

NASM Competencies Summary

Degree: The **BM in Music Theory, a professional undergraduate degree**

Essential Note: Items below are excerpts from the *NASM Handbook*. Items 1 through 4 indicate the content and natures of the competencies expected of those graduating with the above degree. Items 5 and 6 indicate recommendations for competency development.

Only the *Handbook* in its entirety contains all standards and guidelines applicable to and used by all phases of NASM membership reviews. In the text below "H." indicates the location of the excerpted text in the Handbook; the term "(All)" indicates standards applicable to all professional undergraduate music degrees including music theory; "(Music Theory)" indicates specific standards for that major.

Item 1. (All)

Common Body of Knowledge and Skills (H.VIII.B.)

1. **Performance.** Students must acquire:
 - a. Technical skills requisite for artistic self-expression in at least one major performance area at a level appropriate for the particular music concentration.
 - b. An overview understanding of the repertory in their major performance area and the ability to perform from a cross-section of that repertory.
 - c. The ability to read at sight with fluency demonstrating both general musicianship and, in the major performance area, a level of skill relevant to professional standards appropriate for the particular music concentration.
 - d. Knowledge and skills sufficient to work as a leader and in collaboration on matters of musical interpretation. Rehearsal and conducting skills are required as appropriate to the particular music concentration.
 - e. Keyboard competency.
 - f. Growth in artistry, technical skills, collaborative competence and knowledge of repertory through regular ensemble experiences. Ensembles should be varied both in size and nature.

Normally, performance study and ensemble experience continue throughout the baccalaureate program.

2. **Musicianship Skills and Analysis.** Students must acquire:
 - a. An understanding of the common elements and organizational patterns of music and their interaction, the ability to employ this understanding in aural, verbal, and visual analyses, and the ability to take aural dictation.
 - b. Sufficient understanding of and capability with musical forms, processes, and structures to use this knowledge and skill in compositional, performance, analytical, scholarly, and pedagogical applications according to the requisites of their specializations.
 - c. The ability to place music in historical, cultural, and stylistic contexts.
3. **Composition/Improvisation.** Students must acquire a rudimentary capacity to create original or derivative music. It is the prerogative of each institution to develop specific requirements regarding written, electronic, or improvisatory forms and methods. These may include but are not limited to the creation of original compositions or improvisations, variations or improvisations on existing materials, experimentation with various sound sources, the imitation of musical styles, and manipulating the common elements in non-traditional ways. Institutional requirements should help students gain a

basic understanding of how to work freely and cogently with musical materials in various composition-based activities, particularly those most associated with the major field.

4. **History and Repertory.** Students must acquire basic knowledge of music history and repertoires through the present time, including study and experience of musical language and achievement in addition to that of the primary culture encompassing the area of specialization (see Standards for Accreditation III.L.).
5. **Synthesis.** While synthesis is a lifetime process, by the end of undergraduate study students must be able to work on musical problems by combining, as appropriate to the issue, their capabilities in performance; aural, verbal, and visual analysis; composition/improvisation; and history and repertory.

Item 2. (All)

Results (H.VIII.C.)

Upon completion of any specific professional undergraduate degree program:

1. Students must demonstrate achievement of professional, entry-level competence in the major area, including significant technical mastery, capability to produce work and solve professional problems independently, and a coherent set of artistic/intellectual goals that are evident in their work. A senior project or presentation in the major area is required in many concentrations, and strongly recommended for all others.
2. Students are expected to have the ability to form and defend value judgments about music, and to communicate musical ideas, concepts, and requirements to professionals and laypersons related to the practice of the major field.

Item 3. (Music Theory)

Essential Competencies, Experiences, and Opportunities (H.IX.B.3.)

(in addition to those stated for all degree programs):

- a. Advanced capabilities in musical analysis including the ability to produce and discuss analytical work from an independent perspective. This includes the ability to compare and evaluate the results of various analytical procedures.
- b. An understanding of the relationships between theory and composition. This includes original and imitative work in composition and a basic understanding of the relationships among musical structure, aesthetic effect, and cultural context.
- c. Ability to use the tools of theoretical work including keyboard skills, spoken and written language, research techniques, and applicable technologies.
- d. An opportunity for independent study that culminates in a senior project or thesis is strongly recommended.

Item 4. (All)

General Studies Competencies (H.VIII.A.6.)

- a. **Competencies.** Specific competency expectations are defined by the institution. Normally, students holding a professional undergraduate degree in music are expected to have:
 - (1) The ability to think, speak, and write clearly and effectively.
 - (2) An informed acquaintance with fields of study beyond music such as those in the arts and humanities, the natural and physical sciences, and the social sciences.
 - (3) A functional awareness of the differences and commonalities regarding work in artistic, scientific, and humanistic domains.

- (4) Awareness that multiple disciplinary perspectives and techniques are available to consider all issues and responsibilities including, but not limited to, history, culture, moral and ethical issues, and decision-making.
- (5) The ability to identify possibilities and locate information in other fields that have bearing on musical questions and endeavors.

Item 5. (Music Theory)

Recommendations for General Studies (H.IX.B.2.)

Study in such areas as computer science, acoustics, and aesthetics is strongly recommended.

Item 6. (All)

Recommendations for Professional Studies (H.VIII.D.)

Students engaged in professional undergraduate degrees in music should have opportunities to:

1. Gain a basic understanding of the nature of professional work in their major field. Examples are: organizational structures and working patterns; artistic, intellectual, economic, technological, and political contexts; and development potential.
2. Acquire the skills necessary to assist in the development and advancement of their careers, normally including basic competency development in communication, presentation, business, and leadership, all with particular regard to professional practices in their major field.
3. Develop teaching skills, particularly as related to their major area of study.
4. Continue to develop improvisational skills whether as an aspect of composition, musicianship, or performance studies.
5. Experience a broad range of repertory through attendance at events such as recitals, concerts, opera and music theatre productions, and other types of performances.
6. Develop an awareness of copyright, licensing, and permission requirements as they relate to access to and use of musical works.
7. Explore areas of individual interest related to music in general or to the major. Examples are music bibliography, notations, aesthetics, acoustics, performance practices, specialized topics in history, musicology, ethnomusicology, analysis, and technology.
8. Explore multidisciplinary issues that include music.
9. Practice synthesis of a broad range of musical knowledge and skills, particularly through independent study that involves a minimum of faculty guidance, where the emphasis is on evaluation at completion (see Standards for Accreditation III.G.)

Please Note:

For specific information regarding curricular structure, see H.IX.B.1. Normally, approximately 65% of a 120 semester hour program is in music studies to ensure that time is available to develop the requisite competencies.

For a table of contents for all standards, see [NASM Handbook](#).