

Tonal/Rhythmic Theory and Musicianship

Syllabus

Prerequisites:

This course is intended for students who have spent at least two years seriously committed to learning and playing a musical instrument (or singing). The ability to read and write music notation in both treble and bass clef, knowledge of rudimentary music terminology (e.g. chords, scales, intervals), and familiarity with basic music performance conventions (e.g. counting time), are **required**.

Course Description:

This course serves as an introduction to the basic structures of Western musical tonality and meter. Tonality and meter will be taught through a multitude of composition, analysis, dictation, and improvisation exercises. Musical material will include European/American and African/American folk tunes, songs from the Great American Songbook, contemporary popular songs, and simple compositions from the Classical period.

In each class session you will be asked to improvise and/or aurally recognize short tonal figures (Do-Re-Mi, Sol-Mi-Re-Do, etc.) and metrical rhythmic patterns (2+1+1, 3+3+2, etc.). All students will be asked to improvise orally in class—however, neither vocal range, timbre, nor prowess will be graded. Improvisations will be very short (3–5 notes) and can be drawn from a stock of simple idiomatic melodic figures that will be taught to you. Through weekly written assignments you will learn to piece these melodic/rhythmic figures into well-formed melodies, and harmonize these melodies. In the final weeks of the course, you will add proper voice-leading and increasingly elaborate basslines to your harmonic progressions, building towards the composition of simple counterpoint.

Course Goals:

In this course, you will . . .

- become familiar with the basic organizational structures of Western music—how Western music “works.”
- develop intellectual knowledge about music to complement your existing musical intuitions.
- learn a set of vocabulary and concepts that will help you talk about music, facilitating communication with other musicians, teachers, conductors, and ensemble leaders.
- learn to aurally recognize and spontaneously vocalize common melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic patterns.
- compose idiomatic tonal melodies and simple harmonic progressions/counterpoints.
- competently analyze, reduce, or elaborate simple melodies and harmonic progressions.
- better appreciate the music you love, and fall in love with new pieces you’ve never heard.

Course Materials

The course schedule and all course materials (assignments, musical scores, video-lectures, readings, etc.) are posted on the course website. The course discussion forum is also accessed through the

website. Key worksheets must be submitted through the course website—other assignments may be uploaded through the website or turned in in person.

Videos and Readings

Theoretical concepts will be introduced through short (3–5 minute) **video lectures**. Most lectures have associated readings (pdfs, or weblinks) which summarize and elaborate the points in the video. You must prepare for each class by watching the assigned video lecture and/or reading any assigned readings. Video lectures and reading materials can (and should) be rewatched for clarification and/or review.

Homework

Assignments

There will be ten homework assignments throughout the semester—**five composition assignments** and **five analysis assignments**. Assignments are due at the start of the scheduled class session. No late assignments will be accepted unless you have obtained an excused absence.

A cumulative **midterm analysis project** is due the week of the midterm. You will demonstrate your mastery of the material from the first half of the course in an analysis of a melody from a song of your choice. Songs will be chosen well in advance and with the instructor's permission to ensure appropriate length and content. The project will be comprised of three components: an annotated analysis of the score, a written commentary/explanation of your analysis, and a short (5 minute) interview with the instructor.

A cumulative **final composition project** is due the week of finals. This will be a well organized original melody with an accompanying harmonic progression, demonstrating your understanding and fluency with the harmonic, rhythmic, and formal concepts learned throughout the semester. The final time slot will be reserved for performances of the class's final compositions.

Key-drill Worksheets

Throughout this course, theoretical discussions and musicianship exercises will be presented using *relative pitch* terminology, including fixed-do solfege (do, re, mi, fa, . . .), scale-degree numbers ($\hat{1}$, $\hat{2}$, $\hat{3}$, $\hat{4}$, . . .), roman numerals (I, ii, iii, IV, . . .), qualitative sonority descriptors (major triad, minor seventh chord, etc.), and intervals (major 6th, diminished 5th, etc.). However, professional musicianship also requires that students become fluent in mapping relative pitch concepts (such as scales and intervals) to *absolute pitches* in any key. Musical examples used in class, homework assignments, and video lectures will be drawn from a variety of keys, requiring you to quickly identify scale degrees and chord qualities from written music in order to learn and to participate. In addition, each composition assignment you submit must be written in a different key.

To practice and improve your key recognition skills, each week you will be asked to complete an online key-drill worksheet consisting of 120 fill-in-the-blank questions—20 from each of these six categories:

- Given key and note name → label the scale degree.
- Given key and scale degree → label the note name.
- Given scale degree and note name → label the major/minor key.
- Given three/four pitches → label the chord root and quality.
- Given chord and key → label roman numeral.
- Given key and roman numeral → label chord root and quality.

Each student will be given a unique, randomized worksheet each week. Key-drill worksheets must be submitted through the course website on or before 11:59pm, each Sunday.

Theory Forum

The course website includes an online discussion forum. Participation in the forum is graded as part of your participation credit. At a minimum, each student must participate in the forum as a structured part of their composition assignments: Each student must post early drafts of each of their composition assignments on the forum. Each student must also post at least five constructive criticisms (especially pointing out possible errors) of other students' posted drafts. The same process will be applied to the analyses and composition portions of the midterm and final practice tests.

Beyond the minimum participation outlined above, you can receive participation credit for discussing, asking, or answering questions related to the video-lectures, readings, assignments, or any other pertinent topics, on the forum. Special credit for discussion of video-lectures/reading materials *before* the associated class session. Productive, genuine, participation in the forum is necessary to receive full participation credit. As in any other scholastic environment, polite, respectful behavior on the forum is *required*.

Class Time

You must prepare for each class by watching the assigned video lecture and/or reading any assigned readings. The first half of each class session will consist of discussion/review of (and sometimes quizzes concerning) the content presented in the video lecture. The second half of each class session will consist of written, aural, and vocal exercises related to this content. Your consistent preparation and active participation is essential to your learning, and to your grade.

Exams and Quizzes

Over the course of the semester, ten short pop **quizzes** will be conducted at the beginning of class. These quizzes will test concepts presented in the video/written preparation materials. Quizzes may also include a number of key-drill fill-in-the-blanks. The **midterm** and **final** exams will contain both composition and analysis components, covering everything studied from the beginning of class.

Grading:

- 10% Quizzes
- 10% Key-drill worksheets
- 10% Midterm Exam
- 10% Final Exam
- 15% Participation (in class and online)
- 15% Assignments
- 15% Analysis project
- 15% Composition project

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty (cheating) will not be tolerated in this class. All assignments submitted for a grade must be your own original work. In accordance with university policies, the instructor will officially report any academic dishonesty to the university. Don't do it!

Class Schedule

Week	<i>Topic</i>	New concepts
1	<i>Rhythm and Meter</i>	The metric hierarchy Strong and weak metric positions Rhythmic patterns/motives
2	<i>Tonality</i>	The diatonic scale (major and minor) The tonic hierarchy (Do, Mi, Sol) Local contours (passing, neighbor, leap-skip reversal)
3	<i>Melody</i>	Phrases Global contour Melodic/rhythmic accents
4	<i>Tonality</i>	The dominant hierarchy (Sol, Ti, Re, Fa) The subdominant hierarchy (Fa, La, Do, Re)
5	<i>Melody</i>	Subphrases Motives
6	<i>Rhythm and Meter</i>	Hypermeter
7	<i>Melody</i>	Periods Sentences
8	<i>Review and midterm preparation</i>	
9	<i>Midterm and analysis project</i>	
10	<i>Harmony</i>	Triads and 7th chords The tonic hierarchy/triad/function Local contours, accents, and “non-chord” tones
11	<i>Harmony</i>	Dominant and subdominant chords Functional hierarchies and chord progressions
12	<i>Rhythm and Meter</i>	Harmonic rhythm
13	<i>Harmony</i>	Sequences Circle of 5ths/4ths
14	<i>Rhythm</i>	Syncopation Cross-rhythms
15	<i>Counterpoint</i>	Basslines Voice-leading
16	<i>Review and final exam</i>	
Finals	<i>Composition project</i>	