Incoming Freshmen's Guide to Music Theory and Functional Keyboard

Is there anything I can do <u>before</u> I come to MSU to better prepare for the theory diagnostic exam and my theory classes in general?

We encourage our incoming music majors and minors to enter the program with the following skills:

- Basic literacy of musical notation, particularly that which describes pitches, rhythms, time signatures, and key signatures
- Ability to read notes in both treble and bass clef
- General knowledge of the layout of a piano keyboard
- Ability to aurally differentiate between upward and downward melodic motion
- Ability to aurally differentiate between stepwise motion (C to D) and leaps (C to E)
- Ability to use your singing voice comfortably**

When classes begin, you will be given a theory diagnostic exam which will assess the first three skills listed above (in bold), but you will also be using the last three skills right away in your aural skills classes. If you have access to a computer, you can learn and practice many of them at the following free website: http://www.musictheory.net/

** The functional use of your singing voice (for instrumentalists as much as vocalists) is important to your success as a music student at MSU, and later as a music teacher in private lessons, ensemble rehearsal, or the classroom. If you have not recently had experience singing, then you are urged to find a place in a school or community choir or another musical venue where you can develop your skill and comfort level.

You can also purchase your theory textbook in advance. Since the fall of 2012, the Murray State music department has been using *Tonal Harmony* by Stefan Kostka and Dorothy Payne (seventh edition, with workbook and CD, McGraw-Hill).

Working on the first three chapters ahead of time and at your own speed will help you score higher on the diagnostic exam, and you will be better prepared for your theory classes. If your teacher or school library has an older edition of *Tonal Harmony*, you can use that until you arrive at MSU.

Can I test out of my theory courses?

For those of you taking the AP Music Theory Exam, scoring a 5 gives you credit for both Theory I and Theory II (MUS 170 and 173), giving you the option of taking Theory III as a freshman. Scoring a 3 or 4 gives you credit for Theory I only. In addition, the department offers "challenge exams" for Theory I and II at the very beginning of the fall semester. There will be a sign-up sheet posted on Dr. D'Ambrosio's office door (FA 544) at that time. Sitting for the exam(s) costs \$5 per credit hour.

How do I know whether to register for MUS 100 (Developmental Music Theory) or MUS 170 (Theory I)?

All freshmen register for both courses - passing or failing the diagnostic exam will have no effect on your university schedule. Once the diagnostic exam has been graded (usually by 3PM the next day), those who pass will receive an automatic "P" in MUS 100. Those students will attend only MUS 170. Students who do not pass and require additional practice with music fundamentals will need to attend and pass MUS 100 in order to earn their "P" grade in MUS 100. They will take both MUS 100 and MUS 170 concurrently for the first five weeks of school (MUS 100 is a five-week course).

When and where will the theory diagnostic exam be given?

If you follow your class schedule, you will go to your MUS 100 class on the first Wednesday of the fall semester. The diagnostic will be given at that time.

If you have any further questions or concerns, feel free to contact Dr. Mike D'Ambrosio at mike.dambrosio@murraystate.edu or (270) 809-3142.

What can I do to prepare for Functional Keyboard classes?

Since the first few weeks of Functional Keyboard move at a brisk pace, it is very important for incoming freshmen to become fluent in basic note and rhythm reading as soon as possible. Students with access to a piano or a keyboard are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the layout of the piano keyboard at the same time that they are mastering their note-reading skills. The easiest way to do this is to practice with music flash cards. (You can find them online to print, or make your own using 3x5 cards.) Twenty minutes of flash card practice per day will have students reading better in about two weeks.

Below are a few books and online resources to practice your piano reading skills:

- http://www.musictheory.net/exercises
- http://www.soundswell.co.uk/pages/swsightr.htm (The exercises in the "First Steps" section will work.)
- https://www.sightreadingfactory.com (Try the Demo for free.)
- Bastien, James. Sight Reading, Level 1 (Kjos Music Company)
- Bastien, Jane Smisor. A Line a Day Sight Reading, Level 1 (Kjos Music Company)
- Johnson, T.A. and Caroline Evans. *Right@Sight, Grade 1* (Edition Peters)
- Kember, John. Piano Sight Reading, Volume 1 (Schott)
- Marlais, Helen and Kevin Olson. Sight Reading & Rhythm Every Day, Book 1A (FJH Music Company)