

# Harmony, Counterpoint and Keyboard Skills I

## MUSIC 173 (Spring 2026)

Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays

09:00 – 09:50

Rm. 353

**“Persevere, do not only practice your art, but endeavor also to fathom its inner meanings;  
it deserves this effort.”**

**Beethoven, July 17, 1812; letter to Emilie M.**

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class open forum address: [173@lists.ursatz.com](mailto:173@lists.ursatz.com)

### Supplies (bring with you to all classes)

Textbook:

Harmony and Voice Leading (4th Edition). Edward Aldwell & Carl Schachter. REQUIRED  
(ISBN: 0-4951-8975-8). 5th edition is also acceptable (ISBN: 978-1337560573).

Counterpoint in Composition. Felix Salzer & Carl Schachter. (ISBN-10: 023107039X) OPTIONAL

*The textbook(s) will be shown to the teacher in the second week of the class.*

Other:

Music paper; pencil with eraser. You may not use writing implements other than pencils.  
Homework, quizzes, or exams done in anything except pencil will not be marked and will receive a failing grade.

### Grading

This course consists of two components: harmony and counterpoint, and keyboard skills. You will earn one grade for harmony and counterpoint and one grade for keyboard skills. The harmony and counterpoint component will count as 65%, and the keyboard component will count as 35%, of your final grade. Thus, if you earn an 85 in harmony and counterpoint, but a 75 in keyboard, your final grade would be  $(85 \times .65) + (75 \times .35) = 55.25 + 26.25 = 81.5$ .

Each component will be graded in the following manner:

Homework assignments, quizzes, participation (see below): 50%

Midterm exam: 20%

Final exam: 30%

Participation: [see Attendance Policy, below]

As a matter of policy, I drop the lowest harmony and voice leading quiz or homework grade.

Final letter grades are assigned according to the following scale:

A+ = 97-100	A = 93-96	A- = 90-92	D+ = 67-69	D = 63-66	D- = 60-62
B+ = 87-89	B = 83-86	B- = 80-82	F = 0-59		
C+ = 77-79	C = 73-76	C- = 70-72			

Weekly keyboard assignment grades convert letters to the highest associated number for calculation purposes (A+ = 100; A = 96; A- = 92; B+ = 89; etc.) except for F, which will convert to 0.

Theory course material is presented in three forms: textbook readings, handouts/downloads, and lectures. You are responsible for all material, regardless of the medium of presentation. It is of utmost importance that you bring music paper to class and *take notes*. In the event that you are absent for a lecture, be sure to get the notes for that class from a classmate.

**Please note that homework assignments will be posted on my website in the "courses" section. I do not accept late homework if the assignment is available to the student (e.g., via download), even if the student was absent when the assignment was given. Please see "Homework Policy," below, for additional information.**

FAILURE TO APPEAR FOR YOUR MIDTERM or FINAL EXAMINATIONS WILL RESULT IN A FAILURE OF MUS 173 (regardless of your average).

***ACSM policy mandates that an overall grade of C- or better, as well as passing grades (minimum of D) in both written and keyboard work, is required in order to continue to the next course in the sequence.***

***Per this policy, a student whose final average is C- or higher, but who does not have at least a D in either written theory or keyboard will receive a final grade of F.***

## Calculations

All written work is graded mathematically. The following is a partial list of errors to be on the listen for in written work; more severe infractions are in *italics*.

### COUNTERPOINT

#### DISSONANCE

- Downbeat dissonance in 1, 2, 3 species*
- Non-passing dissonance in 2 species
- Chromaticism in major*
- Direct chromaticism in minor*
- Skip from a dissonance
- Skip to a dissonance*
- Melodic dissonance
- Outlined dissonance
- Dissonant climax

#### VOICE LEADING

- Parallel perfect 1, 5, 8
- Antiparallel 1, 5, 8
- Disalloweed direct 1, 5, 8 (e.g., beats 3-1 in 3spc)
- Incorrect rhythm*
- Voice crossing (per instance)
- Intrusive voice overlapping
- Sequence (per ex. after first statement)
- Intrusive simultaneous skips
- Ottava battuta and the like
- Melodic subdivision (3spc)
- Multiple skips in a row (per incident after 2nd)
- Intrusive skip in similar dir. as preceding motion
- Trill; near-trill ("noodling")
- Missing #7 at cadence
- Excessive stepwise motion (no variety)
- Excessive consecutive par 3rds, 6ths
- Large leap not filled in sufficiently
- Multiple ties/repeated tones (1spc)
- Missing tie on repeated note (1spc)

### INTERVALS

- Incorrect opening interval*
- Incorrect closing interval*
- Non-allowed unisons
- Excessive harmonic interval range

### HARMONY, VOICE LEADING, FIG. BASS REALIZATION, GENERAL

- Incorrect notation*  
*including, but not limited to:*
  - Incorrect stemming
  - wrong note values
  - misplaced accidentals
- Doubled 7th or leading tone*
- Use of chord not in directions*
- Parallel perfect 1, 5, 8
- Contrapuntal ending
- Not starting/ending on tonic
- Incorrect diss leaps or
  - extended bass embellishment (e.g., trill)
- Syntactic error (e.g., V<sup>7</sup> – V)
- Harmonic syncopation
- Non-resolution of diss
- Incorrect resolution of diss
- Voice overlap
- Voice crossing
- Incorrect spacing
- Misspelling
- Intrusive similar motion to a 5th or 8ve
- Intrusive antiparallel 8ves
- Adding to the figure*
- Missing note required by figures
- Note out of range
- Missing a voice

Unless otherwise specified, all chords *must* be labeled with Roman Numerals and figures in chorale work.

## **Material Covered / Course Objectives**

MUS 173 is an introductory course in Harmony, Counterpoint, and Keyboard Skills. Procedures of four-part writing are introduced, and students learn the basic elaborations of the tonic-dominant relationship. Work is done in un/figured bass realization, chorale settings, Roman numeral and formal analysis, species counterpoint, and keyboard exercises.

As this course is dependent on mastery of fundamentals of theory material (MUS 73), I reserve the right to give regular fundamentals quizzes. These quizzes are timed and cover basic material which should have been mastered previously. This material includes, but is not limited to, identifying and writing: key signatures, intervals, triads, 7th chords, and scale degrees.

## **Quiz Policy**

A student who is absent when any quiz is given must schedule a time to take an *equivalent* quiz within one week of the original quiz date. *It is the student's responsibility to arrange the make-up quiz.* Failure to take a quiz will result in a grade of "0" being entered for the quiz.

## **Participation / Attendance Policy**

Class attendance is expected of all students.

Students are expected to show up to class on time. A 2-point reduction on the student's final grade will result for every 2 instances of tardiness.

Students will be allowed to make-up two class days' worth of in-class performance assignments (i.e., keyboard exercises) in total. Make-up work must be done within a week of the original due date. *It is the student's responsibility to arrange the make-up performance.* Any additional missed keyboard assignments will receive a grade of 0 (zero) and opportunity to make up the assignment will not be granted.

You will hear people say, "practice makes perfect." This is not true. Practice makes *permanent*. If you are having difficulties with practicing, understanding how to properly prepare, etc., it is incumbent upon you to seek help (via an office hour and/or through the tutoring offered by the school).

## **Academic Honesty**

Students are expected to adhere to the college's Academic Integrity policies.

A copy of those policies may be found here:

<https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/legal-affairs/policies-procedures/academic-integrity-policy/>

Students may (and should) write in fingering, analysis, counting, etc. on prepared keyboard assignments. Students may *not* write in the names of notes in any form (e.g., letters, solfege syllables, etc.) on prepared keyboard assignments.

## Americans with Disabilities Act

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Office of Accessibility Services (OAS), Kiely 171; (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of classes.

For more information about services available to Queens College students, contact the Office of Accessibility Services (OAS) at 718-997-5870.

For exams, please note:

If you are entitled to special services accommodations, you must request them with their office **at least one week prior to the exam.**

If they don't hear from you (and, subsequently, I don't hear from them), *you will have forfeited your accommodation for the exam* and will need to take it during the scheduled time.

## In-Class Technology Policy

Students are expected to have cell phones, digital cameras, laptops, etc. put away during class time (though they may be kept on). During quizzes and exams, these devices are to be put away and *turned off*.

NO so-called "wearable" computers (e.g., Apple Watch™) are allowed to be used in the classroom.

Audio recordings of the class are permitted. Please inform the instructor if you are doing this.

NO videos may be taken during class. Videos taken in class will result in failure on all work for that day (first offence) or failure of the course (second offence).

Photographs of the material on the board may be taken *with the permission of the instructor.*

This permission must be acquired for each instance. The taking of photographs without permission will result in failure on all work for that day (first offence) or failure of the course (second offence).

## Email

Students are *strongly* encouraged to enter my email address and the class open forum address into their email address book and/or on their "safe list." Notifications from ISPs that legitimate emails sent from me or the class open forum have been tagged as spam will result in the removal of the student's address from the open forum list. This could result in missing important class announcements, for which I take no responsibility.

STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO CHECK THEIR EMAIL REGULARLY.

## **Homework Policy**

If the student is PRESENT when the assignment is due and fails to hand in the homework, it will NOT be accepted late.

If a student is ABSENT on the day the assignment is due, the student MAY hand in the assignment at the next class. If the student is absent at the next class, they must make arrangements to have the homework handed in (for example, give it to a friend to hand in; you may also scan it into a computer and send it, or make special arrangements with me).

Regardless of absence or presence, no homework will be accepted three or more class days after the due date.

THIS HOMEWORK POLICY WILL BE *STRICTLY* ADHERED TO.

## **SOME IMPORTANT DATES**

### **NO CLASS:**

Feb 12 (Thu)	Lincoln's BD
Feb 17 (Tue)	Washington's BD
Mar 20 (Fri)	No Class
Apr 02 (Thu)	Spring Break
Apr 03 (Fri)	Spring Break
Apr 07 (Tue)	Spring Break
Apr 09 (Thu)	Spring Break

### **LAST CLASS OF THE SEMESTER:**

May 19 (Tue)

### **MIDTERM EXAM:**

Mar 19 (Thu): Written Theory

Mar 27 (Fri): Keyboard

### **FINAL EXAM:**

May 15 (Fri): Keyboard

May 16-24 (exact date/time TBA): Written Theory

### **PLEASE NOTE:**

April 21 (Tuesday) follows a Thursday schedule, but this does not affect us in this class.

## THE POWER OF A ZERO

Many people don't realize the havoc a single zero can wreak on an average. Sure, they can figure out the basic math, but it still doesn't quite sink in what it all means. Let's have a look . . .

For simplicity, let's say we are looking at only one aspect of a grade (for example, your "homework" grade).

If you are given two homework assignments and you do a perfect job on the first one, but don't hand in the second one, your grade is cut in half:

from 100% (A+) to 50% (F).

Things don't get much better if you are given three assignments and you ace two, but don't hand in the third. The grade shift:

from 100% (A+) to 66.67% (D).

Indeed, to get that average back up to the "A" range, you would need:

9 *perfect* papers just to get a 90% (A-)

What do you need to get the full letter back?

28 *perfect* papers will get you to 96.55% (A+)

What do you need to statistically get the 100% average back?

198 *perfect* papers!!!!

And, Nota Bene, *all* of the papers to make up for the *single* zero need to be perfect (100%).

## DO YOUR HOMEWORK

## A FEW WORDS TO CONSIDER

**JIM NEGLIA, noted contractor (NJ Symphony, The Who, Jacksonville Symphony, Hugh Jackman, etc.):**

"Some are curious how musicians get added to my 'hire' list. Generally speaking, I hear about other talented musicians from colleagues and conductors. Getting on my list by a solid reference is not the real challenge; staying on my list requires some doing, however. How does one remain on my hiring list? There is an easy answer to that question: **don't be a jerk and impossible to work with; don't be needy; don't be unreasonable; don't make more work for me; be on time, smile, and as I like to say, play nice in the sandbox.** That is the secret of getting and staying on my list."

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**HARLAN ELLISON:**

"As a writer of matters fantastic and as a critic of the field, I get a lot of mail, and they are filled with opinions. Everybody has opinions: I have them, you have them. And we are all told from the moment we open our eyes, that everyone is entitled to his or her opinion. Well, that's horsepuckey, of course. We are not entitled to our opinions; we are entitled to our *informed* opinions. Without research, without background, without understanding, it's nothing. It's just bubble-babble."

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**DAVID BOWIE:**

"A discipline doesn't mean that you make sure that you have breakfast at eight o'clock in the morning and you are out of the house by half past eight. A discipline is...if you conceive some thing, then you decide whether or not it's worth following through, and if it's worth following through then you follow it through to its logical conclusion, and do it...to the best of your ability. That's a discipline, yes?"

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**LUDWIG van BEETHOVEN:**

"Persevere, do not only practice your art, but endeavor also to fathom its inner meanings; *it deserves this effort.*"\*

\* Beethoven wrote this in a July 17, 1812 letter to a little girl, Emilie M., in response to a fan letter she had written him.

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**W. A. MOZART (purported remark to *Don Giovanni* conductor, Jan Křtitel Kuchař):**

"It is a mistake to think that the practice of my art has become easy to me. I assure you, dear friend, no one has given so much care to the study of composition as I. There is scarcely a famous master in music whose works I have not frequently and diligently studied."

**HARRY NILSSON:**

"Now I would like to spend a few minutes talking about song construction, which is one of the most important parts of song-writing... First of all, in construction, I might say that you have to get to know your song. You got to take it apart, put it back together again; keep it clean, because some day in combat it might save your life."

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**JOHN PAUL JONES:**

"I just keep listening....In composition, and playing to a certain extent, everything is really—at a basic level—about questions and answers. You have musical questions and you need to find the answers to them; This is especially true of composition, that's what it's all about. Things like, 'how does the piece start?' 'Then what happens?' 'Then what happens?' And so what you'll do is you'll get a musical idea, then you have to realize it. And in the realization it's just questions and answers. 'How does it finish?' 'What will make it interesting now that we've done this for a little while?'....All music has the same questions and answers; it doesn't matter what type it is, it's still—whether it's Pygmy music, a Mongolian Nose flute—it's still, like, 'how do I present a musical idea? How do you have tension and release' and so on. It's all there. And you can very often hear how other people and other musics and other styles answer these same questions. And whilst you might not incorporate a salsa lick, you think, 'Ah! I like the way, you know, to raise the tension, they've just not used the root; they've just used the third.' Or, 'they've not played the downbeat.' And all this can come in useful as sort of reference material for your own questions, for your own music. And so I think it's VERY important to listen to everything that's out there. It's one thing I do tell young musicians is don't close your ears to music you don't know."

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**In re CHARLES IVES:**

"Moreover, having pursued the full implications of play, Charlie was urged by father 'not to stop when it got hard.' The permissive father displays a strong hand only in insisting that you know how to do it 'right' before you are permitted to do it 'wrong' and that, having been adventurous ('roam for fun'), you not retreat fearfully but 'stick it to the end.' He makes it clear that all this is in the service of something beyond play—namely, the musical idea: there had to be 'some sense behind it.' What the student sought did not have to be conventional or thought out at the outset ('maybe not very much or too good a sense, but something more than just thoughtless fooling'). Above all, he had not to accept rules blindly. The conditions for innovation were created by George for Charlie, an ideally responsive student. Permission, play, and perseverance were important elements."\*

\* from Stuart Feder's "Charles Ives: My Father's Song: A Psychoanalytic Biography." The quotes within are direct from Ives himself.

While my philosophy of teaching is rather complex, it can most easily be summarized by the following seven broad, interrelated topics: The Study of Music Must Encourage Musical Processes; Teach for Distance: Teach Via Principles and Examples, Not Via "Rules;" Avoid Issuing Fiats or Leaning on Rote Learning; Incorporate an Integration of Elements; Nurture Students by Encouraging Curiosity, Imagination, and Enthusiasm; Avoid Rigidity for Its Own Sake: The Teacher as Student; Engage All Students as Musicians, Future Audience Members, and Patrons

### The Study of Music Must Encourage Musical Processes

Too often students in ear training and theory courses are left wondering what the connection is between their coursework and the music they are studying. I work hard to help students understand this connection. In a relaxed, supportive atmosphere, students learn to keep tempi steady, to keep going if they make a mistake, to work with others in ensemble-like situations, etc. The relation to their instrumental or vocal work is both obvious and important.

### Teach for Distance: Teach Via Principles and Examples, Not Via "Rules"

Theory is, by its nature, a study of tendencies. Frequently, students are given ad-hoc lists of purported rules to follow in their exercises. It is pedagogically more fruitful—and musically more sound—not to teach these as independent rules, but as aspects of larger principles, thus placing them in their proper context and giving them their proper weight. Such a pedagogical approach has the added benefits of being more versatile and more readily comprehensible. Further, the careful study of the literature to illustrate concepts is important. This can be done at all stages of study and examples must be chosen carefully to render clear the concept(s) discussed.

While it is important to control the flow of information to students carefully so that they do not become confused or get ahead of themselves, it is important not to impart principles that will be contradicted or refuted by later information—what I call "teaching for distance." The knowledge should build one thing upon another.

### Avoid Issuing Fiats or Leaning on Rote Learning

Students generally learn best when they understand the reasons behind the principles they are learning, and they should learn to question things judiciously. One must encourage students to come to conclusions about music, conclusions rooted in the musical investigations that form the substance of musical coursework. Even lessons which must be committed completely to memory, even if ultimately by rote, should not be presented just as a command ("learn these"), but rather as lessons which integrate their meaning into a larger picture.

### Incorporate an Integration of Elements

The study of music involves widespread cross-pollination of creative ideas, technical and historical information, stylistic insights, etc. For example, through such simple means as asking a student in an ear training class that has been assigned a melody in E-flat Major which Beethoven Symphony is in that key, the students start to see the larger picture in their studies and to understand how things relate to each other. They become aware that they are required to know works that do not involve their instrument. And the idea that theory or sight singing or dictation is somehow separate from their personal musical experience becomes an increasingly absurd idea to them.

### Nurture Students by Encouraging Curiosity, Imagination, and Enthusiasm

To bring out the best in students, one must create an atmosphere where students' enthusiasm is encouraged and lauded. The skillful use of one's curiosity and imagination is not merely a good learning practice; it is a musical practice. Students' performances and analyses should be governed by the controlled use of ear training, knowledge, imagination, and conceptualization; musical teaching should be geared towards increasing students' skills in these areas.

### Avoid Rigidity for Its Own Sake: The Teacher as Student

Malleability in pedagogical approaches is essential. By this I do not mean that one should not have clear ideas or techniques to draw upon, or that one should not have firm beliefs, as should be obvious from the foregoing remarks. Rather, a teacher who cannot or will not continually look for new ways to explain things, for ways to clarify concepts, for ways to keep students engaged, is not executing the duties inherent in the position of a teacher.

### Engage All Students as Musicians, Future Audience Members, and Patrons

The job of a teacher is to foster students' understanding, love, and appreciation for music. While one would like to think that all students will be engaged as performers and scholars, it is important to maintain the enthusiasms of those who will be pursuing alternative career paths. As no one has clairvoyance in these matters, one must regard all students first as musicians, but also as future audience members and patrons. If we do not encourage those who have expressed interest in the arts, whom do we expect to support those arts?