
AP Music Theory Essentials

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2:30 – 3:45 p.m.



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In the students' words...

What have I gained from AP Music Theory?

“A more sophisticated knowledge of chord structures”

“In-depth strength in intervals, sight-reading...”

Quotes from AP Music Theory students,
Newtown High School (CT), June 2017

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In the students' words...

What have I gained from AP Music Theory?

“good study habits”

“I have learned to manage my time better and be a better student”

Quotes from AP Music Theory students,
Newtown High School (CT), June 2017



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In the students' words...

What have I gained from AP Music Theory?

“As a student I gained more attention to detail”

“How crucial it is to understand one topic in order to understand the next”

Quotes from AP Music Theory students,
Newtown High School (CT), June 2017

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In the students' words...

What have I gained from AP Music Theory?

“An understanding of music on a more fundamental level allowing me to pick up on things when listening and make sure to bring out certain parts when I'm performing.”

Quotes from AP Music Theory students,
Newtown High School (CT), June 2017



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In the students' words...

What have I gained from AP Music Theory?

“...a much deeper appreciation and passion for music”

Quotes from AP Music Theory students,
Newtown High School (CT), June 2017



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In the students' words...

What have I gained from AP Music Theory?

“...the means to approach music writing from a more diversified perspective”

“...a different approach at how I look at music in the world”

Quotes from AP Music Theory students,
Newtown High School (CT), June 2017



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What is essential in teaching AP Music Theory?

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What is essential in teaching AP Music Theory?

-
- ✓ **Make it engaging for the students**
 - ✓ **Keep the learning afloat**
 - ✓ **Acquaint students with the exam**
 - ✓ **Treat music as a language**

What is essential in teaching AP Music Theory?

✓ **Make it engaging for the students**

- Meet students “where they are;” draw on *their* interests
- Invite connections to students’ own solo/ensemble repertoire
- Enjoy a good digression

In the students'
words...

“I really enjoyed the little snip-its
of music history we discussed,
even though it wasn't directly part
of the curriculum.”

Quotes from AP Music Theory students,
Newtown High School (CT), June 2017



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What is essential in teaching AP Music Theory?

✓ **Make it engaging for the students**

- Meet students “where they are;” draw on *their* interests
- Invite connections to students’ own solo/ensemble repertoire
- Enjoy a good digression
- Maximize opportunities for composition
- Keep students active (lots of singing, active listening, even movement)
- Share the *best* musical examples you can find (knock their “musical socks” off)
- Have fun; build rapport

Wie Melodien zieht es mir, Op. 105, No. 1 (Text: Klaus Groth)
Johannes Brahms



Singstimme *Zart*

Wie Me-lo - di - en - zieht es mir lei - se durch den

Pianoforte *p sempre dolce*



⑤

Sinn, wie Früh - lingsblu - men blüht es und schwebt wie Duft da -

Long-lost original text translation



Singstimme *Zart*

Wie Me-lo-di-en-zieht es mir lei-se durch den
Oh how we love to sing these ex-quis-ite non-har-mon-ic

Pianoforte *p sempre dolce*

5
-Sinn; tones! wie Früh-lingsblu-men blüht es und schwebt wie Duft da.

What is essential in teaching AP Music Theory?

✓ **Keep the learning afloat**

- Use small, frequent review opportunities to *perpetuate* exposure to learned concepts
- Treat all skills as “strands” that start on Day One and run continually throughout the year
- Good news: Musicianship skills reinforce one another, so time spent on sight-singing, for example, is simultaneously helping with dictation, ear-training, aural analysis, score analysis, etc. (So... sing all the time!)

Classroom activities: [Skill Drills 1](#) and [Skill Drills 2](#)

What is essential in teaching AP Music Theory?

✓ Acquaint students with the exam

- Use actual AP exam questions as early as possible
 - Example Planning resource: [Assembling Sample Multiple-Choice Questions for Classroom Practice](#)
- Even practice at the pre-exam level (i.e., early in the course) can *mimic* the exam experience through similar question formats, instructions, etc.
 - Example Instructional resource: Aural Multiple-Choice Practice ([template](#) and [example](#))

What is essential in teaching AP Music Theory?

✓ **Treat music as a language**

- Music is a language, perhaps the most universal language
- Music is strongly analogous to verbal/written language
 - Knowledge: vocabulary, spelling, grammar/syntax, phrase/sentence structure, form, style
 - Skills: reading, dictation, composition, analysis (of written and heard material)
- Creating is at the highest level (composition & improvisation)

What is essential in teaching AP Music Theory?

-
- ✓ **Make it engaging for the students**
 - ✓ **Keep the learning afloat**
 - ✓ **Acquaint students with the exam**
 - ✓ **Treat music as a language**

Teaching strategies for AP Music Theory

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AP Music Theory Skills

-
- ✧ **Convert music between aural and written forms**
 - ✧ **Analyze performed music**
 - ✧ **Analyze notated music**
 - ✧ **Create music based on cues within a tonal context**

AP Music Theory Skills

✧ Convert music between aural and written forms

- Ear-training multiple-choice questions
- Melodic dictation
- Harmonic dictation
- Sight-singing

AP Music Theory Skills

✧ Convert music between aural and written forms

3. Which of the following is played?



29. The rhythm of the first vocal phrase of part 1 can be notated as



AP Music Theory Skills

✧ Convert music between aural and written forms

21. The melody sung by the chorus begins with scale degrees

- (A) 1 3 4 5
- (B) 1 4 5 6
- (C) 5 1 2 3
- (D) 5 2 3 4

36. Which of the following analyses best represents the harmonic progression heard in both phrases of the coda?

- (A) I – IV – ii – V – I
- (B) I – vi – ii⁶ – V – I
- (C) V⁷ – I – ii⁶ – V – I
- (D) V⁷ – vi – ii – V – I



AP Music Theory Skills

✧ Convert music between aural and written forms

Question 1. The melody will be played three times. There will be a pause of 30 seconds after the first playing and a one-minute pause after each subsequent playing. The melody you will hear uses all four of the measures provided below and contains no rests. The melody will be played on a violin.

The pitch of the first note has been provided. Be sure to notate the rhythm of that note. Now listen to the melody for the first time and begin working. 

Moderato



A musical staff with a treble clef, a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and a 6/8 time signature. The first measure contains a quarter note on G5. The remaining three measures are empty.

AP Music Theory Skills

✧ Convert music between aural and written forms

Question 3. Before listening to the first playing, please look at the staff below. Notice that there are nine chords in the progression; the soprano and bass notes and the Roman numeral of the first chord are given.

Now listen to the progression for the first time and begin working. 



A: I _____

AP Music Theory Skills

✧ Convert music between aural and written forms

Question 1. Look over the melody and begin practicing. You have 75 seconds to practice. This is the starting pitch of the printed melody. 

Moderato



f



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Skill: Convert music between aural and written forms

- **Ear-training**
- **Melodic/harmonic dictation**
- **Sight-singing**



Sing, sing, sing!

- Start every class with singing
 - Scales, including the “waveform scale” (1 up to 5, down to low 5, back to 1)
 - Interval “wedge” exercises (diatonic and chromatic)
 - Scale-degree and tendency-tone awareness; for example...
1 – (4) – 3 – (6) – 5 – (7) – 1
 - Echo short melodic segments (4 beats long) using solfège or numbers

Skill: Convert music between aural and written forms

- **Ear-training**
- **Melodic/harmonic dictation**
- **Sight-singing**

Sing, sing, sing! (cont'd)

- Sing (and hear) all concepts discussed in the cognitive realm (e.g., chord qualities, voice-leading examples, compound meter, etc.)
- Address glaring intonation and vocal problems, which sometimes means slowing down the tempo
- Frequent vocalizing acclimates uncomfortable students to singing; must cultivate a mindset where the voice just one more part of the musical apparatus, along with the brain, ears, and eyes

Skill: Convert music between aural and written forms

- **Ear-training**
- **Melodic/harmonic dictation**
- **Sight-singing**

Audiate, audiate, audiate!

- Use the term; describe why it's important to a musician and practically helpful for the exam
- *Practice* it: e.g., sing simple tonal segments and ask students to “echo” each segment in their mind’s ear

When ear-training, connect sound to concepts *and actual notes on the staff*

- When ear-training with intervals, chords, or other pitch patterns, ask students to identify type/quality/size *and, given a reference pitch, to notate actual pitch(es)* [\[example\]](#)

Skill: Convert music between aural and written forms

- **Ear-training**
- **Melodic/harmonic dictation**
- **Sight-singing**

Start sight-singing and dictation (melodic and harmonic) as early as possible

- Start with easy examples (simple, short)
- As soon as students are able, progress to actual exam questions administered in real-time

For sight-singing, use audio capture technology as soon as possible

- Students should be fully acquainted with audio capture methods by exam-day
- To build student confidence in voice-recording, start with *prepared* melodies

Skill: Convert music between aural and written forms

- **Ear-training**
- **Melodic/harmonic dictation**
- **Sight-singing**

Scaffold, scaffold, scaffold!

- Dictation is often new to students (“You want me to do *what?!?*”); break down tasks into *manageable components*
- For harmonic dictation:
 - Students can treat the task as two *melodic* dictations (soprano line and bass line)
 - Supportive step: Play harmonic progression very slowly (“slo-mo”), asking students to “follow” the soprano line in real time (sing each next pitch as they hear it); repeat for bass line

Skill: Convert music between aural and written forms

- **Ear-training**
- **Melodic/harmonic dictation**
- **Sight-singing**

Scaffold, scaffold, scaffold! (cont'd)

- For melodic dictation:
 - Separate rhythm and pitch
 - Students often struggle with pitch in the minor mode: take rhythm out of the equation and focus on pitch
- Classroom activity: [Dictation Warm-ups](#)

Skill: Convert music between aural and written forms

- **Ear-training**
- **Melodic/harmonic dictation**
- **Sight-singing**

Online/software drill provides individualized instruction (educational gold!)

- musictheory.net
 - Interval Ear Training
 - Scale Ear Training (hearing scale *types*)
 - Chord Ear Training
- sonicfit.com
 - Scale Degree Ear Training (hearing scale degrees in a tonal context)
 - Harmonic Bass Line (hearing bass line and Roman numerals; 2/3 of the harmonic dictation task)
 - Melodic Dictation

Skill: Convert music between aural and written forms

- **Ear-training**
- **Melodic/harmonic dictation**
- **Sight-singing**

Use actual exam questions as early as possible

- Wealth of questions from released exams (2016, 2008, 2003), Practice Exam, and Course Description
- Divide into early-, mid-, and late-year questions
- As soon as a concept has been introduced, find appropriate exam questions to acquaint students with *how* the concept might be assessed [\[example\]](#)

Skill: Convert music between aural and written forms

- **Ear-training**
- **Melodic/harmonic dictation**
- **Sight-singing**

Use actual exam questions as early as possible (cont'd)

- Question sets can be disassembled into individual questions; it's okay for students to re-visit recorded examples periodically as they build knowledge
- Offer test-taking strategies right away

Skill: Convert
music between
aural and written
forms

- **Ear-training**
- **Melodic/harmonic dictation**
- **Sight-singing**

Other ideas...

AP Music Theory Skills

✧ Analyze performed music

- Multiple-choice question sets based on recorded examples
- Knowledge of pitch (including melody, harmony, and voice leading), rhythm, form, and musical design (including texture, timbre, and expressive elements)

AP Music Theory Skills

✧ Analyze performed music

Questions 38-42 are based on an excerpt for concert band. The first section of the excerpt, which consists of the introduction and first main section, will be played once; then the second section will be played twice. Finally, the entire excerpt will be played once. Before listening to the first section, please read **Questions 38-40**.

38. The texture of the introduction is best described as

- (A) monophony
- (B) homophony
- (C) imitative polyphony
- (D) nonimitative polyphony

39. The tempo is best described as

- (A) largo
- (B) andante
- (C) allegro
- (D) prestissimo

40. In the repeat of the main section, the performance features which of the following compositional devices?

- (A) Ostinato
- (B) Countermelody
- (C) Pedal point
- (D) Canonic imitation

Before listening to the second section, please read **Questions 41-42**.

41. The second section begins with an ascending melody that is heard twice. The melody ascends, respectively, to scale degrees

- (A) 1 and 2
- (B) 4 and 5
- (C) 5 and 6
- (D) 7 and 1

42. Over the course of the second section, the meter

- (A) changes from simple to compound
- (B) changes from compound to simple
- (C) remains simple throughout
- (D) remains compound throughout

Now listen to the second section for the first time and answer **Questions 41-42**. 



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AP Music Theory Skills

✧ Analyze performed music

38. The texture of the introduction is best described as

- (A) monophony
- (B) homophony
- (C) imitative polyphony
- (D) nonimitative polyphony

50. The excerpt ends with which type of cadence?

- (A) Half
- (B) Plagal
- (C) Perfect authentic
- (D) Imperfect authentic

AP Music Theory Skills

✧ Analyze notated music

- Multiple-choice question sets based on score examples
- Knowledge of pitch (including melody, harmony, and voice leading), rhythm, form, and musical design (including texture, timbre, and expressive elements)

AP Music Theory Skills

✦ Analyze notated music

Questions 45-50 are based on the excerpt below.

The musical score consists of four staves: Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The excerpt spans measures 42 to 51. In measure 45, a dashed box highlights the interval between the violin and viola parts. In measure 51, a note on the violin staff is circled.

45. In measure 45, the boxed interval between the violin and viola pitches is a
- (A) minor third
 - (B) major third
 - (C) perfect fourth
 - (D) perfect fifth
46. The phrase structure of measures 42-47 can best be described as a
- (A) parallel period
 - (B) double period
 - (C) single phrase with cadential extension
 - (D) single phrase with sequential repetition
47. At measures 48-49, there is a temporary tonicization of
- (A) D minor
 - (B) G minor
 - (C) A major
 - (D) F major
48. In measures 48-51, which of the following compositional devices is used in the first violin part?
- (A) Disjunct motion
 - (B) Literal repetition
 - (C) Melodic inversion
 - (D) Melodic sequence
49. The nonchord tone circled on the downbeat of measure 51 is
- (A) a suspension
 - (B) an anticipation
 - (C) an appoggiatura
 - (D) an accented passing tone
50. The excerpt ends with which type of cadence?
- (A) Half
 - (B) Plagal
 - (C) Perfect authentic
 - (D) Imperfect authentic

AP Music Theory Skills

✧ Analyze notated music

45. In measure 45, the boxed interval between the violin and viola pitches is a
- (A) minor third
 - (B) major third
 - (C) perfect fourth
 - (D) perfect fifth
50. The excerpt ends with which type of cadence?
- (A) Half
 - (B) Plagal
 - (C) Perfect authentic
 - (D) Imperfect authentic

Skill: Analyze performed and notated music

Question sets based on...

- Recorded examples
- Score examples

Use actual exam questions as early as possible

Identify “power standards”— fundamental, prioritized content that is *sure* to appear on the exam—and incorporate frequent opportunities for practice

- Examples: identifying meter types, cadence types, texture types; using small letters to map phrase structure; error detection
- Single questions planted strategically throughout the year can keep concepts afloat

Skill: Analyze performed and notated music

Question sets based on...

- Recorded examples
- Score examples

Many great resources to locate practice material

- Musical examples borrowed from other textbooks
- Anthologies have topical indices
- Online resources:
 - [Internet Music Theory Database](#)
 - [G Major Music Theory: Contextual Listening](#)

Skill: Analyze performed and notated music

Question sets based on...

- Recorded examples
- Score examples

Other ideas...

AP Music Theory Skills

✧ Create music based on cues within a tonal context

- Realizing a figured bass
- Realizing a Roman-numeral progression
- Composing a bass line for a given melody, implying appropriate harmony

AP Music Theory Skills

✧ Create music based on cues within a tonal context

Question 5. (Suggested time—15 minutes)

Realize the figured bass below in four voices, following traditional eighteenth-century voice-leading procedures. Continue logically from the spacing of the first chord. Do not add embellishments unless indicated by the figured bass. On the blank below each chord, write the Roman numeral that appropriately indicates harmonic function.

The musical notation shows a bass line in 2/4 time. The notes and figured bass symbols are: G₂ (3), A₂ (6), B₂ (6), C[#]₃ (5), D₃ (6), and E₃ (#). The treble clef staff is empty.

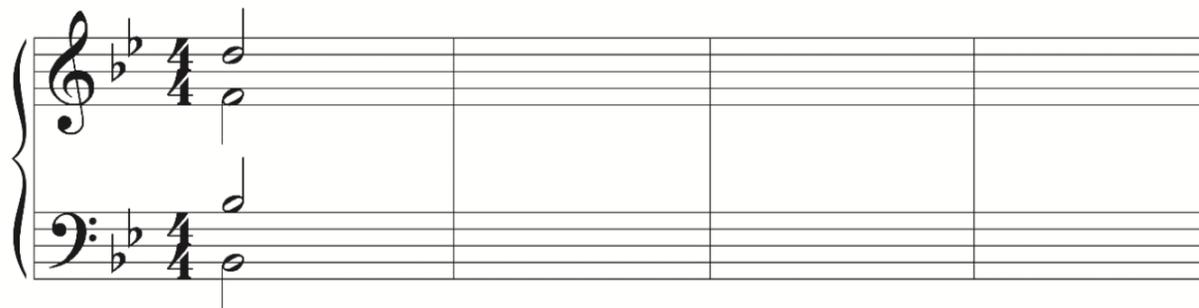
a: _____

AP Music Theory Skills

✧ Create music based on cues within a tonal context

Question 6. (Suggested time—10 minutes)

Write the following progression in four voices, following eighteenth-century voice-leading procedures. Continue logically from the spacing of the first chord. Do not add embellishments unless indicated by the Roman and Arabic numerals. Use only quarter and half notes.



B \flat : I I⁶ IV V₃⁴/ii ii V⁸⁻⁷ I

Skill: Create music based on cues within a tonal context

- **Realizing a figured bass**
- **Realizing a Roman-numeral progression**
- **Composing a bass line for a given melody, implying appropriate harmony**

Start practicing tasks as early as possible

- Part-writing can be the vehicle through which harmony and voice-leading are learned
- Many melodies can be harmonized as soon as tonic and dominant chords have been introduced

Skill: Create music based on cues within a tonal context

- **Realizing a figured bass**
- **Realizing a Roman-numeral progression**
- **Composing a bass line for a given melody, implying appropriate harmony**

Bring part-writing to life

- Have students sing class examples after (and as) they write them; a sequence might be:
 1. Sing each line in unison
 2. Sing outer voices
 3. Sing full SATB parts

In the students' words...

What was your favorite part of AP Music Theory?

“The singing of course! Being able to hone my singing skills was amazing especially in regards to the chorales we've sung. I really love being a part of a group effort to create music and I'm glad I got that experience in this class.”

Quotes from AP Music Theory students,
Newtown High School (CT), June 2017



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Skill: Create music based on cues within a tonal context

- **Realizing a figured bass**
- **Realizing a Roman-numeral progression**
- **Composing a bass line for a given melody, implying appropriate harmony**

Bring part-writing to life

- Have students sing class examples after (and as) they write them; a sequence might be:
 1. Sing each line in unison
 2. Sing outer voices
 3. Sing full SATB parts
- Spend time with scores/recordings that demonstrate figured bass (e.g., slow movement from J.S. Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 5) and chorale-writing (e.g., chorales from Bach cantatas and passions)

J. S. Bach: Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, Movement 2

Affettuoso.

Flauto traverso.

Violino principale.

acomp.

Cembalo.



Skill: Create music based on cues within a tonal context

- Realizing a figured bass
- Realizing a Roman-numeral progression
- Composing a bass line for a given melody, implying appropriate harmony

Bring part-writing to life (cont'd)

- Look for connections to popular music
 - “American Tune” (Paul Simon) based on “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded” (prominent Lutheran chorale tune)



- Have students composing as much as possible and facilitate live performances of their music...

Skill: Create music based on cues within a tonal context

- **Realizing a figured bass**
- **Realizing a Roman-numeral progression**
- **Composing a bass line for a given melody, implying appropriate harmony**

Other ideas...

Bringing Part-Writing to Life through Composition

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Why compose?

-
- Students love it: Informal survey showed half of my own students asking for more composition
 - Emphasis on *creativity* aligns beautifully with established and progressive educational thinking
 - *Create* is the highest of Bloom's Cognitive Dimensions
 - *Creating* (as well as *evaluating* and *refining*) are 21st Century Skills
 - Allows for experience with notation software

Why compose?

-
- Chorale-writing offers an excellent introduction to composing: harmony and voice-leading “guidelines” provide concrete (and often comforting) structure for students new to composition

Advice for composition projects

-
- As soon as students are doing textbook part-writing, they can be composing original phrases
 - Keep it small (e.g., a 4-measure phrase); foster “quality over quantity”
 - Keep it structured; provide detailed instructions

Advice for composition projects



-
- Compositions should always be *heard* by class:
 - On piano (by teacher or student)
 - Electronic rendering (by software)
 - Sung by class (with and/or without piano support)
 - Informal “reading sessions”
 - On instruments, by members of class (“miscellaneous” chamber ensemble)
 - By established school ensembles
 - At school concerts, even an established “Composers’ Concert”

Example composition projects for AP Music Theory

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Composition Assignment: Chorale Phrase *(early in the year)*

*But there's so much to cover.
How do I find the TIME for
composition?*

Composition Project: Complete Chorale Composition *(designed for minimal time expenditure)*



Extending the Learning: Post-Exam Composition Project *(including optional discussion of modern harmony)*

Thank You!

Materials available at:

www.NewtownNewMusic.weebly.com/APAC2017

Email: leec@newtown.k12.ct.us



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