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Graduate Placement Exam: Description and Study Guide

A two-hour entrance examination in music history and entrance examinations in both music theory and aural skills are required of all graduate students before their first term of enrollment. The examinations are given during Week of Welcome (WOW), which occurs one week prior to the start of Fall term. Students who score below the designated levels must enroll in the prescribed course or courses at the earliest opportunity.

Music History

Overview: This examination assesses vocabulary, listening skills, and concepts that are typically covered in a 1-year undergraduate survey sequence of the history of Western music. As survey content can differ from one institution to the next, we recommend supplementing your existing knowledge with guided listening to musical works in a standard textbook anthology, such as the *Norton Anthology of Western Music*, along with self-study from a respected textbook, with a focus on key vocabulary and terms. For most exam-takers, a swift, but not comprehensive, review of one of the books in “Suggested Study Materials” (below) will suffice.

Part One

Listening

Ten listening examples will be played twice (each approximately 30–90 seconds in length). For each example, identify a probable or likely composer, a fifty-year span during which the example could have been composed (e.g., 1875–1925, 1700–1750), and 2-3 salient musical features that led you to deduce that information. The composers and works chosen for this section are broadly representative of major stylistic shifts and aesthetic approaches from the period. If the composer you identify is incorrect, but it’s clear you are sensitive to the sound world and time period of the excerpt, the answer will be marked correct. (30 points)

Part Two

Short-Answer Questions

Choose 10 of 15 terms listed (e.g., the term *madrigal*). Describe briefly, but specifically, what the following terms mean and/or why they are significant to music history. Are there specific time periods or places associated with the term? What is distinctive about the term that differentiates it from similar words? The terms chosen for this section represent words that are shown in boldface in standard textbooks, and that

represent important aesthetic, generic, historical, and stylistic shifts in Western music history. Note: please review the definition of the word “genre” (symphony, string quartet, song, opera, oratorio, etc.) (20 points)

Part Three

Essay

You will be asked to write on one essay question from a selection of six prompts. PhD students with a primary area in musicology will choose two essay questions. Below you will find three examples of essay prompts offered in past years; note that these precise questions will not appear on the exam. (20 points)

Example 1: Discuss the main developments in opera from its beginnings to Wagner. How did the sound of this genre change, and why? What social situations and literary content were popular in different periods, and why?

Example 2: The nineteenth century is characterized by the rise of nationalist movements and the rapid expansion of colonial empires. How did nationalism and colonialism, via exoticism and orientalism, impact musical sound in this period? Choose at least two musical works as examples, one work for each topic (nationalism and colonialism).

Example 3: Western music history courses often focus disproportionately on music from France, Germany, Austria, and Italy. Choose a body of music from somewhere that is NOT these four localities. You may talk about any genre of music you choose. In your essay, explain the context and significance of this music. What features of the music would appeal to students in a survey course? How would you teach it? What historical or cultural themes does this music bring to the surface?

Suggested Study Materials for Exam Preparation

Music history textbooks such as:

J. Peter Burkholder, Donald J. Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 7th edition. (N.Y.: Norton, 2005).

Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (N.Y.: Norton, 2003).

Sarah Fuller, *The European Musical Heritage, 800-1750*, revised edition (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006).

Donald J. Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 6th edition (N.Y.: Norton, 2001).

H. Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974).

David Poultney, *Studying Music History: Learning, Reasoning, and Writing About Music History and Literature*, 2nd edition (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1996).

K. Marie Stolba, *The Development of Western Music*, 3rd edition (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1998).

Anthologies of Western music and recorded anthologies of Western music such as:

Norton Anthology of Western Music, 2 vols, 4th edition, edited by Claude V. Palisca, and *The Norton Recorded Anthology of Western Music*, 2 vols, 4th edition, edited by Claude V. Palisca (N.Y.: Norton, 2001).

The Norton Anthology of Western Music and The Norton Recorded Anthology, 5th edition, edited by J. Peter Burkholder. (N.Y.: Norton, 2005);

K. Marie Stolba, *The Development of Western Music: An Anthology*, 2 vols. 3rd edition (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1998); Compact Discs, vol. 1-2 for use with *The Development of Western Music: An Anthology*, 2 vols. 3rd edition (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1998).

Music Theory and Aural Skills

Aural skills exam

A. Melodic Dictation

One or two melodies of moderate difficulty will be performed at the piano (or, for an online exam, given as an audio file). Clef, key, time signature and starting pitch will be given. The student will be asked to notate the melodies, or to choose the correct melody from a set of possibilities.

B. Harmonic Dictation

We will play a few excerpts of about four measures each in a homophonic texture (all voices moving together) on the piano, or as a recording for an online exam. Students will be asked to notate the bass line and soprano line (not the inner voices) and to provide a Roman-numeral analysis of the progression.

The vocabulary of chords includes the following: diatonic triads and seventh chords (including the fully-diminished seventh chord), secondary dominants, dominant sevenths, and diminished sevenths of all scale degrees (V/ii, vii^{o7}/V, etc.), and chromatic chords such as the Neapolitan and augmented sixths.

C. Sightsinging (tested individually)

Students will be asked to sing an unfamiliar melody at sight. Students will be given one minute to practice before performing, during which time they may sing but will not be able to use a piano or other instrument (the proctor will give the tonic pitch or chord). Students may sing on any syllable they wish (solfège not required).

The melodies will be tonal with some chromaticism and/or a modulation to a closely related key. Below is a typical example; others can be found in the Ottman/Rogers *Music For Sightsinging* textbook, Chapters 15–16.

A typical example:

The musical notation consists of three staves of music in 4/4 time, written in treble clef. The first staff begins with a whole note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, a quarter rest, a quarter note B4, a half note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F#4, and a whole note E4. The second staff begins with a whole note D#4, followed by a whole note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F#4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note D#4, and a whole note C5. The third staff begins with a half note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F#4, a whole note E4, a quarter note D#4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F#4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note D#4, a quarter note C5, and a whole note B4.

Written theory exam

A. Analysis

A section or full movement of a classical piece will be given in both score and audio form. Students will be asked to analyze several aspects of the piece, which may include:

- Roman numeral analysis (labeling each chord, e.g. "ii" or "V⁶/V")
- Cadence identification (both identifying where cadences occur and identifying their type and key, e.g. "perfect authentic cadence in G major")
- Labeling embellishing tones as, for example, "passing tones" or "suspensions"
- Short-answer questions about more difficult chords or melodic features
- Form identification and description (for instance, describing the themes that occur and what key they are in, and which sections repeat and/or vary prior sections; also identifying common classical forms such as "rounded binary" or "sonata form")

B. Writing a chord progression in four voices

Students will be given a chord progression, notated with Roman numerals, and asked to write out that chord progression in four voices (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) or as piano chords (bass line in left hand, three notes in right hand).

C. Harmonizing a melody

Students will be given a short, simple melody and will be asked to add an appropriate bass line and chord progression (in Roman numerals) that harmonize that melody. Inner voices (alto and tenor) are not required.

Suggested study materials for exam preparation

Some textbooks/exercises that could be useful in preparing for the theory entrance exam:

Aural Skills (sight singing): Robert Ottman & Nancy Rogers, *Music for Sight Singing*

Aural Skills (dictation): Gary Karpinski, *Manual for Ear Training and Sight Singing*

Concepts: Elizabeth Marvin & Jane Clendinning, *The Musician's Guide to Theory and Analysis*

Considerations for online theory and aural skills exams

The theory and aural skills exams may be given online through Canvas. To successfully take these exams online, students must be able to:

- Access the internet, uninterrupted
- See images through their web browser (phones not recommended)
- Hear audio through their device (headphones recommended)
- Write musical notation on staff paper and upload it in digital form, either by scanning it through a scanning app or by using a tablet with a stylus.
 - o For the theory exam, the notation may be done with notation software and exported as a PDF
 - o For the aural skills exam, the melodic dictation must be done by hand (notation software's playback capability defeats the purpose!)