Terms and Symbols used on the AP Music Theory exam

The terms and symbols in the list below may appear in the directions or questions on the AP Music Theory Exam, as well as in course instructional materials. As such, the list will be an invaluable guide in the development of an AP Music Theory course, but it is not intended to limit course content — some teachers may choose to include topics not shown here.

It is important to note that the list does not include extremely basic musical vocabulary, even though such widely used terms may be used on the exam — for example, “quarter note” is not listed. Nor is every term of equal importance — for example, “strophic” and “rubato” may not appear on every exam, but “melody,” “phrase” and “texture” certainly will.

Definitions and illustrations of the terms and concepts listed here can be found in music theory textbooks and standard reference works, such as The New Harvard Dictionary of Music.

Form

Symbols
Lowercase letters indicate musical phrases or subsections: for example, a b indicates a contrasting period; a b a indicates a phrase, contrasting phrase and return to the original phrase. A prime (as in a a') denotes a phrase and a varied restatement. Capital letters are used to indicate larger sections of compositions.

Terms
Cadence
Cadential extension
Coda
Codetta
Contour
Counterpoint
Elision (phrase elision)
Fragment (fragmented motive)
Introduction
Jazz and pop terms
bridge
chorus
song form (AABA)
turnaround
twelve-bar blues

Motive
Period
antecedent
consequent
contrasting period
double period
parallel period
Phrase group
Refrain
Small forms
binary
rounded binary

Melodic procedures
augmentation
conjunct
diminution
disjunct
extension, phrase extension
fragmentation
internal expansion
inversion, melodic inversion
literal repetition
motivic transformation
octave displacement
retrograde
rhythmic transformation
sequence
sequential repetition
transposition
truncation

Solo, soli
Stanza
Strophic
Theme
thematic transformation
Through-composed
Tutti
Variation
Verse
simple binary
ternary

Harmony
Symbols
Roman and Arabic numerals
Capital Roman numerals denote major triads.
Lowercase Roman numerals denote minor triads.
A capital Roman numeral with a “+” indicates an augmented triad.
A lowercase Roman numeral with a “ø” indicates a diminished triad.
Arabic numerals or figured-bass symbols denote intervals above the bass and hence indirectly indicate chord inversion. Arabic numerals may indicate voice leading and/or nonharmonic tones.

Triads
6 indicates a first inversion triad
64 indicates a second inversion triad

Seventh Chords
7 indicates a root-position seventh chord
Ø indicates a half-diminished seventh chord
ø indicates a diminished (fully-diminished) seventh chord
65 indicates first inversion
43 indicates second inversion
42 indicates third inversion

Other figures
8–7 indicates melodic movement from an octave to a seventh above the bass.
9–8, 7–6, 4–3 indicate a suspension and melodic resolution.
An accidental before an Arabic numeral indicates alteration of the interval involved.
A figure with a slash (e.g., 4+) indicates that the note creating the interval in question is raised a half step.

Cadence Types
Authentic
imperfect authentic
perfect authentic
Conclusive cadence
Deceptive
Half
Phrygian half
Inconclusive cadence
Plagal

Chord Quality
Triads augmented or +
diminished or Ø
major or M
minor or m

Seventh chords
major seventh (MM; M7) ("major-major")
dominant seventh (Mm7) (used for major-minor seventh chords exercising a dominant function)
major-minor seventh (Mm7) (same quality as dominant seventh without denoting function)
minor seventh (m7; mm) ("minor-minor")
half-diminished seventh (Ø; dm) ("diminished-minor")
fully-diminished seventh (ø; dd) ("diminished-diminished")

Functions and Progressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale degrees/diatonic chord names</th>
<th>Harmonic rhythm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tonic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supertonic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mediant</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>subdominant</td>
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<td>dominant</td>
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<td>submediant</td>
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<tr>
<td>subtonic</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>leading tone</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tonic function</td>
<td>Retrogression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dominant function</td>
<td>Secondary dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>predominant function</td>
<td>Secondary leading tone chord</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Circle of fifths                   | Tonicization    |
| Deceptive progression              |                 |

Treatment of second inversion (64) triads

**Arpeggiating** 64 — a 64 created by arpeggiation of the triad in the bass (e.g., 1a).

**Cadential** 64 — a 64 preceding the dominant, often at a cadence. Although it contains the notes of the tonic triad, it does not exercise a tonic function but rather serves as an embellishment of the dominant. It occurs in a metrically stronger position than the dominant, and the upper voices most often move by step to the tones of the dominant. May also be written as V64*53, including the resolution of the cadential 64 to the dominant (e.g., 1b).

**Neighboring or pedal** 64 (embellishing 64, auxiliary 64) — occurs when the third and fifth of a root position triad are embellished by their respective upper neighboring tones, while the bass is stationary, usually occurring on a weak beat (e.g., 1c).

**Passing** 64 — harmonizes the second note of a three-note ascending or descending scale fragment in the bass; that is, it harmonizes a bass passing tone. The usual metric placement is on an unaccented beat and the motion of the upper voices is ordinarily by step (e.g., 1d).

1a. Arpeggiating 64 1b. Cadential 64 1c. Neighboring or pedal 64 1d. Passing 64
### Nonharmonic Tones
- Anticipation
- Appoggiatura
- Embellishment
- Escape tone (échappé)
- Neighboring tone
  - (auxiliary tone, embellishing tone, neighbor note) double neighbor
  - lower neighbor upper neighbor
  - neighbor group (cambiata, changing tones, changing notes)

### Ornament
- Passing tone (accented, unaccented)
- Pedal point
- Resolution
- Retardation
- Suspension
  - rearticulated suspension
  - suspension chain

### Spacing/Voicing/Position
- Alto
- Bass
- Close position
- Doubling
- First inversion
- Inversion, inversion of chords
- Open position

### Root
- Root position
- Second inversion
- Soprano
- Tenor
- Third inversion

### Voice Leading
- Common tone
- Contrary motion
- Cross relation (false relation)
- Crossed voices (voice crossing)
- Direct fifths (hidden fifths)
- Direct octaves (hidden octaves)
- Oblique motion
- Overlapping voices
- Parallel motion

### Parallel intervals
- objectionable parallels
  - parallel fifths
  - parallel octaves

### Similar motion
- Tendency tone
- Unresolved leading tone
- Unresolved seventh
- Voice exchange

### Miscellaneous Harmonic Terms
- Arpeggio, arpeggiation
- Chromatic
- Common Practice Style
- Consonance
- Diatonic
- Dissonance

### Figured bass
- Lead sheet
- Picardy third
- Resolution

### Intervals
- Compound interval
- Half step (semitone)
- Interval
- Inversion, inversion of an interval
- Numerical names (i.e., third, fifth, octave)
- Quality or type (e.g., perfect, major, minor, diminished, augmented)
- Tritone
- Unison (prime)
- Whole step (whole tone)
**Performance Terms**

Antiphonal
Articulation
  - arco
  - legato
  - marcat
  - pizzicato
  - slur
  - staccato
  - tenuto
Call and response
Dynamics
  - crescendo
  - diminuendo
  - terrace dynamics
  - pianissimo pp
  - piano p
  - mezzo piano mp
  - mezzo forte mf
  - forte f
  - fortissimo ff

**Improvisation, improvisatory**
**Phrasing**
**Tempo**
  - adagio
  - allegro
  - andante
  - andantino
  - grave
  - largo
  - lento
  - moderato
  - presto
  - vivace
  - accelerando
  - ritardando
  - ritenuto
  - rubato

**Rhythm/Meter/Temporal Organization**

Accent
  - agogic accent
  - dynamic accent
  - metrical accent
Anacrusis (pickup; upbeat)
Asymmetrical meter
Augmentation
Bar line
Beat
Beat type
  - compound
  - simple
Changing meter (multimeter)
Cross rhythm
Diminution
Dot, double dot
Dotted rhythm
Duplet
Duration
Hemiola
Irregular meter
Meter
  - duple
  - quadruple
  - triple
Note value
Polyrhythm
Pulse
Rhythm
Swing rhythm
Syncopation
Tempo
Tie
Time signature (meter signature)
Triplet

**Scales/Keys/Modes**

Accidental
Chromatic, chromaticism
Diatonic
Key signature
Major
Minor
  - Harmonic minor
  - melodic minor,
    - ascending/descending

Modality
Parallel key, parallel major or minor
Pentatonic
Relative key, relative major or minor
Scale degrees
  - tonic \(^1\)
  - supertonic \(^2\)
  - mediant \(^3\)
  - subdominant \(^4\)
  - dominant \(^5\)
natural minor (Aeolian)

Mode
- Ionian
- Dorian
- Phrygian
- Lydian
- Mixolydian
- Aeolian
- Locrian

Text/Music relations
- Lyrics
- Melismatic
- Stanza
- Syllabic

Texture
- Alberti bass
- Canon
- Canonic
- Chordal accompaniment
- Contrapuntal
- Counterpoint
  - imitation
  - imitative polyphony
  - nonimitative polyphony
  - countermelody
  - fugal imitation
- Heterophony, heterophonic
- Homophony, homophonic
  - chordal homophony
  - chordal texture (homorhythmic)
  - melody with accompaniment

Instrumentation
- brass
- continuo
- percussion
- rhythm section
- strings
- timbre
- woodwinds

Melody
- Monophony, monophonic
- Obbligato
- Ostinato
- Polyphony, polyphonic
- Register
- Solo, soli
- Tessitura
- Tutti
- Walking bass

Other terms that may be used on the AP Music Theory Exam
- Aria
- Art song
- Concerto
- Fugue
- Genre(s)
- Interlude
- Opera
- Prelude
- Postlude
- Sonata
- Song
- String quartet
- Symphony