

AP Music Theory

VOCABULARY/TERMS/SYMBOLS

Terms and Symbols Used on the AP Music Theory Exam

The terms and symbols in the list below may appear in the directions or questions on the AP Music Theory Exam, as well as in course instructional materials. As such, the list will be an invaluable guide in the development of an AP Music Theory course, but it is not intended to limit course content — some teachers may choose to include topics not shown here.

It is important to note that the list does not include extremely basic musical vocabulary, even though such widely used terms may be used on the exam — for example, “quarter note” is not listed. Nor is every term of equal importance — for example, “strophic” and “rubato” may not appear on every exam, but “melody,” “phrase” and “texture” certainly will.

Definitions and illustrations of the terms and concepts listed here can be found in music theory textbooks and standard reference works, such as *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*.

LIST 1

FORM

Symbols

Lowercase letters indicate musical phrases or subsections: for example, **a b** indicates a contrasting period; **a b a** indicates a phrase, contrasting phrase and return to the original phrase. A prime (as in **a a'**) denotes a phrase and a varied restatement. Capital letters are used to indicate larger sections of compositions.

Terms

Cadence
Cadential extension
Coda
Codetta
Contour
Counter melody
Elision (phrase elision)
Fragment (fragmented motive)
Introduction

Jazz and pop terms

bridge
chorus
song form (AABA)
turnaround
twelve-bar blues

Melodic procedures

augmentation
conjunct
diminution
disjunct
extension, phrase extension
fragmentation
internal expansion
inversion, melodic inversion
literal repetition
motivic transformation
octave displacement
retrograde
rhythmic transformation
sequence
sequential repetition
transposition
truncation

Motive

Period

antecedent
consequent
contrasting period
double period
parallel period

Phrase group
Refrain

Small forms

binary
rounded binary
simple binary
ternary

Solo, soli
Stanza
Strophic
Theme
Thematic Transformation
Through-composed
Tutti
Variation
Verse

LIST 2

HARMONY

Symbols

Roman and Arabic numerals

Capital Roman numerals denote major triads.

Lowercase Roman numerals denote minor triads.

A capital Roman numeral with a “ + ” indicates an augmented triad.

A lowercase Roman numeral with a “ ø ” indicates a diminished triad.

Arabic numerals or figured-bass symbols denote intervals above the bass and hence indirectly indicate chord inversion. Arabic numerals may indicate voice leading and/or non-harmonic tones.

Triads

6 indicates a first inversion triad

6

4 indicates a second inversion triad

Seventh Chords

7 indicates a root-position seventh chord

o7 indicates a diminished (fully-diminished) seventh chord

ø7 indicates a half-diminished seventh chord

6

5 indicates first inversion

4

3 indicates second inversion

4

2 indicates third inversion

Other figures

8–7 indicates melodic movement from an octave to a seventh above the bass.

9–8, 7–6, 4–3 indicate a suspension and melodic resolution.

An accidental before an Arabic numeral indicates alteration of the interval involved.

A figure with a slash (e.g., /) or a plus (e.g., 4+) indicates that the note creating the interval in question is raised a half step.

Cadence Types

- *Authentic Cadence
 - Imperfect authentic Cadence
 - Perfect authentic Cadence
- *Conclusive cadence
- *Deceptive
- *Half
 - Phrygian half
- *Inconclusive cadence
- *Plagal

Chord Quality

Triads

- augmented or +
- diminished or \emptyset
- major or M
- minor or m

Seventh chords

- major seventh (MM; M7) (“major-major”)
- dominant seventh (Mm7) (used for "major-minor" seventh chords exercising a dominant function)
- minor seventh (m7; mm) (“minor-minor”)
- half-diminished seventh (\emptyset 7; dm) (“diminished-minor”)
- fully-diminished seventh (\emptyset 7; dd) (“diminished-diminished”)

Functions and Progressions

Scale degrees/diatonic chord names

- tonic
- supertonic
- mediant
- subdominant
- dominant
- submediant
- subtonic
- leading tone

Functions

- tonic function
- dominant function
- predominant function

Circle of fifths

Deceptive progression

Harmonic rhythm

Modulation

- common tone modulation
- phrase modulation
- pivot chord modulation

Neighboring chord

Rate of harmonic change

- Realize, realization of a figured bass,
- realization of a four-part Roman numeral progression

Retrogression

Secondary dominant

Secondary leading tone chord

Tonicization

Treatment of second inversion (6/4) triads

Arpeggiating 6

4—a 6/4 created by arpeggiation of the triad in the bass (e.g., 1a).

Cadential 6

4—a I 6/4 preceding the dominant, often at a cadence. Although it contains the notes of the tonic triad, it does not exercise a tonic function but rather serves as an embellishment of the dominant. It occurs in a metrically stronger position than the dominant, and the upper voices most often move by step to the tones of the dominant. May also be written as $V6/4 = 5/3$, including the resolution of the cadential 6/4 to the dominant (e.g., 1b).

Neighboring or pedal 6

4 (embellishing 6/4, auxiliary 6/4)—occurs when the third and fifth of a root position triad are embellished by their respective upper neighboring tones, while the bass is stationary, usually occurring on a weak beat (e.g., 1c).

Passing 6

4—harmonizes the second note of a three-note ascending or descending scale fragment in the bass; that is, it harmonizes a bass passing tone. The usual metric placement is on an unaccented beat and the motion of the upper voices is ordinarily by step (e.g., 1d).

EXAMPLES

C: I I₄⁶ I ii⁶ I₄⁶ V I I IV₄⁶ I I⁶ V₄⁶ I

or
V₄⁶ —₃⁵ I

1a. Arpeggiating 6

4

1b. Cadential 6

4

1c. Neighboring or Pedal 6

4

1d. Passing 6

4

Non-harmonic Tones

- Anticipation
- Appoggiatura
- Embellishment
- Escape tone (échappé)

Neighboring tone (auxiliary tone, embellishing tone, neighbor note)

- double neighbor
- lower neighbor
- upper neighbor
- neighbor group (cambiata, changing tones, changing notes)

Ornament

Passing tone (accented, unaccented)

Pedal point

Preparation

Resolution

Retardation

Suspension

rearticulated suspension

suspension chain

Spacing/Voicing/Position

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Close position

Open position

Doubling

Inversion, inversion of chords

Root

Root position

First inversion

Second inversion

Third inversion

Voice Leading

Common tone

Contrary motion

Cross relation (false relation)

Crossed voices (voice crossing)

Direct fifths (hidden fifths)

Direct octaves (hidden octaves)

Oblique motion

Overlapping voices

Parallel motion

Parallel intervals

objectionable parallels

parallel fifths

parallel octaves

Similar motion

Tendency tone

Unresolved leading tone

Unresolved seventh

Voice exchange

Miscellaneous Harmonic Terms

Arpeggio, arpeggiation

Chromatic

Common Practice Style

Consonance

Diatonic

Dissonance

Figured bass

Flatted fifth

Lead sheet

Picardy third

Resolution

Intervals

Compound interval

Half step (semitone)

Interval

Inversion, inversion of an interval

Numerical names (i.e., third, fifth, octave)

Quality or type (e.g., perfect, major, minor, diminished, augmented)

Tritone

Unison (prime)

Whole step (whole tone)

Performance Terms

Antiphonal

Articulation

arco

legato

marcato

pizzicato

slur

staccato

tenuto

Call and response

Dynamics

crescendo

diminuendo

terrace dynamics

pianissimo pp

piano p
mezzo piano mp
mezzo forte mf
forte f
fortissimo ff
Improvisation, improvisatory
Phrasing

Tempo

adagio
allegro
andante
andantino
grave
largo
lento
moderato
presto
vivace
accelerando
ritardando
ritenuto
rubato

Rhythm/Meter/Temporal Organization

Accent

agogic accent
dynamic accent
metrical accent

Anacrusis (pickup; upbeat)
Asymmetrical meter
Augmentation
Bar line
Beat

Beat type

compound
simple

Changing meter (multimeter)
Cross rhythm
Diminution
Dot, double dot
Dotted rhythm
Duplet
Duration
Hemiola
Irregular meter

Meter

duple
quadruple
triple
Note value
Polyrhythm
Pulse
Rhythm
Swing rhythm
Syncopation
Tempo
Tie
Time signature (meter signature)
Triplet

Scales/Keys/Modes

Accidental
Chromatic, chromaticism
Diatonic
Key signature
Major

Minor

harmonic minor
melodic minor, ascending/descending natural
minor (Aeolian)

Mode

Ionian
Dorian
Phrygian
Lydian
Mixolydian
Aeolian
Locrian

Modality

Parallel key, parallel major or minor
Pentatonic
Relative key, relative major or minor

Scale degrees

tonic ^1
supertonic ^2
mediant ^3
subdominant ^4
dominant ^5
submediant ^6
leading tone ^7
Tetrachord
Tonal
Tonality
Tonic
Whole-tone scale

Text/Music Relations

Lyrics
Melismatic
Stanza
Syllabic

Texture

Alberti bass
Canon
Canonic
Chordal accompaniment
Contrapuntal

Counterpoint

imitation
imitative polyphony
nonimitative polyphony
countermelody
fugal imitation
Heterophony, heterophonic

Homophony, homophonic

chordal homophony
chordal texture (homorhythmic)
melody with accompaniment

Instrumentation

brass
continuo
percussion
rhythm section

strings
timbre
woodwinds
Melody
Monophony, monophonic
Obbligato
Ostinato
Polyphony, polyphonic
Register
Solo, soli
Tessitura
Tutti
Walking bass

Other terms that may be used on the AP Music Theory Exam

Aria
Art song
Concerto
Fugue
Genre(s)
Interlude
Opera
Prelude
Postlude
Sonata
Song
String quartet
Symphony