

Preparing for and taking ABRSM music theory exams

Each Music Theory paper carries a total of 100 marks, 66 are required to achieve a pass, 80 to receive a merit and 90 for a distinction.

In the Music Theory papers at Grades 1–5 many of the questions test multiple aspects of the syllabus, and the answers are often right or wrong.

Prepare early by paying attention during lessons and completing all homework set. Music theory is a knowledge building process and in order to understand the next step you need to understand the current, and previous, ones.

After you have studied and think you know the topics for each grade, practice them under test conditions. Make use of past papers and see if you can finish them in the allotted time for the exam.

- Decide on your question order. Some people like to start with the topic they know best to give them a good start, because with one question completed, they can relax a little.
- Read through the whole exam so that you know what is expected of you.
- Make sure you are answering the question that is being asked.
- Underline the key words in the question.
- Identify the main topic of the particular question.
- Remember to pace yourself. If you get stuck on a topic move on and come back to it later. When you are finished, recheck all your work.
Neatness makes it much easier to recheck.

The stress of working under time constraints in an exam room can make all your hard preparation work disappear. Often students know how to solve a problem, but they misread or misinterpret the question itself.

If your mind goes blank put your pen down, take a deep breath, sit back and relax for a moment. If you're in the middle of an answer, read through what you have written so far. If you really can't progress with this answer, leave it and come back to it. Answers may well come back to you when you are less anxious.

If you are running out of time, look at the questions you have left to answer and divide up your remaining time to cover them.