Van Tech Music

MUSIC THEORY LEARNING GUIDE

LEVEL IA

Van Tech Music

MUSIC THEORY PROGRAM - LEVEL IA

The Level IA Program is intended for students in Beginning Band, Junior Orchestra, and new members of the Concert Choir. The program focuses on very simple skills of reading, notation, and language of music.

Activities are noted in each section of this program guide and additional resources will be available at www.vtmusic.ca.

Each Friday in November, December, and January, the Music Room (511) will be home to a *Theory Club* tutorial. Students are encouraged to seek assistance from their friends and by attending these tutorial sessions.

Examinations for Level IA will take place at each sitting of Theory Program exams - once in January and once in June, annually. **Students must write the exams until they have completed Level IIIB.**

Topics for Level IA

1. Pitch Naming
    a. Enharmonic Names
    b. Whole tones vs. Semitones
2. Major Scale Writing
3. Scale Degree Identification
4. Major Triads
5. Rhythm
    a. Note & Rest Values
    b. Time Signatures
    c. Counting System
6. Italian Terms
    a. tempo
    b. dynamics
    c. general use

1. Pitch Naming

Each key on the piano keyboard will sound a different pitch. Similarly, string, brass, woodwind, and pitched percussion instruments can sound numerous pitches across a broad pitch range.

The pitch names in the 'musical alphabet' are:

A   B   C   D   E   F   G

Each of these pitch names can be modified by adding a sharp or flat sign. The sharp sign will raise the pitch by one semitone from its natural pitch. The flat sign will lower the pitch by one semitone from its natural pitch. To cancel either of these symbols, a natural sign is used. All three of these signs are known, collectively, as **accidentals**.

♭   ♮   ♯

FLAT   NATURAL   SHARP

It is important to note that when written in text, we say the pitch name followed by the accidental (i.e. B flat or F sharp). When written on the staff, the accidental will always appear before the actual note.

Each pitch has a place on the **staff**. A staff must include a **clef** to indicate the range in which the pitch should sound. Placing a note on the staff tells a performer which pitch should be played. In our school ensembles, four different clefs are used. Below is a list of the instruments which use each clef, along with a graphic of the clef itself.

Treble Clef	*Bass Clef*	*Alto Clef*	*Tenor Clef*
Flute (and piccolo)	Bassoon	Viola	Bassoon*
Oboe	Trombone		Trombone*
Clarinet	Euphonium		Cello*
Saxophone	Tuba		
Trumpet	Cello		
French Horn			
Violin			

*These instruments only use the tenor clef when the written pitch remains in a range above the bass clef.
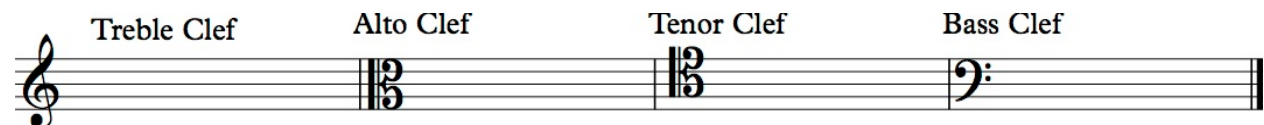
A. Enharmonic Names

Every pitch has the possibility of more than one name. Even though the sound of pitch doesn't change, its additional name(s) are called **enharmonic names**. For example, using the piano keyboard we would easily see that between the white keys called G and A, there exists a black key. That black key could be named G# or Ab because of its distance relative to the white keys.

B. Whole Tones vs. Semitones

The smallest distance between two pitches is a **semitone**. The distance of two semitones is called a **whole tone**. On a piano keyboard, you can identify a semitone by playing two immediately adjacent keys. Playing a semitone will sound like the famous opening to the theme song from *Jaws*. A whole tone will sound like the first two pitches of *Happy Birthday*.

Activity

1) Visit the website below and follow the links to the online lesson. Once you've completed the lesson, you can test yourself using the exercise trainer. **Be sure to customise the exercises to only include the clef you will use when playing your instrument.**

www.musictheory.net > LESSONS > The Staff, Clefs, and Ledger Lines

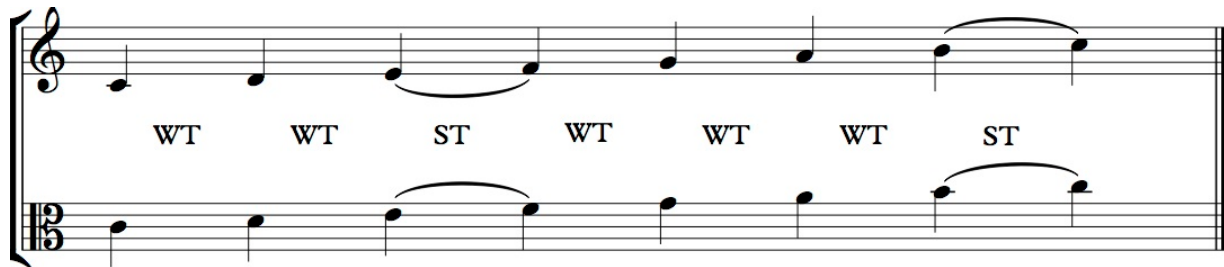www.musictheory.net > EXERCISES > Note Identification

2) Visit www.vtmusic.ca and download the Whole Tones vs. Semitones worksheet. If you play viola, be sure to download your instrument-specific worksheet. To check your work, ask a friend or attend one of the Friday *Theory Club* tutorials.

2. Major Scale Writing

A scale is a sequence of pitches, ascending or descending, that follow a pattern of semitones and whole tones. In this section, you are only required to demonstrate knowledge by writing Major and natural minor scales. Both of these scales require no modification to the sequence of pitches.

A **Major scale** will contain 8 pitches, exactly one octave in range. If the scale starts on C, it will continue up (or down) until you reach the next C.

Using your knowledge of semitones (ST) and whole tones (WT), you will be able to identify that a pattern of these exists in all Major scales. The pattern is shown below.

WT   WT   ST   WT   WT   WT   ST

Activity

Visit www.vtmusic.ca and download the Scale Writing Activity. To check your work, ask a friend or attend one of the Friday *Theory Club* tutorials.

3. Scale Degree Identification

There are two ways of identifying where a certain pitch fits into the scale of a given key. For our purposes, we will only learn the modern system using **scale degree numbers**. In the example below, you'll see a C Major scale with the scale degree number identified below. To ensure that others will understand how you use the numbers, you must always place a **caret** (^) above the number.

^   ^   ^   ^   ^   ^   ^   ^
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

To identify the first scale degree, you need to look at the name of the key. For example, in C Major, the first scale degree is C. This information will be useful in the next lesson, when you learn about triads.

Activity

Vist www.vtmusic.ca and complete the Scale Degree Identification worksheet. To check your work, ask a friend or attend one of the Friday *Theory Club* tutorials.

4. Major Triads

A **triad** is a collection of three pitches played simultaneously (harmonic) or in sequence (melodic). A **Major triad** is comprised of the first, third, and fifth scale degrees. We call this "spelling a chord". Triads can also be called **chords** and are used by composers to add musical interest accompanying a melody.

In the example, you will notice that melodic sounding of the triad does not always have to be in ascending or descending sequence.

Activity

1) Sing the figures notated in the example above. This will help your ear training and make it easier for you to identify what pitch you are playing in a given chord.

2) Vist www.vtmusic.ca and complete the Triad Scale Degree Identification worksheet. To check your work, ask a friend or attend one of the Friday *Theory Club* tutorials.

5. Rhythm

Rhythm is the manner in which sounds are organized. The **duration**, or value, of each note or rest must reflect **rhythmic accuracy** by individuals so that different musicians performing different parts maintain strong **rhythmic integrity**.

A. Note & Rest Values

Notes have relationships to each other in the same way as fractions. For example, eight 'eighths' OR four 'quarters' OR two 'halves' will make one 'whole'. We use the same words to describe note and rest values.

Whole note

Half note

Quarter note

Eighth note
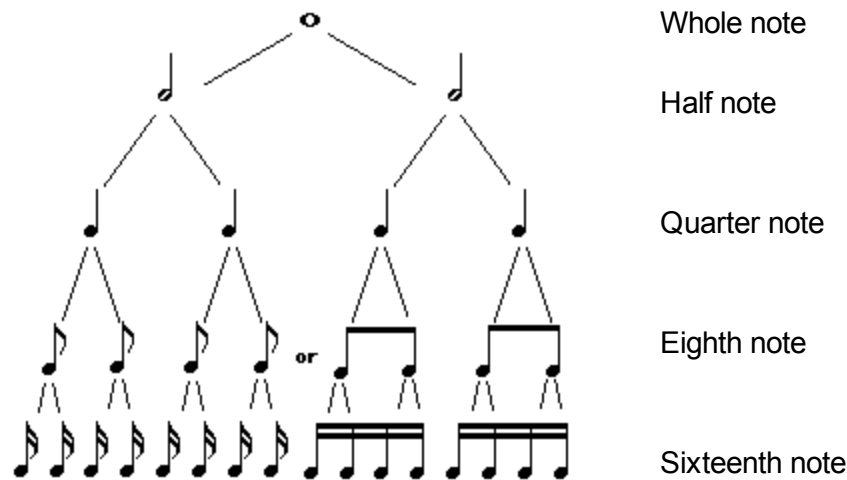
Sixteenth note

Similarly, rests have the same relationship as illustrated above. Observe in the example below the rests shown in sequence from whole rest to eighth rest. You aren't required to demonstrate knowledge of the sixteenth note or sixteenth rest in this level.
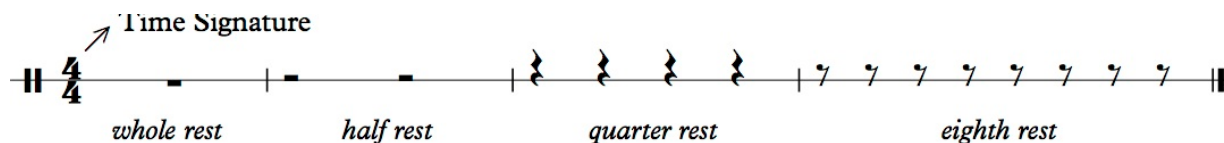
B. Time Signatures

The **time signature** identified in the example above is an important aspect of organizing music. The two numbers provide different information for us. The top number (*numerator*) tells us how many beats are in a single bar or measure. The bottom number (*denominator*) tells us what note value gets one beat.

To easily read a time signature, simply say it like a fraction. For example, a measure with a time signature of 3/8 consists of *three eighths*.

C. Counting System

Different musicians rely on different systems of counting their music. As a developing musician, you may have organized a way to count that brings you success. For the purpose of being able to communicate consistently amongst student-musicians at Van Tech, the following are examples of the counting system we will use to represent:

- duration of notes that sound
- duration of rests
- subdivision of each beat

It is absolutely true that the first beat in any measure of music will be represented by '1'. Look at the following examples as you come to understand the rules listed below.

Rule 1 - Duration of Notes that Sound
- *Use a regular (or larger) sized number or '+' symbol to identify beat or part of a beat on which the note begins to sound.*
- *Use smaller numbers or '+' symbols to identify that the note continues to sound until the end of its value.*

Rule 2 - Duration of Rests
- *Use parentheses to surround numbers or '+' symbols to identify the full duration of a rest.*

Rule 3 - Subdivision of Each Beat
- *In every measure, each eighth must be indicated by a number of '+' symbol to ensure that no part of a measure was left out.*
- *If a passage of music uses sixteenth notes or sixteenth rests, you must use the* '1 e + a' *pattern of counting.*

Activity

Vist www.vtmusic.ca and complete the Rhythmic Analysis worksheet. To check your work, ask a friend or attend one of the Friday *Theory Club* tutorials.

6. Italian Terms

Communicating in a common language is an important aspect of musicianship. Composers and performers use an efficient system of expressive terms when describing music or providing instructions for how the music should be interpreted. Most often, these terms are provided in Italian. Some composers like Mahler, Grainger, or Debussy are known to use German, English, and French terms. The list below will be tested on the Level IA Examination.

A. Tempo

Italian Term	English meaning
Grave	slow and solemn
Lento	slowly
Largo	broadly
Adagio	slow and stately
Andante	at a walking pace
Moderato	moderately
Allegro	lively and quick
Vivace	fast
Presto	very fast
L'istesso tempo	the same tempo
Accelerando	gradually faster
Ritardando	gradually slower
Rallentando	suddenly slower
Mosso	motion

B. Dynamics

pianissimo	very soft
piano	soft
mezzo piano	medium soft
mezzo forte	medium strong
forte	strong
fortissimo	very strong
crescendo	gradually stronger
decrescendo	gradually softer
diminuendo	diminishingly

C. General Use

meno	less
piu	more
poco a poco	little by little
subito	suddenly
da capo	the beginning
coda	ending
fine	the end