

## **Introduction to Theory Guidelines**

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The 1989 revised theory guidelines for the state of Florida are based on suggestions by teachers throughout the state in answer to a questionnaire distributed by the theory chairmen in 1985. Because theory is a study of the structure of music, the new guidelines have avoided references to the keyboard in order to make the subject accessible to all instrumentalists as well as vocalists.

### **Written Theory**

Each category, (identified by letter A, B, C, etc.), beginning with Level 1, follows a developmental pattern by adding one new step or one new item at the next level. A decision was made to select the easiest and most direct route to thorough understanding of chord structure. For this reason, as an example, chord progressions are introduced in root position so that students know that the V chord is built on the 5<sup>th</sup> step of the scale, or the IV chord is built on the 4<sup>th</sup> step of the scale. After two years of writing chords in their root position, students are taught (Level 6), to use these chords in their inverted form for a smoother progression. If they are taught the inverted form first, they tend to learn the chords by rote and do not develop an awareness of the relationship of chords through their common tones. This knowledge is important in understanding harmonic structure and in recognizing key modulations in the music they play. For the same reason, four-part writing, as introduced here, is an exercise in the recognition of relationships between chords without the additional burden, at this level, of learning correct voice leading in baroque style. It is useful in understanding stylistic differences for students to know that by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, even more so, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, many of the old rules were discarded as composers looked for new tonal colors and combinations of sounds. In their break with tradition, they used parallel fifths and parallel octaves for color effects or as a re-creation of medieval music in modern guise. It is important for students in intermediate and upper levels to know that what is acceptable in one style may not be acceptable in another style.

### **Aural Theory**

Since music is an art form which must be heard, it is important to develop listening skills which promote an awareness of sound, rhythm, tempo, style. To help focus the way a student listens, we have introduced rhythmic and melodic dictation. Step-by-step suggestions for presenting rhythmic and melodic dictation will be found under the heading Music Dictation, page xxvi. Additionally, learning to differentiate scale modes, intervals, triads, 7<sup>th</sup> chords, etc. can help students avoid wrong notes in learning a piece. A quick recognition of scale and chord patterns can also be an aid in sight-reading. And for non-keyboard students, it is essential to be able to hear intervals correctly for accurate intonation in performance.

### **Upper Levels - 10 through 12**

The guidelines for the first eight levels are tailored to the needs of students who take lessons but may not plan to make music their profession. These students probably will not go beyond Level 8 or 9 in their theory study. The upper three levels are designed to prepare serious music students for theory placement exams when they apply to a college or conservatory. These upper levels are, of course, appropriate also for students who enjoy an in-depth study of the structure of music.

## **Summary - How to Use the Guidelines**

We suggest that these guidelines be used as just that — guidelines, not absolute rules. On the early levels, if a few minutes of each lesson are devoted to writing and listening, students associate the need to understand form and structure as an integral part of learning a new piece. Recognizing a cadence creates an awareness of phrasing. Recognizing the significance of a key signature helps the student avoid wrong notes. Knowledge creates understanding and promotes better performance. These guidelines provide a uniform curriculum throughout the state, but it is up to the teachers to incorporate them into their own style, their own planning, their own approach to teaching, while pursuing the goal of a well-rounded music education for their students.

References for the written and aural theory guidelines:

*Harvard Dictionary of Music*, Willi Apel

*Elementary Harmony*, Robert W. Ottman

*Harmony*, Walter Piston

*Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Eric Blom