

HUMA 2104: Music Theory I — Introduction to Tonal Music

Division of Humanities, School of Humanities and Social Science (SHSS)

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)

Fall 2026

Course Information

- **Instructor:** Dr. Austin Leung (hmaustini@ust.hk)
- **Instructional / Teaching Assistants:** Roderick YU (roderickyu@ust.hk)
- **Lectures (L1):** Monday & Wednesday | 09:00 AM – 09:50 AM | Shaw Auditorium, Rm. 103 (SA103)
- **Tutorials:** Wednesday | Shaw Auditorium, Rm. 103 (SA103)
 - **T1:** 10:00 AM – 10:50 AM
 - **T2:** 11:00 AM – 11:50 AM
 - **T3:** 12:00 PM – 12:50 PM
 - **T4:** 13:00 PM – 13:50 PM

Course Description

Music Theory I is an introduction to the basics of Western music theory with an emphasis on analytical listening and rudimentary composition. Writing skills taught in the course include notation; operating with keys and scales; identifying and constructing intervals and chords; and basic harmonic analysis. The course has a rigorous ear-training component which will be mostly practiced in tutorials. This will involve performing (by singing, clapping, talking) and writing down music (rhythms, melodies, harmonies). The course culminates in a final project in which students compose a simple piano piece. This project will happen in clearly guided steps throughout the semester.

A broader objective of the course is to acquire listening skills that may be applied to various types of music. Students will develop an understanding of how different parameters (melody, harmony, rhythm, and so on) interact to create music. Examples used in class will be drawn mostly, but not exclusively, from Western classical repertoire. Although prior musical training will be helpful, there are no prerequisites for the course.

This is a labor-intensive course: Be prepared to invest a significant amount of time and energy each week!

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

On successful completion of the course, you will have:

1. The ability to listen to music analytically, with an awareness of parameters such as meter, texture, modulation, instrumentation, and form;
2. Learned the rudiments of reading and writing music, as well as basic musicianship skills;
3. Developed a deeper appreciation and understanding of music, regardless of style, and of Western classical music in particular; and
4. Prepared yourself to pursue more advanced studies in music (including HUMA 3104: Music Theory II).

Course Policies & Attendance

- **Attendance & Participation:** Crucial for assimilating reading/writing skills and ear training. Attendance is taken at the beginning of class; arriving late twice equals one absence.
- **Study Materials:** No textbook is required. PDF handouts and assignments will be provided on Canvas. Music staff paper (printable from Canvas) is required for taking notes.
- **Homework:** Homework PDFs must be printed and completed in pencil (then scanned/photographed for Canvas upload) or completed digitally via tablet. Late homework is not accepted without verified extenuating circumstances.
- **Composition Exercise:** Short, simple composition exercise following traditional tonal rules as the final project. Completed in guided stages throughout the term.
- **Examinations:** Midterm (first half of course) and Final Exam (cumulative with focus on second half). Make-up exams are only granted for verifiable emergencies.

Term Paper — Cosmopolis Festival Event Report

Attendance at one of the Fall 2026 HKUST Cosmopolis Festival concerts at Shaw Auditorium is a mandatory component of this class. Your term paper will be an analytical writing assignment based on a composition/performance of your choice heard during the concert.

Select one of the following performances:

- **Tigran Hamasyan Quartet** — Friday, October 16, 2026 | 7:30 PM (Shaw Auditorium)
- **Music of Palestine with Nai Barghouti** — Sunday, October 25, 2026 | 7:30 PM (Shaw Auditorium)

Paper Length: Minimum 350 words (approx. 1.5 pages, Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced). Registration details and submission guidelines will be provided on Canvas.

Grading Scheme

Assessment Component	Weight
Final Examination	30%
Midterm Examination	15%
Homework Assignments	15%
Final Project (Composition Exercise)	15%
Attendance & Class Participation	15%
Concert Report / Term Paper	10%

Course Schedule — Fall 2026

Week	Date	Class / Topic
Week 1	Wed, Sep 2	Lec 1: Introduction to the course; musical perception: music and time, overtone series
Week 2	Mon, Sep 7	Lec 2: Topic 1. Rhythmic notation; note and rest durations; meter; bar lines; tempo; dotted and tied rhythms; simple meter
	Wed, Sep 9	Lec 3: Topic 1. Tuplets; compound meters; pick-up bars; upbeats and downbeats <i>Week 2 Tutorials:</i> Reading rhythms; simple rhythm dictations; recognizing meter
Week 3	Mon, Sep 14	Lec 4: Topic 2. Pitch notation: staves and the grand staff, clefs; accidentals, enharmonics; diatonic and chromatic half steps and whole steps

Week	Date	Class / Topic
	Wed, Sep 16	Lec 5: Topics 3 & 4. Introducing rhythm composition assignment; introducing keys and scales <i>Week 3 Tutorials:</i> Rhythm work, parallel period phrases; singing half/whole steps and major scales
Week 4	Mon, Sep 21	Lec 6: Topic 4. Circle of fifths and keys, placement of accidentals
	Wed, Sep 23	Lec 7: Topic 4. Devices for determining keys; circle of fifths in minor; minor scale forms (natural, harmonic, melodic); relative and parallel keys <i>Week 4 Tutorials:</i> Ear training with major and minor scales
Week 5	Mon, Sep 28	Lec 8: Topics 3 & 5. Discussion on rhythm composition assignments; introducing intervals
	Wed, Sep 30	Lec 9: Topic 5. Intervals: numbers and qualities
Week 6	Mon, Oct 5	Lec 10: Topic 6. Introducing major-key melody composition assignment; motives and themes; phrase structure
	Wed, Oct 7	Lec 11: Topic 6. More on melodic writing in major <i>Week 6 Tutorials:</i> Singing parallel period phrases in major; creating, identifying, and singing intervals
Week 7	Mon, Oct 12	Lec 12: Topic 9. Introducing triads and harmony
	Wed, Oct 14	Lec 13: Topics 7 & 8. Introducing minor-key melody composition assignment; application of minor scales; analytic listening: texture, meter, tonality <i>Week 7 Tutorials:</i> Creating, identifying, and singing triads

Week	Date	Class / Topic
		(harmonic and melodic)
Week 8	Mon, Oct 19	NO CLASS — Public Holiday <i>(Day following Chung Yeung Festival)</i>
	Wed, Oct 21	Lec 14: Topic 9. Seventh chords; inversions of chords and figured bass <i>Week 8 Tutorials:</i> Singing on the melodic minor scale
Week 9	Mon, Oct 26	Lec 15: Topics 6 & 11. Discussion on major key phrases; guidelines for concert report/term paper
	Wed, Oct 28	Lec 16: MID-TERM EXAMINATION <i>Week 9 Tutorials:</i> Ear training
Week 10	Mon, Nov 2	Lec 17: Topic 10. Harmonic analysis in major; ear training with seventh chords
	Wed, Nov 4	Lec 18: Topic 10. Introducing cadences; harmony and form <i>Week 10 Tutorials:</i> Seventh chords ear training; cadence identification
Week 11	Mon, Nov 9	Lec 19: Topic 10. More on harmonic analysis; analyzing examples from repertoire
	Wed, Nov 11	Lec 20: Topics 11 & 12. Introducing composition exercise (final project); concert paper review <i>Week 11 Tutorials:</i> Ear training on cadences and harmonic progressions
Week 12	Mon, Nov 16	Lec 21: Topic 12. Working on sample final project together

Week	Date	Class / Topic
	Wed, Nov 18	Lec 22: Topics 9 & 12. Discussion on minor key phrases; sample final project: voice leading <i>Week 12 Tutorials:</i> Guidance on final composition exercise
Week 13	Mon, Nov 23	Lec 23: Topic 12. Voice leading and texture; analyzing music examples from repertoire
	Wed, Nov 25	Lec 24: More analysis of music from repertoire <i>Week 13 Tutorials:</i> Final project Q&A and submission review
Week 14	Mon, Nov 30	Lec 25: Wrapping up; review for final examination