

Project #1: Fundamentals Textbook Review

Please be aware that a fundamentals course is normally considered remedial for music majors. Because of prior experience, most music majors do not need a book like this.

All of the fundamentals textbooks below are on reserve in the music library.

Clendinning, Marvin, and Phillips, *The Musician's Guide to Fundamentals* (2nd ed.)

Clough, Conley, and Boge, *Scales, Intervals, Keys, Triads...* (3rd ed.)

Damschroder, *Foundations of Music and Musicianship* (3rd ed.)

Duckworth, *A Creative Approach to Music Fundamentals* (11th ed.)

Houlahan and Tacka, *From Sound to Symbol: Fundamentals of Music* (2nd ed.)

Johnson, *Foundations of Diatonic Theory* [optional and very different!]

Straus, *Elements of Music* (3rd edition)

Overview: Summarize each resource, emphasizing how it is distinct from the others; write an essay (optional; 20% penalty if omitted) describing how these books fit (or don't fit) your pedagogical perspective and which one you might use if given a choice.

Suggested Approach:

Start by taking a fairly quick look at each book just to get a sense of its style and content.

- Does the book seem to be geared towards some particular student or situation (e.g., non-music majors, guitarists, courses with a co-requisite, small classes, etc.)?
- Are assignments included and, if so, how practical are they? Are there enough assignments? Do they seem appropriate in content, difficulty, and variety?
- Is the book's layout clear and/or appealing? When scanning the pages, is important information easy to find?
- What is the tone of the book? Is it too easy, too difficult, or just confusing to read? Does it use atypical jargon or unnecessary acronyms?
- Does the book include topics beyond the usual scope of written fundamentals (e.g., aural skills, keyboard exercises, four-part writing, composition)? If so, is this extra material useful? (More is not necessarily better!)

Now take a closer look at each book, focusing on topics that are especially important to you. For instance, you might consider:

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| • effective links between written and aural skills | • types of musical examples |
| • the method for determining interval qualities | • minor scales and keys |
| • thorough vs. gradual introduction of topics | • use of piano keyboard |

Whenever you notice a unique (or nearly unique) feature about a book, be sure to make a note of it. Your memory will quickly fade if you aren't able to distinguish one book from another. The more vivid your notes, the more helpful you will find them in the long run.

Friendly warning: statements you read in a book's introduction or advertising are not necessarily true. Don't let yourself be misled.

What to turn in on Friday, September 26:

1. Textbook summaries — provide an overview of each textbook (one single-spaced page per book, arranged in alphabetical order). There's no need to write in complete sentences; the project will be more useful to you later if you create an outline or an organized list. Definitely include:
 - the ideal class or user for this book, in your opinion — whether or not the author(s) would agree
 - other reasonable class(es) or user(s) for this book
 - the quantity, quality, and usefulness of homework that is included
 - distinctive feature(s) — this is the most important thing!
 - your frank assessment of things you like and/or don't like about the book (order of topics, writing style, level of flexibility, use of diagrams, choice of musical examples... whatever you find important)A sample summary (for a fictitious textbook) is provided on the next page.
2. A short essay (3 pages, double-spaced — may be omitted with a 20% grade penalty) that addresses the following questions:
 - A. What are your primary concerns in choosing a fundamentals textbook? Are there certain features that you find absolutely necessary? Conversely, are there approaches that are simply incompatible with your outlook or goals?
 - B. If you were teaching a fundamentals course for college-level music majors at a conservatory or school of music, which textbook would you choose? Why? Obviously you should indicate how this book reflects the concerns you outlined.
 - C. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of not using a traditional book and instead having your students use *Open Music Theory* (2nd version, by Gotham, Gullings, Hamm, Hughes, Jarvis, Lavengood, and Peterson)?
 - D. Given your background and professional interests, describe a different music theory fundamentals class that you can envision yourself teaching (in a Suzuki program, at a public high school, a college elective for non-musicians, etc.). Which resource would you choose for this situation? Why?

Specific examples are encouraged, both because they will clarify your essay and because they will help jog your memory when you refer back to this project in the future. Your writing is not required to be formal; the main point is to express your own well-formed opinion, so of course the writing will tend to be more personal than that of a typical research paper.

I will leave it to your discretion whether your essay should go into more depth with relatively few topics or summarize a wider variety of information. Similarly, your essay may focus primarily on a few books and shortchange a few others. There is no requirement that you treat all books and all topics equally in your essay. However, please consider this essay from my point of view as a grader: if you don't mention the most distinctive features of a book (either in your essay or in the book summaries), or if you contrast two books while ignoring a third book that better illustrates this contrast, I'm going to have to wonder how carefully you reviewed it.

<p>You are welcome (indeed, encouraged) discuss these textbooks and your reactions to them your classmates. However, you are not permitted to divide the workload with anyone; for example, you can't look at half of the books while a friend looks at the other half. Additionally, the written work you turn in must be strictly your own.</p>

SAMPLE REVIEW:

William and Theodore, *The Most Excellent Music Fundamentals Book Ever*

Ideal user: Although the authors say this book is intended for non-musicians, to me it seems better suited for music majors who don't yet read music. It starts with extremely basic information, but much of the discussion requires more familiarity with Classical music repertoire than I think most non-musicians would have. Clearly the book is intended for classroom use. It might work really well for students who have played guitar for many years (see below).

Other user: This would be fine for high school students with a lot of musical experience (e.g., performing in a choir), but I don't think it would work well for independent study at any level because there are too many things a teacher really has to demonstrate or explain to clarify the text.

Homework: There are three tear-out assignments for each chapter. I think each chapter would take a week or less to get through, so this should be plenty. The assignments are good, in the sense that they emphasize the most important information in each chapter. They're also very clear and the directions are easy to understand. However, there isn't a lot of variety; mostly, students do the same kinds of problems over and over. This suddenly changes in the final chapter, where the assignments are geared toward a final composition project. It's a sudden change, and I'm not sure it would lead to a successful composition.

Distinctive features:

- Intervals are divided into two chapters: thirds and fifths (Chapter 4) and everything else (Chapter 6). This is because the authors want to get to triads (Chapter 5) as soon as possible.
- Almost everything is represented both on a keyboard and on a guitar. The homework assignments early in the book also require students to represent answers on a keyboard and on a guitar.
- There are good suggestions for ear training, but there is no real corresponding homework. Apparently all of the ear training is done in class.

My opinion:

- There are probably people who will think that it's great not to rely exclusively on the piano, given that many students don't play the piano. However, I don't think the guitar representations are helpful. First, I think even fewer students are familiar with the guitar. Second, I just think the piano is more helpful because the keyboard is entirely linear and corresponds better to standard pitch notation.
- The bright orange boxes are supposed to draw attention to the most important points, but I find them very distracting.
- The writing is clear and concise, but I think a lot of concepts would go over beginning students' heads. As a teacher, though, I could easily work with this.
- The table of contents is kind of vague, but the topic index is excellent, so it would be very easy to find information later.