

ONE BOOK, NOT FIVE
PASS
GRADE 5 MUSIC THEORY
IN FOUR WEEKS

The complete Grade 1–5 theory course



**BEGINNER
TO GRADE 5**

Start from anywhere. One course takes you the whole way.



**22
KNOWLEDGE POINTS**

All five grades sorted into 22 topics — learnt systematically, not grade by grade.



**FOUR WEEKS,
DAY BY DAY**

22 days to learn it, 6 days to prove it. The exact plan is printed in the book.

THE KNOWLEDGE BOOK

Dr. XinRu
XINRU PIANO

Preface

I am a very penny-pinching person, so I hate watching my students waste money on unnecessary books and lessons.

And Grade 5 theory is where they waste the most.

The traditional route: five official theory workbooks, one for each grade (£58.75 the set); an exercise book on top (£7.50); and a teacher at the Musicians' Union minimum rate of £44 an hour, once a week for fifty weeks (£2,200). And then the exam.

£2,266.25 in total.

But is it really that hard? Grade 5 theory — the gate you must pass before any Grade 6+ instrumental exam — is it truly so hard that a kid needs a whole year and more than two thousand pounds to get through it?

I refuse to believe that.

That is why I wrote this book. I have sorted everything a student needs to know not by grade, but by **knowledge point**. Fragmented learning is the biggest enemy of real understanding — and the traditional way, where a kid learns a little bit of everything in every grade, is in my opinion the least efficient way to study anything.

So in this book, you have every knowledge point you need from Grade 1 to Grade 5, explained in the simplest, most straightforward way. No beating around the bush. No unnecessary words. No knowledge scattered across five books.

We have limited time. We go straight to the point.

If you consider yourself a competent self-learner, you do not even need lessons. Follow this book, work through the Exercise Book, sit a few practice papers — and you should be ready to pass. If you are not that kind of learner, some lessons will help: you are welcome to visit the **XinRu Piano** website, where you will find all our products and services — including a **four-week Fast Track** for exactly this.

I hope this book lowers the barrier for every adult and every kiddo who wants to take a Grade 6+ instrumental exam. More than that, I hope it gives everyone a chance to study theory systematically without paying thousands of pounds — and leaves a clear structure standing in your mind, a solid foundation for everything you will learn after it.

It is not the knowledge that is hard. It is the way you were made to learn it.

— Dr. XinRu

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Grade 5 Music Theory — the whole map

Grades 1–5 taken apart and rebuilt by topic — all 6 chapters · 22 knowledge points on one page.
Go through them one at a time: cross off the ring for anything you already have. The rings still open are what to work on.

Ch.1 Terms, Signs & Instruments + Key Signatures

- **1.1 Musical terms**
Italian / German / French — all three languages
- **1.2 Signs**
dynamics; slurs & ties; articulation (accent / staccato / staccatissimo / tenuto / marcato); pause; metronome marks; 8va; repeat marks & 1st / 2nd time bars; bar repeat; string bowing & mute
- **1.3 Ornaments (decoration notes)**
both directions — read the sign, and write it out in full
- **1.4 Instrument knowledge**
the four families; single & double reeds; transposing instruments; voice types & SATB
- **1.5 All 24 key signatures, in 4 clefs**
learn by heart — start on day one
- **1.6 Degree names**
tonic / supertonic / mediant / subdominant / dominant / submediant / leading note — learn by heart

Ch.2 Pitch · Single Note (4 clefs)

- **2.1 Name & write notes in all 4 clefs**
with the octave labelled: very low / low / middle / high / very high
- **2.2 Enharmonic equivalents**

Ch.3 Intervals

- **3.1 Simple intervals, in 2 clefs**
with and without a key signature
- **3.2 Compound intervals, in 2 clefs**
with and without a key signature

Ch.4 Primary Chords + II

- **4.1 I · II · IV · V chords (primary chords + II)**
in 2 clefs
- **4.2 Chords in 3 positions**
- **4.3 The 3 cadences**

Ch.5 Scales & Tonality

- **5.1 The 12 major scales**
written with a key signature, and written with accidentals
- **5.2 The 12 minor scales**
harmonic & melodic — each written with a key signature and with accidentals
- **5.3 The chromatic scale**
(1) never use the same letter name 3 times in a row (2) it must end on the note it began on — start on D#, end on D#, not Eb (3) no leaps
- **5.4 Transposition**
by a major 2nd / minor 3rd / perfect 5th, using accidentals — for transposing instruments

Ch.6 Rhythm

- **6.1 Time values**
breve down to demisemiquaver + the matching rests; dotted & double-dotted; triplets / quintuplets / sextuplets (duplets come after compound time)
- **6.2 Simple time signatures**
duple / triple / quadruple, including irregular: 5/4 · 7/4 · 5/8 · 7/8
- **6.3 Compound time signatures**
6/8 9/8 12/8 · 6/4 9/4 · 6/16 9/16 12/16
- **6.4 Rewriting simple as compound, and back**
 $3/4 = 9/8$ · $2/4 = 6/8$ · $4/4 = 12/8$ — note value for note value
- **6.5 Note grouping (simple & compound) + rests**
beaming: in simple time never beam across beats 2–3; in compound time beam within the beat only. Rests: a whole bar, a half bar and a whole beat each take their own rest; if a single note fits, don't tie.

Ch.1

Terms, Signs, Instruments & Key Signatures

The learn-by-heart chapter — start it on day one

Even though most of this book can be **worked out** from a knowledge point, a few things cannot. They simply have to be **memorised** — and that is exactly why they sit here at the very beginning: it gives them the whole of Chapters 2 to 6 to settle properly into your memory while you work.

I am afraid there is no strategy that can help you here. You just need to remember them, and then you will be fine.

If you tell me you cannot remember them — okay. Then you have just thrown away ten free marks. **Not my problem!**

EXAM SECTIONS — STILL COMING, AND YOURS FREE

Each knowledge point will also carry an *exam section*: the same knowledge shown exactly as the real exam asks it, worked through step by step. They are being written now. The day they are finished, everyone who already owns this book will be sent the complete edition again — **free**. You buy this book once.

1.1 Musical Terms

GERMAN — THE COMPLETE LIST

Six words. That is the whole of the German you are asked for.

all six. There are no others at Grade 5.

langsam	slow	lebhaft	lively
mässig	at a moderate speed	ruhig	peaceful
schnell	fast	traurig	sad

FRENCH — THE COMPLETE LIST

Six again. Everything else in the paper is Italian.

all six. There are no others at Grade 5.

lent	slow	animé	animated, lively
modéré	at a moderate speed	douce	sweet
vite	quick	retenu	held back

ITALIAN — THE WHOLE VOCABULARY, BY MEANING

Everything is Italian unless it looks German or French. Sorted here by what the word actually does.

SPEED

grave	very slow, solemn	vivace	lively, quick
largo	slow and stately	vivo	lively
larghetto	rather slow, not as slow as largo	presto	very quick
lento	slow	prestissimo	as fast as possible
adagio	slow	comodo · tempo comodo	at a comfortable, easy speed
andante	at a walking pace	tempo	speed
andantino	slightly faster than andante	a tempo	return to the previous speed
moderato	at a moderate speed	tempo primo	the first speed
allegretto	fairly quick, slower than allegro	l'istesso tempo	the same speed
allegro	quick, lively	doppio movimento	twice as fast
allegro assai	very quick — assai means "very"		

CHANGES OF SPEED

accelerando (accel.)	gradually getting quicker	calando	getting softer and slower
stringendo	gradually getting faster	smorzando (smorz.)	dying away in tone and speed
rallentando (rall.)	gradually getting slower	più mosso	more movement, quicker
ritardando (rit.)	gradually getting slower	meno mosso	less movement, slower
ritenuto (riten.)	held back	rubato · tempo rubato	with some freedom of time
allargando	broadening, getting slower and fuller	ad libitum (ad lib.)	at choice, freely
largamente	broadly		

DYNAMICS

pianissimo (pp)	very soft	fortissimo (ff)	very loud
piano (p)	soft	forte-piano · fortepiano (fp)	loud, then immediately soft
mezzo-piano (mp)	moderately soft	sforzando · sforzato (sf, sfz)	forced, strongly accented
mezzo-forte (mf)	moderately loud	rinforzando (rf, rfz, rinf.)	reinforcing
forte (f)	loud		

CHANGES OF DYNAMICS

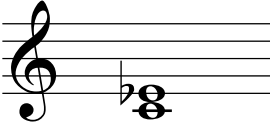
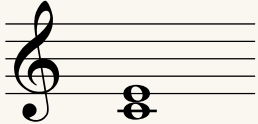
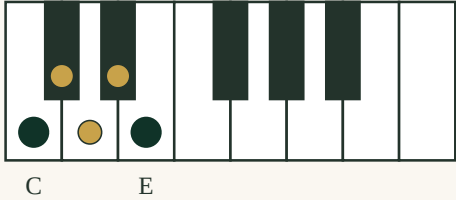
crescendo (cresc.)	gradually getting louder	morendo	dying away
diminuendo (dim.)	gradually getting quieter	perdendosi	getting gradually quieter and dying away
decrescendo (decresc.)	gradually getting quieter	a niente	to nothing

CHARACTER & MOOD

affettuoso	tenderly	espressivo (espress.)	expressive
agitato	agitated	feroce	fierce
alla marcia	in the style of a march	fiero	proud
amabile	amiable, pleasant	giocosso	playful, merry
animato · con anima	animated, lively	grandioso	grand, imposing
appassionato	with passion	grazioso	graceful
brillante	brilliant	lacrimoso	sad, tearful
cantabile	in a singing style	maestoso	majestic
cantando	singing	mesto	sad
con brio	with vigour	nobilmente	nobly
con dolore	with grief	pesante	heavy
con forza	with force	risoluto	bold, strong
con fuoco	with fire	ritmico	rhythmically
con moto	with movement	scherzando · scherzoso	playful
con spirito	with spirit, vigorously	semplice	simple
deciso	with determination	sonoro	resonant, with a rich tone
dolce	sweet, soft	sostenuto	sustained
dolcissimo	very sweetly	sotto voce	in an undertone, in a quiet voice
dolente	sad	tranquillo	calm
doloroso	sorrowful	triste · tristamente	sad
energico	energetic		

TOUCH & ARTICULATION

legato	smoothly	pizzicato (pizz.)	plucked
leggero	light	arco	with the bow
staccato (stacc.)	detached	con sordino	with mute
staccatissimo	as detached as possible	senza sordino	without mute
mezzo-staccato	half detached	una corda	one string — left pedal down
tenuto (ten.)	held, sustained	tre corde	three strings — release the left pedal
marcato (marc.)	emphatic, accented		

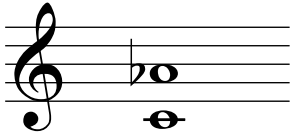
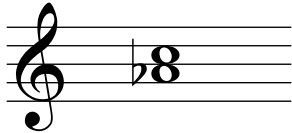
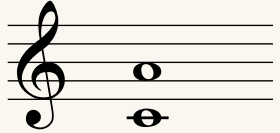
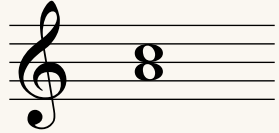
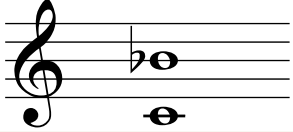
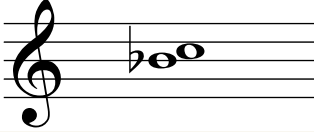
Interval	Keys in between	Written	On the keyboard
Minor 3rd	2		
Major 3rd	3		

XINRU SHORTCUT — TURN IT OVER AND YOU ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER

Do not count keys for 6ths and 7ths. Turn the interval upside down, name the small one you already know, and read it back — major turns into minor, minor turns into major.

C up to A flat, turned over, is A flat up to C — a **major 3rd**. So C to A flat is a **minor 6th**.

6ths and 7ths — the same four, upside down

Interval	Written	Turn it upside down	and it is a
Minor 6th			Major 3rd
Major 6th			Minor 3rd
Minor 7th			Major 2nd

Grade 5 Theory · the cheat sheet

The last thing you read before you go in. Nothing new here — just the bits that win marks and the bits that lose them.
TIP is the quick way to the answer. **CAREFUL** is where people throw marks away.

1 Words — the ones they keep asking

Everything is **Italian** unless it looks German or French. Twelve words are not:

German	langsam <i>slow</i> · mässig <i>moderate</i> · schnell <i>fast</i> · lebhaft <i>lively</i> · ruhig <i>peaceful</i> · traurig <i>sad</i>
French	lent <i>slow</i> · modéré <i>moderate</i> · vite <i>quick</i> · animé <i>lively</i> · douce <i>sweet</i> · retenu <i>held back</i>

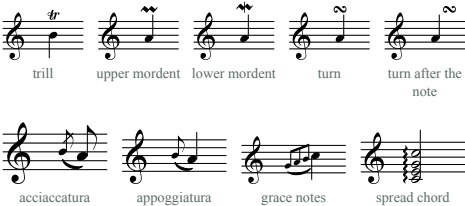
TIP The **little** words win the marks: **assai** very · **poco** a little · **non troppo** not too much · **sempre** always · **subito** suddenly · **meno** / **più mosso** slower / quicker

2 Signs — what each one asks for

CAREFUL Slur and tie are the **same curve**. Same note = **tie**. Different note = **slur**.

Louder / softer	cresc. · dim. · sfz <i>suddenly loud</i>
How to touch it	accent <i>emphasise</i> · staccato <i>detached</i> · staccatissimo <i>as short as possible</i> · tenuto <i>full length</i> · marcato <i>heavily accented</i>
Other	pause <i>hold longer</i> · 8va <i>an octave higher</i> · con sord. <i>with mute</i> · pizz. / arco <i>pluck / bow</i>

3 Ornaments — know them by their shape



TIP Lower mordent has the **little line through it**. Acciaccatura has the **slash** — appoggiatura does not, and it takes **half** the main note.

CAREFUL Grace notes **never count** towards the beats in a bar.

4 Instruments — reeds, percussion, transposing

Single reed	clarinet · saxophone
Double reed	oboe · cor anglais · bassoon
No reed at all	flute · piccolo · recorder
Definite pitch	timpani · xylophone · glockenspiel · marimba · vibraphone · tubular bells · celesta
Indefinite pitch	side drum · bass drum · cymbals · triangle · tambourine · castanets · tam-tam

TIP Transposing: Bb clarinet & trumpet sound a MAJOR 2nd lower · A clarinet a MINOR 3rd lower · F horn & cor anglais a PERFECT 5th lower · piccolo an octave HIGHER · double bass an octave LOWER.

CAREFUL Only strings and brass take mutes. A **flute cannot** play *con sordino*.

5 Key signatures — never count again

Sharps go on in this order **F C G D A E B**
Flats are the same letters backwards **B E A D G C F**

TIP Sharps: the last sharp is the letter **below** the key. Last sharp C# → the key is D.

TIP Flats: the **second-to-last flat is the key**. Bb Eb Ab → the key is Eb. (F major has one flat — just remember that one.)

CAREFUL You must be able to write all 24 in **all four clefs**. In alto and tenor the sharps and flats sit on different lines — learn the shape, not the height.

6 Degree names — the seven jobs

1 tonic · **2** supertonic · **3** mediant · **4** subdominant · **5** dominant · **6** submediant · **7** leading note

TIP The name never changes, whatever the key. Number the scale from the **tonic** and read off.

CAREFUL In a **minor** key the leading note is the **raised 7th** — the one the harmonic minor sharpens.

7 Reading notes — four clefs

Find middle C first. Then count up or down from it. Never guess from the middle of the stave.

TIP Alto clef: middle C is on the middle line. **Tenor clef:** middle C is on the 4th line up. Both clefs point at it.

CAREFUL Then **check which octave you are in** — very low · low · middle · high · very high. This is where the easy marks go missing.

8 Enharmonic equivalents

One key on the keyboard, more than one name on the page. The sound never changes — only the spelling.

B = Cb = Ax · F# = Gb = Ex · C = B# = Db

TIP To find one: keep the sound, move to the **next letter**, then fix the accidental. Up a letter → flatter. Down a letter → sharper.

9 Intervals — do it in this order

Number first: count the letter names, both ends included. **2nd · 3rd · 6th · 7th** are major or minor; **4th · 5th · 8ve** are perfect.

TIP Only ever count keys for **2nds and 3rds**. For **6ths and 7ths turn it upside down** — major flips to minor, minor to major.

TIP Accidentals? Hands on the table. Move only the finger whose note has the accidental: sharp = up, flat = down. Fingers apart → bigger. Together → smaller.

CAREFUL Two odd ones out: **F up to B is augmented 4th · B up to F is diminished 5th.**

10 Compound intervals

TIP Reduce it first. Drop the top note an octave and work the whole thing out as a small interval — number, quality, accidentals, all of it.

Then **add 7** to the number (minor 3rd → minor 10th), or keep the small name and put **compound** in front. Both are full marks.

CAREFUL Reducing **never** changes the quality. Over two octaves the number is dropped altogether — just say **compound**.

11 Which chord is it — I, II, IV, V

Write the scale first, then take **1 · 3 · 5** counting up from that degree. I tonic · II supertonic · IV subdominant · V dominant.

CAREFUL Minor key? The chords come off the **harmonic** minor, so chord V gets the **raised 7th**. Forgetting it is the most-lost mark in the paper.

12 Chord positions — a, b or c

Read the **BOTTOM** note and nothing else.
root at the bottom = **a** · middle note at the bottom = **b** · top note at the bottom = **c**

TIP Stuck? Write the three notes stacked up normally first, then move the one that has to be at the bottom.

13 Cadences — look at the LAST chord first



TIP Last chord is **V**? Imperfect — done. Last chord is **I**? Look at the one before: **V** makes it perfect, **IV** makes it plagal.

14 Major scales — all twelve

The pattern, every time: **T T S T T T S**
(tone tone semitone · tone tone tone semitone)

TIP Write it two ways: with a **key signature**, or with **accidentals** in front of the notes. Never both.

CAREFUL A major scale has **one** form. Only minors have versions.