

## **Aural Survival Skills: High School Teachers on Melodic Dictation**

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### **Abstract**

Based on relevant literature and recent qualitative findings, the purpose of this survey research was to identify pedagogical approaches to melodic dictation employed by Advanced Placement (AP) Music Theory teachers across the United States. The researcher-designed survey questions focused on pitch and rhythm skills, instructional resources, dictation strategies, test-taking skills, and characteristics of successful dictation students. The survey was distributed online to a stratified random sample of 875 AP Music Theory teachers across the United States. Of these recipients, 398 participants from 49 states and the District of Columbia completed the survey, yielding a 45.5% return rate. Results indicated that teachers preferred pitch systems that emphasized scale-degree-function and rhythm systems that emphasized the meter. Participants also reported the influence of the AP exam on their dictation teaching and described their need for additional instructional time and better preparation for teaching aural skills. Suggestions for further research include similar studies of other populations, including high school teachers of other theory courses and college theory instructors.

\*Please see reverse for applications of this research to teaching.

## Applications to Teaching

- Choosing a system for singing and decoding *pitches* is an important decision. Based on the specific tasks required in aural skills coursework, teachers should consider carefully which system will be most beneficial to students as they develop knowledge and skills related to those tasks.
- Choosing a system for singing and decoding *rhythms* is an important decision. Based on the specific tasks required in aural skills coursework, teachers should consider carefully which system will be most beneficial to students as they develop knowledge and skills related to those tasks.
- Resources abound for teaching aural skills. Critical review of a variety of available texts, software for purchase, and free websites will help teachers determine how best to help students succeed in the time-intensive process of aural skills development.
- Research suggests that the dictation process is unique for each student. Students likely benefit most from explicit introduction to a variety of strategies that can be chosen and combined according to the strengths and weaknesses of each student.
- Specific preparation to teach theory and aural skills is not a standard component of many collegiate teacher preparation programs. Pre-service music educators may need to take the initiative to “learn from learning,” and prepare themselves to teach this material effectively. College faculty members should consider the likelihood that future educators may teach aural skills as part of their position, and structure ways for them to develop competence and confidence in this area of their training.