

# Self-Determination and Student Motivation in Music Theory and Aural Skills

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Intrinsic or Extrinsic	Type of Regulation	Autonomous or Controlled
Intrinsic: Engaging in an activity because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable; the activity itself is the reward.	Intrinsic: Doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable.	Autonomous: Acting with a sense of willingness.
Extrinsic (four subtypes): Engaging in an activity as a means to an end; the reward is external to, or separable from, the activity. <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg); font-size: small; margin-right: 5px;">Degree of internalization</div> <div style="border-left: 1px solid black; border-right: 1px solid black; height: 100px; margin: 0 5px;"></div> <div style="font-size: 2em; margin: 0 5px;">↑</div> </div>	Integrated: Doing something because one believes the activity is worthwhile and because the activity aligns with one's deeply held values and interests.	
	Identified: Doing something because one believes the activity is valuable.	
	Introjected: Doing something because of internally imposed pressure, either to feel good about oneself or to avoid feelings of anxiety, guilt, or shame.	Controlled: Acting with a sense of internal or external constraints.
	External: Doing something to obtain a reward or to avoid punishment, both of which come from outside oneself.	

Figure 1. Categories of motivation with concise definitions.

Basic Psychological Needs	Definitions
Autonomy	Having “a sense of initiative and ownership in one’s actions.”
Competence	Experiencing “the feeling of mastery, a sense that one can succeed and grow.”
Relatedness	Feeling “a sense of belonging and connection.”

Figure 2. Basic psychological needs. Definitions are quoted from Ryan and Deci (2020, 1), the original proponents of self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 1985).

Recommendations	Examples of Verbal Framing
Providing meaningful feedback	<p>“Here is the rubric I will use to evaluate your midterm singing performance next week. Please take note of which categories are weighted the most heavily so you can pay close attention to these areas when you practice.” —Aural Skills I</p> <p>“Please look at the errors I’ve marked in the part-writing assignment that I just returned. Identify one type of error (such as forgetting to add the leading tone in minor keys) that you want to avoid in future assignments, and write yourself a note to remember to check for this error before you submit the next assignment.” —Theory II</p>
Providing choices	<p>“For this in-class exercise, you are welcome to work individually or to collaborate with your neighbors.” —Theory I</p> <p>“Which components of this course (melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic dictation; prepared or sight-reading melody and rhythm performance) do you most need to practice? In which components would you like additional opportunities for graded work?” —Aural Skills II</p> <p>“I’ve listed the diatonic modes on the board. Come sign up for a mode that interests you, with two or three people per mode. The people who sign up for the same mode will be partners for our modal melody composition activity during class.” —Aural Skills IV</p>
Using informational rather than controlling language	<p>“I understand that it’s easy to be distracted by our phones. Because it’s important to me to make sure I am fully present with you during class, I’ve left my phone in my office instead of bringing it to class. I’m asking you to join me in putting your phones away during class so you can receive the greatest benefit for your learning from our time together.” —Theory III</p>
Supporting internalization	<p>“Most of you are future music educators. If you’re teaching a class, you can’t afford to be late because it’s not safe to leave the students without adult supervision. Those of you who are majoring in performance and sound recording technology need to be reliable and on time for gigs. Because punctuality is such an important part of professionalism, the attendance policy in our class—and in the music theory area in general—is designed to help you build habits of punctuality that will help you succeed as professional musicians.” —Aural Skills III</p>
Providing rationales and acknowledging feelings  Rationales →  Feelings →	<p>“In your Roman-numeral analysis, please make the chord qualities clear, especially when distinguishing between major seventh chords and major-minor seventh chords. We are still working with diatonic harmonies for right now, but when we move on to chromatic harmonies next semester, there will be times when we find chords with qualities that we didn’t expect. It helps to practice analytical precision as we build up to that point.” —Theory II</p> <p>“I realize this was a challenging activity—melodic dictation that reflects a non-diatonic scale in changing meters is complex. This is as hard as it gets in our course this semester; the final exam won’t be any harder. To prepare for this type of dictation, I recommend reviewing interval identification with small intervals to help you navigate the note-to-note connections in non-diatonic melodies.” —Aural Skills IV</p>

Figure 3. Examples of verbal framing to support students’ basic psychological needs in music theory and aural skills courses. Recommendations in the left column come from Graham and Vaughan (2022, 139).

Analysis Adventures	Choose the adventure that will be best for your learning today as we explore the topic of modulation in music analysis.
Solo Excursion	Work individually, moving through the analysis as efficiently as possible. If time permits, think about how you would discuss the topics of harmonic sequences and types of modulation in this piece.
Team Quest	Collaborate with two or three of your peers as you work through the analysis together. Let me know if you get stuck; otherwise, I'll give your groups time to work independently.
Guided Tour	Participate actively as I walk you through an analysis of this piece. We will move at a methodical pace so we don't skip any steps.



Lesson Plan  
& Score

Figure 4. Scaffolded in-class analysis assignments for Theory III.

A: I IV V V<sup>6</sup> I I<sup>6</sup> ii<sup>6</sup> V I V I

E: IV V V<sup>6</sup>

I vi ii<sup>6</sup> V I A: V<sup>7</sup>/ii ii<sup>7</sup> (V<sup>6</sup>) V<sup>7</sup> I (I<sup>6</sup>)

Parallel <sup>6</sup>/<sub>5</sub> chords

ii<sup>6</sup> iii<sup>6</sup> IV<sup>M6</sup> V<sup>6</sup> I IV V I IV V V<sup>6</sup>

I I<sup>6</sup> ii<sup>6</sup> V I V I V V<sup>6</sup> I vi ii<sup>6</sup> V I

Figure 5. Analyzed score for Johann Philipp Kirnberger, "La Lutine," no. 3 of *Four Small Pieces*, EngK. 51. Typesetting and analysis are those of the author. Shaded circles denote passing tones.

Meeting Type and Timing	Questions and Conversation Starters
Getting Acquainted (Week 1 or 2; about 5 minutes per student)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are things going for you in the course so far?</li> <li>• I noticed on your questionnaire that...[choose applicable option]               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ ...you've attempted this course before. What do you think contributed to your not being able to pass the course then?</li> <li>○ ...a topic/skill you've found challenging is _____. Can you tell me more about that?</li> <li>○ ...you're interested in learning more about _____. What are you looking forward to about this topic?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Do you have any other questions or concerns at this point?</li> </ul>
Aural Skills Mini-Lesson (Week 2 or 3; 5–7 minutes per student)	Have the student perform a prepared melody or rhythm. Invite the student to sit across from the instructor for the following discussion. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are some things that you think went well in your performance? What else went well?</li> <li>• Is there anything that you would want to change if you were going to perform this melody/rhythm again?</li> <li>• I agree with you that _____ and _____ went well in your performance and that _____ and _____ could be areas for improvement. Some other things I noticed are _____.</li> <li>• Do you have any questions I can help with?</li> </ul>
Course Progress Report (Mid-semester and/or late in the semester; about 3 minutes per student)	Invite the student to sit across from the instructor and ask the student to record the information that is shared. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the melodic dictation component, you currently have a grade of ____%. [Repeat for the other components.]</li> <li>• In terms of attendance, you currently have a total of _____ unexcused absences, including any tardies. [Choose applicable option.]               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Thank you for attending class so consistently!</li> <li>○ That's still within the number of unexcused absences allowed for the class, so it's not affecting your grade.</li> <li>○ Unfortunately, that means that your course grade is now being affected. Right now, you're looking at a deduction of ____%.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Are there any components in which you would like additional opportunities for graded work?</li> <li>• Do you have any questions at this point?</li> </ul>

Figure 6. Student meeting templates.

<b>Next Steps: Suggestions for Instructors</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recall a time when you have seen students highly motivated, whether during class or in another setting. Which basic psychological need(s) were likely being met in that scenario?</li> <li>• Choose a specific course that you teach—perhaps one you are currently teaching or that you will teach in the upcoming term.</li> <li>• For now, select a single basic psychological need (autonomy, competence, or relatedness) that you would like to emphasize in the course you chose. What do you hope your students will gain from increased fulfillment of this need?</li> <li>• Develop a plan to do one new thing that will help fulfill that basic need for students in the course you selected. This change can take place on a micro level (e.g., a single class activity) or a macro level (e.g., an aspect of course design). Be as specific as possible.</li> <li>• Implement your plan. If possible, begin preparations early in case they take longer than anticipated.</li> <li>• After you implement your plan, reflect on what you observed during the process. What went well? What changes, if any, would you like to make?</li> </ul>

Figure 7. Prompts for planning and reflection.

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