

AP[®] Music Theory

About the Advanced Placement Program[®] (AP[®])

The Advanced Placement Program[®] has enabled millions of students to take college-level courses and earn college credit, advanced placement, or both, while still in high school. AP Exams are given each year in May. Students who earn a qualifying score on an AP Exam are typically eligible, in college, to receive credit, placement into advanced courses, or both. Every aspect of AP course and exam development is the result of collaboration between AP teachers and college faculty. They work together to develop AP courses and exams, set scoring standards, and score the exams. College faculty review every AP teacher's course syllabus.

AP Music Theory Course Overview

The AP Music Theory course corresponds to one-to-two semesters of typical, introductory college music theory and aural skills coursework. Students learn to recognize, understand, describe, and produce the basic elements and processes of performed and notated music. Course content extends from the fundamentals of pitch, rhythm, timbre, and expression to concepts of harmonic function, phrase relationships, and tonicization. Students study these concepts in heard and notated music, with emphasis on identification and analysis of musical features, relationships, and procedures in full musical contexts. Repertoire for analysis on the AP Music Theory Exam ranges from European Baroque pieces to folk and popular music from across the globe. Students develop musicianship skills through melodic and harmonic dictation, sight singing, and error detection exercises. Writing exercises further emphasize the foundational harmonic and voice-leading procedures of Western art music.

Because college curricula vary for beginning music theory courses, the college-level course equivalency of AP Music Theory will vary from one institution to the next.

RECOMMENDED PREREQUISITES

There are no prerequisite courses for AP Music Theory. Prospective students should be able to read and write musical notation and have basic performance skills with voice or an instrument.

AP Music Theory Course Content

The course content is organized into eight units, which have been arranged in the following suggested, logical sequence:

- **Unit 1:** Music Fundamentals I: Pitch, Major Scales and Key Signatures, Rhythm, Meter, and Expressive Elements
- **Unit 2:** Music Fundamentals II: Minor Scales and Key Signatures, Melody, Timbre, and Texture

- **Unit 3:** Music Fundamentals III: Triads and Seventh Chords
- **Unit 4:** Harmony and Voice Leading I: Chord Function, Cadence, and Phrase
- **Unit 5:** Harmony and Voice Leading II: Chord Progressions and Predominant Function
- **Unit 6:** Harmony and Voice Leading III: Embellishments, Motives, and Melodic Devices
- **Unit 7:** Harmony and Voice Leading IV: Secondary Function
- **Unit 8:** Modes and Form

Each unit is broken down into teachable segments called topics.

In addition, the following big ideas serve as the foundation of the course, enabling students to create meaningful connections among concepts and develop deeper conceptual understanding:

- **Big Idea 1:** Pitch
- **Big Idea 2:** Rhythm
- **Big Idea 3:** Form
- **Big Idea 4:** Musical Design

Course Skills

The following skill categories describe what skills students should develop during the course:

- **Analyze Performed Music:** Apply musical terms, concepts, and relationships to performed music (aural).
- **Analyze Notated Music:** Apply musical terms, concepts, and relationships to notated music (written).
- **Convert Between Performed and Notated Music:** Apply conventions of musical notation and performance in converting music between aural and written forms.
- **Complete Based on Cues:** Complete music based on cues, following 18th-century stylistic norms.

