



Learning Music Fundamentals

A secure knowledge music fundamentals—the basic materials of music—is critical to your success as a university-trained musician. During orientation you will take a Theory Placement Test. If you demonstrate a mastery of music fundamentals on the exam, you may enroll in Theory I and Aural Skills I in your first semester. If, however, you need more work in this area you will need to take Fundamentals of Music (MUT 1300) first. This course can be counted as elective credit, but it does not count toward the required courses for the music major.

Generally, a mastery of music fundamentals should include:

- fluency in reading note names in bass and treble clefs (Familiarity with movable C clefs is also helpful.)
- proficiency in using common elements of musical notation (e.g. notes, clefs, sharps and flats, beams)
- an understanding of and ability to read basic rhythm and meter
- an understanding of major and minor scales and keys
- an understanding of enharmonic spellings and chromatics
- the ability to recognize and write intervals
- the ability to recognize and write triads and seventh chord
- an understanding of chord inversion
- an introduction to diatonic harmony (e.g. cadence types, roman numeral labels)

If you have not already learned the fundamentals of music, or if you just want to review, there are several ways you might prepare for your college placement exams.

- **Ask your music teacher for help or information.** Talk to your choir, band, or private teacher, a minister of music, or any musician with whom you have contact. Perhaps you could arrange tutoring or private lessons. Talk to your high school teachers and administrators about offering theory courses.
- **Take piano lessons.** Find a piano teacher who will work with you on both piano and basic theory skills. This will help you prepare for both the required theory classes and class piano study. Even if you have only a few months to study, every little bit helps. This is probably the single most important thing you can do to prepare for college music study.
- **Contact a local community college or university.** Many schools offer fundamentals classes in the summer and evenings. At some schools, high school juniors and seniors are eligible to take such courses.
- **Take an on-line fundamentals course.** A wide variety of resources are available on the Web. Quality varies widely, but many at least provide opportunities for drill and practice.
- **Buy a computer-based tutorial.**
- **Buy a text book.** With the aid of a text, you may work on your own or with a tutor. There are several texts that can be used with minimal direct supervision.
 - Stephan Kostka and Dorothy Payne, *Tonal Harmony*. This text, used in Theory I - III at Belmont, provides a good though brief review of fundamentals.

- Paul Harder and Greg Steinke, *Basic Materials in Music Theory: A Programmed Course*. This text is designed to be a mostly self-teaching.
- John Clough, et al., *Scales, Intervals, Keys, Triads, Rhythm and Meter*. W.W. Norton, 1999. This is also a programmed text, that is, it is designed to be self-teaching.

Many other music fundamentals and music theory texts are available. Consult a book store or on-line book dealer for more ideas.

It is very much to your advantage to gain as much background in music fundamentals as possible before you enroll at Belmont. If you took the Placement Test on your audition day, you may take it again before classes begin, provided you have taken some specific steps to improve your score. There is no one way to learn music fundamentals and no path guarantees success. The best approach is to gain as much experience as possible through as many avenues as possible. Fundamentals really is fundamental to your continued progress as a musician. The best music education is built from a strong foundation.

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