

HUMA 2104: Music Theory I — Introduction to Tonal Music
SHSS, Division of Humanities, HKUST — Spring 2025

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Office:	Shaw Auditorium, Rm. 205
Office hours:	Wed 9:30–11:30 AM/by appointment
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Office:	CYT G004
Lectures:	Tuesday/Thursday 10:00–10:50 AM
Location:	Shaw Auditorium, Rm. 103
Tutorials:	Tuesday 11:00–11:50 AM; 12:00–12:50 AM; Thursday 11:00–11:50 AM; 12:00–12:50 AM
Location:	Shaw 103

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 very 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

- the ability to listen to music analytically, with an awareness of parameters such as meter, texture, modulation, instrumentation, and form;
- learned the rudiments of reading and writing music, as well as basic musicianship skills;
- developed a deeper appreciation and understanding of music, regardless of style, and of Western classical music in particular; and
- prepared yourself to pursue more advanced studies in music (including HUMA3104: Music Theory II).

Attendance and participation are crucial for assimilating the skills needed for reading music and developing your ear. We will be taking attendance at the beginning of the class; arriving late twice will be considered equivalent of being absent once.

If you cannot commit to attending every class session and tutorial, you should not take this course. Also note, the Cosmopolis Festival off-season concert with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra (below) is a *mandatory part of this class as well.*

Term paper—Cosmopolis Festival: The Hong Kong Philharmonic

This spring semester, in lieu of a full-fledged season, HKUST's Cosmopolis Festival will present two individual events. The one relevant to this course is two recitals by the pride of the city, the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra. This event is a required part of the course. Your term paper will be an analytic writing assignment, based on a composition of your choice that you hear at the concert.

*You can choose between **Saturday, April 12, or Sunday, April 13, at 7:30 PM.***

Attendance is free, but you will need to register a seat; a link will be provided later.

The length of your paper is a minimum 350 words, which works out to around 1.5 pages in Times New Roman 12-point font, double spaced. More details will be given in class. You will also be provided a link to a video of the concert to assist with writing the paper (assuming MTPC will edit publish it in due course).

Study materials

No textbook is required for this class. You will be given PDF handouts and assignments, and directed to various online resources for reference, review, and practice. For taking notes, you will need music staff paper, which you can print out from a file available on Canvas.

Homework

Each homework assignment PDF needs to be printed out by the student, completed in pencil, scanned or photographed, and uploaded on Canvas by the given deadline, usually before the next class session. Alternatively, the homework can be done on a tablet computer or other device that allows marking up PDFs. We do not accept late homework unless there are extenuating circumstances; even so, missing the deadline will lower your homework grade. If we have already gone through assigned material in detail in the class after the deadline, it cannot be turned in late regardless of the reasons. Under extenuating circumstances, you may be assigned a make-up homework exercise.

Composition exercise

The course will provide you an opportunity to try your hands on writing a short, simple composition, following the rules of traditional tonal music, as your final project. This is the most challenging component of HUMA 2104. You don't need to worry about your project being a flawless work of art—the purpose is to give you insights into the craft composition by trying it out yourself, and learning music theory through “reverse engineering”. This will be done gradually over the course of the semester, with ample opportunity for revisions at every stage of the process.

Examinations

The midterm will cover the material of the first half of the course and the final exam will cover mostly the material of the second half, with some material from the first. Exams may not be made up unless you have a verifiable illness or emergency. You must notify us in advance if you must miss an exam.

Grading

Final Exam	30%
Midterm	15%
Homework	15%
Final Project	15%
Concert report	10%
Attendance/participation	15%

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Tentative class schedule — Spring 2024

LECTURE:

TOPIC:

Week 1

Tue, Feb 4 – Lec 1

Introduction to the course; musical perception: music and time, overtone series

Thu, Feb 6 – Lec 2

Topic 1. Rhythmic notation; note and rest durations; meter; bar lines; tempo; dotted and tied rhythms; simple meter

Week 2

Tue, Feb 11 – Lec 3

Topic 1. Triplets; compound meters; pick-up bars; upbeats and downbeats

Thu, Feb 13 – Lec 4

Topic 2. Pitch notation: staves and the grand staff, clefs; accidentals, enharmonics; diatonic and chromatic half steps and whole steps

Week 2 tutorials: Reading rhythms; simple rhythm dictations; recognizing meter

Week 3

Tue, Feb 18 – Lec 5

Topics 3 & 4. Introducing rhythm composition assignment; introducing keys and scales

Thu, Feb 20 – Lec 6

Topic 4. Circle of fifths and keys, placement of accidentals

Week 3: tutorials: More rhythm work, including reading short parallel period phrases; simple singing exercises on half steps and whole steps, major scales

Week 4

Tue, Feb 25 – Lec 7

Topic 4. Devices for determining keys; circle of fifths in minor; minor scale forms (natural, harmonic, melodic); relative and parallel keys

Thu, Feb 27 – Lec 8

Topics 3 & 5. Discussion on students' rhythm composition assignments; introducing intervals

Week 4 tutorials: Ear training with major and minor scales

Week 5

Tue, Mar 4 – Lec 9

Topic 5. Intervals: numbers and qualities

Thu, Mar 6 – Lec 10

Topic 6. Introducing major-key melody composition assignment; motives and themes; phrase structure

Week 5 tutorials: Singing simple parallel period phrases in major; creating, identifying, and singing intervals, both harmonic and melodic

Week 6

Tue, Mar 11 – Lec 11

Topic 6. More on melodic writing in major

Thu, Mar 13 – Lec 12	<u>Topic 9.</u> Introducing triads and harmony
	<u>Week 6 tutorials:</u> Creating, identifying, and singing triads, both harmonic and melodic
Week 7	
Tue, Mar 18 – Lec 13	<u>Topics 7 & 8.</u> Introducing minor-key melody composition assignment; application of minor scales; analytic listening: texture, meter, and tonality
Thu, Mar 20 – Lec 14	<u>Topic 9.</u> Seventh chords; inversions of chords and figured bass
	<u>Week 7 tutorials:</u> More singing on the melodic minor scale
Week 8	
Tue, Mar 25 – Lec 15	<u>Topics 6 & 11.</u> Discussion on students' phrases in major key; guidelines for concert report/term paper
Thu, Mar 27 – Lec 16	<u>MID-TERM EXAMINATION</u>
Week 9	
	<u>Mid-Term Break – No classes Tue, Apr 1 & Thu Apr 3</u>
Tue, Apr 8 – Lec 17	<u>Topic 10.</u> Harmonic analysis in major; ear training with seventh chords
Thu, Apr 10 – Lec 18	<u>Topic 10.</u> Introducing cadences; harmony and form
	<u>Week 9 tutorials:</u> Creating, identifying, and singing seventh chords, both harmonic and melodic; cadence identification
Week 10	
Tue, Apr 15 – Lec 19	<u>Topic 10.</u> More on harmonic analysis; analyzing examples from repertoire
Thu, Apr 17 – Lec 20	<u>Topics 11 & 12.</u> Introducing composition exercise (final project); more on term paper
	<u>Week 11 tutorials:</u> Ear training on cadences and other harmonic progressions
Week 11	
Tue, Apr 22 – Lec 21	<u>Topic 12.</u> Working on sample final project together
Thu, Apr 24 – Lec 22	<u>Topics 9 & 12.</u> Discussion on students' phrases in minor key; more work on sample final project: voice leading
Week 12	
Wed, Apr 29 – Lec 23	<u>Topic 12.</u> More work on sample final project: voice leading and texture; analyzing music examples from repertoire
	<u>Labor Day – No class on Thu, May 1</u>
Week 13	
Tue, May 6 – Lec 24	More analysis of music from repertoire

Thu, May 8 – Lec 25

Wrapping up; review for final examination