutoring session going over your materials, so that you know what to ask for help on; maybe you can clarify your own issues! Do make use of tutoring services well before the end of the semester; it is a great idea to plan ahead and have a great foundation in each class by meeting with a tutor.

Other resources

Writing assistance is available at the CSU Writing Center; they do a fantastic job in helping you write at your best level. They need time to help you, so contact them well before your paper is due.

If you think that you might be having a broader difficulty in your classes (for example, you find that you blank out in the middle of every lecture period, or you just can't seem to stop panicking every time you take an exam), you should consider contacting counselors in the CSU Testing Center and the Office of Center for Accommodation and Access. They can help evaluate broader learning issues and will be able to suggest strategies ranging from the very simple (like getting more sleep) to more thorough programs that your instructor will participate in to assist your learning.

Keyboard Proficiency

All students majoring in music are required to pass a keyboard proficiency examination. The proficiency examination tests the student's ability to use the keyboard as a tool within the framework of his/her professional activities. The examination requirements are passed during MUSA 2315 (Keyboard 4). Some requirements are passed in class, and some are recorded for faculty observation. All recording is done in class. No individual recordings will be accepted. The proficiency course (MUSA 2315) must be passed before enrolling in secondary applied piano.

Requirements for MUSA 2315/Proficiency

All major and minor (all forms) scales, hands separate, in two octaves: played in eighth notes with a metronome marking of quarter = 80, including correct standard fingerings. In addition one "white key" scale and one "black key" scale are included played with hands together, each example played in major and three forms of parallel minor.

Five-finger patterns in the right hand, harmonized with primary triads in close position in the left hand. The patterns are played ascending chromatically in tempi appropriate for vocal warm-ups. The right hand is performed in sixteenth notes, with the left hand in quarter notes, at a metronome marking of quarter = 80

Chord progressions in all keys: I-IV-I-V7-I or i-iv-i-V7-I, with the right hand in all three possible chord positions and the root in the left hand.

Folk melody with accompaniment, in appropriate tempo. The melody will include some secondary dominants.

Four-part open choral score, playing two parts simultaneously, with singers singing those parts. The student will perform at least three of the different combinations possible.

Accompaniment appropriate to the major and concentration (solo or choral), performed with a partner soloist.

Memorized performance of Happy Birthday .

Keyboard Majors

Keyboard majors (organ and piano) do not need to play scales, since these will be covered in their instrumental studies. Keyboard majors are not required to enroll in MUSA 2313 or MUSA 2314, but they MUST enroll in MUSA 2315 as a degree requirement.

Transfer Students

Transfer students who passed a piano proficiency examination at another institution must provide the class piano instructor a copy of the examination, together with a statement from an official of that institution (a transcript copy is sufficient if the exam is graded) showing that the student passed the examination. The class piano instructor will then inform the student which parts, if any, of the Schwob School of Music proficiency curriculum must be completed. An advisor will further consult with the student to decide if the student needs to enroll in any "exemption" sections of MUSA 2313 or MUSA 2314 to complete the CSU degree requirements.

Other Keyboard Proficiency Courses

The undergraduate degrees generally require three semesters of preparation leading up to the fourth semester of proficiency completion. These courses are listed below with the general materials covered in each course. All these courses require a C or better to count toward degree completion.

MUSC 1314 Skills 1: This course is split between Aural Skills and Class Piano. Generally students meet twice a week for 25 minutes in the aural skills room and 25 minutes in the keyboard lab.

MUSA 2313 Keyboard 1:

MUSA 2314 Keyboard 2: