

Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2021 AP[®] Music Theory Free-Response Questions

- Number of Readers 148

Music Theory

- Number of Students Scored 16,271
- Score Distribution

Exam Score	N	%At
5	3,235	19.9
4	2,947	18.1
3	3,781	23.2
2	3,773	23.2
1	2,535	15.6
- Global Mean 3.04

Music Theory Aural Subscore

- Number of Students Scored 16,268
- Score Distribution

Exam Score	N	%At
5	3,274	20.1
4	2,901	17.8
3	3,839	23.6
2	3,723	22.9
1	2,531	15.6
- Global Mean 3.04

Music Theory Nonaural Subscore

- Number of Students Scored 16,268
- Score Distribution

Exam Score	N	%At
5	3,174	19.5
4	2,968	18.2
3	3,784	23.3
2	3,833	23.6
1	2,509	15.4
- Global Mean 3.03

* The number of students with Music Theory aural and nonaural subscores may differ slightly from the number of students who took the AP Music Theory Exam due to exam administration incidents.

The following comments on the 2021 free-response questions for AP[®] Music Theory were written by the Chief Reader, Ron Rodman, Dye Family Professor of Music at Carleton College. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student preparation in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

Question #1 **Task:** Skill Category #3 Convert Between Performed and Notated Music **Topic:** Melodic Dictation

Max. Points: 9

Mean Score: 4.34

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- hear a four-measure major-key melody in compound meter and notate the melody;
- hear and notate ascending and descending scalar patterns;
- hear and notate the dotted rhythm in the first and third measure of the melody;
- hear and notate melodic patterns containing stepwise motion and melodic skips in the tonic triad;
- hear and notate an idiomatic melodic cadence; and
- hear and notate pitches correctly in treble clef.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Student responses demonstrated:

- moderate ability of converting a heard melody into music notation;
- understanding of the topics (major scale, treble clef, compound meter) through moderately correct notation; and
- limited difficulty with pitch and rhythm as demonstrated by common errors of notation.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Inability to differentiate skips vs. steps
- Inability to successfully notate rhythms in compound meter on the subdivision level
- Limited difficulty with pitch and rhythm as demonstrated by errors of notation

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inability to hear skips vs steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to differentiate steps and skips, especially those specific to the tonic triad
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inability to notate correct rhythms in compound duple (6/8) meter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to notate correct rhythms, especially dotted rhythms on the subdivision level
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inability to notate the entire melody, especially the interior measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to hear and notate the entire melody

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Practice aural skills daily.
- Practice having students listen and recall the melody before notating on the page.
- Expose students to a wide variety of melodies in major and minor, various meters (especially compound), and differing tempi.
- Do more sight singing. Focus on developing scale degree awareness, so that students are not measuring leaps as intervals devoid of a tonal context.

- Do not ignore rhythm: Teach students a vocabulary of typical rhythmic patterns in both simple and compound meters.
- Stress proper notation, including correct use of stems, beams, accidentals, dots, etc. Constantly reinforce this until clear notation is a habit. Students may lose points because of illegible notation.
- Discuss question strategy with students; tell them that they can expect straightforward rhythms, a range of approximately one octave, and a likely ending on tonic on a strong beat. Caution students that even if they are unsure about some of the durations, they should not leave noteheads without rhythmic values indicated.
- Also coach students to think strategically about completing melodic dictation; have a strategy for notating rhythm or pitch first, working from both ends to the middle of the melody, etc.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

Please refer to the [AP Music Theory Course and Exam Description](#) to find suggestions for introducing, practicing, and assessing students' melodic dictation skills. Of particular use is the "Aural Skills Progression" outline on pp. 197–203.

Also see: [Sight-Singing: Your Key to Success in Melodic Dictation](#) and other publications posted on the [AP Music Theory Classroom Resources](#) page.

AP Classroom contains several free-response melodic dictation questions with scoring guidelines that mimic those used on the AP Music Theory exam:

- Formative free-response melodic dictation questions in major modes (Topic Questions searchable in Question Bank; Personal Progress Check questions accessible from the Unit tabs in AP Classroom):
 - Half-length Melodic Dictation Topic Questions:
 - Unit 1: Melodic Dictation in A-flat Major, Melodic Dictation in E Major
 - Unit 2: Melodic Dictation in D Major
 - Full-length Melodic Dictation Topic Question:
 - Unit 3: Melodic Dictation in D Major
 - Half-length Melodic Dictation Progress Check Questions:
 - Unit 1 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Questions 1 & 2 (B-flat Major, D Major)
 - Unit 2 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Questions 2 (A Major)
 - Full-length Melodic Dictation Progress Check Questions:
 - Unit 8 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 1 (A Major)
- Summative free-response melodic dictation questions (accessible using the Question Bank search function in AP Classroom):
 - To find all available melodic dictation questions in the Question Bank, search using the following filters:
 - Assessment Purpose and Source: Summative
 - Question Type: FRQ: Melodic Dictation
 - Question titles show key, clef, and meter type
- Summative free-response major mode melodic dictation questions on the three full-length practice exams (accessible via the "Assessments" tab in the Question Bank):
 - 2008 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 1 (B-flat major, bass, simple meter)
 - 2016 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 1 (E major, treble, compound meter)
 - 2020 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 1 (E-flat major, bass, simple meter)

Question #2 **Task:** Skill Category #3 Convert
Between Performed and Notated Music

Topic: Melodic Dictation

Max. Points: 9

Mean Score: 2.93

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- hear a four-measure minor-key melody in bass clef and simple meter and notate the melody;
- hear and notate ascending and descending scalar patterns in the minor mode;
- hear and notate an ascending arpeggiated tonic triad;
- hear and notate an ascending arpeggiated subdominant triad;
- hear and notate the dotted rhythms in measures 2 and 4;
- hear and notate melodic patterns containing stepwise motion and melodic skips;
- hear and notate a chromatic passing tone in measure 3 of the melody;
- hear and notate an idiomatic melodic cadence; and
- hear and notate pitches correctly in bass clef.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Student responses demonstrated:

- limited ability of converting a heard melody into music notation;
- incomplete understanding of the minor scale and bass clef, as indicated by problematic notation;
- marked difficulty with rhythm, as demonstrated by errors of notating common beat patterns used in simple meters; and
- limited proficiency with minor keys, shown by errors in notating minor patterns.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Inability to differentiate skips vs. steps, especially skips in the tonic triad
- Incomplete understanding of harmonic minor, especially the raised leading tone
- Limited difficulty with pitch and rhythm as demonstrated by errors of notation

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inability to hear skips vs steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to differentiate steps and skips, especially those specific to the tonic triad
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited understanding of minor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to notate melody using accidentals to account for harmonic minor structure
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inability to notate the entire melody, especially the interior measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to hear and notate the entire melody
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inability to hear chromatic alteration of the chromatic passing tone in m. 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to hear and notate chromaticism

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Practice aural skills daily.
- Teach students to listen to and remember the melody before notating on the page.
- Expose students to a wide variety of melodies in major and minor, various meters, and differing tempi. Focus on all forms of the minor, but stress that harmonic minor will be used in melodic contexts.
- Do more sight singing. Focus on developing scale degree awareness, so that students are not measuring leaps as intervals devoid of a tonal context.
- Do not ignore rhythm: Teach students a vocabulary of typical rhythmic patterns in the basic meters.
- Stress proper notation, including correct use of stems, beams, dots, accidentals, etc., especially in compound meters. Constantly reinforce this until clear notation is a habit. Students may lose points because of illegible notation.
- Discuss question strategy with students; tell them that they can expect straightforward rhythms, a range of approximately one octave, and a likely ending on tonic on a strong beat. Caution students that even if they are unsure about some of the durations, they should not leave noteheads without rhythmic values indicated.
- Coach students to listen for chromatic alterations in the second melodic dictation; usually in the form of a chromatic passing tone or chromatic neighbor tone.
- Also coach students to think strategically about completing melodic dictation; have a strategy for notating rhythm or pitch first, working from both ends to the middle of the melody, etc.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

Please refer to the [AP Music Theory Course and Exam Description](#) to find suggestions for introducing, practicing, and assessing students’ melodic dictation skills. Of particular use is the “Aural Skills Progression” outline on pp. 197–203.

Also see: [Sight-Singing: Your Key to Success in Melodic Dictation](#) and other publications posted on the [AP Music Theory Classroom Resources](#) page.

AP Classroom contains several free-response melodic dictation questions with scoring guidelines that mimic those used on the AP Music Theory exam:

- Formative free-response melodic dictation questions in minor modes (Topic Questions searchable in Question Bank; Personal Progress Check questions accessible from the Unit tabs in AP Classroom):
 - Half-length Melodic Dictation Topic Question:
 - Unit 2: Melodic Dictation in G Minor
 - Full-length Melodic Dictation Topic Questions:
 - Unit 6: Melodic Dictation in G Minor
 - Unit 8: Melodic Dictation in C Minor
 - Half-length Melodic Dictation Progress Check Question:
 - Unit 2 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 1 (D Minor)
 - Full-length Melodic Dictation Progress Check Questions:
 - Unit 3 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 2 (A Minor)
 - Unit 6 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 1 (D Minor)
- Summative free-response melodic dictation questions (accessible using the Question Bank search function in AP Classroom):
 - To find all available melodic dictation questions in the Question Bank, search using the following filters:
 - Assessment Purpose and Source: Summative
 - Question Type: FRQ: Melodic Dictation
 - Question titles show key, clef, and meter type
- Summative free-response minor mode melodic dictation questions on the three full-length practice exams (accessible via the “Assessments” tab in the Question Bank):
 - 2008 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 2 (E minor, treble, compound meter)
 - 2016 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 2 (C minor, bass, simple meter)
 - 2020 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 2 (D minor, treble, compound meter)

Question #3 **Task:** Skill Category #3 Convert Between Performed and Notated Music **Topic:** Harmonic Dictation

Max. Points: 24

Mean Score: 14.49

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- hear a four-part progression in a major key and notate the outer voices;
- provide the correct Roman numeral analysis of the chords;
- demonstrate a knowledge of common chord progressions, including a passing six-four;
- hear and notate triads in root position and in inversion and a seventh chord in third inversion; and
- hear, notate, and analyze an imperfect authentic cadence.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Student responses demonstrated:

- moderate understanding of diatonic major mode, triads in root position and inversion, seventh chords, and notating the soprano and bass voices, as demonstrated by use of music notation; and
- some difficulties in precisely identifying diatonic chords, as shown in the Roman and Arabic numerals below the staff in the student responses.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Differentiating leaps in bass and soprano lines, resulting in incorrect harmonic analysis
- Differentiating triads from seventh chords, especially when ii^6 and V are triads and not sevenths
- Hearing the V_4^6 as a passing $\overset{6}{4}$ chord

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to hear skips vs steps in outer voices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to differentiate steps and skips, and successfully applying Roman numerals to correct pitches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to differentiate triads and sevenths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to hear triad and seventh-chord qualities

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Practice aural skills daily, and remember to include harmonic dictations.
- Teach students to identify cadence types (PAC, IAC, half, and deceptive) and to work backwards from the ends of phrases.
- Encourage students to check that their bass and soprano lines match their Roman numeral analysis.
- Emphasize the distinctive sounds of triads versus seventh chords.
- Practice hearing and notating inverted chords.
- Practice two-part dictation when given a four-part aural prompt.
- Teach common chord progressions and inversions, including the passing V_4^6 chord and the $V_2^4-I^6$ progression.

- Coach students to look critically at their responses and determine if they fit with common chord progressions studied in class.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

Please refer to the [AP Music Theory Course and Exam Description](#) to find suggestions for introducing, practicing, and assessing students' harmonic dictation skills. Of particular use is the "Aural Skills Progression" outline on pp. 197–203.

Also see: *Techniques for Teaching Harmonic Dictation* in [Building AP Music Theory Skills from the Ground Up](#) and other publications posted on the [AP Music Theory Classroom Resources](#) page.

AP Classroom contains several free-response harmonic dictation questions with scoring guidelines that mimic those used on the AP Music Theory exam:

- Formative free-response harmonic dictation questions in major mode (Topic Questions searchable in Question Bank; Personal Progress Check questions accessible from the Unit tabs in AP Classroom):
 - Harmonic Dictation Topic Question:
 - Harmonic Dictation in B-flat Major
 - Half-length Harmonic Dictation Progress Check Question:
 - Unit 3 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 1 (B-flat Major)
 - Full-length Harmonic Dictation Progress Check Question:
 - Unit 5 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 1 (A Major)
- Summative free-response harmonic dictation questions (accessible using the Question Bank search function in AP Classroom):
 - To find all available harmonic dictation questions in the Question Bank, search using the following filters:
 - Assessment Purpose and Source: Summative
 - Question Type: FRQ: Harmonic Dictation
 - Question titles list key, most advanced content found in each question (i.e., secondary [or applied] dominant, cadential six-four, passing six-four, etc.), and occasionally additional content information like cadence type.
- Summative free-response major mode harmonic dictation questions on the three full-length practice exams (accessible via the "Assessments" tab in the Question Bank):
 - 2008 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 3 (E-flat major, deceptive progression)
 - 2016 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 3 (A major, predominant 7th)
 - 2020 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 4 (A major, secondary dominant)

Question #4 **Task:** Skill Category #3 Convert Between Performed and Notated Music **Topic:** Harmonic Dictation

Max. Points: 24

Mean Score: 11.01

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- hear a four-part progression in a harmonic minor key and notate the outer voices;
- provide the correct Roman numeral analysis of the chords;
- demonstrate a knowledge of common chord progressions, including a cadential six-four and a secondary dominant;
- hear and notate triads in root position and in inversion and seventh chords in root position and first inversion; and
- hear, notate, and analyze a deceptive cadence.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Student responses demonstrated:

- limited understanding of minor mode progressions including one secondary dominant chord, as revealed by pitch notation and chord identification;
- fair understanding of outer voice motion, as demonstrated by use of music notation; and
- limited understanding of chord progressions presented in performed music, as reflected in notation of Roman and Arabic numerals below the staff.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Differentiating leaps in bass and soprano lines, resulting in incorrect harmonic analysis
- Differentiating triads from seventh chords, especially when ii^6 and \underline{V} are triads and not sevenths
- Confusing the ii^6 chord with a iv chord
- Failure to identify and notate the secondary dominant chord

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hearing and notating the ii^6 chord vs. a iv chord 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to successfully notate the ii^6 chord
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to hear and notate the $\underline{V}_3^6/\underline{V}$ chord, including the accidental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to successfully hear and notate the $\underline{V}_3^6/\underline{V}$ chord correctly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General misunderstanding of harmonic minor and accidentals to be used therein 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully notating the outer voices and correct RNs in harmonic minor

Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Practice aural skills daily, and remember to include harmonic dictations.
- Teach students to identify ALL cadence types and to work backwards from the ends of phrases.
- Encourage students to check that their bass and soprano lines match their Roman numeral analysis.
- Emphasize the distinctive sounds of all triads (including the diminished triad) versus seventh chords.
- Emphasize the distinctive sounds of secondary dominant chords. Practice notating and listening for secondary dominants.
- Practice hearing and notating inverted chords.
- Practice two-part dictation when given a four-part aural prompt.
- Teach common chord progressions and inversions.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

Please refer to the [AP Music Theory Course and Exam Description](#) to find suggestions for introducing, practicing, and assessing students' harmonic dictation skills. Of particular use is the "Aural Skills Progression" outline on pp. 197–203.

Also see: *Techniques for Teaching Harmonic Dictation* in [Building AP Music Theory Skills from the Ground Up](#) and other publications posted on the [AP Music Theory Classroom Resources](#) page.

AP Classroom contains several free-response harmonic dictation questions with scoring guidelines that mimic those used on the AP Music Theory exam:

- Formative free-response harmonic dictation questions in minor mode (Topic Questions searchable in Question Bank; Personal Progress Check questions accessible from the Unit tabs in AP Classroom):
 - Harmonic Dictation Topic Questions:
 - Harmonic Dictation in A Minor
 - Harmonic Dictation in C Minor
 - Full-length Harmonic Dictation Progress Check Questions:
 - Unit 3 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 2 (A Minor)
 - Unit 6 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 1 (D Minor)
 - Unit 7 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 2 (G Minor)
- Summative free-response harmonic dictation questions (accessible using the Question Bank search function in AP Classroom):
 - To find all available harmonic dictation questions in the Question Bank, search using the following filters:
 - Assessment Purpose and Source: Summative
 - Question Type: FRQ: Harmonic Dictation
 - Question titles list key, most advanced content found in each question (i.e., secondary [or applied] dominant, cadential six-four, passing six-four, etc.), and occasionally additional content information like cadence type.
- Summative free-response minor mode harmonic dictation questions on the three full-length practice exams (accessible via the "Assessments" tab in the Question Bank):
 - 2008 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 4 (B minor, secondary dominant)
 - 2016 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 4 (E minor, secondary dominant, DC)
 - 2020 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 3 (G minor, cadential six-four)

Question #5**Task:** Skill Category #4
Complete Based on Cues**Topic:** Realizing a Figured Bass**Max. Points:** 25**Mean Score:** 13.56***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

This question assessed students' ability to:

- realize a figured bass progression in Common Practice style in four voices;
- employ smooth voice-leading procedures;
- demonstrate understanding of diatonic harmony, including chord spelling, spacing, doubling, and voice leading in a four-part texture;
- analyze chords using Roman numerals;
- spell chords in a minor key, including raising the leading tone in the dominant chord;
- notate a half cadence; and
- notate a 4–3 suspension, including its proper preparation and resolution.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Student responses demonstrated:

- moderate understanding of figured bass realization, as shown by the number of correctly spelled chords and correct Roman numeral analyses;
- moderate abilities in employing smooth voice leading procedures, as shown throughout the progression;
- moderate abilities to write a half cadence, as demonstrated in the last measure; and,
- limited abilities to correctly prepare and resolve the suspension.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- General misunderstanding of chord spelling and progressions in minor keys
- General misunderstanding of figured bass
- Inability to recognize a half cadence at the end
- Misunderstanding figures to successfully compose a 4–3 suspension at the end

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General misunderstanding of chord spelling and progressions in minor keys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to spell chords correctly and to compose progressions with smooth voice leading
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General misunderstanding of figured bass 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to identify chords and inversion through figured bass symbols
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misunderstanding of figures to successfully compose the 4–3 suspension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to identify suspension figures, and correctly prepare and resolve the suspension

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Coach students on how to avoid overcomplicating the required tasks.
- Practice writing clear, unambiguous music notation by hand.
- Encourage students to think about voice leading before working on vertical realization.
- Teach students to use stepwise motion and to keep the common tone whenever possible. (Think like a singer.)
- Review the meanings of the figures, including inversion symbols and suspension figures, giving special attention to identification of chordal roots.
- Emphasize that figured bass is not the same thing as inversion symbols.
- Drill chord spelling and remind students that chord spelling errors result in a 5-point deduction.
- Include minor key examples in your training.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

Please refer to the [AP Music Theory Course and Exam Description](#) to find suggestions for introducing, practicing, and assessing part-writing and figured bass realization skills. Also see “Instructional Approaches” in the back of the CED, specifically: Developing Course Skills, Skill Category 4, pp. 194–195.

Also see: [Thinking Horizontally: Learning Part Writing and Figured Bass Through Analysis](#) (p. 140) and other publications posted on the [AP Music Theory Classroom Resources](#) page.

AP Classroom contains several free-response figured bass questions with scoring guidelines that mimic those used on the AP Music Theory exam:

- Formative free-response figured bass questions (Topic Questions searchable in Question Bank; Personal Progress Check questions accessible from the Unit tabs in AP Classroom):
 - Topic Questions:
 - Unit 4: Figured Bass in B Major
 - Unit 7: PW from Figured Bass in G
 - Progress Check Questions:
 - Unit 4 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 1 (D Minor)
 - Unit 7 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 1 (B Minor)
- Summative free-response figured bass questions (accessible using the Question Bank search function in AP Classroom):
 - To find all available questions in the Question Bank, search using the following filters:
 - Assessment Purpose and Source: Summative
 - Question Type: FRQ: Harmonic Dictation
 - Question titles list key, most advanced content found in each question (i.e., inverted 7th, cadential six-four, 4–3 suspension, etc.), and occasionally additional content information like cadence type.
- Summative free-response figured bass questions on the three full-length practice exams (accessible via the “Assessments” tab in the Question Bank):
 - 2008 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 5 (A minor, 3rd inversion 7th chord)
 - 2016 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 5 (A minor, 2nd inversion vii^{o7})
 - 2020 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 5 (D minor, predominant 7th, vii^{o7})

Question #6

Task: Skill Category #4
Complete Based on Cues

Topic: Realizing Roman Numerals in
Four Voices

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- write a four-part chord progression from Roman numerals;
- demonstrate an understanding of chord spelling, spacing, and doubling;
- demonstrate an understanding of chord inversions;
- demonstrate command of voice-leading procedures;
- demonstrate knowledge of secondary dominant chords;
- notate a deceptive cadence;
- demonstrate an understanding of tendency tones and their resolutions; and
- demonstrate knowledge of how to approach and resolve chordal dissonances.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Student responses demonstrated:

- proficient understanding of diatonic Roman numerals, as demonstrated by the spelling of chords;
- limited abilities at spelling secondary dominant seventh chords, as shown by the frequent errors in the spelling of this chord; and
- insufficient understanding of voice leading procedures, as demonstrated by the limited number of proficient responses.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- General misunderstanding of chord spelling and progressions in minor keys
- General misunderstanding of figured bass
- Inability to recognize a half cadence at the end

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General lack of proficiency in part-writing skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective proficiency in part-writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of understanding of spelling and/or resolution of the secondary dominant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proficiency in spelling and resolution of secondary dominants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of proficiency in preparing chromatic alterations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proficiency in preparing chromatic alterations

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Encourage students to use smooth voice leading, and especially to avoid large leaps.
- Encourage students to use contrary motion in the outer voices.
- Encourage students to write the outer voices first and to fill in the inner voices as a pair, after the outer voices have been carefully checked.
- Avoid overemphasis of doubling the root, because this is not always appropriate (especially when chords are inverted).
- Think carefully about the key signature, about whether a chord should need any accidentals, and, if so, which specific accidentals are needed.
- Be careful not to confuse the leading tone (scale degree seven) with the chordal seventh.
- Drill inversions and their figures, carefully distinguishing triads from seventh chords. Students should be aware that they will not receive any points for a chord if the inversion is incorrect or if a seventh is added or omitted (i.e., does not match the analysis provided).
- Focus on proper treatment of dissonance, especially the approach to and resolution of the chordal seventh. Students should be aware that the seventh must resolve in the same voice (not just the same register).
- Emphasize the importance of resolving leading tones, particularly in outer voices.
- Consider identifying tendency tones with a special symbol (e.g., circling them or writing arrows from them) to highlight their importance and their resolutions.
- Advise students not to add embellishing tones unless specifically required by the figures.
- Address the strategic use of incomplete chords: Often voice leading is substantially improved when the fifth is omitted from a root-position chord.
- Discuss the appropriate use of charts, diagrams, and other memory aids. Writing charts and diagrams often seems unhelpful for this particular question: it takes time, the information is not always relevant to the question, and the layout sometimes seems to cause mistakes because the student confuses the layout of the diagram with the actual music notation.
- Address issues of notation, particularly the proper way to write noteheads and accidentals (including the placement of accidentals on the left side of the notehead rather than the right), and how to portray doubling.
- When discussing the use of accidentals, use the terms “raise” and “lower” rather than “sharp” and “flat” because sometimes a natural (rather than a sharp or flat) is needed.
- Practice writing common cadences, so that typical voice-leading combinations become familiar.
- Students who can’t answer the entire question should be encouraged to skip unfamiliar portions and fill in the chords that they know.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

Please refer to the [AP Music Theory Course and Exam Description](#) to find suggestions for introducing, practicing, and assessing part-writing skills. See “Instructional Approaches” in the back of the CED, specifically: Developing Course Skills, Skill Category 4, pp. 194–195.

Also see: [Thinking Horizontally: Learning Part Writing and Figured Bass Through Analysis](#) (p. 140) and other publications posted on the [AP Music Theory Classroom Resources](#) page.

AP Classroom contains several free-response Roman numeral realization questions with scoring guidelines that mimic those used on the AP Music Theory exam:

- Formative free-response part writing from Roman numerals questions (Topic Questions searchable in Question Bank; Personal Progress Check questions accessible from the Unit tabs in AP Classroom):
 - Topic Questions:
 - Unit 4: PW Roman numeral in F Minor
 - Unit 6: Part-writing from Roman numerals in G Major

- Progress Check Questions:
 - Unit 4 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 2 (B-flat Major)
 - Unit 6 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 2 (E Minor)
- Summative free-response part writing from Roman numerals questions (accessible using the Question Bank search function in AP Classroom):
 - To find all available questions in the Question Bank, search using the following filters:
 - Assessment Purpose and Source: Summative
 - Question Type: FRQ: Part Writing from Roman Numerals
 - Question titles list key, whether the question contains an applied chord, and occasionally additional content information like cadence type.
- Summative free-response part writing from Roman numerals questions on the three full-length practice exams (accessible via the “Assessments” tab in the Question Bank):
 - 2008 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 6 (A-flat major, secondary dominant of vi)
 - 2016 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 6 (B-flat major, secondary dominant, V8–7)
 - 2020 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 6 (G major, secondary dominant, deceptive cadence)

Question #7**Task:** Skill Category #4
Complete Based on Cues**Topic:** Harmonization of a Melody**Max. Points:** 9**Mean Score:** 4.62***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

This question assessed students' ability to:

- compose a bass line following the rules of eighteenth-century counterpoint;
- write standard authentic and half cadences;
- harmonize a melody with an appropriate chord progression;
- use conventional harmonic patterns;
- recognize and correctly use a secondary dominant chord;
- correctly harmonize a chromatically-altered scale degree 4 in the melody;
- use six-four chords according to conventional common practice;
- treat the leading tone correctly, concerning both chord voicing and voice leading; and
- use embellishments correctly in a two-part framework.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Student responses demonstrated:

- moderate understanding of adding a bass line and Roman numeral analysis to a melody, as shown by the number of responses that earned a middle score; and
- fair understanding of cadences, as demonstrated by proper use of harmonic patterns and bass lines at the ends of phrase.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Writing bass lines that clashed with the given melody
- Writing Roman numerals that did not agree with the given bass line or melody
- Poor chord choice and chords that did not fit into conventional progressions

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing bass lines that clashed with the given melody 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing bass lines that demonstrated good counterpoint with the given melody
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Roman numerals that did not agree with the given bass line or melody 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Roman numerals that harmonized with the given bass line or melody
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor chord choice and chords that did not fit into conventional progressions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing chords that reflected conventional chord progressions

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Discourage overuse of six-four chords, except for the cadential six-four if appropriate at a cadence. Remind students that passing and pedal six-four chords must occur on weak beats.
- Encourage the use of root position chords at cadences.
- Discourage the use of seldom-used chords, such as the iii chord, and the root position vii^o chord.
- Teach students to prepare and resolve chordal sevenths properly.
- Teach students that ii[#] is not proper notation for a secondary dominant chord.
- Remind students that unaccented passing tones are the only appropriate embellishments for this exercise and that the given melody will not include accented non-harmonic tones.
- Encourage students to use the first phrase as a guide for consistency throughout the question.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

Please refer to the [AP Music Theory Course and Exam Description](#) to find suggestions for introducing, practicing, and assessing part-writing skills. See “Instructional Approaches” in the back of the CED, specifically: Developing Course Skills, Skill Category 4, pp. 194, 196.

Also see: [Interpreting and Harmonizing Melodies: Some Formulas for Success](#) (p. 32) and other publications posted on the [AP Music Theory Classroom Resources](#) page.

AP Classroom contains several free-response harmonization of melody questions with scoring guidelines that mimic those used on the AP Music Theory exam:

- Formative free-response harmonization of melody questions (Topic Questions searchable in Question Bank; Personal Progress Check questions accessible from the Unit tabs in AP Classroom):
 - Half-length Topic Questions:
 - Unit 4: Harmonization of Melody in A major
 - Unit 4: Harmonization of Melody in A-flat
 - Full-length Topic Questions:
 - Unit 7: Harmonization of Melody in E
 - Unit 8: Harmonization of Melody in G
 - Half-length Progress Check Questions:
 - Unit 5 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 2 (B-flat Major)
 - Unit 6 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 3 (D Major)
 - Unit 7 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 3 (B-flat Major)
 - Full-length Progress Check Question:
 - Unit 8 Progress Check: FRQ Part A, Question 2 (E-flat Major)
- Summative free-response harmonization of melody questions (accessible using the Question Bank search function in AP Classroom):
 - To find all available questions in the Question Bank, search using the following filters:
 - Assessment Purpose and Source: Summative
 - Question Type: FRQ: Harmonization of a Melody
 - Question titles list key and occasionally additional content information like soprano scale degrees at cadences 3 or 4.
- Summative free-response harmonization of melody questions on the three full-length practice exams (accessible via the “Assessments” tab in the Question Bank):
 - 2008 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 7 (G major)
 - 2016 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 7 (G major)
 - 2020 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 7 (F major)

Question 8 (S1)**Task:** Skill Category #3
Convert Notated Music to
Performance**Topic:** Sight Singing**Max. Points:** 9**Mean Score:** 3.90**What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?**

This question assessed students' ability to:

- sight read and sing a melody in minor mode;
- sing in simple quadruple meter;
- perform common rhythmic patterns;
- perform a dotted rhythm;
- sing skips and stepwise motion in both ascending and descending directions;
- sing a melody with a vocal range of a seventh;
- perform chordal skips within the tonic triad;
- establish and maintain a steady tempo;
- establish and retain a sense of tonic; and
- read in treble clef.

How well did the response address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Student responses demonstrated:

- moderate effectiveness at converting notated music to performed music by singing a minor mode melody in the treble clef using simple meter; and
- moderate proficiency of performing common rhythmic patterns, demonstrated by moderate success singing simple patterns in simple meter.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Confusing major and minor keys
- Losing the sense of tonic and other scale degrees while singing
- Confusing skips with steps; skips often sung not wide enough

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusing major and minor keys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizing and singing in the required minor key
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Losing the sense of tonic and other scale degrees while singing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to retain tonic and other scale degrees during singing

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Sight sing regularly in class.
- Practice reading and performing in different clefs.
- Encourage students not to hum, but to sing with an initial consonant sound; humming obscures accurate pitch.
- Encourage students to sing strongly so they can be heard.
- Encourage students to sing the tonic triad to establish the key/tonic.
- Encourage students to select a starting pitch that is comfortable for their individual range.

- Encourage students to ghost-finger along, as if playing their instruments, while singing.
- Encourage students to sing using contour—not just rhythm on the tonic pitch—if they struggle greatly with pitch.
- Encourage students to keep going even if they make a mistake.
- Practice common rhythmic patterns in various meters.
- Emphasize holding notes for their full value.
- Allow students to use a neutral syllable if, by March, they are struggling with solfège or numbers.
- Encourage students to analyze the mode of the melody they are performing.
- Encourage students to sing aloud during the 1-minute-15-second practice time.
- Encourage students to practice rhythm first during the 1-minute-15-second practice time.
- Let students know that it is acceptable to write on the test during the practice period.
- Let students know that it is acceptable to conduct while they practice so that they establish a steady tempo.
- Give practice AP[®] Music Theory Exams, including the free examples posted on AP Central.
- Simulate the recording scenario for students.
- AP[®] Music Theory teachers need to work with their administrations to establish an appropriate testing environment for the sight singing questions. Students need to be sonically isolated from each other, so that they do not hear each other’s practice and performance.
- Train proctors prior to the day of the exam.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

Please refer to the [AP Music Theory Course and Exam Description](#) to find suggestions for introducing, practicing, and assessing sight singing skills. Additional suggestions for teaching and practicing sight singing can be found in the “Instructional Approaches” in the back of the CED, specifically:

- Developing Course Skills, Skill Category 3, p. 193
- Aural Skills Progression, pp. 197–203

Also see: [Teaching Sight Singing](#) and [Sight Singing: A Strategy for the Non-Singer and the Underprepared Student](#) (p. 16).

AP Classroom contains several sight singing questions with scoring guidelines that mimic those used on the AP Music Theory exam:

- Formative sight singing questions in minor mode (Topic Questions searchable in Question Bank; Personal Progress Check questions accessible from the Unit tabs in AP Classroom):
 - Half-length Topic Question:
 - Unit 2: Sight singing in c minor
 - Full-length Topic Questions:
 - Unit 2: Sight singing e minor
 - Unit 2: Sight singing in E minor
 - Unit 6: Sight singing in B minor
 - Unit 6: Sight singing in D minor
 - Half-length Progress Check Question:
 - Unit 2 Progress Check: FRQ Part B, Question 1 (E minor)
 - Full-length Progress Check Question:
 - Unit 5 Progress Check: FRQ Part B, Question 1 (B minor)
 - Unit 6 Progress Check: FRQ Part B, Question 1 (A minor)
 - Unit 8 Progress Check: FRQ Part B, Question 1 (C minor)
- Summative sight singing questions (accessible using the Question Bank search function in AP Classroom):
 - To find all available questions in the Question Bank, search using the following filters:
 - Assessment Purpose and Source: Summative
 - Question Type: FRQ: Sight Singing
 - Question titles list key, clef, and information about meter type. The title will occasionally include information about whether the melody contains a chromatically inflected note.
- Summative minor mode sight singing questions on the three full-length practice exams (accessible via the “Assessments” tab in the Question Bank):
 - 2008 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 8 (D minor)
 - 2016 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 9 (F minor)

- 2020 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 8 (E minor)

Question 9 (S2) **Task:** Skill Category #3 Convert Notated Music to Performance **Topic:** Sight Singing
Max. Points: 9 **Mean Score:** 3.79

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

This question assessed students' ability to:

- sight read and sing a melody in major mode;
- sing in compound duple meter;
- perform common rhythmic patterns;
- perform dotted rhythms;
- sing skips and stepwise motion in both ascending and descending directions;
- sing a melody with a vocal range of a ninth;
- perform chordal skips within the tonic and dominant triads;
- sing a chromatic lower neighbor tone;
- establish and maintain a steady tempo;
- establish and retain a sense of tonic; and
- read in bass clef.

How well did the response address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Student responses demonstrated:

- limited understanding of bass clef and compound meter, as demonstrated by the number of mediocre responses;
- moderate success at singing with stepwise motion and recognizing common rhythm patterns in compound meter;
- deficient understanding of advanced tonality, shown by incorrect performance of the chromatic embellishing tone; and
- difficulty singing leaps, especially those greater than a third.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Difficult performing dotted rhythms in compound meter
- Losing the sense of tonic and other scale degrees while singing
- Confusing skips with steps; skips often sung not wide enough

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty singing rhythms in compound meter, especially dotted rhythms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of rhythmic patterns and successfully singing them
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Losing the sense of tonic and other scale degrees while singing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to retain tonic and other scale degrees during singing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty singing the lower chromatic neighbor tone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to recognize and audiate the chromatic neighbor tone

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Sight sing regularly in class.
- Look at a melody as being centered on a tonic triad.
- If you teach a student a vocalization pattern to establish tonic, make sure the student understands its relation to tonality.
- Practice melodies that contain chromatically altered tones.
- Encourage students to articulate each note (e.g., “ta ta” instead of a slurred response).
- Singing letter names, scale degree numbers, or solfège, without correct pitch and rhythm doesn’t earn credit.
- Practice executing rhythm patterns, including dotted rhythms.
- Emphasize rhythmic integrity; the duration of the final note is important.
- Teach students to choose an appropriate tempo for singing. The tempo of this exercise was marked *Moderato*. Although points were not deducted for an incorrect tempo set at the start of the exercise, students tended to fare worse if they chose to perform at a painstakingly slow tempo OR at a very fast tempo.
- Offer strategies for the sight singing process: use of the practice time; identification of clef, key signature, range, mode, and time signature; identification of tricky spots; recognition of basic rhythm and melodic patterns.
- Simulate the testing experience. Let students practice with the recording technology in a situation that replicates where the proctor and equipment will be during testing.
- Encourage students to sing freely with full voice during the practice and performance portions of the exam.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

Please refer to the [AP Music Theory Course and Exam Description](#) to find suggestions for introducing, practicing, and assessing sight singing skills. Additional suggestions for teaching and practicing sight singing can be found in the “Instructional Approaches” in the back of the CED, specifically:

- Developing Course Skills, Skill Category 3, p. 193
- Aural Skills Progression, pp. 197–203

Also see: [Teaching Sight Singing](#) and [Sight Singing: A Strategy for the Non-Singer and the Underprepared Student](#) (p. 16).

AP Classroom contains several sight singing questions with scoring guidelines that mimic those used on the AP Music Theory exam:

- Formative sight singing questions in major mode (Topic Questions searchable in Question Bank; Personal Progress Check questions accessible from the Unit tabs in AP Classroom):
 - Half-length Topic Question:
 - Unit 1: Sight Singing in B-flat
 - Full-length Topic Questions:
 - Unit 1: Sight singing in D major
 - Unit 2: Sight Singing in D major
 - Half-length Progress Check Question:
 - Unit 1 Progress Check: FRQ Part B, Question 1 (G major)
 - Full-length Progress Check Question:
 - Unit 3 Progress Check: FRQ Part B, Question 1 (E-flat major)
 - Unit 4 Progress Check: FRQ Part B, Question 1 (B-flat major)
 - Unit 7 Progress Check: FRQ Part B, Question 1 (A-flat major)
- Summative sight singing questions (accessible using the Question Bank search function in AP Classroom):
 - To find all available questions in the Question Bank, search using the following filters:
 - Assessment Purpose and Source: Summative
 - Question Type: FRQ: Sight-Singing
 - Question titles list key, clef, and information about meter type. The title will occasionally include information about whether the melody contains a chromatically inflected note.
- Summative major mode sight singing questions on the three full-length practice exams (accessible via the “Assessments” tab in the Question Bank):
 - 2008 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 9 (B-flat major)

- 2016 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 8 (D major)
- 2020 Practice Exam FRQ: Question 7 (B-flat major)