

Basic Keyboard Skills: FAQ

What will I be asked to do in my BKS placement?

The main tool we use in the placement exam is sight reading. You will be asked to play a series of examples that get progressively more difficult. This gives us a good idea of where you fall into our curriculum. If you test beyond the basic level, you will also be asked about your knowledge of scales, chord theory, harmonization and transposition as we find the best placement for you in our three-term sequence. Since we have limited time, we will not hear prepared pieces during the placement exam.

If I have not had any previous piano study, do I still need to take a BKS placement exam?

Yes. We still want to meet all students and get some basic information about your theory and reading skills, even if you have not yet applied them to the piano.

Is it possible to test out of one or more terms of BKS?

Yes. Many students test into the higher levels of BKS and are therefore not required to take the earlier levels. You can see the approximate playing level required for each level of BKS by looking at the exam requirements at each level.

Is it possible to test out of the entire BKS sequence?

Yes, there are some students who come to Lawrence prepared to take the proficiency exam and are thus given the chance to test out of the entire sequence of Basic Keyboard Skills without taking any of the classes. These students are able to sight read a hymn, harmonize melodies at sight, transpose melodies and create accompaniments. They have also studied the chord progressions listed on the handout under MURP 203 and are comfortable playing them in many keys.

How can I best prepare for my BKS placement?

Working on your sight reading skills is the best thing you can do to prepare for your placement. If you are a beginner, learning the names of all of the keys on the keyboard and being able to name notes in both treble clef and bass clef is critical. If you are at a fairly high reading level and have had more than a few years of piano, you can also work on the theory skills listed in the exam requirements, including harmonization skills and chord progressions.

Why do I need to learn to play the piano when I am a (violin) major?

In your future as musicians, you will use the piano to accompany your students, play and hear multiple parts of a score, and apply your theory/composition work. Since the keyboard is such a central tool in the lives of musicians, all music majors and minors are required to gain a basic proficiency at the piano.

What will I learn in BKS?

Students will learn basic technical skills at the piano, how to read and coordinate hands together playing, and apply theory skills at the piano, such as harmonizing melodies, creating and transposing accompaniments, and playing chord progressions in all keys.

What book will I need for BKS?

You will need the following book for all three levels of BKS: [Alfred's Group Piano for Adults, second edition, by Lancaster and Renfrow \(ISBN 9780739053010\)](#).