

Guidelines for Dictation

For Sight Singing & Ear Training I-IV

Dictating harmony, melody, and rhythm is a necessary component of your music education and is designed to help you do anything from improvising a solo to hearing a wrong note in your middle school band (it's also a great party trick when you go home for breaks). In SSET, we will practice this skill on a weekly basis. This is no wrong way, but here's how I typically go about it:

1. Write out the parameters

On staff paper or your iPad, write down the given parameters. You may be given a key signature, clef, time signature, number of measures, and/or starting note. It will look something like this to start with:

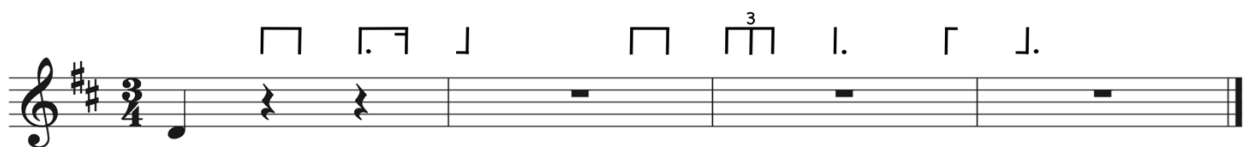


2. Tonicization

Your instructor may tonicize a key before they play the selection.

3. First listen – rhythmic shorthand for melody

On the first listening, I like to notate just the rhythm of the melody with shorthand above the staff in real time like so:



...which would translate to:



4. Second, third, fourth listen

For these hearings, your goal should be to “fill in the blanks”. For example:

- Listening for outlines of the tonic (1-3-5) or dominant (5-7-2-[4])
- Double-checking notes which you are not sure of using your knowledge of intervals/neighboring notes
- Determining if chromatics are neighbor tones, part of an applied chord, or passing tones
- Determining roman numerals (if harmonic dictation): our harmonic dictations will always follow a functional map. Use your bass pitches to determine what harmonic numerals are possible (for example, if the bass is scale degree 5, options may be V, V⁷, Cad⁶₄...).
- When I am really struggling with a melody, I like to notate the longer notes first, as “landmarks”, and then filling in between those “landmarks”.
- Listen for cadences

Note that not every dictation will go smoothly, and you will more than likely struggle during these few hearings – that is completely normal!

5. Last listen

Aim for this listen to be your “check” listen, making sure what you hear being played is what you’re reading on your paper and adjust as necessary.