

MUSIC THEORY *(Subject Code: 99)*

Developing literacy with the tonal language forms a key part of a rounded education for performers, composers and listeners of all kinds. An understanding of how written symbols relate to the elements of music, and having the skills to interpret and translate them into sounds, empowers us to communicate and experience music in a meaningful way. Without knowledge of notation it is impossible for classical musicians to access their repertoire with ease or to rehearse together; and this repertoire could not be heard at all had composers not been able to write it down. So, music theory is a very practical subject that is completely entwined with performance and composition.

ABRSM's Music Theory exams give students opportunities to acquire:

- a knowledge of the notation of western music, including the signs and terminology commonly employed
- an understanding of fundamental musical elements such as intervals, keys, scales and chords
- skill in constructing balanced rhythmic patterns or completing given melodic or harmonic structures
- an ability to apply theoretical knowledge and understanding to score analysis

Candidates are assessed on their ability to identify, use and manipulate conventional musical symbols, to complete extracts and to answer questions relating to the elements of music according to the grade-by-grade parameters detailed on the following pages.

Grade 5 as a prerequisite

A longstanding ABRSM benchmark is that a pass at Grade 5 or above in Music Theory must be obtained before candidates can enter for Grades 6, 7 or 8 Practical exams. We believe that a thorough understanding of the elements of music is essential for a full and satisfying performance at these higher grades. (Grade 5 or above in Practical Musicianship or any solo Jazz subject also fulfils this prerequisite.)

Marking scheme

Theory exams are marked out of a total of 100, with 66 marks required for a Pass, 80 for a Merit and 90 for a Distinction. The marking criteria for Theory exams are available at www.abrsm.org/theorymarkingcriteria.

Past papers

Copies of the question papers set in ABRSM's Theory exams for each of the preceding five years are available for purchase from music retailers and from www.abrsm.org/shop. Model answers for papers for the same period are also available.