

MUSC 220: Fundamentals of Music Theory + Ear-Training Lab

Spring 2026

Professor David Smey
dsmey01@manhattan.edu

Miguel Hall, Room 207

T: 12:30 - 1:45

W: 1:00 - 1:50 (lab)

F: 12:30 - 1:45

Welcome to Fundamentals of Theory! In this class we will learn about the basic materials that make up music. We'll learn about musical notation, rhythms, intervals, chords, scales, chord progressions and more. In our ear-training lab we'll focus on "sight-singing" (figuring out what a melody sounds like by looking at the notation) and "dictation" (understanding music by ear and writing it down.) These subjects can help you better understand, perform and compose music of all kinds.

Offered in the Fall: Music 110 – Intro to Music Reading and Notation

Our department also offers a more introductory theory class for students who don't have a lot of experience reading music. It goes at a relaxed pace and is fairly low stakes! If this class proves to be too intense for you, you might consider 110. Sound studies majors are required to take two semesters of music theory, and you can use 110 and 220 to fulfill that requirement.

Textbook + Daily Requirements

We will use my own free materials for class. I'll give you our theory textbook in a white binder at the beginning of the semester. You don't need to bring that one to class each day.

I'll also give you a "soft" binder that contains our anthologies for in-class practice (clef-reading / melodies / rhythms). Please DO bring that one to class for each session. In addition, you will need a pencil with eraser. Music paper will be provided as needed, but it's a good idea to have your own supply.

Class Website

We will have a class blog on davesmey.com, where we will archive all of our documents, keep track of class activities, and keep up-to-the-minute grade information. All students should visit the site within the first week of classes and register a personal account.

Grade

Your overall grade in the class will be calculated with the following plan:

Four ear-training grades, 5% each (= 20%)

Homework 25%

Three theory quizzes, 10% each (= 30%)

Theory Final 25%

Homework Grading

Homework is graded on a “check plus” (= excellent, worth 100 points), “check” (= pretty good, 92 points) and “check minus” (60 points) system. The criteria for what constitutes a check plus varies from assignment to assignment and depends somewhat on how your work compares to that of your classmates. I accept late homework up to four weeks after the due date, but the best grade you can get on it is usually a check.

Attendance + Participation

In addition, an attendance-and-participation modifier will be added to your overall grade. This can give you a modest bonus or cost you a significant penalty. We’ll use the following table to calculate your score:

0-2 absences	3 point bonus
3 absences	2 point bonus
4 absences	1 point bonus
5-6 absences	no bonus, no penalty
7+ absences	3 point penalty for each absence over 6

Note that this is an “everything counts” policy that does not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences – all of the typical causes of absence (like illness, work conflicts, extracurricular activities etc.) count toward your attendance total. My hope is that all students can meet our attendance goals regardless of what happens. However, if something truly extreme or traumatic does occur I will try to work with you to help you complete the class without a penalty.

In general this is a fairly liberal policy, since one can possibly miss a large number of sessions and still pass. However, I strongly recommend that you strive for that 3-point bonus, since being present for most of your classes is simply the best approach to college, and poor attendance usually correlates with low grades on homework and tests.

Being late to class may be counted as a quarter or half of an absence.

Failure to meet the expectations of positive in-class participation can also cause additional demerits to be added to your attendance tally. Rude, disruptive, or inattentive behavior can cause you to be marked absent for the day.

Finally, it is very important that you make it to our tests at their scheduled times. If something will prevent you from attending, you must contact me ASAP! I reserve the right to give you a zero if I don't think you have a legitimate reason for missing a test.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1 (Jan 13, 14 and 16):

Simple rhythms in 4/4, clefs, sharps and flats, piano keyboard

Ear training: Intro to treble clef, solfege syllables, melodies in C

Week 2 (Jan 20, 21 and 23):

Whole steps and half steps, major scales, key signatures, circle of fifths

Week 3 (Jan 27, 28 and 30):

Dotted rhythms in 4/4, intro to 3/4

Ear training: Rhythms in 4/4

Week 4 (Feb 3, 4 and 6):

Theory Quiz 1. Intro to minor scales

Ear training: intro to rhythms in 6/8

Week 5 (Feb 10, 11 and 13):

Triads, Intervals

Ear training: **Singing Quiz 1**

Week 6 (Feb 17, 18 and 20):

Ear training: **First Dictation Grade**

Week 7 (Feb 24 and 27):

Wed Feb 25 is Manhattan University's Wellness Day, and we will not meet.

More intervals. **Theory Quiz 2.**

Week 8 (Mar 3, 4 and 6):

Diatonic triads

Ear-training: Identifying triads and intervals by ear

Week 9 (Mar 10, 11 and 13):

Inverted triads. Intro to counterpoint.

Ear-training: Rhythms with 16ths, intro to the V chord

Spring Break is the week of March 16-20.

Week 10 (Mar 24, 25 and 27):

Writing + playing I-V-I progressions, extended circle-of-fifths sequences

Week 11 (Mar 31, Apr 1):

April 2-6 is off for Easter.

Writing + playing ii-V-I, IV-V-I

Ear-training: Minor keys

Week 12 (Apr 8 and 10):

April 7 will follow a Monday schedule, so we will not meet.

Writing + playing progressions-by-third. **Theory Quiz 3**

Week 13 (Apr 14, 15 and 17):

Seventh chords

Ear-training: **Singing Quiz 2**

Week 14 (Apr 21, 22 and 24):

Intro to music analysis

Week 15 (Apr 28, 29 and May 1):

Ear-training: **Second Dictation Grade**

Final Exam (May 8):

The **Theory Final Exam** is currently scheduled for Tuesday, May 5 at 11:00am.