

Preparing for Your Music Theory Placement Exam

To successfully register in many of our first-year music courses such as music theory, aural skills, music technology, and studio lessons, you must provide evidence that you already understand some basic music theory. These are core musicianship courses in the first year of our music programs, so fulfilling the music theory requirement is essential to gain entry to our programs. The College Calendar requires you to write a music theory placement exam if you cannot provide a credential indicating that you have already passed a specified music theory exam at any of the well-known conservatories (e.g. Conservatory Canada or Royal Conservatory). If you have either a Royal Conservatory Level 8 Theory certificate, a Conservatory Canada Grade Four Theory certificate, or have passed MU1000 (the music rudiments course at NWP) or an equivalent course, you will be exempt from the exam. Otherwise, you will need to pass a music theory placement exam before your registration is accepted. The exam requires you to show familiarity with:

- note identification in treble and bass clefs
- scales and scale degrees
- key signatures and time signatures
- intervals (sizes and qualities)
- rhythms, meter, and time signatures
- triads (qualities and inversions)
- musical terms and symbols (e.g. articulations)
- key identification of a melody
- transposition

Failing the exam will deny you entry to the program. You can take the exam more than one time, and there are no time restrictions (e.g. you could take it again a week after an unsuccessful attempt). If you do not pass the exam, you could choose to take MU1000 here. This would likely add a year to the length of your studies here (along with all the extra costs associated with that year). It is obviously in your best interest to ensure you will pass the exam.

If you need to take the exam because you don't have one of the prerequisites, there are a number of resources to help you prepare for the music theory placement exam. They are identified below, along with some "pros and cons" associated with each method.

1. Private music theory lessons are the best choice to ensure success on the exam. Find a music teacher who will tutor you in music theory. Any qualified teacher (piano teachers are the traditional choice for theory lessons) should be able to lead you through the introductory material with ease; try calling Fay Bredeson in the NWP Music Conservatory at 780-539-2444 for recommendations of theory teachers who are associated with our Department.
 - a. Pros: one on one or small class instruction, ability to have questions answered immediately, and someone will take a personal interest in your learning and your goals, tailored to your schedule.
 - b. Cons: more expensive than other methods and it might be challenging finding a teacher depending on your geographic location.

2. You can purchase an introductory music theory textbook, such as *The Complete Elementary Music Rudiments* 2nd edition, by Mark Sarnecki, Frederick Harris Music, ISBN 978-1-55440-277-9, or *Elementary Rudiments of Music Revised Edition* ed. by Kathleen Wood, by Barbara Wharram, Frederick Harris Music, ISBN 978-1-55440-011-9. The Long and McQuade Music store in Grande Prairie likely has some copies of these sources or they can order them for you. (Long and McQuade, 10013 97 Ave. GP, AB T8V 0N3) Phone (780) 532-8160. Toll free: 1-800-661-3288. E-mail: grandeprairie@long-mcquade.com
 - a. Pros: these relatively inexpensive, comprehensive texts cover everything you will need to know.
 - b. Cons: you may need a resource person to answer questions and clarify material, lack of face-to-face instruction, and you must be self-motivated to get through the material on your own.
3. Look for a comprehensive online course, such as a MOOC (massive open online course) that deals with music theory. Several organizations (Coursera, EdX, Kadenze, and others) provide music courses that are often free if you don't want to earn a certificate for them. Some are not 'free' but provide free access to some or most or all of the content in the course. The courses are often on tight schedules and require students to do real work to be successful. You can check their websites ([Coursera.org](https://www.coursera.org), [Edx.org](https://www.edx.org), [Kadenze.com](https://www.kadenze.com)) for information about upcoming courses.
 - a. Pros: free (you may need to buy a text), instruction is high quality, very organized.
 - b. Cons: you NEED to keep up to finish, and time management for a distance course is more difficult than for an in-person course.
4. Use additional resources; there are a number of websites that exist to share materials on music theory; Google "music theory" to find several of them. One suggested website is <http://www.teoria.com>, which has a large reference section that would be a useful starting point.

Rice University in Texas offers some valuable free theory resources online listed below.

- <http://cnx.org/content/col10714/latest/> Music Fundamentals 1: Pitch and Major Scales and Keys
- <http://cnx.org/content/col10716/latest/> Music Fundamentals 2: Rhythm and Meter
- <http://cnx.org/content/col10717/latest/> Music Fundamentals 3: Minor Scales and Keys
- <http://cnx.org/content/col10730/latest/> Music Fundamentals 4: Intervals and Inversions
- <http://cnx.org/content/col10731/latest/> Music Fundamentals 5: Triads, Chords, Introduction to Roman Numerals
 - a. Pros: free, relatively easy-to-access materials.
 - b. Cons: you will probably need to access several websites to collect all the information you need, learning is not guided, the quality of websites is uneven and while some (such as Rice's offerings) are excellent others may be as confusing as they are helpful, and you need to be self-motivated to find the materials before you can begin wading through them.

If you have any questions regarding the music theory placement exam, please contact the Fine Arts Department office at 780-539-2443 and we will help you contact one of our music instructors.