

## Terms and Symbols Used on the AP Music Theory Exam

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The terms and symbols in the list below may appear in the directions or questions on the AP Music Theory Exam, as well as in course instructional materials. As such, the list will be an invaluable guide in the development of an AP Music Theory course, but it is not intended to limit course content — some teachers may choose to include topics not shown here.

It is important to note that the list does not include extremely basic musical vocabulary, even though such widely used terms may be used on the exam — for example, “quarter note” is not listed. Nor is every term of equal importance — for example, “strophic” and “rubato” may not appear on every exam, but “melody,” “phrase” and “texture” certainly will.

Definitions and illustrations of the terms and concepts listed here can be found in music theory textbooks and standard reference works, such as *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*.

### Form

#### Symbols

Lowercase letters indicate musical phrases or subsections: for example, **a b** indicates a contrasting period; **a b a** indicates a phrase, contrasting phrase and return to the original phrase. A prime (as in **a a'**) denotes a phrase and a varied restatement. Capital letters are used to indicate larger sections of compositions.

#### Terms

|                              |                              |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Cadence                      | Melodic procedures           |
| Cadential extension          | augmentation                 |
| Coda                         | conjunct                     |
| Codetta                      | diminution                   |
| Contour                      | disjunct                     |
| Countermelody                | extension, phrase extension  |
| Elision (phrase elision)     | fragmentation                |
| Fragment (fragmented motive) | internal expansion           |
| Introduction                 | inversion, melodic inversion |
| Jazz and pop terms           | literal repetition           |
| bridge                       | motivic transformation       |
| chorus                       | octave displacement          |
| song form (AABA)             | retrograde                   |
| turnaround                   | rhythmic transformation      |
| twelve-bar blues             | sequence                     |
|                              | sequential repetition        |
|                              | transposition                |
|                              | truncation                   |

|                    |                         |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Motive             | Solo, soli              |
| Period             | Stanza                  |
| antecedent         | Strophic                |
| consequent         | Theme                   |
| contrasting period | thematic transformation |
| double period      | Through-composed        |
| parallel period    | Tutti                   |
| Phrase group       | Variation               |
| Refrain            | Verse                   |
| Small forms        |                         |
| binary             |                         |
| rounded binary     |                         |
| simple binary      |                         |
| ternary            |                         |

## Harmony

### Symbols

#### Roman and Arabic numerals

Capital Roman numerals denote major triads.

Lowercase Roman numerals denote minor triads.

A capital Roman numeral with a “+” indicates an augmented triad.

A lowercase Roman numeral with a “°” indicates a diminished triad.

Arabic numerals or figured-bass symbols denote intervals above the bass and hence indirectly indicate chord inversion. Arabic numerals may indicate voice leading and/or nonharmonic tones.

#### Triads

<sup>6</sup> indicates a first inversion triad

<sup>6</sup>/<sub>4</sub> indicates a second inversion triad

#### Seventh Chords

<sup>7</sup> indicates a root-position seventh chord

<sup>o7</sup> indicates a diminished (fully-diminished) seventh chord

<sup>#7</sup> indicates a half-diminished seventh chord

<sup>6</sup> indicates first inversion

<sup>5</sup> indicates second inversion

<sup>4</sup> indicates third inversion

<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>

#### Other figures

8–7 indicates melodic movement from an octave to a seventh above the bass.

9–8, 7–6, 4–3 indicate a suspension and melodic resolution.

An accidental before an Arabic numeral indicates alteration of the interval involved.

A figure with a slash (e.g.,  $\flat$ ) or a plus (e.g., 4+) indicates that the note creating the interval in question is raised a half step.

**Cadence Types**

Authentic  
     imperfect authentic  
     perfect authentic  
 Conclusive cadence  
 Deceptive  
 Half  
     Phrygian half  
 Inconclusive cadence  
 Plagal

**Chord Quality**

Triads  
     augmented or  $^+$   
     diminished or  $^\circ$   
     major or M  
     minor or m

Seventh chords  
     major seventh (MM; M7) (“major-major”)  
     dominant seventh (Mm7) (used for major-minor seventh chords exercising a dominant function)  
     major-minor seventh (Mm7) (same quality as dominant seventh without denoting function)  
     minor seventh (m7; mm) (“minor-minor”)  
     half-diminished seventh ( $^{\circ}7$ ; dm) (“diminished-minor”)  
     fully-diminished seventh ( $^{\circ\circ}7$ ; dd) (“diminished-diminished”)

**Functions and Progressions**

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Scale degrees/diatonic chord names | Harmonic rhythm                                      |
| tonic                              | Modulation   |
| supertonic                         | common tone modulation                               |
| mediant                            | phrase modulation                                    |
| subdominant                        | pivot chord modulation                               |
| dominant                           | Neighboring chord                                    |
| submediant                         | Rate of harmonic change                              |
| subtonic                           | Realize, realization of a figured bass,              |
| leading tone                       | realization of a four-part Roman numeral progression |
| Functions                          | Retrogression  |
| tonic function                     | Secondary dominant                                   |
| dominant function                  | Secondary leading tone chord                         |
| predominant function               | Tonicization   |
| Circle of fifths                   |  |
| Deceptive progression              |  |

## Treatment of second inversion ( $\frac{6}{4}$ ) triads

**Arpeggiating  $\frac{6}{4}$** —a  $\frac{6}{4}$  created by arpeggiation of the triad in the bass (e.g., 1a).

**Cadential  $\frac{6}{4}$** —a  $I_4^6$  preceding the dominant, often at a cadence. Although it contains the notes of the tonic triad, it does not exercise a tonic function but rather serves as an embellishment of the dominant. It occurs in a metrically stronger position than the dominant, and the upper voices most often move by step to the tones of the dominant. May also be written as  $V_4^6 \text{---} \frac{5}{3}$ , including the resolution of the cadential  $\frac{6}{4}$  to the dominant (e.g., 1b).

**Neighboring or pedal  $\frac{6}{4}$**  (embellishing  $\frac{6}{4}$ , auxiliary  $\frac{6}{4}$ )—occurs when the third and fifth of a root position triad are embellished by their respective upper neighboring tones, while the bass is stationary, usually occurring on a weak beat (e.g., 1c).

**Passing  $\frac{6}{4}$** —harmonizes the second note of a three-note ascending or descending scale fragment in the bass; that is, it harmonizes a bass passing tone. The usual metric placement is on an unaccented beat and the motion of the upper voices is ordinarily by step (e.g., 1d).

1a. Arpeggiating  $\frac{6}{4}$     1b. Cadential  $\frac{6}{4}$     1c. Neighboring or pedal  $\frac{6}{4}$     1d. Passing  $\frac{6}{4}$

C: I  $I_4^6$  I     $ii^6$   $I_4^6$  V I  
or  $V_4^6 \text{---} \frac{5}{3}$  I    I  $IV_4^6$  I     $I^6$   $V_4^6$  I

## Nonharmonic Tones (Nonchord Tones)

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Anticipation  | Ornament                            |
| Appoggiatura  | Passing tone (accented, unaccented) |
| Embellishment   | Pedal point                         |
| Escape tone (échappé)   | Preparation                         |
| Neighboring tone (auxiliary tone, embellishing tone, neighbor note) | Resolution                          |
| double neighbor   | Retardation                         |
| lower neighbor  | Suspension                          |
| upper neighbor  | rearticulated suspension            |
| neighbor group (cambiata, changing tones, changing notes)           | suspension chain                    |

**Spacing/Voicing/Position**

Alto  
 Bass  
 Close position  
 Doubling  
 First inversion  
 Inversion, inversion of chords  
 Open position

Root  
 Root position  
 Second inversion  
 Soprano  
 Tenor  
 Third inversion

**Voice Leading**

Common tone  
 Contrary motion  
 Cross relation (false relation)  
 Crossed voices (voice crossing)  
 Direct fifths (hidden fifths)  
 Direct octaves (hidden octaves)  
 Oblique motion  
 Overlapping voices  
 Parallel motion

Parallel intervals  
 objectionable parallels  
 parallel fifths  
 parallel octaves  
 Similar motion  
 Tendency tone  
 Unresolved leading tone  
 Unresolved seventh  
 Voice exchange

**Miscellaneous Harmonic Terms**

Arpeggio, arpeggiation  
 Chromatic  
 Common Practice Style  
 Consonance  
 Diatonic  
 Dissonance

Figured bass  
 Flatted fifth  
 Lead sheet  
 Picardy third  
 Resolution

**Intervals**

Compound interval  
 Half step (semitone)  
 Interval  
 Inversion, inversion of an interval  
 Numerical names (i.e., third, fifth, octave)  
 Quality or type (e.g., perfect, major, minor, diminished, augmented)  
 Tritone  
 Unison (prime)  
 Whole step (whole tone)

## Performance Terms

Antiphonal

Articulation

arco

legato

marcato

pizzicato

slur

staccato

tenuto

Call and response

Dynamics

crescendo

diminuendo

terrace dynamics

pianissimo *pp*

piano *p*

mezzo piano *mp*

mezzo forte *mf*

forte *f*

fortissimo *ff*

storzando *sf, sfz*

Improvisation, improvisatory

Phrasing

Tempo

adagio

allegro

andante

andantino

grave

largo

lento

moderato

presto

vivace

accelerando

ritardando

ritenuto

rubato

Tremolo

Trill

## Rhythm/Meter/Temporal Organization

Accent

agogic accent

dynamic accent

metrical accent

Anacrusis (pickup; upbeat)

Asymmetrical meter

Augmentation

Bar line

Beat

Beat type

compound

simple

Changing meter

Cross rhythm

Diminution

Dot, double dot

Dotted rhythm

Duplet

Duration

Hemiola

Irregular meter

Meter

duple

quadruple

triple

Note value

Polyrhythm

Pulse

Rhythm

Swing rhythm

Syncopation

Tempo

Tie

Time signature (meter signature)

Triplet

**Scales/Keys/Modes**

Accidental  
 Chromatic, chromaticism  
 Diatonic  
 Key signature  
 Major  
 Minor  
   harmonic minor  
   melodic minor,  
     ascending/descending  
   natural minor (Aeolian)  
 Mode  
   Ionian  
   Dorian  
   Phrygian  
   Lydian  
   Mixolydian  
   Aeolian  
   Locrian

Modality  
 Parallel key, parallel major or minor  
 Pentatonic  
 Relative key, relative major or minor  
 Scale degrees  
   tonic            $\hat{1}$   
   supertonic      $\hat{2}$   
   mediant        $\hat{3}$   
   subdominant    $\hat{4}$   
   dominant        $\hat{5}$   
   submediant     $\hat{6}$   
   leading tone    $\hat{7}$   
 Tetrachord  
 Tonal  
 Tonality  
 Tonic  
 Whole-tone scale

**Text/Music Relations**

Lyrics  
 Melismatic  
 Stanza  
 Syllabic

**Texture**

Alberti bass  
 Canon  
 Canonic  
 Chordal accompaniment  
 Contrapuntal  
 Counterpoint  
   imitation  
   imitative polyphony  
   nonimitative polyphony  
   countermelody  
   fugal imitation  
 Heterophony, heterophonic  
 Homophony, homophonic  
   chordal homophony  
   chordal texture (homorhythmic)  
   melody with accompaniment

Instrumentation  
   brass  
   continuo  
   percussion  
   rhythm section  
   strings  
   timbre  
   woodwinds  
 Melody  
 Monophony, monophonic  
 Obbligato  
 Ostinato  
 Polyphony, polyphonic  
 Register  
 Solo, soli  
 Tessitura  
 Tutti  
 Walking bass

## Other terms that may be used on the AP Music Theory Exam

|           |                |
|-----------|----------------|
| Aria      | Prelude        |
| Art song  | Postlude       |
| Concerto  | Sonata         |
| Fugue     | Song           |
| Genre(s)  | String quartet |
| Interlude | Symphony       |
| Opera     |                |

## Exam Format

Five kinds of questions are ordinarily included in the exam: multiple-choice questions based on recorded music played within the exam; multiple-choice questions without aural stimulus; written free-response questions with aural stimulus; written free-response questions without aural stimulus; and sight-singing. The written free-response and sight-singing sections are scored by AP Music Theory teachers and college music faculty. A description of the AP Music Theory Exam follows. Sample questions follow the description of each portion of the exam. Answers to the multiple-choice questions are given on page 35.

## Multiple-Choice Section

The multiple-choice section of the exam consists of about 75 questions and counts for 45 percent of the total score. Multiple-choice scores are based on the number of questions answered correctly. Points are not deducted for incorrect answers, and no points are awarded for unanswered questions. Because points are not deducted for incorrect answers, students are encouraged to answer all multiple-choice questions. On any questions students do not know the answer to, students should eliminate as many choices as they can, and then select the best answer among the remaining choices.

- Questions based on aural stimulus test a student's listening skill and knowledge about theory largely in the context of examples from actual literature. Most of these questions will cover topics D, E, and F in section V of the outline on page 10, although emphasis is likely to be on the various elements mentioned under topic F. Some aural stimulus questions may test the student's skill in score analysis.
- Questions not based on aural stimulus emphasize those materials listed in topics A–E in section IV of the outline on page 10; they may include knowledge and skills listed for sections I, II, and III as well.