

MUSIC THEORY AT COASTAL CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

GETTING STARTED WITH MUSIC FUNDAMENTALS

Welcome to the Department of Music at Coastal Carolina University! Among the core requirements of every music degree are four semesters of music theory, musicianship (sight singing & ear training), and keyboard skills. In the most general sense, you need to understand the music you hear, play and read. Knowing how music “works,” how to communicate with other musicians, how to read standard music notation, how to identify the things you hear, will be an important component of your future success as a musician.

Everyone comes to us from their own unique background and experiences. University music programs have developed different strategies for ‘leveling the playing field,’ so that students in the same classes are prepared for the college music curriculum. These may include requiring students to take an exam to place out of remedial music fundamentals classes in order to start the required sequences mentioned above or adding an extra semester to these sequences and allowing students with stronger backgrounds to automatically get credit for the courses where they already know the materials.

At Coastal Carolina, the Department of Music uses a slightly different approach. Once you pass an audition and are accepted into the program, you may enroll in the first semester core classes in music theory (MUS 115), musicianship (MUS 117) and keyboard skills (MUS 172). This allows everyone to get started together. Ideally, everyone would have a least a certain level of familiarity with the basics of music notation, theory, listening and keyboard from the start, and that is why we are providing you with materials to help you get ready.

HOW TO GET READY FOR MUSIC CORE CLASSES

When we say someone ‘knows’ music fundamentals, it can mean different things. Let’s think about three levels of ‘knowing’:

Familiarity is being aware of the basic concepts, understanding how to get the right answer, but perhaps not having an ability to work with the materials in real time. It’s like studying a language where you can read it aloud, look words up and conjugate the most common verbs, but can’t really follow a conversation or read a newspaper article in that language.

Proficiency is being able to work with the material, getting the answers in a reasonable time, but perhaps struggling a bit to keep up in a real-time musical situation. It’s like being able to have a conversation in a language, but you miss parts of many sentences, and continually have to translate what you hear back to English in your mind.

Fluency is absorbing the materials to where most of it is second nature. It is like a second language where you are able to not just speak or comprehend but to think in that language. Wouldn’t that be nice?

As far as the basic materials of music, we would like you to have as much *familiarity* as possible at the start of the various sequences. This will be a base upon which you can build increasing skills and comprehension. By spending more time practicing this material, you can progress to *proficiency*. We would like you to be at that point later in the first semester. *Fluency* comes later as you are immersed in a musical environment every day and function as a listening, playing and thinking musician. None of these stages come from merely reading a definition, solving a few exercises or passing a single test. You will progress bit by bit through effective practice, mindful music making and good study habits.

Reporting your results to us: It’s important for you and for us to know where you are in your knowledge when we start the semester. On the following pages we explain what we expect you to do and how to do it. For each exercise, take your best score and email the results to Dr. Andrew Fowler at afowler@coastal.edu, or bring the printed result sheets to the first day of classes. We’re here to help you, so don’t worry if you can’t do all of it yet.

TOOLS TO HELP YOU LEARN MUSIC FUNDAMENTALS

We are directing you to tools that will help with your progress to familiarity with music fundamentals. This is not comprehensive, but rather tries to get you familiar with the most common musical ideas as a way to get you started in each area. Among these are:

Videos: Professor Donald Sloan, coordinator of the music theory and musicianship area, has made a series of videos for each topic. Think of these as 5-15 minute lessons to introduce you to each topic. The links to these videos are posted on the Department of Music page.

Website: A free website, www.musictheory.net, is a wonderful resource for learning, practicing and assessing your music fundamentals. The three main areas of this site are *lessons*, *exercises* and *tools*. The lessons are a web-based resource for the material we are covering. The exercises are ways to practice in order to increase your skills and to test yourself to see how you are progressing. The tools are various calculators that can serve as references, showing you the correct answers for any problem.

Apps: The material on this website has also been developed into a pair of iOS apps: Music Lessons and Tenuto, corresponding to the Lessons for the first app, Exercises and Tools for the Tenuto app. They are only available for the iPhone/iPad family and cost \$2.99 and \$3.99 respectively. The advantage to getting the apps is to be able to take your practice with you wherever you go. You can still work from the website (even from your mobile device browser) without the apps, but they are a nice feature.

Our help: If you need our help, you can send us an email. Perhaps we can answer your question that way, or even schedule a one-on-one videochat to keep you moving in the right direction. Our contact information is:

Dr. Donald Sloan, Professor of Music: dsloan@coastal.edu

Dr. Andrew Fowler, Lecturer in Music: afowler@coastal.edu

HOW TO USE THE TOOLS TO LEARN THE MUSIC BASICS

Videos: We have created our own series of videos, each one covering a single lesson. It assumes that the student is starting more or less from scratch, so depending on your background you may already be familiar with a number of these concepts. The list of videos is as follows:

- Theory Tutor—0. Welcome File
- Theory Tutor—1. Musical Alphabet
- Theory Tutor—2. Reading Treble Clef
- Theory Tutor—3. Reading Bass Clef
- Theory Tutor—4. Keyboard Geography
- Theory Tutor—5. Basic Rhythms and Rests
- Theory Tutor—6. Simple Meters and Tempo
- Theory Tutor—7. Half Steps and Whole Steps
- Theory Tutor—8. Introduction to Major Scales
- Theory Tutor—9. Introduction to Minor Scales
- Theory Tutor—10. More about minor scales
- Theory Tutor—11. Key Signatures
- Theory Tutor—12. Intervals Part 1
- Theory Tutor—13. Intervals Part 2
- Theory Tutor—14. Intervals Part 3
- Theory Tutor—15. Introduction to Chords

Standards: Rather than overwhelm you with the entire range of music fundamentals, we suggest a portion of them, using the most commonly found examples. You should try to get familiarity with the following musical objects:

Note Reading: both treble and bass clef, up to one ledger line above and below each staff. When you get better at this, add an extra ledger line in either direction.

Key Signatures: Be able to identify or write major and minor keys from 3 flats to 3 sharps. Know the order of sharps or flats.

Intervals: all major, minor and perfect intervals up to a 5th, as well as the tritone (augmented 4th or diminished 5th). These are all intervals found naturally in major or minor scales. Use both clefs.

Scales: Be able to identify or construct major or natural minor scales between 3 flats and 3 sharps, both clefs.

Chords: Be able to identify or construct minor or minor triads, both clefs.

Keyboard: Be able to identify or play individual notes on the keyboard.

Using musictheory.net or Tenuto: The exercises on musictheory.net or the iOS app Tenuto are intended to give you practice leading to an assessment of your skills. The chart shows you what settings to use for each exercise. The two timings on the chart are to achieve familiarity or

proficiency with each exercise. On your way to learning the materials, you can use the settings to reduce to range of what you are practicing, so that you may start with what is most familiar to you, adding more types of examples as you get better.

How to practice: Watch the videos for any areas where you are not yet proficient. You can use the musictheory.net or Tenuto exercises to drill for each skill. When you are still learning and practicing, turn the “Challenge” button in each setting off. It will still tell you how many you are getting right or wrong, but there is no timer or set of required examples to get through.

How to assess how you are doing: The chart includes settings for each exercise, including timings for familiarity (the first level of learning), then proficiency. We would like you to achieve familiarity in each of these levels upon entry to the theory and musicianship sequences, with proficiency (and a broader range of musical objects) coming later. Turn the “Challenge” button ON and set a time. If you don’t want the clock to run out, or the first time you try this, set the timer for 10 minutes, then when you get through the total number of examples set by the exercise, see how long it took you. Work your way down until you achieve familiarity at least.

Letting us know how you are doing: For each exercise, take your best score and email the results to Dr. Andrew Fowler at afowler@coastal.edu, or bring the printed result sheets to the first day of classes.

Other questions you may have:

Do I need to do all of this to get in the first-year music classes? No, but although we will review the concepts in class, things will move rather quickly. The more you can familiarize yourself with these concepts, the less you will struggle keeping up with the class material.

I’m having trouble getting one or more concepts even after watching the video or looking at the music lessons on musictheory.net. What can I do?: We can make ourselves available on email or even a Zoom meeting to answer any questions and get you straightened out. Contact us, Dr. Donald Sloan (dsloan@coastal.edu) or Dr. Andrew Fowler (afowler@coastal.edu).

I already know most of this. Do I have to take the assessments? Why not? You need to demonstrate this proficiency when you get to class, so try it to see how you do. When you show us the results, we will have confidence that you are prepared.

I don’t have an iPhone or iPad. Can I still use this software? If this is the case, you need to work online at the www.musictheory.net website. The site is free, the apps have a small cost.

Are there other apps that can help me practice this material? Whether you have an iOS or Android device, go to your app store and explore. Many apps are free, but only give a limited number of exercises and want you to subscribe to their service. We chose one that will cost less.

Any other questions? Email us dsloan@coastal.edu or afowler@coastal.edu.