

Graduate Music History Entrance Exam Guide

When to take the exam

All students must take the Graduate Music History Entrance Exam before beginning their first semester of coursework. The exam will be made available online at midnight on Saturday, August 21, and must be completed by midnight on Friday, August 27.

Students who pass the exam with a score of 70% or higher may enroll directly in MUSC 611 Studies in Music History in the spring of the first year of study or in the fall or spring semesters of the second year of study. Students who do not pass the exam initially will be given the opportunity to re-take the exam during the following winter session. The music history faculty will provide these students with guided review materials during the academic year.

Taking the Exam

The exam typically takes about 2-3 hours to complete, and consists of four sections. Logistical information for taking the exam will be circulated closer to the date, but please plan to have access to a working computer, including being able to hear sound, and an internet connection.

The first two sections consist of listening examples and score identification. For each of the listening examples and score examples you will be asked a series of guided questions exploring questions of era, style/genre, and composer.

The third section contains objective-style questions. Questions may focus on definitions of technical terms, forms, instruments, musical concepts, etc. Additionally, you may be asked about composers, works, sources, chronologies, and important historical factors that contributed to the development of western music. This section will cover material drawn from the medieval period through to the late 20th century.

The final section requires that you write two substantial essays. You will be given three essay prompts and asked to choose two. Each of the essay prompts will require that you address an overarching historical or aesthetic idea and apply it to specific composers, stylistic developments, and repertoire drawn from at least three different historical periods and genres. Your essay should demonstrate a familiarity with the material involved and an ability to express that knowledge in a clear and thoughtful manner.

Preparing for the Exam

You may wish to purchase or check out a book or two to assist you in preparing for the exam. Any music history text will give you an overview of each era, who the major composers were, and what types of pieces were composed. There are several paperback books on the market, e.g., Milo Wold's "An Outline History of Western Music," or "Studying Music History" (2nd edition) by David Poultney. In addition, the learning tools for Peter Burkholder's "A History of Western Music" are a very helpful resource (<https://digital.wwnorton.com/hwm10>). It will also be useful for you to review scores and pieces that you know well, paying attention to the elements that would allow you to recognize other pieces by that composer or of that era.