

MUSC 320: Advanced Music Theory

Spring 2026

Professor David Smey

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Miguel Hall, room 207

Tuesdays and Fridays, 2:00 - 3:15

Welcome to Advanced Theory. In this class we'll pick up where we left off in MUSC 220, learning the basics of how music is constructed. By the time we are finished you will hopefully have a good technical foundation that can help you understand a wide variety of musical genres.

In the broadest sense we'll cover five different topic areas in the following sequence:

- I. Chromatic harmony
- II. Modulation
- III. Harmony in popular music
- IV. Modernist scales and chords
- V. "Atonal" music theory

Textbook

We will use my own free materials for class. I'll give you our textbook in a hard binder at the beginning of the semester.

Required Materials

Students should try to bring a pencil with eraser to each class. Having your own supply of scrap paper and music paper is highly recommended. Also, please bring our textbook binder to each class, since I will frequently hand out new chapters as I work on a fresh draft.

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. I will alter your music 220 accounts so that they work in the advanced theory blog, and I'll email you details about that.

Grade

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

Homework 45%

Two theory tests, 15% each (= 30%)

Final Paper 25%

Homework

Homework will have to work a little differently here than it did last semester. **Because we will frequently discuss homework in class, many of our assignments are marked “must be submitted on time.” In order to give you some flexibility with this I will let you drop three assignments with no grade penalty.** Other assignments that are not time sensitive will give you an extra grace period to submit.

Homework is still 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.

Final Paper

Instead of a final exam we'll do a final paper. This can be on the topic of your choice, as long as it involves a decent amount of music analysis. The target length is 5-8 pages (including technical examples) and can focus on a detailed discussion of one work or shorter discussions of several tunes. Since getting your sources together for this project (i.e. all the sheet music, transcriptions etc.) can take some time, I recommend thinking about what you might want to do WAY in advance.

Attendance + Participation

As with music 220, 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	1.5 point bonus
4-5 absences	no bonus, no penalty
6+ absences	3 point penalty for each absence over 5

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, and extracurricular activities) 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 also is a fairly “liberal” attendance policy, since one can still pass with a large number of absences. I strongly recommend that all students strive for that 3 point bonus, since being present for most of your classes is simply the best approach to college, and good attendance usually correlates with better grades.

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 class.

Finally, it is very important that you make it to our quizzes 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.

Class Schedule

We'll meet every Tuesday and Friday from 2:00-3:15.

First class is Tuesday, January 13.

There is no class during the week of March 16-20 due to **Spring Break**.

No class on Friday April 3 due to **Easter**.

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

Last class is Friday May 1.

No final exam. Final papers will be due on Friday May 8.