

HUMA 2104: Music Theory I — Introduction to Tonal Music

SHSS, Division of Humanities, HKUST — Spring 2026

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Office:	Academic Building Rm 3022 (near lift 2)
Office hours:	Monday 11:30-13:30, by appointment
Instructional Assistants:	Roderick YU – roderickyu@ust.hk
Lectures:	Monday/Wednesday 10:30 – 11:20 AM
Location:	Main Academic Building Rm 3020 (near lift 2)
Tutorials:	Monday 11:30 – 12:20; 12:30 – 13:20; 13:30 – 14:20; 14:30 – 15:20 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 transcribing 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, you will be required to attend two concerts (listed below) and two educational events (TBA).

Term paper—concert report

Your term paper will be an analytic writing assignment, based on a composition of your

choice that you hear at a concert. 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. Possible concerts will be announced at a later date.

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

This 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	15%
Attendance/participation	10%

Statement on Assessment and Grading

This course will be assessed using criterion-referencing, and grades will not be assigned using a curve.

Statement on Communication and Feedback

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission.

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Tentative class schedule — Spring 2026

LECTURE:

TOPIC:

Week 1

Mon, Feb 2 – Lec 1

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

Wed, Feb 4 – Lec 2

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

Week 2

Mon, Feb 9 – Lec 3

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

Wed, Feb 11 – 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

Mon, Feb 16 – Lec 5

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

Wed, Feb 18 – Lec 6

No class, public holiday

Week 4

Mon, March 4 – Lec 7

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

Wed, March 6 – Lec 8

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

Week 4 tutorials: Ear training with major and minor scales, More rhythm work, including reading short parallel period phrases; simple singing exercises on half steps and whole steps, major scales

Week 5

Mon, March 9 – Lec 9

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

Wed, March 11 – Lec 10

Topic 5. Intervals: numbers and qualities

Week 5 tutorials: Singing simple parallel period phrases in

Week 6

Mon, March 16

Topic 6. Introducing major-key melody composition

	assignment; motives and themes; phrase structure
	major; creating, identifying, and singing intervals, both harmonic and melodic
Wed, March 18 – Lec 11	Topic 6. More on melodic writing in major
	<u>Week 6 tutorials</u> : Creating, identifying, and singing triads, both harmonic and melodic
Week 7	
Mon, March 23 – Lec 12	Topic 7. Analytical Listening
	Topic 8. Introducing triads and harmony
Wed, March 25 – Lec 13	Topics 8 & 9. Introducing minor-key melody composition assignment; application of minor scales; analytic listening: texture, meter, and tonality
	<u>Week 7 tutorials</u> : More singing on the melodic minor scale
Week 8	
Mon, March 30 – Lec 14	Topic 8. Seventh chords; inversions of chords and figured bass
Wed, April 1 – Lec 15	Topics 6 & 11. Discussion on students' phrases in major key; guidelines for concert report/term paper
Week 9	
Mon, April 6 – Lec 16	No class, public holiday
Wed, April 8 – Lec 17	<u>MID-TERM EXAMINATION</u>
Week 10	
Mon, April 13 – Lec 18	Topic 10. Harmonic analysis in major; ear training with seventh chords
Wed, April 15 – Lec 19	Topic 10. Introducing cadences; harmony and form
	<u>Week 10 tutorials</u> : Creating, identifying, and singing seventh chords, both harmonic and melodic; cadence identification
Week 11	
Mon, April 20 – Lec 20	Topic 10. More on harmonic analysis; analyzing examples from repertoire
Wed, April 22 – Lec 21	Topics 11 & 12. Introducing composition exercise (final project); more on term paper
	<u>Week 11 tutorials</u> : Ear training on cadences and other harmonic progressions

Week 12

Mon, April 27 – Lec 22

Topic 12. Working on sample final project together

Wed, April 29 – Lec 23

Topics 9 & 12. Discussion on students' phrases in minor key; more work on sample final project: voice leading

Week 13

Mon, May 4 – Lec 24

Topic 12. More work on sample final project: voice leading and texture; analyzing music examples from repertoire

Wed, May 6 – Lec 25

More analysis of music from repertoire