Academic Decathlon Music Practice Test (Sample)

Study Guide

Everything you need from our exam experts!

Table of Contents

Introduction

Preparing for a certification exam can feel overwhelming, but with the right tools, it becomes an opportunity to build confidence, sharpen your skills, and move one step closer to your goals. At Examzify, we believe that effective exam preparation isn't just about memorization, it's about understanding the material, identifying knowledge gaps, and building the test-taking strategies that lead to success.

This guide was designed to help you do exactly that.

Whether you're preparing for a licensing exam, professional certification, or entry-level qualification, this book offers structured practice to reinforce key concepts. You'll find a wide range of multiple-choice questions, each followed by clear explanations to help you understand not just the right answer, but why it's correct.

The content in this guide is based on real-world exam objectives and aligned with the types of questions and topics commonly found on official tests. It's ideal for learners who want to:

- **Practice answering questions under realistic conditions,**
- **Improve accuracy and speed,**
- **Review explanations to strengthen weak areas, and**
- **Approach the exam with greater confidence.**

We recommend using this book not as a stand-alone study tool, but alongside other resources like flashcards, textbooks, or hands-on training. For best results, we recommend working through each question, reflecting on the explanation provided, and revisiting the topics that challenge you most.

Remember: successful test preparation isn't about getting every question right the first time, it's about learning from your mistakes and improving over time. Stay focused, trust the process, and know that every page you turn brings you closer to success.

Let's begin.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to help you study more effectively and approach your exam with confidence. Whether you're reviewing for the first time or doing a final refresh, here's how to get the most out of your Examzify study guide:

1. Start with a Diagnostic Review

Skim through the questions to get a sense of what you know and what you need to focus on. Your goal is to identify knowledge gaps early.

2. Study in Short, Focused Sessions

Break your study time into manageable blocks (e.g. 30 – 45 minutes). Review a handful of questions, reflect on the explanations.

3. Learn from the Explanations

After answering a question, always read the explanation, even if you got it right. It reinforces key points, corrects misunderstandings, and teaches subtle distinctions between similar answers.

4. Track Your Progress

Use bookmarks or notes (if reading digitally) to mark difficult questions. Revisit these regularly and track improvements over time.

5. Simulate the Real Exam

Once you're comfortable, try taking a full set of questions without pausing. Set a timer and simulate test-day conditions to build confidence and time management skills.

6. Repeat and Review

Don't just study once, repetition builds retention. Re-attempt questions after a few days and revisit explanations to reinforce learning. Pair this guide with other Examzify tools like flashcards, and digital practice tests to strengthen your preparation across formats.

There's no single right way to study, but consistent, thoughtful effort always wins. Use this guide flexibly, adapt the tips above to fit your pace and learning style. You've got this!

Questions

1. In tonal harmony, what function do predominant harmonies serve?

A. They pull to the dominant

B. They lead to the tonic

C. They pull to the dominant

D. They create dissonance

2. How do chordophones make sound?

A. The membrane vibrating produces sound waves

B. The vibrating strings create sound waves

C. A vibrating column of air produces sound waves

D. The frame vibrates to produce sound waves

3. What is a tritone?

A. An interval composed of three half steps.

B. A musical interval composed of three whole tones.

C. A perfect fourth.

D. A major sixth.

4. What are idiophones?

A. Instruments where the frame vibrates to make noise

B. Instruments with membranes stretched across frames

C. Instruments with strings

D. Instruments that produce sound by air columns

5. Tessitura describes which aspect of a melody?

A. The duration of notes

B. The portion of the range where most notes lie

C. The number of repetitions of motifs

D. The tempo

6. Why is musique concrète a French word?

A. Because it derives from Latin roots

B. Because it refers to concrete instruments

C. Because it was named after a French city

D. Because the first practitioners were based in Paris

7. Where and when was common-practice tonality developed and codified?

A. In Africa during the Middle Ages, codified in 1650.

B. In Europe during the Renaissance, codified in 1600.

C. In Europe during the Middle Ages, codified in 1700.

D. In Europe during the Middle Ages and codified in 1750.

8. How do woodwind instruments produce sound?

A. The column of air is moved by breath and lip buzz

B. Reeds strike membranes

C. Strings are bowed

D. The column of air is moved by breath alone

9. The piano is typically categorized as which type of instrument?

A. Chordophone

B. Aerophone

C. Membranophone

D. Idiophone

10. Which term describes the interval when two pitches occur in succession?

A. Harmonic interval

B. Chromatic interval

C. Melodic interval

D. Diatonic interval

Answers

1. C
2. B
3. B
4. A
5. B
6. D
7. D
8. D
9. A
10. C

Explanations

1. In tonal harmony, what function do predominant harmonies serve?

A. They pull to the dominant

B. They lead to the tonic

C. They pull to the dominant

D. They create dissonance

Predominant chords function as the setup that pulls the harmony toward the dominant, creating the forward motion needed for a cadence. In tonal harmony, moving from a predominant harmony toward the dominant builds tension and prepares the ear for the arrival of V, which then resolves to the tonic. For example, in a major key, chords like ii or IV push the progression toward the dominant (V), so you get a strong V–I resolution. Their job isn't to directly land on the tonic or to "create dissonance" in and of itself; it's to set up and intensify the pull to the dominant, so the tonic can feel like a satisfying ending when the cadence arrives.

2. How do chordophones make sound?

A. The membrane vibrating produces sound waves

B. The vibrating strings create sound waves

C. A vibrating column of air produces sound waves

D. The frame vibrates to produce sound waves

Chordophones produce sound when their strings under tension vibrate. When a string is plucked, bowed, or struck, it vibrates at a fundamental frequency plus harmonics. Those vibrations are transferred to the instrument's body and its soundboard, which act as a resonator and radiate the vibrations into the air as sound waves. The pitch depends on string length, tension, and mass per unit length, while the frame mainly helps amplify the sound. Other families produce sound with vibrating membranes or vibrating air columns, not with vibrating strings.

3. What is a tritone?

A. An interval composed of three half steps.

B. A musical interval composed of three whole tones.

C. A perfect fourth.

D. A major sixth.

A tritone is an interval that spans six semitones, which equals three whole tones. In other words, it covers three steps of a whole-tone scale and divides the octave into two equal halves. In equal temperament, this gives that distinctive, tense sound that composers often use for unrest or tension, and it can be spelled as either an augmented fourth or a diminished fifth depending on the musical context (for example, C to F# or C to Gb). To see why the other options aren't correct: three half steps measure a minor third, five semitones make a perfect fourth, and nine semitones make a major sixth. Thus, the defining distance of a tritone is three whole tones.

4. What are idiophones?

A. Instruments where the frame vibrates to make noise

B. Instruments with membranes stretched across frames

C. Instruments with strings

D. Instruments that produce sound by air columns

Idiophones produce sound from the vibration of their own material. When you strike, shake, or rub the instrument, the body itself vibrates and creates the tone, with no separate membrane, string, or air column involved. That's why common idiophones include things like xylophones, bells, triangles, and wooden blocks—their material alone vibrates to produce sound. By contrast, membranophones rely on a stretched membrane to vibrate, chordophones on vibrating strings, and aerophones on vibrating air in a tube or column. So the description of instruments where the frame itself vibrates to make noise matches idiophones precisely.

5. Tessitura describes which aspect of a melody?

A. The duration of notes

B. The portion of the range where most notes lie

C. The number of repetitions of motifs

D. The tempo

Tessitura is about where a melody sits in pitch—the general range or register that most of its notes occupy. It describes the portion of the pitch spectrum where the melody spends the bulk of its time, not just its highest or lowest note. This is different from how long notes last (duration), how many times motifs repeat (repetition/structure), or how fast the music moves (tempo). So the description that matches tessitura is the part of the range where most notes lie, because it directly refers to the melodic pitch area that dominates the piece. In singing, tessitura helps indicate whether the music sits in a comfortable vocal range for most of the song.

6. Why is musique concrète a French word?

A. Because it derives from Latin roots

B. Because it refers to concrete instruments

C. Because it was named after a French city

D. Because the first practitioners were based in Paris

Musique concrète is a French phrase because it was created in France by Paris-based composers in the 1940s. The word "musique" is simply the French word for music, and "concrète" refers to real, tangible sounds captured from the world rather than abstract, notated tones. The label reflects where and by whom the practice was developed, which is why it carries a French name. It isn't about Latin roots or clocking to concrete instruments, and while the origin is tied to Paris, the point is that the term comes from that French, Parisian context.

7. Where and when was common-practice tonality developed and codified?

A. In Africa during the Middle Ages, codified in 1650.

B. In Europe during the Renaissance, codified in 1600.

C. In Europe during the Middle Ages, codified in 1700.

D. In Europe during the Middle Ages and codified in 1750.

The main idea being tested is when and where the system of common-practice tonality became established and described. In Western music, tonal organization—centered on major and minor keys, functional harmony, and predictable voice-leading—developed in Europe and gradually formed into a standard approach during the Baroque through the Classical periods. The formal description and a widely taught framework for how this harmony works were codified in Europe in the 18th century, with important theoretical works around the 1730s to 1750s that solidified the rules musicians would follow for generations. That's why locating it in Europe and around 1750 best fits the idea being tested. Options that place the development in Africa or during the Middle Ages don't align with how and when this tonal system actually came together, and a date like 1600 or 1700 doesn't capture the period when the theory was most systematically articulated.

8. How do woodwind instruments produce sound?

A. The column of air is moved by breath and lip buzz

B. Reeds strike membranes

C. Strings are bowed

D. The column of air is moved by breath alone

Woodwind sound comes from the air column inside the instrument vibrating, driven by the player's breath. Your breath provides the energy that starts and sustains that vibration, while the instrument's design—holes, keys, edges, and reeds—lets the air column resonate at specific lengths to produce different pitches. In flutes the vibration starts at the air jet off the edge; in reed instruments the reed itself vibrates to set the air column into motion (and in oboes and bassoons a double reed does the same). Across all woodwinds, the source of the sound is the vibrating air column, energized by breath, rather than a separate string or membrane. That's why this description, focusing on the air column moved by breath, matches how woodwinds work.

9. The piano is typically categorized as which type of instrument?

A. Chordophone

B. Aerophone

C. Membranophone

D. Idiophone

When we classify instruments, the key idea is what part of the instrument vibrates to produce the sound. A chordophone is any instrument whose sound comes from vibrating strings. The piano fits this because pressing a key causes hammers to strike strings, making those strings vibrate and generate pitches. The body and soundboard amplify that vibration, but the vibrating element is the string itself. Aerophones create sound from vibrating air, membranophones from a stretched membrane, and idiophones from the instrument's own solid material vibrating without strings. So the piano is categorized as a chordophone.

10. Which term describes the interval when two pitches occur in succession?

A. Harmonic interval

B. Chromatic interval

C. Melodic interval

D. Diatonic interval

When two pitches are heard in sequence, the interval is described as melodic. This term specifically captures motion from one note to the next, which is what a melody does. If the same two pitches are sounded at the same time, that creates a harmonic interval. The other terms relate to scale context or alteration (chromatic or diatonic) and can apply to both melodies and harmonies, but they don't encode whether the pitches occur sequentially or simultaneously. So for a pair of notes heard one after another, the appropriate label is melodic interval.

Next Steps

Congratulations on reaching the final section of this guide. You've taken a meaningful step toward passing your certification exam and advancing your career.

As you continue preparing, remember that consistent practice, review, and self-reflection are key to success. Make time to revisit difficult topics, simulate exam conditions, and track your progress along the way.

If you need help, have suggestions, or want to share feedback, we'd love to hear from you. Reach out to our team at hello@examzify.com.

Or visit your dedicated course page for more study tools and resources:

https://academicdecathlonmusic.examzify.com

We wish you the very best on your exam journey. You've got this!