



D.M.A. COMMON MUSIC THEORY EXAM

Overview and study tips

The D.M.A. music theory exam will be a three-hour written examination, offered once each semester, with the following components:

1. SCORE ANALYSIS—shorter passages. Answer directed, pointed questions about analysis of the passage (e.g., harmonic action, motivic use, compositional devices, etc.). Various passages will be shown (one using imitative technique, one “tonal” piece, and one twentieth or twenty-first century piece) and each will require a response.

Skills required and study tips:

Terminology specific to musical forms of different eras (i.e., Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Post-tonal, Serial)
Score reading fluency (instrumentation and transpositions)
Appropriate analytical tools for music of different eras
SATB part writing
Roman numeral/figured bass realization

2. SCORE ANALYSIS—a more extensive excerpt—this could be a complete piece or substantial section of a longer piece (3-4 pages or more), possibly in open score. Answer directed questions about tonalities used and how established, tonal design, harmonies used, harmonic identification and analysis as directed, motivic use/development, rhythmic style/devices, etc. There will also opportunity for more open-ended questions regarding the excerpt in question.

Skills required and study tips:

Terminology specific to musical forms of different eras (i.e., Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Post-tonal, Serial)
Score reading fluency (instrumentation and transpositions)
Appropriate analytical tools for music of different eras

3. ESSAY RESPONSE—written response required, possibly also involving musical notation responses. Your score will be determined both on the content and the quality of your writing.

Skills required and study tips:

Clearly organized and thorough discussion of the musical example
Ability to address in depth the directed questions and not generalize
Evidence of detailed and musically expressive writing (not bullet points)

4. SCORE ID AND COMMENTARY: Given unidentified score excerpts to look at, comment on these excerpts, addressing specific stylistic characteristics and probable date (within a reasonable range) of composition and composer.

Skills required and study tips:

Browse various music anthologies, noting musical characteristics specific to various genres and historical eras and representative composers

5. TERMINOLOGY: Briefly define or explain analytical terms and concepts that will be listed according to courses taken.

Skills required and study tips:

Review course notes from all classes taken and compile a vocabulary list

Browse the index of a standard undergraduate theory textbook; look up unknown terms

Ability to answer clearly and thoroughly (not bullet points)

Suggested reading: (The following books are recommended sources for study relative to the points given above. We are not recommending that you read each and every one from cover to cover. Rather, you should consult this list as needed to remediate any weaknesses you may have.)

Harmony:

- Kostka, Stephan and Dorothy Payne. *Tonal Harmony: With an Introduction to Twentieth-Century Music*
 - Aldwell, Schachter, and Cadwallader. *Harmony and Voice Leading*
 - Roig-Francoli, *Harmony in Context*
- (There are roughly 200 published undergraduate theory textbooks. Choose one for review that is up to date and in current use. It is also a good idea to browse 2-3 to compare their content and refresh your knowledge of the concepts within.)

Counterpoint:

- Kennan, Kent. *Counterpoint*
 - Gauldin, Robert. *A Practical Approach to Eighteenth-Century Counterpoint*.
- (Study in this book should be undertaken from the standpoint of analysis you would apply to baroque contrapuntal pieces regarding motivic and thematic use, form, phrases, cadences, tonality changes, and contrapuntal devices and procedures. The purpose of your study does not involve composing counterpoint or executing detailed analytical (voice-leading) reductions. Recommended are Chapters 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 20.)

Form and Analysis:

- Green, Douglass. *Form in Tonal Music: An Introduction to Analysis*
- Berry, Wallace. *Form in Music*
- James Mathes. *The Analysis of Musical Form*

Twentieth-century techniques:

- Kostka, Stephan. *Materials and Techniques of Twentieth-Century Music*
- Straus, Joseph. *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*

Other:

- Laitz and Bartlette. *Graduate Review of Tonal Theory: A Recasting of Common-Practice Harmony, Form, and Counterpoint*
- Deborah Stein, *Engaging Music*
(Offers an overview of analytic approaches and models of how to write analytically)

General strategies for success:

- Form a study group
- Allow yourself ample time to prepare (*at least* 3-4 months)
- The exam provides time allowances for each section; bring a watch and budget your work on each section accordingly
- We consider the content of this exam to be standard working knowledge in the areas of tonal and post-tonal theory and analysis. Be prepared to answer questions beyond simply the content of your recent graduate courses. In other words, you should also review concepts covered in a typical undergraduate core theory curriculum and remediate any weaknesses or omissions in your prior studies

Good luck!