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Setting a Policy for AP[®] Music Theory

The purpose of this guide is to provide college faculty and administrators with research data, participation and performance data of AP[®] Music Theory students, curricular content, and sample exam questions to facilitate the establishment of appropriate credit and placement policies for AP Music Theory.

The Advanced Placement Program[®] (AP) provides motivated students with the opportunity to take college-level courses while still in high school. Students demonstrate their mastery of the curriculum by taking AP Exams—35 exams are available in 20 subject areas. In 2005, more than 1.2 million students took AP Exams worldwide. Of the 2.1 million AP Exams taken in 2005, about 10,000 were in Music Theory. More than 3,000 colleges and universities, including many international institutions, accept qualifying AP Exam scores for credit, placement, or both.

Throughout its 50-year history, the AP Program has maintained high standards of rigor in its courses and exams. Since its inception, AP has been a respected force in American education due to the critical involvement of college and university faculty members.

Music Theory Faculty Involvement in AP

College and university faculty members play a vital role in every stage of the development and scoring of an AP course and exam, helping to ensure their high quality. Each AP discipline has its own Development Committee—composed of college and university professors and experienced AP teachers—that is responsible for creating the course guidelines and exam questions. College and university faculty members also serve as the Chief Readers, responsible for establishing the exam-scoring guidelines and overseeing the annual AP Reading of the free-response section for their academic discipline.

“The AP Music Theory course and exam increase the number of students who get a solid background in theory—a subject at the core of musical competence, and one that American musical education has for the most part put off until college. Having worked on developing the exam for the last few years with colleagues who teach theory at both the high school and college levels, I can attest to its quality and to the relevance of the musical skills that it requires. Preparing for the test—and, one hopes, succeeding in it—helps students to develop a knowledge base that is essential to their understanding of the music that they sing, play, compose, and hear.”

—Patrick McCreless, AP Music Theory Development Committee
Yale University

How to Set an AP Policy

The College Board encourages higher education institutions to base their AP policy decisions on data and research, and recognizes that different institutions and departments will set different policies, based upon factors unique to their institution, student body, and academic discipline. The best way for colleges and universities to determine their AP credit and placement policies is to conduct their own research on the performance of AP and non-AP students at their own institution and in their own department.

Research on AP Music Theory Student Performance

Research studies show that students who do well on an AP Exam are academically prepared to place out of a corresponding college course and move on to the next higher-level course in the discipline.

Taking the AP course and exam stimulates further interest in the subject area and encourages deeper disciplinary knowledge.

Research studies show that students who take the AP Music Theory Exam are significantly more likely to take further course work in music than students who do not take the AP Exam. Higher scores on the AP Exam make this trend even more pronounced, with a greater likelihood of majoring or minoring in the discipline. See Table 1 for data from this research study.

Table 1: Additional College Music Course Work AP Music Theory Students Versus Non-AP Students

	AP EXAM GRADE	PERCENT TAKING ADDITIONAL MUSIC COURSES	AVERAGE NUMBER OF COLLEGE MUSIC COURSES TAKEN
AP Music Theory Students	AP 5	88	6.7
	AP 4	84	6.5
	AP 3	72	6.3
Non-AP Students	Non-AP	28	0.7

PDF copies of this and other research studies on AP student performance can be found at apcentral.collegeboard.com/colleges/research.

“I’m pleased with the breadth of the AP Music Theory Exam and the high standard it brings to high school theory classes. I’m always happy to have an AP student in my classroom; I know I have one more person with good previous training in fundamentals, harmony, basic form, and aural skills.”

—Ken Stephenson, AP Music Theory Chief Reader
University of Oklahoma

In addition to research studies on AP student performance, the College Board conducts college comparability studies to measure the degree to which the AP courses and exams are equivalent in content and difficulty to corresponding college courses. The AP Exam scoring rubric is established so that the lowest composite score that earns an AP grade of 5 is equivalent to the average score earned by college students who received grades of A in a comparable course. The lowest score that earns an AP grade of 4 is equivalent to the average B, and the lowest score that earns an AP grade of 3 is equivalent to the average C.

The research that the College Board conducts is intended to help institutions and academic departments as they establish appropriate AP policies. AP Central® (apcentral.collegeboard.com), the College Board’s online home for AP professionals, contains other resources that may assist in this process, including the Course Description, released exam questions, and sample student responses at different levels of ability.

For more information go to:
apcentral.collegeboard.com/musictheory/exam

AP Credit Policy Info on the Web

Information about AP credit and placement policies at more than 1,000 colleges and universities is available on the College Board’s Web site at www.collegeboard.com/ap/creditpolicy.

AP Music Theory Students, Course, and Exam

Participation and Performance Data for AP Music Theory Students in 2005

Total Number of Schools Offering AP Music Theory: 1,901

Table 2: AP Music Theory Exam Score Distribution, 2005

EXAM GRADE	NUMBER OF EXAMINEES	% AT
Score of 5	1,800	18.2%
Score of 4	1,836	18.6%
Score of 3	2,633	26.6%
Score of 2	2,584	26.1%
Score of 1	1,034	10.5%
	9,887	100.0%

Figure 1: AP Music Theory Examinees by Gender, 2005

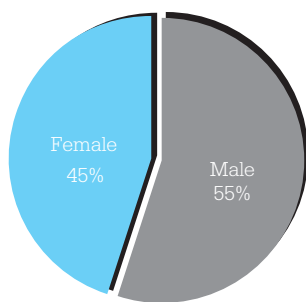
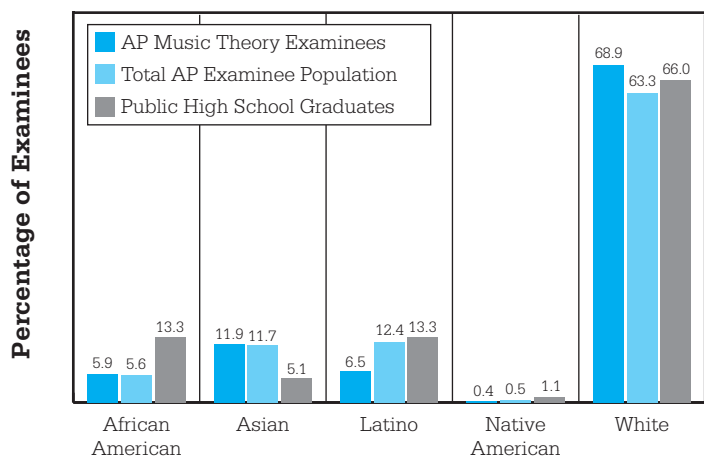


Figure 2: AP Music Theory Examinees by Race and Ethnicity, 2005



The AP Music Theory Course

AP Music Theory is designed to provide students with a learning experience equivalent to that of an introductory college course in music theory. The course should develop a student’s ability to recognize, understand, describe, and analyze the basic materials and processes of music that are heard or presented in a score. The course emphasizes integrated approaches to the student’s development of aural, sight-singing, written, compositional, and analytical skills through listening, performance, written, creative, and analytical exercises.

The course includes the study of the rudiments and terminology of music including notation, intervals, scales and keys, chords, metric organization, rhythmic patterns, and diatonic progressions in four voices. Study of a wide variety of vocal and instrumental music from the standard Western tonal repertoires, as well as jazz, popular music, and music from nonwestern cultures, are included in the course curriculum. Attention is given to the acquisition of correct notational skills, along with speed and fluency with basic materials. The course should also include more sophisticated and creative tasks such as composition of a bass line for a given melody, implying appropriate harmony; realization of a figured bass; realization of a Roman numeral progression; and analysis of repertoire, including study of motive treatment, examination of rhythmic and melodic interaction between individual voices of a composition, and harmonic analysis of functional tonal passages. A brief introduction to twentieth-century scales, chordal structures, and compositional procedures is incorporated into the course either through analysis or original composition. The course emphasizes procedures based in common-practice tonality, including functional triadic harmony in traditional four-voice texture (with vocabulary including nonharmonic tones, seventh chords, and secondary dominants); tonal relationships; and modulation to closely related keys.

In the AP Music Theory course, students are required to read, notate, compose, perform, and listen to music. The development of aural skills is a primary objective; throughout the course students should listen to musical works attentively and analytically, developing their “musical memory” and their ability to articulate responses to formal, stylistic, and aesthetic qualities of the works. Performance—using singing, keyboard, and students’ primary performance media—should also be a part of the learning process. In addition to technical knowledge and skills, students gain exposure to and familiarity with a wide variety of musical literature, and the ability to apply their knowledge and skills to it.

“The AP curriculum in music theory is stronger and more musical than those found at many colleges and universities. It encourages active involvement with music in many styles, and helps students develop difficult and sophisticated critical listening skills.”

—Eric J. Isaacson, AP Music Theory Development Committee former Chair
Indiana University, Bloomington

The Development Committee creates the guidelines for the AP Music Theory course and designs the AP Exam. Periodically the Development Committee conducts curriculum surveys, sent to professors who teach the comparable college-level course, which help ensure that the AP Music Theory course remains current with concepts and themes as taught in college and university classrooms.

Beginning in fall 2006, AP Music Theory teachers and principals of schools where AP Music Theory is taught must certify that their 2007-08 courses follow all the requirements stipulated by the Development Committee, including using a college-level textbook and providing the equipment and materials for students to facilitate listening practice, in order to ensure that the AP course reflects college-level standards. By completing this AP Course Audit, high schools will receive individual licenses to label their music theory courses “AP.” In fall 2007, colleges and universities will receive a list of all high schools authorized to use the “AP” designation for their music theory courses.

The AP Music Theory Exam

The AP Music Theory Exam tests the candidate’s understanding of musical structure and compositional procedures through recorded and notated examples. Strong emphasis is given to listening skills, particularly those involving recognition and comprehension of melodic and rhythmic patterns, harmonic functions, small forms, and compositional techniques. Most of the musical examples are taken from standard repertoire, although some examples of contemporary, jazz, vernacular music, or music beyond the Western tradition are included for testing basic concepts. The examination assumes fluency in reading musical notation and a strong grounding in music fundamentals, terminology, and analysis. The examination includes questions that measure the following abilities:

- I. Musical Terminology
 - a. Terms for intervals, triads, seventh chords, scales, and modes
 - b. Terms pertaining to rhythm and meter, melodic construction and variation, harmonic function, cadences and phrase structure, texture, small forms, and musical performance
- II. Notational Skills
 - a. Rhythms and meters
 - b. Clefs and pitches
 - c. Key signatures, scales, and modes
 - d. Intervals and chords
 - e. Melodic transposition
- III. Basic Compositional Skills
 - a. Four-voice realization of figured-bass symbols and Roman numerals

- b. Composition of a bass line (with chord symbols) for a given melody
- IV. Score Analysis (with or without aural stimulus)
 - a. Small-scale and large-scale harmonic procedures
 - b. Melodic organization and developmental procedures (scale types, modes, motivic development and relationships)
 - c. Rhythmic/metric organization (meter and beat type, rhythmic devices and procedures)
 - d. Texture (types and devices)
 - e. Formal devices and/or procedures (phrase structure, phrases in combination, small forms)
- V. Aural Skills
 - a. Sight-singing
 - b. Melodic dictation
 - c. Harmonic dictation
 - d. Identification of isolated pitch and rhythmic patterns
 - e. Detection of errors in pitch and rhythm in one- and two-voice examples
 - f. Identification of processes and materials in the context of music literature representing a broad spectrum of genres, media, and styles

The AP Music Theory Exam includes multiple-choice, free-response, and sight-singing sections. The multiple-choice section, weighted at 45 percent of the final grade, includes questions based on an aural stimulus that test a student’s listening skill and knowledge about theory largely in the context of examples from actual literature, and questions not based on aural stimulus that primarily evaluate a student’s ability to analyze a score, as well as their knowledge of and skills in evaluating musical terminology, notation, and composition.

The written free-response section, weighted at 45 percent of the final grade, includes questions both with and without an aural stimulus. The question types are as follows:

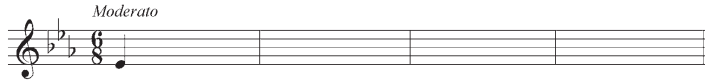
Questions 1 and 2	Melodic Dictation
Questions 3 and 4	Harmonic Dictation
Question 5	Part-Writing from Figured Bass
Question 6	Part-Writing from Roman Numerals
Question 7	Composition of a Bass Line for a Given Melody, Implying an Appropriate Harmonic Progression

The sight-singing portion of the exam, weighted at 10 percent of the final grade, comprises two brief, primarily diatonic melodies (of about four to eight bars) that the student sings and records on a cassette tape. Students are given 75 seconds to examine and practice each melody, and 30 seconds to perform each melody. They may sing or whistle the melody beginning with the given starting pitch or another pitch in a range that is more comfortable.

Sample AP Music Theory free-response questions are listed below.

Question on Melodic Dictation with Aural Stimulus

Students listen to a melody played four times with a 30-second pause after the first playing and a one-minute pause after each subsequent playing. Students are told that there are no rests in the melody they hear and that it will be played on a clarinet. The first note of the melody is provided.



Correct response:

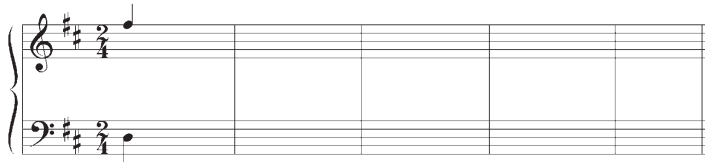


Question on Harmonic Dictation with Aural Stimulus

Students listen to a harmonic progression four times with a 30-second pause after the first playing and a one-minute pause after each subsequent playing. Students are instructed to:

- A. Notate only the soprano and bass voices. Do not notate the alto and tenor voices.
- B. On the lines provided under each staff, write in the Roman and Arabic numerals that indicate the chords and their inversions.

Students are also instructed to note that there are nine chords in the progression; the soprano and bass notes and the Roman numeral of the first chord are given.



D: I — — — — — — —

Correct response:



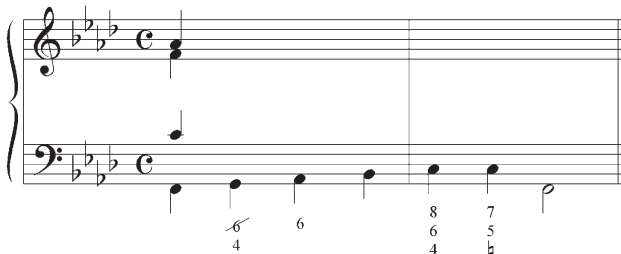
D: I V⁶ I vi IV ii⁶ V₄⁶ — 3 vi
 or 14 V

“Writing good free-response questions in music is challenging because, to ensure that scores are distributed properly among students of differing abilities, the questions have to allow students to succeed and fail at different points. For those questions that involve listening skills—melodic and harmonic dictation, as well as sight-singing—it means the difficulty factors have to be carefully chosen and positioned within the item. It is not unusual for the committee to spend an hour tweaking a melody so that it has just the right balance and placement of difficulty factors, while remaining musically satisfying. The moment it all comes together is often accompanied by smiles and sighs of satisfaction.”

—Eric J. Isaacson, AP Music Theory Development Committee former Chair
 Indiana University, Bloomington

Question on Part-Writing from Figured Bass

Students are instructed to realize the figured bass below in four voices, following traditional eighteenth-century voice-leading procedures, and to continue logically from the spacing of the first chord. They are told to supply the Roman numeral that appropriately indicates harmonic function in the space below each chord.



f: — — — — — — —

One possible excellent response:



f: i V i iv i₄⁶ V i

Question on Composition of a Bass Line for a Given Melody, Implying an Appropriate Harmonic Progression

Students are instructed to complete the bass line for the melody below, making sure to keep the portion composed consistent with the first phrase. They are told to place Roman numerals with inversion symbols below the bass line to indicate the harmonies implied by the soprano and bass. Additionally, the students are asked to observe the following:

- A. The bass line should make melodic sense in relation to the given soprano line.
 1. Give melodic interest to the bass line.
 2. Vary the motion of the bass line in relation to the soprano.
 3. Use note values ranging from half notes to eighth notes.
- B. The bass line and chord choices should make harmonic sense with the melody.
 1. Use an appropriate cadence at each phrase ending.
 2. Use at least two chords or two positions of the same chord per measure.
- C. Do not notate alto and tenor lines.

Key: E
Chord Analysis: I V I — IV⁶ IV I IV V⁶ I

Key: E
Chord Analysis: I V I — IV⁶ IV I IV V⁶ I V₃⁴ I V

One possible excellent response:

Key: E
Chord Analysis: I V I — IV⁶ IV I IV V⁶ I V₃⁴ I V

Key: E
Chord Analysis: I V₃⁴ I⁶ I⁶ I⁴ V⁷ vi V₆/V V I V⁶ I ii⁶ V I

Question on Sight-Singing

Students are given 75 seconds to view and practice the melody, and are given the starting pitch.

Moderato
f

How to Get Involved

There are many ways college and university faculty members can help maintain the high standards of the AP Program:

- Participate in a college comparability study
- Be an AP Reader
- Contribute multiple-choice test items for the AP Exam
- Become an AP Faculty Consultant

For more information, please go to: apcentral.collegeboard.com/highered/getinvolved

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