

A Guide to Preparing for College Music Theory
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Many incoming freshmen are intimidated by music theory at the college level. These courses require a student to not only think musically, but also to sing, to play the piano, to take melodic and harmonic dictation, and to memorize a great number of musical laws. Music theory courses are usually the most challenging academic courses that music majors take.

However, there are many steps a college-bound student can take to bypass any remedial courses and to be well-prepared for that first semester of college music theory. Here are some of them:

1. Get a computer and an Internet connection. I would advise all college-bound students to do so, regardless of their specific fields of study. A great resource for learning music theory is <http://www.musictheory.net/>. Find and try out the free lessons provided there.
2. If you aren't already, start taking piano lessons, regardless of the instrument you play. You don't need to pay to study with a concert pianist; if you live in a college town, start taking beginning piano lessons with a college piano major. The lessons will be cheaper and, if you apply yourself, you will get what you need out of them.
3. If you're not a singer, start singing. You don't need to take lessons, just get used to singing your part in band or orchestra, and to singing along with the radio or with your favorite music videos. Get comfortable with your own voice. You don't need to have a pretty sound, you just need to be able to match pitch and develop a little vocal flexibility. If you want to take it further, learn how to sing in movable-do solfege by asking your choir director to show you how (be sure to ask them how it works in *different* major keys, not just in C major).
4. Get ear-training software. I recommend buying the *MacGamut User Disk* (available online at <http://www.macgamut.com/>). This program will help you develop the dictation skills you need in college.
5. Learn the following topics on your own: the staff and clefs, rhythm, meter, scales, key signatures, intervals, interval inversion, triads, seventh chords, and chordal inversion. All of these topics can be learned for free from lessons provided online (see the free lessons on <http://www.musictheory.net/>).
6. Get help. Reading about music theory can be difficult, but any college-trained musician should (given time) be able to help a college-bound student studying theory on his or her own.