Graduate 20th-Century Theory Exam
The graduate 20th-century theory diagnostic examination includes a short multiple choice written exam (taking ninety minutes). The exam focuses on the basic material used in post-tonal music: pitch class set nomenclature and manipulation, basic twelve-tone theory, post-tonal scales/modes, and rhythmic techniques.

Sample Questions

Example 1:

1. Consider the pitches bracketed above the letters A, B, C, and D to belong to unordered pitch-class sets. How does D relate to A?
   a. D is a transposition of A.
   b. D is a transposed inversion of A.
   c. D is the complement of A.
   d. D is a subset of A.
   e. None of the above.

2. Consider the pitches bracketed above the letters A, B, C, and D to belong to unordered pitch-class sets. How does C relate to B?
   a. C is a transposition of B.
   b. C is a transposed inversion of B.
   c. C is the complement of B.
   d. C is a subset of B.
   e. None of the above.
3. The melodic pitches in the voice part of Example 2 belong to which of the following scales?
   a. Dorian mode
   b. Octatonic scale
   c. Pentatonic scales
   d. Phrygian mode
   e. Whole tone scale.

4. Which term below best describes the harmonic structures in the piano part of Example 2?
   a. Tone clusters
   b. Tertian harmony
   c. Quartal harmony
   d. Polytonal harmony
   e. Aleatoric harmony

Sample Resources

Sample Resources for the 20th-Century Theory Exam
Kostka, Materials and Techniques of Post-Tonal Music
Kostka/Payne, Tonal Harmony: With and Introduction to Twentieth Century Music
Lester, Analytic Approaches to Twentieth-Century Music
Roig-Francoli, Understanding Post-Tonal Music

N.B.: All sample resources listed are typical texts that are commonly used in undergraduate post-tonal music theory courses. The list is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive of the exam content. Any textbooks or notes from your undergraduate post-tonal music theory courses would also be excellent review sources.