



Learning Music Fundamentals

A secure knowledge of music fundamentals—the basic materials of music—is critical to your success as a university-trained musician. Either on your audition day or before you register for classes, you will take a Harmony Placement Test. If you demonstrate a mastery of music fundamentals on this exam, you may enroll in **Harmony I** (MUT 131) and **Ear Training I** (MUT 133) in your first semester. If, however, you need more work in this area, you will need to take **Fundamentals of Music** (MUT 130) first. This course can be counted as elective credit, but does not count toward the required courses for the music major.

Generally, a mastery of music fundamentals should include:

- fluency in reading note names in bass and treble clefs (Familiarity with movable C clefs--alto and tenor--is also helpful.)
- proficiency in using common elements of musical notation (e.g. notes, stems, clefs, sharps and flats, beams)
- an understanding of and ability to read basic rhythm and meter
- an understanding of major and minor scales and keys
- the ability to recognize and write intervals
- the ability to recognize and write triads and seventh chords
- an understanding of chord inversion
- an introduction to harmony (e.g. cadence types, Roman numeral labels)
- basic music terminology

If you have not already learned the fundamentals of music, or if you just want to review, there are several ways you might prepare for your Harmony Placement Test.

- *Ask your music teacher for help or information.* Talk to your choir, band, or private teacher, a minister of music, or any musician with whom you have contact. If your high school offers music theory, enroll in it as soon as possible. If not, perhaps you could arrange tutoring or private lessons.
- *Take piano lessons.* Find a piano teacher who will work with you on both piano and basic theory skills. This will help you prepare for both the required theory classes and class piano study. Even if you have only a few months to study, every little bit helps.
- *Contact a local community college or university.* Many schools offer fundamentals classes in the summer and evenings. At some schools, high school juniors and seniors are eligible to take such courses. Some schools even offer summer camps specifically designed to prepare students for college level music theory.



Learning Music Fundamentals cont'd

- *Take an on-line fundamentals course.* A wide variety of resources is available on the Web.
- *Buy a computer-based tutorial.* Many are available. Some Fundamental text books come with a computer-based component.
- *Buy a text book.* With the aid of a text, you may work on your own or with a tutor. The following are several texts that can be used with minimal direct supervision:
 - Theodore Lynn, *Introductory Musicianship.* It is not designed as a self-teaching text, but does cover the basics and provides lots of drill.
 - Stephan Kostka and Dorothy Payne, *Tonal Harmony.* This text, used in Harmony I - III at Belmont, provides a good though brief review of fundamentals.
 - Paul Harder and Greg Steinke, *Basic Materials in Music Theory: A Programmed Course.* This text is designed to be mostly self-teaching.
 - John Clough, et al., *Scales, Intervals, Keys, Triads, Rhythm and Meter.* This is also designed to be self-teaching.

Many other music fundamentals and music theory texts are available. Consult a book store or on-line book dealer for more ideas.

It is very much to your advantage to gain as much background in music fundamentals as possible **before** you enroll at Belmont. If you took the Harmony Placement Test on your audition day, you may take it again before registration, provided you have taken some specific steps to improve your score. There is no one way to learn music fundamentals and no single path guarantees success. The best approach is to gain as much experience as possible through as many avenues as possible. Fundamentals really is essential to your continued progress as a musician. The best music education is built from a strong foundation.