

Preparing for the Theory of Music and Sight Singing/Ear Training Courses at Northwest Missouri State University

Despite completing advanced placement courses and years of applied study, some entering university music students find courses such as music theory and sight sing/ear training a formidable hurdle. Therefore, the information below is intended to assist entering first-year students in preparing for the Theory Placement Exam and any subsequent music studies.

What do you need to know to pass the Theory Placement Exam?

1. Be able to identify any of the major and minor key signatures and write them correctly on a staff.
2. Be able to identify and write correctly on the staff any of the major scales and the three forms of minor scales (natural, harmonic, melodic).
3. Be able to identify and notate on the staff any of the intervals by modifier (major, minor, diminished, augmented) and numerical value.
4. Be able to identify and notate on the staff all forms of the triads (augmented, major, minor, and diminished) and seventh-chords (MM, Mm, mm, dm, and dd).

Keyboard Skills:

Theory of Music is based on the keyboard. Becoming comfortable at the keyboard is essential for all musicians, and beginning to study the piano before entering university gives students a tremendous advantage. There are qualified piano teachers almost everywhere; so, if you have not had piano lessons, contact a teacher as soon as possible and get started with him or her.

Sight Singing and Ear Training:

Sight Singing and Ear Training courses are necessary because musicians must be proficient at reproducing the symbols we see in a score (by singing and playing them) and interpreting the sounds that we hear. Everyone must be able to use their voices to demonstrate, whether one is a singer or an instrumentalist.

1. Incorporate singing into your daily practice routine and as often as possible.
2. Practice singing with another person – for example, a band or choral director, or someone with advanced skills – who can listen and provide feedback as to your accuracy.
3. For a review of traditional dictation skills, the department recommends the use of *MacGamut* (MacGamut Music Software International, Inc.), a program for Windows and

Macintosh computers, which can be purchased directly from the MacGamut web site for the cost of about \$40 plus shipping (<http://www.macgamut.com>), or Auralia (<http://www.risingsoftware.com/home.php>). A free alternative can be found at www.musictheory.net.

Music Fundamentals:

A thorough review of the chapters on fundamentals and the completion of the practice exercises in a traditional music theory textbook will greatly help you to prepare for university music studies. Many texts are available new and used online at amazon.com or barnesandnoble.com; a partial list is found below:

- Benjamin, Horvit, and Nelson, *Techniques and Materials of Music* (Thompson-Schirmer)
- Benward and Saker, *Music in Theory and Practice* (McGraw-Hill)
- Kostka and Payne, *Tonal Harmony* (McGraw-Hill) [NWMSU uses this text]
- Turek, *Theory for Today's Musician w/ Musical Example CD-ROM* (McGraw-Hill)

Websites Devoted to Music Theory:

You may also find the following websites useful for the review and practice of music theory and musicianship skills.

musictheory.net (especially the "exercises" section)

teoria.com (especially the "exercises" section)

Final Thoughts

Your first semester will be a time of new experiences and classes, and any additional preparation will allow you more time to concentrate on your primary instrument or your voice and make your university experience more enjoyable. If you have any questions about the music theory program at NWMSU, please contact:

Dr. Chris Gibson (reeds@nwmissouri.edu)

Dr. Ernest Kramer (ekramer@nwmissouri.edu)

Dr. Kendall Prinz (kprinz@nwmissouri.edu)

Dr. Stephen Town (stown@nwmissouri.edu)