

D.M.A. COMMON MUSIC HISTORY EXAM 2025 Topics

The DMA Common Music History exam is a **three-hour** written examination for DMA students, offered once each semester, with the following components:

Part 1. BROAD TOPIC: a 1-hour essay devoted to a broad topic, such as a genre, a period, or a composer; you will select one of the two topics presented

Part 2. FOCUSED ESSAY: 1-hour essay devoted to a focused topic (see below); you will select one of the two topics presented

Part 3. RESEARCH TOOLS: a 30-minute essay on a specified research tool

Part 4. TERMS (30 minutes): concise, but thorough musical-historical definitions of six terms, selected from a list of eight.

The broad topic (part 1) will be drawn directly from the topics below in sections A, B, and C (trace the genre, discuss the period or period junction, etc.).

The focused essay (part 2), will be derived from the topics in sections A, B, C, and D, and may draw from more than one of them (for example, if one of the genres is the tone poem, and the period junction were Classic/Romantic, you might be asked to discuss how the tone poem developed from the Classical to the Romantic period; if one of the genres is the motet/anthem, you might be asked to discuss how Josquin used *cantus firmus* in mass or motet).

The question on research tools will relate to one of the two listed in section E.

The terms to be defined will be related to the topics in sections A, B, C, and D. (See section F below.)

NOTE: All of the questions will be derived from the topics listed on the next page. It is imperative to study ALL of the topics in a comprehensive fashion as some questions may span multiple topics.

The questions for the genre, broad topic, and focused topic may not be framed as a survey or historical overview. They will be asked in a manner that requires critical thinking about music and its history within the given chronology.

Please note that topics used on the exam will be removed from the list for the following two semesters and be replaced with others.

TOPICS FOR FALL 2025

A. GENRES

You should be able to trace each genre from its origins through the beginning of the 21st century. You should be able to discuss specific composers and specific works, considering issues of form, style, instrumentation (where relevant), national character (where relevant), etc.

Instrumental:

Symphony

Concerto grosso

Vocal:

Renaissance Mass

Opera Seria

B. PERIODS AND PERIOD JUNCTIONS

You should be able to clearly define the period, being able to discuss the reasons for the traditional boundaries (and any aspects you believe argue against those boundaries), the style and formal characteristics of works from that period, national character, instrumentation, cultural and literary influences, etc. For period junctions you should be able to discuss what links the two periods and what separates them. You should, in both cases, be able to cite characteristic (and exceptional) composers and specific works.

Junction between Classical and Romantic
Early 20th century (ca.1900–1930)

C. COMPOSERS

You should be able to discuss the composer's biography and his or her works, considering issues of style (and style periods), form, genre, etc. You should be able to discuss specific works from all the periods and all the important genres of the composer's output. You should also be able to discuss the chief research tools associated with this composer (biographies, thematic catalogues, collected works, etc.)

Claudio Monteverdi

Clara Schumann

D. OTHER FOCUSED TOPICS

In preparing these topics, you should be able to consider specific composers and their works, discern key musical characteristics, describe the historical and socio-cultural context, as well as relevant aspects of representative musical examples.

- 19th century exoticism/orientalism
- Minimalism
- Comparing the Chinese Bayin System of Organology to the Sachs/Hornbostel System

E. RESEARCH TOOLS

For each of the types of research tool listed, you should be able to define its characteristics, functions, and typical organizations. You should be prepared to discuss specific representative examples in detail, including, where relevant, authors and editors, organizational or editorial principles, etc.

Thematic Catalogues

These are some of the most well-known ones to know but please study others as well.

- JS Bach [BWV (Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis)]
- WA Mozart [K (Köchel-Verzeichnis for Mozart)]
- Franz Schubert [D (Deutsch)]

Online Archives:

These are some of the most well-known ones to know but please study others as well.

- Gallica—The Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) digital library
 - [Gallica](#) is one of the major digital libraries available for free via the Internet. It provides access to any type of document: printed documents (books, press and magazines) in image and text mode, manuscripts, sound and iconographic documents, maps and plans.
- IMSLP
 - The International Music Score Library Project ([IMSLP](#)), also known as the Petrucci Music Library after publisher Ottaviano Petrucci, is a subscription-based digital library of public-domain music scores.
- Digital Mozart Edition
 - On the one hand, the [DME](#) presents Mozart's musical works in new digital formats and is dedicated to online editions of letters and documents as well as textual sources for Mozart's vocal works. On the other hand, the DME offers information on musical compositions and their sources, including information on their transmission and reception.
- DIAMM [Digital Internet Archive of Medieval Music]
 - [DIAMM](#) is a leading resource for the study of medieval manuscripts. They present images and metadata for thousands of manuscripts on this website. They also provide a home for scholarly resources and editions, undertake digital restoration of damaged manuscripts and documents, publish high-quality facsimiles, and offer expertise as consultants.

F. TERMS

The candidate will be required to write clear and concise definitions of 6 terms, which should include musical as well as historical specificity, including an explanation of the period or dates to which it applies, the repertoire with which it is concerned, and references to specific composers, schools, genres, works, practices, or conventions to illustrate the term. As stated above, these terms will be related to topics in sections A, B, C, and D (for example, polytonality and quotation are terms related to compositional practices of Ives).

NOTE: For some guidance in selecting representative composers (for those topics other than the ones specified in section C) and works, you may consult the study list at the following website. Note that this list is designed for Ph.D. students in Musicology, so it includes materials for which you will not be responsible. <https://finearts.uky.edu/sites/default/files/public/content/documents/musicologyliteracylist-9-27.pdf>