



What you need to know about Theory Placement Exams

- **What are theory placement exams?**

As a music major, you will take courses in music theory (Theory and Aural Skills) during your first few semesters at Belmont. The Theory Placement Exams help us find out how much you know about theory and in which course you should begin.

Please note that the Placement Exams are different from the Basic Musicianship Test you took when you auditioned. The Placement Exam is a written test and is taken *after* you have been admitted.

- **Who has to take them?**

Every music major and music minor, as well as anyone who wants to take music theory classes at Belmont, must take the placement exam in written theory. The Aural Skills Test is optional (see below).

- **When are the tests given?**

Placement exams are given Online and during summer Orientation, and on campus at other times as needed. Placement start online with the Theory Placement Pretest.

- **What tests are offered?**

We give tests on five levels of written theory (Fundamentals and Theory I – III), and in aural skills. Which written theory test you take will depend on your background. Included on the following pages is a summary of what we cover in each course. Read it over carefully. It will help you decide which test to take.

The Aural Skills exam is *optional*. You only need to take the test if you have taken an ear training or aural skills course at another school and expect to place above Aural Skills I. Most students will begin in Aural Skills I. (See more below.)

- **Should I study for the exam?**

Absolutely! If you have not taken any theory, now is a great time to start. If you have taken theory, be sure to review it carefully before you take the placement test. Your course placement is based on how well you do on *this* exam, not on how much theory you have taken in the past.

- **How can I prepare?**

There are lots of options for learning music theory. A number of good books are available; some are “self-teaching”; a few come with online components to help you practice. A local bookstore or music teacher might have specific recommendations. There are also a number of Web sites that can help you learn music fundamentals. Most colleges and universities teach introductory courses in music theory. One of the best ways to learn fundamentals is with the help of a good piano teacher. We strongly encourage this option.

- **Should I take AP (Advanced Placement) Theory or Aural Skills?**

An AP course is a great way to learn theory. If theory is not offered at your school, ask your guidance counselor or music teacher to see if it could be added. Taking AP theory, however, doesn't guarantee your placement in a particular course at Belmont. You still need to take our placement exam. If you score 4 or above on the AP exam, you will be given college credit for the course. Whether the course counts as elective credit or helps fulfill a degree requirement depends on your placement exam score and your major.

However you prepare, it is important that you learn the material thoroughly. It's not enough to just be familiar with the fundamentals of music. You have to really *master* them.

- **What about Aural Skills?**

Aural Skills at Belmont helps you develop listening skills important to a musician. In Aural Skills classes you will sight sing music, write down music you hear played, and engage in a variety of other exercises that will help you learn to connect musical sounds with the printed score.

Aural Skills placement exams are optional and are designed especially for people who have taken ear training courses in high school or college. If you "have a good ear" or are a good sight reader, but haven't taken a class or had private instruction in ear training, it is probably better to start at the first level of Aural Skills I. You will be placed there automatically if you do not take the placement exam.

If you have taken an ear training class, or if you think you may do well and want to give it a try, you may take the exam. The exam includes both a dictation test and a sight singing test. The dictation test includes melodies, rhythms, and harmonic progressions for you to write. The sight reading portion includes melodies and rhythms that you will sing. You do not need to sight sing using numbers or solfège, but you may if you know how. For those interested, Belmont uses "movable *do*" solfège, with *do*-based minor.

- **What if I already have taken theory at another college?**

Your placement in music theory at Belmont will depend on your scores on the placement exam, not on how much theory you've taken. All schools number their courses differently and cover different material in their theory courses. We want you to be in the course that best fits your skills. The information below on what we cover in each course should help you see how your coursework fits with our requirements.

- **What if I have finished all my theory at another college?**

Students who have completed four semesters of theory or aural skills at an NASM accredited music school should contact the Music Theory Coordinator in the Belmont University School of Music. It may be possible to evaluate your transfer credit without taking the placement exam.

- **Short answer: What should be my goal?**

If you are a new music major, a reasonable goal is to bypass fundamentals and begin in Theory I and Aural Skills I during your first semester. If you have already learned some theory, study and review so you can bypass courses you have already covered.

- **What if I don't pass the Placement Test?**

The Placement Tests really aren't about passing or failing. If you don't score well on the Fundamentals Test, you will take Fundamentals of Music in your first semester. Although this course doesn't count toward the Bachelor of Music degree, it may count as elective credit. Many of our new music majors take Fundamentals of Music and find it provides a solid foundation for the music theory courses that follow.

What is on each test?

Below is a brief outline of what we cover in each of the written theory courses. (Aural Skills is discussed above.) This list can also be used as a guide for reviewing if you have already studied some theory. The test covers material from the course and is in multiple choice format. The tests vary in length, but all have from 30 – 50 questions and take 30 – 45 minutes to complete.

Fundamentals of Music (MUT 1300) — Here is an overview of what you will learn in Fundamentals of Music (and what you should study to do well on the placement test!)

- ◇ Note names and basics of notation — You will learn to read note names in treble and bass clef, how to use musical symbols such as clef signs, the grand staff, accidentals, and an octave numbering system for naming specific pitches (middle C = C4).
- ◇ Basics of rhythm and meter — You will gain an understanding of simple and compound meter, grouping of beats, meter signatures, rhythmic notation, note and rest values.
- ◇ Intervals — An interval is the distance between two pitches. You will learn to write and identify intervals, including intervals larger than an octave (compound intervals).
- ◇ Scales and keys — You will learn major and minor scales, learn to recognize and use key signatures, and learn what it means to say a piece of music is in a certain “key.”
- ◇ Triads and Seventh chords — You will learn to spell and recognize major, minor, augmented, and diminished triads in root position and in inversion. Seventh chords are introduced in the course as well. You will identify chords using “chord names” or “pop chord symbols,” such as E^o or Dm/F.
- ◇ Introduction to tonal harmony — Most familiar music is “tonal music,” that is, it is in a key and organized around a specific pitch. Tonal music can be described using a system of roman numerals where the roman numeral *I* is given to the tonic triad, *V* indicates a dominant triad, etc. You will begin to learn to apply these labels, including the use of inversion symbols.

Most students should come to college with *some* of this knowledge already in hand. At the very least we encourage every student to learn to read fluently the letter name of the pitches in treble and bass clef. You can learn this in Fundamentals, but you will be farther ahead and perhaps do better in the class if you already have a few basic skills.

Theory I — You will learn:

- ◇ Diatonic triads in major and minor keys (including inversions), applying roman numerals to triads, differences among root position, first inversion, and second inversion triads.
- ◇ Roman numeral analysis and part-writing, including how to read a “figured bass.”
- ◇ Non-chord tones (like passing tones, neighbor tones, and suspensions)
- ◇ How to write a good harmonic progression using diatonic chords
- ◇ Basics of musical form: phrases, periods, and cadences

Theory II — Continuing on with the topics introduced in Theory I, you will learn:

- ◇ Diatonic seventh chords (like ii⁷, V⁷, etc.) including inversions (like V⁶₃, V⁴₂, or V²₁)
- ◇ Secondary dominants (like V⁷/V or vii^o/ii)
- ◇ Types of modulation (for example: common chord, common tone, direct, sequential)
- ◇ Basics of instrumental transposition
- ◇ Binary and ternary form

Theory III — This course includes both traditional concepts as well as an introduction to the basics of pop and jazz harmony. Sometimes these concepts are termed “chromatic harmony.” You will learn:

- ◇ Modal borrowing and mode mixture
- ◇ Neapolitan and augmented 6th chords
- ◇ Enharmonic respellings of augmented 6th chords and tritone substitution
- ◇ Modulation with enharmonic altered chords
- ◇ Jazz harmony including chord extensions (seventh, ninth, eleventh and thirteenth chords), chord symbols, and principles of chord substitution

- Which test should I take?

When you take the Theory Placement Exams, you should take the test for the course you are trying to bypass. For example, if you know most of the material in Fundamentals and some of the material in Theory I, you will probably take the Fundamentals test to try to bypass that class. If you feel you know most of the material in Theory I and would do well on that test, you could take the Theory I test and try to bypass Theory I. As you study and review, it is better to prepare for the level that you think you can do well in, rather than try to look over lots of material you never learn well.

- For more information:

- ◇ Read this sheet carefully and keep it handy. It provides lots of information and helpful tips.
- ◇ The School of Music Web site has information about the tests as well as lots of other important information for new and prospective students.
- ◇ If you have questions about preparing for the theory placement exams, contact Dr. Richard Hoffman, Coordinator of Music Theory, at richard.hoffman@belmont.edu.