

[Close](#)

for Educators

[CLICK TO PRINT PAGE](#) 

Here is the article in a print-friendly format. [Click the button above to print this page.](#)

Music Theory: Tips for Becoming Test Wise

by Michael Levi
College of Saint Rose
Albany, New York

General Tips for Your Students

1. Read the questions *carefully* and *completely*
 - a. look for key phrases
 - all of the following EXCEPT
 - which of the following is NOT changed
 - which of the following IS changed
 - which IS true
 - which is NOT true
 - b. underline or highlight important words
 - c. reread the questions -- be patient and careful
 - d. analyze the written music in question AHEAD of time
 - e. feel free to mark in the test booklet as needed
2. Don't forget to fill in the bubble answer sheet if you are marking in the test booklet.
3. Check and compare similarities and differences in answer choices.
4. If you don't understand a question, see if the answer choices help you to figure it out.
5. The questions in a set are generally in the same order as the events in the music.
6. Don't rush or overlook the first question in a group.
7. Don't take a break during repeated playings of excerpts; always be checking.
8. When a question is finished, put it out of your mind. Go on to the next set.
9. Don't second guess yourself. When you change answers, you might go from right to wrong.
10. ALL Section I questions are of EQUAL value and weight.
11. Don't guess unless you can definitely eliminate at least one of the answer choices. There is a penalty for wrong answers.
12. Sit so that you can hear BOTH speakers.

Section I Part A -- Multiple Choice -- Aural Stimulus

1. Be aware of how many playings you get per question or set of questions.
2. Sing to yourself in your head any printed music in a question.
 - a. try to memorize or internalize a portion of the excerpt
 - b. note similarities and differences in answer choices

3. Internalize KEY portions of the recorded excerpts.
4. See if you hear something that is familiar to you. If not, what is different?

5. On the "Find the Mistakes" question set, have a strategy for listening and for marking the music. For example, circle the measure numbers mentioned in the questions. Listen to the top voice on the first playing and the bottom voice on the second. Mark measures with a P (for pitch) or R (for rhythm) as you discover errors.

Copyright © 2008 collegeboard.com, Inc.

Section I Part B -- Multiple Choice -- No Aural Stimulus

1. This section is timed. Answer all the questions you know well the first time through. Go back to the more lengthy or difficult questions later.
2. Pace yourself. You may want to page through this part quickly before you start. Don't get stuck and run out of time.
3. On the score analysis sets, glance over the questions before you study the score.

Section II -- Free Response

1. Melodic Dictation -- be aware of how many playings and what instrument.
 - a. have a strategy; for example, get beginning and ending on first playing -- SING the melody to yourself in your head
 - b. expect the playing to go by very quickly
2. Harmonic Dictation -- may not always start or end on tonic chord.
 - a. have a strategy; for example, listen carefully for cadences -- not always authentic
 - b. majority of points are given for correct soprano and bass notes
 - c. put down information for all notes and chords -- partial credit is given
 - d. between playings, you may want to sing the soprano or bass line in your head
3. Scoring is ADDITIVE -- you get credit for right answers; incorrect information is ignored.
4. Figured Bass
 - a. have a strategy; for example, spell chords first
 - b. you only get credit for voice leading if the chords are spelled right
 - c. remember to raise leading tone in minor
 - d. remember to check your work
5. Composition Question
 - a. sing the given melody to yourself in your head
 - b. analyze by beat, not necessarily by note -- don't harmonize passing tones
 - c. not every note needs a chord
 - d. think phrases and cadences -- work backward from cadence
 - e. keep contrary motion in mind
 - f. expect secondary dominants and/or deceptive cadences
 - g. stay away from iii, vii and 6/4 chords
 - h. Keep it simple! Less is usually more.
6. Sight Singing -- Make sure to practice recording before the exam, if possible with the equipment that will be used.
 - a. look at key signature and clef and meter signature -- determine if it's a major or minor melody
 - b. look at starting and ending notes; are they tonic?
 - c. don't stop once you begin, points are deducted for hesitation
 - d. pick an appropriate range and tempo
 - e. practice and do it OUT LOUD
 - f. use the system you know best
 - g. write in the book if you wish
 - h. breathe anywhere; phrasing is NOT graded
 - i. hold all notes for their FULL value
 - j. don't forget: one melody will be in treble clef and one in bass clef; one melody will be in major and one in minor