

MUSIC 171 (Fall 2026)

Sight Singing and Dictation I

Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays 11:10 – 12:00 PM

Rm. 353

Instructor: Dr. Eric Chernov

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Office hours: Fridays, 10:00-11:00 *and by appointment.*

Supplies:

Textbooks: Berkowitz, Fontrier, Kraft. et al. A New Approach to Sight Singing. Seventh Edition.
New York: W. W. Norton & Co Inc. (ISBN: 978-1324071563)

Other: Staff paper, pencil(s), eraser(s).

A working, portable metronome will be shown to the teacher no later than the end of the second week of classes. This does not need to be brought to every class but will be an integral part of the students' weekly homework.

GRADING

This course consists of two components: Dictation and Sight Singing.

You will get a separate grade for each component, which is then averaged as follows:

Sight Singing (and other performed work) counts for 66.67% (two thirds) of the grade.

Dictation work counts for 33.33% (one third) of the grade.

The grade for *each* component of the course will be assessed as follows:

Homework assignments and in-class work: 65%

Mid-term exam: 15%

Final exam: 20%

Participation: [see Attendance Policy, below]

Thus, if you make an 88 in ear training, but an 80 in dictation, your final grade would be:

$(88 \times .6667) + (80 \times .3333) = 58.6696 + 26.664 = 85.3336$

Final letter grades are assigned according to the following scale:

A+ = 97-100

B+ = 87-89

C+ = 77-79

D+ = 67-69

F = 0-59

A = 93-96

B = 83-86

C = 73-76

D = 63-66

A- = 90-92

B- = 80-82

C- = 70-72

D- = 60-62

Weekly sight singing (and other performed) 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.

FAILURE TO APPEAR FOR YOUR MIDTERM or FINAL EXAMINATIONS WILL RESULT IN A FAILURE OF MUS 171 (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** sight singing and dictation, are 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 sight singing or dictation will receive a final grade of F.

CLASS POLICIES

Solfege:

The writing in of solfege syllables on any music is strictly prohibited.

Students who have used books with syllables written in should see me immediately to discuss rectifying the situation.

Syllable writing-in may consist of any of the following:

a full syllable (for example, "La"), an abbreviation (for example, "L"),

a syllable written-in and then erased, or even a syllable using another alphabet (for example, Cyrillic (л), Greek (λ), Hebrew (ל), etc.)

Students with syllables written in will receive a zero (0) on the assignment.

The writing in of letters (note names) on music is also prohibited.

Students **may** (and **SHOULD**) write other things on their music, however.
(For example: fingerings, countings, analytical markings, etc.)

Homework:

Please note that homework assignments will be posted on my website in the "courses" section.

Sight singing is a *performance* class, meant to impart good performance practices.

There is no excuse for not being prepared. See attendance policy, below, for more details.

Attendance:

Attendance will be taken at every class. Students will be allowed 4 unexcused absences from MUS 171.

In general, students will have a week to prepare the *prepared* assignments, with Tuesdays being devoted mainly to melodic material and Thursdays being devoted mainly to sing-and-plays.

Sight singing is a *performance* class, meant to impart good performance habits.

As such, the following attendance policies should be noted:

Students will be allowed to make up 2 missed sing-and-play assignments. These must be made up within a week of the original due date. *It is the student's responsibility to arrange the make-up appointment.* Sing-and-plays which do not get made up will be marked as a "0" in the grade book. Any additional missed sing-and-play assignments beyond the 2 in which make-ups are allowed will be marked as a "0" in the grade book. In short, the student is responsible for, and will receive a grade for, *all* sing-and-plays.

Except for the above sing-and-play policy, a student who is absent will not have an opportunity to perform the missed material. There will not be a failing grade entered for other missed material; there will simply be fewer grades in the book to calculate the homework average.

Students are expected to show up to class *on time*.

A 2-point reduction on the student's *final* course grade will result for every 2 instances of tardiness.

MATERIALS COVERED

MUS 171 covers the various first sections of the textbook. It is an introductory course in ear training consisting of solfège, sight-singing, prepared singing assignments, rhythmic studies, some basic conducting (as well as the combination of these), keyboard development, and dictation. There is a heavy emphasis in the first semester of the sequence (i.e., MUS 171) on technique.

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 write in fingerings, analysis, counting, etc. on assignments. Students may *not* write in the names of notes in any form (e.g., letters, solfège syllables, etc.) on 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 into their email address book and/or on their "safe list." Notifications from ISPs that legitimate emails sent from me have been tagged as spam could result in missing important class announcements, for which I take no responsibility. **STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO CHECK THEIR EMAIL REGULARLY.**

Queens College Classroom Photography and Recording Policy

Neither photographs nor recordings (audio or video) of all or parts of classes at Queens College may be made without written permission from the course instructor(s).

The Office of Student Affairs and the Office of Special Services may provide for the recording of classes on behalf of a student receiving disability accommodations, missing class due to religious beliefs, or experiencing extended absence due to medical or other exigent circumstances.

The Queens College Classroom Photography and Recording Policy applies to both students and visitors. Students and visitors are not authorized to copy, download, or disseminate authorized recordings and photographs to others. Students in violation of this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, and visitors in violation of this policy are subject to removal from the classroom and/or campus.

SOME IMPORTANT DATES

NO CLASS:

Sep 11 (Fri)	Rosh Hashanah
Oct 13 (Tue)	Monday Schedule
Nov 26 (Thu)	Thanksgiving
Nov 27 (Fri)	Thanksgiving

LAST CLASS OF THE SEMESTER:

Dec 11 (Fri)

MIDTERM EXAM:

Oct 15 (Thu): Sight Singing
Oct 16 (Fri): Dictation

FINAL EXAM:

Dec 11 (Fri): Dictation
Dec 15-21 (exact date/time TBA): Sight Singing

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."

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 bibble-babble."

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?"

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.

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."

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."

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?