

How to get a **distinction** at Grade One Theory

Well done - you have decided to take Grade One Theory. When you take a practical music examination there is usually just you and the examiner in the room. For a theory exam there may be up to twenty people in the same room as you and you never get to meet the examiner! At the beginning of the examination, the invigilator will talk to you about what will happen in the next 1½ hours and remind you to put your sticky name label at the top of the paper. When s/he says you can start, don't pick your pencil up, but read through all the paper. Starting with the easiest question, write your answer down and then check it. Have you answered the question that was asked and not the one you think was asked? Have you answered it fully? Is your answer written neatly? When you have answered all the questions, have a short rest before you check all your answers again. If you write anything on the rough paper, make sure you later copy it neatly onto the question paper as well. Very occasionally you may be asked a question you think you have not tackled before. Think carefully, as you will still answer it correctly and fully if you take your time and check your answer thoroughly.

The questions on your examination paper will fall into three main categories:

Rhythm Pitch an Extract of Music

Questions on Rhythm:

What's the time signature?

A good way to check your answer is to look not just at the first bar of the question but the others as well. If you still get the same answer, then you're probably right. There are only three possible answers at Grade One:

Grouping notes together (beaming)?

Think in crotchet beats here. For most papers it seems that you count up the dotted quavers, quavers and semiquavers and join them up if they add up to one crotchet beat. One other rule hasn't popped up recently, but it is important - if there are four quavers next to each other you can join them up unless they make up the 2nd/3rd beats of a 4/4 piece. Here you would only join them up in pairs.

Four bar rhythm to finish?

This is easier than it looks at first and should be thought out on the rough paper. The vital question is: *What is the time signature?* Everything you compose in the two blank bars needs to add up to the top number - 2, 3 or 4. The resources you need to use include a small valued rest, a dotted rhythm and a tie across a bar line. It is a good idea to base the third bar on the first bar. You could simply swap the components of the bar around, eg if the first bar is crotchet, dotted quaver and semiquaver, make the third bar dotted quaver, semiquaver and crotchet. Remember if there is a dotted crotchet and quaver in the first bar, keep them next to each other when you swap them around. For the fourth bar, always end with a crotchet and, using the resources mentioned above, make sure you have the correct number of beats in the bar. Perhaps if they have given a dotted rhythm already, you can compose a shorter or longer valued one: they have written dotted crotchet + quaver, you could write dotted quaver + semiquaver. You are trying to achieve a balance between variety of new material with similarity to the given material.

If you get stuck for ideas, don't panic! Have a look for ideas in other questions such as naming keys, adding rests/time signatures etc. Some people get full marks for this question. It is possible for you to too.

Adding missing rests?

First of all check the time signature - is it 2, 3 or 4 crotchet beats in a bar? Work out carefully how many beats you have in the bar, taking this number away from the top number of the time signature. Remember if the bar has no notes in it at all, you will always use a semibreve rest - whether it is 2, 3 or 4 time.

Drawing specific notes/rests?

This really relies on you remembering all the notes/rests and how many beats each is worth! If you have to draw several notes it is tidier to draw them all in the same space/line. If you're not too sure about something, don't worry! Have a good look at some of the other questions - it's fairly likely that there will be a good mixture of notes/rests and that might help you to remember how to draw the correct item. The Semibreve rest is worth 4 beats and hangs from the 4th line. The Minim rest sits on the Middle line. The Crotchet rest is a Curly shape. A semibreve rest is always used (no matter what the time signature) if there are no notes in a bar.

Missing bar lines?

Check the time signature, then remembering the time values for each note/rest, count up the correct number of beats and draw the line.

Having read through this Page, you may want to read some of the other Pages which discuss written notation or talk to John if there are one or two things you can't easily recall.

If you have worked hard over a period of several months you should remember everything. Make sure you take your sticky name label, two pencils, a sharpener, a rubber and a ruler. Within six weeks of taking the exam, you will have a certificate and mark form that you can proudly show to your family and friends. Go for it!