

Composition Comprehensive Exam Guide

University of Missouri School of Music
(last update: March 2025)

I. Goals and Purpose of the Exam

The candidate will be expected to demonstrate an understanding of tonal and post-tonal compositional techniques including the analysis of harmony, form, rhythm, and orchestration through sight-singing, keyboard skills, and score identification.

II. Advance Assignments - the candidate will complete each of the Qualifying Skills privately with faculty prior to the exam.

- A. Sight Singing: Using solfege, the candidate is asked to sing a chromatic excerpt at sight that includes modulation with the starting pitch.
- B. Figured bass: Four parts, will include chromaticism and various types of figured non-chord tones. The figured bass will be provided three days in advance.
- C. String Quartet Excerpt: The candidate is asked to play the excerpt at the keyboard at a steady tempo (even though the tempo might be too slow—we are asking for steady above all), to make any reasonable accommodations for adapting a string quartet texture to the piano, and to be prepared to answer analytical questions. The excerpt will be provided three days in advance.

III. Oral Exam (60 min)

Score Identification: The candidate is given two or three score excerpts at sight and must aim to identify the composer, the period, and the piece. Candidates are to press their analytical skills into service to achieve this task and to be prepared to answer pertinent questions.

IV. Results

Exams will be graded pass/fail, and no follow-up projects to remedy weaknesses exhibited during the exam will be permitted. If a student does not pass the exam, they will be allowed one retake the next semester (not including summer).