

Suggestions for Preparing for Music Theory at OKCU
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For many incoming freshmen, “music theory” is the course that instills the most fear. Not only do Theory, Aural Skills, and Class Piano require the mastery of several skills, such as writing, identification, memorization of “rules,” aural dictation, singing, and piano proficiencies, but these skills must be used quickly. Below are some things that you can do to help prepare for your first semester of music theory. All students who are enrolled in Theory I and Aural Skills I will take a diagnostic exam in order for the faculty to assess each student’s respective skill set. Those students who struggle with this assessment will be asked to attend a weekly review session outside of regular class times in order to make sure that they are caught up by the middle of the first semester.

1. Do not spend your money on books like “Music Theory for Dummies,” “Music Theory Made Easy,” “Lies My Music Theory Teacher Told Me,” or any other music theory book available at your local bookstore. If you want a theory book, then purchase the textbook that you will be using for at least the first three semesters of your music theory career at OCU: Jane Clendinning and Elizabeth Marvin’s *The Musician’s Guide*, 3rd Edition (earlier editions of these books are not acceptable). All of the Theory and Aural Skills texts are available at the OCU Bookstore as well as online. Also, be wary of used textbooks and workbooks, because pages and assignments may be missing, and you may not realize it until it’s too late.

2. Make sure that you have access to a computer and the internet. Several websites exist that have music theory information, but one of the best is Ricci Adams’ www.musictheory.net. This site has several tutorials concerning music theory fundamentals, and is ready to work with you at any time and for as long as you wish.

3. Start playing the piano, even if it is not your primary instrument. As a music major, you will be expected to have a certain level of piano proficiency (Class Piano I-IV). You don’t have to study with a college professor, just someone who can teach you the basics of the instrument. Knowing your way around a keyboard and being able to visualize it will provide substantial help in your Theory and Aural Skills classes.

4. Start singing, even if voice is not your primary instrument. As a college music major, you will be expected to be able to sing melodies on sight. If you’ve never sung, start singing with the radio, television, iPod, your solo lesson or ensemble music, etc. At Oklahoma City University, we use the “moveable do” solfège system, and “do-based” minor. If you’ve used another system, such as “fixed do” or numbers, you will be expected to know “moveable do” here.

5. Your success in Theory/Aural Skills III and beyond is predicated on your success in Theory/Aural Skills I and II. This point cannot be emphasized enough. When students struggle in Theory III, it is largely because they cannot recognize key signatures or spell triads and seventh chords, topics taught in the first four weeks of Theory I. Like any skill set, you must work on it every day in order to master it. If you do not learn the material, to the point of automation, you will likely struggle with these courses.

6. Once you arrive, do not think that because a classmate spends a certain amount of time practicing theory and aural skills work, that you need to do the same. You may need to spend more or less time than anyone else, based on your familiarity with the material. Spend the time that you need to spend working, but make sure that you know this material upside-down and inside-out. These are the courses that will allow you to become the musician that you want to be. Take advantage of these opportunities.