

MUSIC THEORY: from 1 January 2018

ABRSM Music Theory exams are available for Grades 1–8. Candidates may be entered for any grade irrespective of age and without previously having taken any other grade. The full syllabus is available at www.abrsm.org/theory.

About Music Theory

Developing musical literacy forms a key part of a rounded education for performers, composers and listeners of all kinds. An understanding of how written symbols relate to the elements of music, and having the skills to interpret and translate them into sounds, empowers us to communicate and experience music in a meaningful way. Music theory is a very practical subject that is completely entwined with performance and composition.

ABRSM's Music Theory exams give students:

- a knowledge of the notation of western music, including commonly used signs and terminology
- an understanding of fundamental musical elements such as intervals, keys, scales and chords
- an ability to apply theoretical knowledge and understanding to score analysis
- skills in harmonic completion of extracts and melody writing (at Grades 6–8)

Candidates are assessed on their ability to identify, use and manipulate musical symbols, to complete extracts and to answer questions relating to the elements of music according to the parameters detailed in the full syllabus at www.abrsm.org/theory.

Grade 5 as a prerequisite

We believe that a thorough understanding of the elements of music is essential for a full and satisfying performance at the higher grades.

A longstanding ABRSM requirement is that candidates must pass Grade 5 or above in Music Theory (or in Practical Musicianship or any solo Jazz instrument) before they can enter for Grades 6, 7 or 8 Practical exams.

Marking scheme

Theory exams are marked out of a total of 100, with 66 marks required for a Pass, 80 for a Merit and 90 for a Distinction. The marking criteria for Theory exams are available at www.abrsm.org/theorymarkingcriteria.

Theory GRADE 1

- 1 Note values of semibreve, minim, crotchet, quaver and semiquaver, and their equivalent rests (candidates may use the terms 'whole note', 'half note', etc.). Tied notes. Single-dotted notes and rests.
- 2 Simple time signatures of $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$, bar-lines and the grouping of the notes listed above within these times.
- 3 The stave. Treble (G) and bass (F) clefs. Names of notes on the stave, including middle C in both clefs. Sharp, flat and natural signs, and their cancellation.
- 4 Construction of the major scale, including the position of the tones and semitones. Scales and key signatures of the major keys of C, G, D and F in both clefs, with their tonic triads (root position), degrees (number only), and intervals above the tonic (by number only).
- 5 Some frequently used terms and signs concerning tempo, dynamics, performance directions and articulation marks. Simple questions will be asked about a melody written in either treble or bass clef.

Theory GRADE 2

As in Grade 1, with the addition of:

- 1 Simple time signatures of $\frac{2}{2}$ $\frac{3}{2}$ $\frac{4}{2}$ $\frac{3}{8}$ and the grouping of notes and rests within these times. Triplets, and triplet note groups with rests.
- 2 Extension of the stave to include two ledger lines below and above each stave.
- 3 Construction of the minor scale (harmonic *or* melodic at candidate's choice, but candidates will be expected to know which form they are using). Scales and key signatures of the major keys of A, B \flat and E \flat , and the minor keys of A, E and D, with their tonic triads (root position), degrees (number only), and intervals above the tonic (by number only).
- 4 More terms and signs in common use.

Theory GRADE 3

As in preceding grades, with the addition of:

- 1 Compound time signatures of $\frac{6}{8}$ $\frac{9}{8}$ $\frac{12}{8}$ and the grouping of notes and rests within these times. The demisemiquaver (32nd note) and its equivalent rest.
- 2 Extension of the stave beyond two ledger lines. The transposition of a simple melody from the treble clef to the bass clef, or vice versa, at the octave.
- 3 Scales and key signatures of all major and minor keys up to and including four sharps and flats, including both harmonic and melodic forms of minor scales, with their tonic triads (root position), degrees (number only), and intervals above the tonic (number and type).
- 4 More terms and signs. The simple questions about a melody may include one on its phrase structure.

Theory GRADE 4

As in preceding grades, with the addition of:

- 1 All simple and compound duple, triple and quadruple time signatures, and the grouping of notes and rests within these times. The breve and its equivalent rest. Double-dotted notes and rests. Duplets.
- 2 Alto clef (C clef centred on 3rd line). The identification of notes in the alto clef in any of the keys set for this grade (see below), and the transcription at the same pitch of a simple melody from the treble or the bass clef to the alto clef, and vice versa. Double sharp and double flat signs, and their cancellation. Enharmonic equivalents.
- 3 Scales and key signatures of all major and minor keys up to and including five sharps and flats, with both forms of minor scales. Technical names for the notes of the diatonic scale (tonic, supertonic, etc.). Construction of the chromatic scale. All intervals, not exceeding an octave, between any two diatonic notes in any of the keys set for this grade.
- 4 The identification and writing of triads (root position) on the tonic, subdominant and dominant notes in any of the keys set for this grade. The recognition of $\frac{5}{3}$ (root position) chords on the tonic, subdominant and dominant notes in any of the keys set for this grade (the harmonic form of the scale will be used in minor keys).
- 5 More terms and signs, including the recognition and naming (but not writing out) of the trill, turn, upper and lower mordent, acciaccatura and appoggiatura. Questions about a passage of music will include simple related questions about standard orchestral instruments.

Theory GRADE 5

As in preceding grades, with the addition of:

- 1 Irregular time signatures of $\frac{5}{4}$ $\frac{7}{4}$ $\frac{5}{8}$ $\frac{7}{8}$ and the grouping of notes and rests within these times. Irregular divisions of simple time values.
- 2 Tenor clef (C clef centred on 4th line). The identification of notes in the four clefs in any of the keys set for this grade (see below), and the transposition at the octave of a simple melody from any clef to another. The writing at concert pitch of a melody notated for an instrument in B \flat , A or F, and vice versa (the interval of transposition up or down will be given).
- 3 Scales and key signatures of all major and minor keys up to and including six sharps and flats. All simple and compound intervals from any note.
- 4 The identification of the $\frac{5}{3}$ $\frac{6}{3}$ and $\frac{6}{4}$ forms of the tonic, supertonic, subdominant and dominant chords in any of the keys set for this grade. The identification of the progression $\frac{6}{4}$ $\frac{5}{3}$ (Ic-V) on the dominant note in any of the keys set for this grade. The choice of suitable chords at cadential points of a simple melody in the major key of C, G, D or F.
- 5 More terms and signs. The recognition of ornaments, including the replacement of written-out ornamentation with the appropriate signs, but not vice versa. Questions about a passage of music written for voices or instruments appropriate to the grade will include questions on the types of voice and names of instruments, the clefs they use, instrument family groups and the basic way by which they produce sound, as well as points of general musical observation designed to test the candidate's ability to apply theoretical knowledge to actual music.

Theory GRADE 6

As in preceding grades. The harmonic vocabulary expected will include: the use of $\frac{5}{3}$, $\frac{6}{3}$ and $\frac{6}{4}$ chords on any degree of the major or minor (harmonic and melodic) scale; the recognition of the dominant seventh chord in root position, first, second and third inversions, and the supertonic seventh chord in root position and first inversion, in any major or minor key; and the figuring for all these chords. An understanding of the principles of modulation and a knowledge of cadences, ornamentation and melodic decoration (which might include passing notes, auxiliary notes, appoggiaturas, changing notes and notes of anticipation) will also be expected. Questions will cover:

- 1 Writing specified chords for voices in four parts *or* for keyboard (at the candidate's choice) above a given bass part of about four bars.
- 2 The indication of suitable chords for the accompaniment of a diatonic melody of about eight bars in any key, using any recognized method of notation, *or*, at the candidate's choice, the provision of a bass to a given melody, adding figures to indicate the intended harmonies.
- 3 Composition of a melody for a specified instrument (a choice will be given), using a given opening. Modulation to the dominant, subdominant, relative major or relative minor may be required.
- 4 Questions on short extracts of music written for piano or in open score for voices or for any combination of instruments and/or voices, designed to test the candidate's knowledge of the elements and notation of music, including the realization of ornaments, the identification and notation of underlying harmonic structure, phrase structure, style, performance, and on the voices and instruments for which the works were written.

Theory GRADE 7

As in preceding grades, with the addition of recognition of all diatonic secondary seventh chords and their inversions, the Neapolitan sixth and the diminished seventh chords, and of all figures commonly used by composers during the period c.1620-1790 to indicate harmonies above a bass part. Questions will cover:

- 1 The indication of chords and movement of the inner parts by figuring the bass in a passage in which both the melody and bass are given.
- 2 Rewriting a given passage to include appropriate suspensions and notes of melodic decoration.
- 3 Continuation of a given opening for solo instrument with keyboard accompaniment, which will be given in full throughout the passage, by completing the solo part, *or*, at the candidate's choice, composition of a melody for a specified instrument (a choice will be given) based on a given progression of chords or melodic figure.
- 4 Questions on short extracts of music written for piano or in open score for voices or for any combination of instruments and/or voices, designed to test the candidate's knowledge of the elements and notation of music, including the realization of ornaments, the identification and notation of underlying harmonic structure, phrase structure, style, performance, and on the voices and instruments for which the works were written.

Theory GRADE 8

As in preceding grades. The harmonic vocabulary expected will include all standard diatonic and chromatic chords. Questions will cover:

- 1 Continuation of a given opening of a passage from a Baroque trio sonata for two treble instruments and basso continuo. The basso continuo part will be given throughout and fully figured (but a realization for keyboard will not be required).
- 2 Completion of an outline of a short passage for keyboard. Some knowledge of the styles practised by composers from the time of Haydn onwards will be assumed.
- 3 Continuation of a given opening of a melody for a specified instrument (a choice will be given).
- 4 Questions on short extracts of music written for piano or in open score for voices or for any combination of instruments and/or voices, designed to test the candidate's knowledge of the elements and notation of music, including the realization of ornaments, the identification and notation of underlying harmonic structure, phrase structure, style, performance, and on the voices and instruments for which the works were written.