

# Music Theory for the Freshman Music Major

or

(What you need to know before you arrive at college)

Although there are no specific prerequisites for the freshman theory class at Mansfield University, there is an expected level of accomplishment. Some schools give a diagnostic exam to incoming freshmen, and then assign them to a theory class. Other schools, including Mansfield, teach all the basics of music theory fundamentals in the beginning of the first semester music theory, but cover them quickly. If you are genuinely learning several of these topics for the first time, you may find it difficult to succeed. Students who have a basic knowledge of the fundamentals of music theory when they enter an undergraduate music program are much more likely to succeed in all fields of musical study. It is critical to be fluent with the following items!

**Clefs:** Know the note names in both bass and treble clef, and be able to read fluently in both clefs. Knowledge of C clefs is also helpful.

**Scales & Keys:** Know the key signatures for all major and minor keys **fluently**, and be able to play, and write out, all major and minor scales.

**Intervals:** Know all the major, minor, perfect, augmented, and diminished intervals well enough to identify a random set of 20 intervals within a minute.

**Chords:** Know the interval content of major, minor, augmented, and diminished triads. Be able to both recognize and/or construct a random set of 20 triads within a minute. Similar familiarity with seventh chords is also recommended.

**Meter:** Know the difference between simple and compound meters, and between duple and triple meters. Be able to identify the number of beats, and the type of note that represents the beat, the division, and the subdivision in any meter.

**Rhythm:** Know the relative lengths of all note values (i.e., 2 eighth notes in a quarter note) and be able to determine where the beat will fall in any notated rhythm, in any meter.

If any of the items listed above is unfamiliar to you or you feel that you need to review them, it's not too late to begin! On the back of this sheet we have listed several textbooks and a website which can help you become familiar with these topics. Difficulty in the first term of music theory has been the most common reason for students' inability to complete the music degree program!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us. We hope you have a great year, and we hope to see you in the fall.

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The following free website is recommended to prepare for collegiate music study:

Musictheory.net: <http://www.musictheory.net/index.html>

- lessons = text (as in a book) that explains the material.
- trainers = interactive exercises to practice material learned in the lesson.
- Explore all possibilities for each trainer exercise. You can control how easy/difficult the questions will be.

The following theory books may also be used for preparation of collegiate music study. Prices are given as a reference and may change.

- Manoff, Tom. *The Music Kit*. 4th edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 2000. Includes CD and computer software (with interactive exercises that return personal feedback and scores). (\$67.75) The software is Macintosh and Windows compatible.
- Clough, John and Joyce Conley. *Scales, Intervals, Keys, Triads, Rhythm, and Meter*. 3rd edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999. Includes CD. (\$49.75)
- Steinke, Greg and Paul Harder. *Basic Materials in Music Theory: A Programmed Course*. 10th edition. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Professional Technical Reference, 2002. (\$72.00)
- Feldstein, Sandy. *Practical Theory Complete: A Self-Instruction Music Theory Course*. New York: Alfred Publishing Co. Inc., 1997. (\$9.95, which is quite inexpensive!)
- Surmani, Andrew, Morton Manus, and Karen Farnum Surmani. *Alfred's Essentials of Music Theory: Complete*. New York: Alfred Publishing Co. Inc., 2000. (\$12.50)

Private piano study is strongly recommended for anyone contemplating a career in music. Keyboard skills are essential for every musician and facilitate musical understanding and competency. Keyboard study also helps students read the grand staff (treble and bass clefs at the same time) which is a highly valuable skill for music theory study.