

Preliminary Examinations

(revised 6/2022)

New graduate students in all programs are required to take the preliminary examinations. Please see the sheet titled, “Preliminary Exam Requirements” for specifics on your degree and instrument. These exams are designated as “preliminary,” because they evaluate the foundational skills and knowledge that will be assumed in graduate-level theory, musicology, and ethnomusicology courses.

The preliminary exams are offered two times a year, before the beginning of the fall and spring semesters. There are no exceptions/reschedules to these dates. Results for each exam are communicated anonymously as Pass or Fail prior to the first week of classes. (Passing grades are equivalent to C for master’s students and B- for doctoral students.) Any exam not passed on the first attempt may be taken a second time during the week before Spring classes start. **IMPORTANT NOTE: Students who miss the mandatory preliminary examinations (for any reason) before their first semester of study must take the exam on the scheduled date during the week before their second semester and will forfeit their right to attempt an exam for a second time.**

Once you have determined which exams are required for your degree plan (see the chart titled “2022 Preliminary Exam Requirements”), take the time to review for each exam. To help you prepare, detailed information about each exam is provided below, including recommended texts for study. Because the exams measure your preparedness for graduate-level work, you are not allowed to register for courses at the 5000-level or higher until the preliminary exam in the relevant discipline has been passed (exceptions are post-tonal analysis and ethnomusicology, as explained below).

If you have not passed all required prelim exams during the second attempt, you must begin enrolling in remedial coursework as outlined in the written plan approved by your major advisor and the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies. (See below for further details.) Some remedial courses are not offered every semester, so careful planning is essential.

TMUS recitals cannot be scheduled unless you are following the written plan on file in the Graduate Office. The Associate Dean reviews your transcript and plan for remediation before approving recital scheduling requests. Doctoral students are not permitted to enroll in 6000-level courses or TMUS projects until all preliminary exam requirements have been completed. Graduate students also must have all prelim requirements completed before they are permitted to take the M.M. Qualifying Examination or the D.M.A. Comprehensive Examination.

Please see the Canvas orientation course for sample test questions.

Written Theory and Aural Skills. These exams, lasting about 45 minutes each, cover material that is standard in nearly every two-year undergraduate theory sequence. Topics include music rudiments (scales, intervals, modes, rhythm/meter, etc.), traditional chromatic vocabulary and analysis, figured bass, harmonic analysis, basic contrapuntal techniques including species counterpoint, embellishing tones, and instrumental transpositions. A knowledge of traditional tonal voice leading in two to four parts is also tested. The Aural Skills exam includes identification of intervals, melodic patterns, chords, harmonic progressions, rhythms, and error detection.

Good sources for review include: L. Poundie Burstein & Joseph N. Straus, *Concise Introduction to Tonal Harmony* (W.W. Norton, 2016) or other basic undergraduate-level theory, ear-training, and form texts. A recent text aimed specifically at graduate students is Steven G. Laitz & Christopher Bartlett, *Graduate Review of Tonal Theory: A Recasting of Common-Practice Harmony, Form, and Counterpoint* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2010). Computer-assisted ear-training programs are also widely available.

Tonal Analysis. The exam helps the theory faculty to gauge the student's background and ability in the analysis of tonal music. In addition, the exam is meant to determine whether the student has an adequate background and the necessary skills for graduate-level tonal theory and analysis courses.

Specific topics include harmonic analysis (including chromatic harmony), embellishing tones, phrase structure, modulation and tonicization, cadence types, and motivic structure. In addition to having a student identify and label these details, the faculty is particularly interested in having the student interpret them in the context of an entire composition and to make larger analytical observations regarding musical form and style.

Students are provided with a complete score for a relatively short composition, along with a series of questions. The pieces are typically a 2-3 page song (with English translation of text provided) or a character piece by a 19th-century composer. A recording of the piece is played several times during the exam.

Some important areas for preparation:

- Harmonic analysis
 - Secondary harmonies such as $V7/x$ or $vii7/x$
 - Augmented 6th chords, Neapolitan chords, common-tone diminished chords
 - Secondary key areas--interior modulations or tonicizations
 - Chord qualities, especially seventh chords: $Mm7$ or dominant 7th; fully diminished 7th, half-diminished 7th
 - Figured bass symbols (6, 6/4, 6/5, 4/3, 4/2, etc.)
- Identification and labeling of embellishing tones, such as passing tones, neighboring tones, suspensions, appoggiaturas, and so forth.
- Analysis of historical styles that identify composers and attributes of:
 - Harmony, harmonic progression, and tonal direction

- Role of phrase structure and cadence
- Use of chromaticism and the ability to differentiate between 18th- and 19th-century chromaticism
- N.B. When identifying possible composers for the composition, the faculty is primarily concerned with understanding what musical details led to your choice (rather than simply the identification of the composer).

Recommended texts for the review of tonal and Schenkerian analysis are:

Steven G. Laitz, *The Complete Musician: An Integrated Approach to Tonal Theory, Analysis, and Listening* (3rd ed., Oxford Univ. Press, 2011) and other standard undergraduate texts; Allan Cadwallader and David Gagné, *Analysis of Tonal Music: A Schenkerian Approach* (3rd ed., Oxford Univ. Press, 2010); and Felix Salzer and Carl Schachter, *Counterpoint in Composition: The Study of Voice Leading* (McGraw-Hill, 1969; pbk. reprint edition available from Columbia University Press, ISBN 0-231-07039-X).

Post-Tonal Theory and Analysis. We want our students to be able to use the twin tools of theory and analysis in multiple repertoires. This preliminary exam is diagnostic, testing skill in the theory and analysis of post-tonal music. It focuses on basic techniques of twentieth-century atonal and twelve-tone music.

Students will need to understand, demonstrate and apply the following concepts and skills fluently:

(Use C = 0 for all pitch-class labeling (atonal and 12-tone))

- Atonal theory
 - Pitch, pitch-class, pitch interval, pitch-class interval, interval class
 - Pitch-class set, pitch-class set class (prime form)
 - Important pitch-class collections (e.g. whole tone, octatonic, pentatonic) and set-classes
 - Collectional relationships (inclusion, complementation, etc.)
 - Operations (pitch and pitch-class transposition and inversion)
 - Structural principles, invariance (e.g. pitch symmetry, pitch-class symmetry, axis of symmetry, transpositional combination)
 - Pitch and pitch-class centricity
- Twelve-tone theory
 - Row classes (48 forms related by retrograde, transposition, inversion and row form labeling)
 - Row structure (interval succession, set-class content)
 - Relationships between row forms used in a composition
- Analysis
 - Given a short musical work or excerpt, be able to apply the above concepts and skills to produce an illuminating analysis. What are the pitch and pitch-class

structures and processes in the excerpt? What are the significant features of form, instrumentation, register, texture, dynamics, articulation, rhythm, etc.? How do these various parameters (pitch, pitch class, form, rhythm, dynamics, etc.) relate to one another? What special compositional techniques or features characterize the excerpt provided for analysis?

- *Style*: Know representative atonal and twelve-tone literature (Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, Bartók, Stravinsky, et al.) so as to be able to place the given excerpt into a context (time period, style of composition, possible composer). Provide convincing reasons for your choice.

Recommended texts for the study of 20th-century analysis are:

Straus, Joseph N. *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*. The 3rd ed. is concise and a good reference; the 4th ed. is much bulkier (and describes finding prime form only informally).

Counterpoint Examination. The counterpoint examination is designed to test competence in contrapuntal analysis and writing. Tasks that may be asked of the student include:

- 1) Writing imitative polyphony in two or three voices
- 2) Adding one or two voices to a given texture
- 3) Elaborating a 1:1 (i.e., note-against-note or first species) contrapuntal framework. The student may be asked to elaborate this into a 2:1 (second species), 3:1, or 4:1 (third species) rhythmic relationship, and/or may be asked to include suspensions (fourth species) and other non-harmonic tones.
- 4) Analyzing and identifying contrapuntal procedures (canon in augmentation/diminution, stretto, invertible counterpoint, fugal subject, tonal answer in fugue, real answer in fugue, fugal exposition, fugal episode, etc.) in a given piece.
- 5) Writing a three-voice fugal exposition to a given fugue subject, or realizing a given figured bass (18th century).

Suggested text for study:

18th-Century Counterpoint: Kent Kennan, *Counterpoint* (4th ed., Prentice-Hall, 1998; other eds. are fine). Robert Gauldin, *A Practical Approach to Eighteenth-Century Counterpoint* (Waveland Press, 1995).

Musicology Examinations

There are three musicology examinations: 1) Pre-1750 Musicology; 2) Post-1750 Musicology; and 3) Ethnomusicology. Students are required to achieve passing scores on each examination (except in cases where the ethnomusicology examination is not required).

Pre-1750 & Post-1750 Musicology. These two historical musicology exams include questions on the history of Western art music, from antiquity to the present, including the

European/U.S. traditions, with listening identification from six different eras. The student is asked about various composers, genres, styles, terms, instruments, and related topics. Review sources should include a textbook and audio examples used for undergraduate music history courses, such as: J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Grout, & Claude Palisca's *A History of Western Music* (10th ed., W.W. Norton, 2019).

Ethnomusicology. This exam includes questions on ethnomusicology and world music, including the European/U.S. traditions, including listening identification. The student is asked about different musical traditions from around the world as well as the discipline of ethnomusicology. Questions focus on genres, styles, terms, instruments, traditions, and related topics. Review sources should include a textbook and audio examples used for undergraduate world music courses, such as: Terry Miller & Andrew Shahriari's *World Music: A Global Journey* (4th ed., Routledge, 2017).

Major Field Examination. Students preparing for their written major field exam should review the history, literature, and pedagogy of their proposed major field of study. Jazz majors should also review jazz theory. The examination format varies by department and generally lasts three hours. Music education, musicology and theory/composition majors are exempt from the major field exam.

Evaluation of Preliminary Examinations

The faculty evaluates the exams immediately so that results can be communicated before the first day of classes each semester. Each exam is judged either as "P" (Passing) or "F" (Failing). You are urged to review your graded exams after the third week of the semester; sometimes an "F" grade is close to passing, and you can target your studies in advance of the January exams so that you are more likely to pass on the second attempt. All exams must be reviewed in the Graduate Office, and you are only permitted to make summary notes about your answers.

There are two ways to rectify a failing grade:

1. You may retake any failed exam during the week before Spring classes start, when it is next offered. If you pass on the second attempt, you have completed the requirement for that exam.
2. You may enroll in an appropriate course; a list of courses for Preliminary Exam Remediation is provided on the graduate studies advising website. Master's Degree students must earn a C or higher and Doctoral Degree students must earn a B- or higher in order to complete the requirement. Some students opt to enroll in coursework instead of retesting, especially if they have not previously had the chance to study the subject (e.g., counterpoint, ethnomusicology, etc.).

Coursework for Remediation

If you have not passed all required preliminary examinations after the second attempt, you

must begin enrolling in at least one remedial course (and preferably more) each semester, beginning with your second semester (usually, spring semester).

Remedial coursework, which may be attempted one time only, is mandated for any prelim not passed by the start of the second semester in residence. Students who have not passed all required preliminary exams at the start of their second semester must meet with their advisor to formulate a written plan for remediation. The plan must be signed by the advisor and submitted to the Graduate Office by January 31, in the Spring semester. After the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies has reviewed and signed your plan, it is placed in your digital student file.

Note that some remedial courses are listed at the 5000 level, which means that the course satisfies preliminary exam remediation *and* may count toward graduate degree requirements.

Coursework for rectifying deficiencies in Written Theory, Aural Skills, Analysis, and Counterpoint:

- For **Aural Skills**: NCMU 4101-751 (Graduate Aural Skills Review; 2 cr.) [offered through continuing education, spring semester]
- For **Written Theory**: NCMU 4101-750 (Graduate Theory Review; 2 cr.) [offered through continuing education, spring semester]
- For **Tonal Analysis**: There are two non-passing grades for this exam: **R4** - NCMU 4101-750 (Theory Review) or **R5** - MUSC 5061 (Advanced Tonal Analysis). If MUSC 5061 is recommended instead of NCMU 4101, the course may be used for graduate degree credit. N.B.: The written Theory preliminary exam (or NCMU 4101-750) must be passed prior to registration for MUSC 5061
- For **Post-Tonal Analysis**: MUSC 5071 (Post-Tonal Theory & Analysis). May be used for graduate credit. N.B. The written Theory preliminary exam must be passed prior to registration for MUSC 5071.
- For **Counterpoint**: Eighteenth-century counterpoint (MUSC 5021). Note: Composition and Theory majors must pass the examination or take the corresponding course.

Coursework for rectifying deficiencies in Musicology:

Each of the three segments is evaluated separately as Pass or Fail: 1) pre-1750 Musicology; 2) post-1750 Musicology; and 3) Ethnomusicology.

- Remediation for pre-1750 Musicology is History of Music 1 (MUSC 3802), offered every fall semester.
- Remediation for post-1750 Musicology is History of Music 2 (MUSC 3812), offered every spring semester.
- Remediation for Ethnomusicology may be accomplished by enrolling in one of three ways: 1) one 5000 level Ethnomusicology Area Course (this 3 cr. course may also

fulfill graduate degree requirements); 2) World Musics (MUSC 27x2) course; or 3) two semesters of a World Music Ensemble.

Rectifying deficiencies in the Major Field:

The major professor or department chair will evaluate the major field exam and recommend any necessary remedial work. Some professors' recommendations will be informal (e.g., "Your knowledge of 20th-century repertoire is weak; be sure to work on this before your MM Qualifying Examination.") On the other hand, the major area faculty may require formal coursework as a result of the major field examination. This coursework may not necessarily also fulfill degree requirements.