**Affordable Learning Georgia Affordable Materials Grants  
Continuous Improvement Grants Final Report**

*(or Mini-Grants, for R17 and earlier)*

# General Information

Date: December 1, 2025

Grant Round: Round 26

Grant Number: M316

Institution Name: Kennesaw State University

Team Members:

* Dr. Benjamin Wadsworth, Professor of Music Theory, bwadswo2@kennesaw.edu
* Dr. Kelly Francis, Part-Time Professor of Music Theory, kfranc10@kennesaw.edu
* Dr. Jeffrey Yunek, Associate Professor of Music Theory, jyunek@kennesaw.edu

Project Lead:

* Dr. Benjamin Wadsworth (PI)

Course Name(s) and Course Numbers:

* Aural Skills I (MUSI 1111)
* Aural Skills II (MUSI 2212)
* Aural Skills III (MUSI 3111)
* Aural Skills IV (MUSI 3112)

Final Semester of Project:

* Fall 2025

***If applicable to your project:***

Average Number of Students Per Course Section:

* Aural Skills I: 5 sections with 84 total students, so 17 students per section
* Aural Skills II: 4 sections with 80 total students, so 20 students per section
* Aural Skills III: 3 sections with 68 total students, so 23 students per section
* Aural Skills IV: 3 sections with 60 total students, so 20 students per section

Number of Course Sections Affected by Implementation of Revised Resources:

* 15 in total over one AY; 8 over the fall semester; 7 over the spring semester

Total Number of Students Affected by Implementation of Revised Resources:

* 292 students in total over one AY (Fall 2025–Spring 2026)

# Project Narrative

The underlying context of this Continuous Improvement Grant is an online, no-cost aural skills textbook that replaces the dictation curriculum from the *Manual for Ear Training* (Gary Karpinski, W.W. Norton, $126) and a parallel sight-singing textbook that replaces the *Music for Sight Singing* (Ottman and Rogers, Pearson, $54.96). The result of these replacements was to make our aural skills curriculum no-cost for students. In a Transformation Grant (2018, Round 10), Drs. Jeffrey Yunek and Benjamin Wadsworth created the dictation textbook and a parallel set of practice exercises, housed at freemusicdictations.net and hosted by ALG in Volume 6. In a Continuous Improvement Grant (2020, Round 18), the authors added the aligned sight-singing textbook. In the current grant (2024, Round 26), Dr. Kelly Francis joins the team as an expert in music theory pedagogy and music cognition. In the current Continuous Improvement Grant, our goal is to improve the quality of the sight-singing textbook by adding a substantial quantity of melodies (80 in number) and improvisations (50 in number), particularly at moderate levels of difficulty to complement a tendency in the resource toward very easy or very difficult melodies. The sight-singing melodies help students become better music readers having a sense of internal hearing (audiation), while the improvisation exercises help students think of chords and melody notes faster (as proven by jazz majors being the fastest at chord identification). We had two ancillary goals: (1) continue adding melodies by composers with a variety of different backgrounds, and (2) experiment with the parameters of the improvisation tasks to adjust their difficulty level, thereby reaching a greater sample of students and helping them become more refined musicians.

The projected timeline was to create a draft version of Aural Skills I and III by May of 2025, then get feedback on it in the fall semester of 2025 (by October). (Our initial proposal incorrectly switched Aural Skills I and III with II and IV.) In the plan, Wadsworth and Francis would focus on the sight-singing melodies, while Yunek would focus on the improvisation exercises and compile materials on the website.

Although we had planned to start work in May 2025 on the resources in Aural I and III, the work started late since our grant was only fully executed by KSU by June 23, necessitating a flurry of work in July to make sure the team got paid, then in August 1–14, just before the Fall semester started, we created the melodies and improvisations for Aural I and III and then uploaded them to the revamped website. Work on sight-singing textbooks starts with a spreadsheet categorizing melodies by theoretical technique, often a type of interval or chord. When one surveys the common-practice literature, melodies tend to occur in some categories more frequently than others. For instance, it is easy to find melodies that arpeggiate the Tonic triad, but not those that include an arpeggiation of a more unusual chord, such as V/vi. For the underrepresented categories, one must follow a variety of leads to find suitable melodies by a particular composer, for instance Haydn Trios for diatonic skips or Robert Schumann’s works for skips of the IV chord. If one finds a suitable melody, it might need to be adapted into an appropriate exercise, perhaps by making the ending more final, making the melody less repetitive, or saturating the topic in a given excerpt. If these leads do not work out in a timely fashion, one typically composes a new melody and moves on to other melodies.

In this grant, Wadsworth and Francis found the melodies whereas Yunek uploaded them to the revised website. The team focused on melodies by composers with diverse backgrounds and those that were accessible and enjoyable. All melodies were deemed singable; Wadsworth and Francis did many internet searches for items such as “most popular classical pieces” or “easy string quartets.” In the in-class testing of the AS III melodies, I (Wadsworth) saw clear evidence of this with an AS III melody, “The Easy Winners,” by Scott Joplin (melody 34.2), where students enjoyed its snappy beat. Similarly, the end-of-semester survey in Aural Skills III confirmed the class’s high satisfaction for the melodies (4.1 out of 5, assuming maximum satisfaction of 5 and least of 1). After a final count, 12 of the new melodies were by underrepresented composers. Dr. Wadsworth designed the improvisations for Aural I and III, while Dr. Francis designed those for Aural II and IV. Early in August, we edited the melodies and put them in more accessible keys that most of a class could sing. We continued work throughout the fall, finding (and sometimes composing) melodies for Aural II and IV. We did find that it was difficult to predict the final order of the melodies in their chapter, as the difficulty of all melodies is subjective, so in the later fall’s batches of melodies, we did not specify their order before Yunek selected an ordering, but instead identified each melody with more intuitive descriptors: theoretical topic, title, and composer.

Much of the work on improvisations involved the creation of new types. Typical improvisations in Ottman and Rogers are tightly scripted, with 2–3 empty measures that specify chords and rhythms. We developed types that relaxed and tightened the students’ control over the musical material. Here they are described, from less control (1) to more (7):

1. Provide music for a set number of measures without guidance
2. Repeat then vary a motive
3. Sing up and down a scale using a predetermined rhythm
4. Repeat a motive and adapt it to a chord pattern
5. Complete a musical form, often a parallel period
6. Create a melody that embellishes a series of target notes
7. Fill in the blank with multiple, functionally equivalent options; improvise multiple versions

The resources as revised now contain 196 melodies at the website (up from 98), <https://www.freemusicdictations.net/sight-singing-excerpts>. There is now a pdf on this webpage containing 50 new improvisation tasks. These can be found at the same URL as given above. We checked the website for accessibility using Wix’s accessibility checker, and the improvisations PDF using the accessibility checker in Word. All titles are formatted hierarchically as headings; all images have alt text.

Given our experiences from this year, in the future we would communicate more persistently with the KSU Office of Research on how to move the grant forward. The delays in getting the grant fully executed had many causes, ranging from personnel turnover in the Office of Research, to complex approval chains involving both the Office of Research and UITS, to approval from Faculty Affairs to make sure part-time faculty pay did not exceed 25–30 hours per week. For example, our director was asked to submit an UITS ticket to get Wadsworth p-card access before the grant was fully executed, but the link for that access was not obvious and needed clarification. In a second example, the grant was fully executed two weeks prior to June 23, but the team was not notified until Wadsworth sent a reminder request. In retrospect, we did not need to have the grant to ask for funding for Dorico and Wix software. Approvals for the funding and disbursement of both software packages were complex and took multiple weeks. We did learn that Teams meetings between the BSOM Director, team PI, and Pre-Award and Post-Award Grants Specialists were essential in overcoming obstacles.

# Materials Description

The sight-singing textbook (<https://www.freemusicdictations.net/sight-singing-excerpts>) has been revised with a greater number of sight-singing melodies (196 up from 98) and improvisations (now 50 up from 6, in a downloadable pdf). Now, the reader will see four sight-singing melodies per chapter instead of the previous two. The materials are shared under an Attribution 4.0 License (CC BY). All webpages and pdfs have been checked for accessibility.

# Materials Links

Please see <https://www.freemusicdictations.net/sight-singing-excerpts>.

# Future Plans

We plan to share the results of the student surveys with the Director of the Bailey School of Music and Associate Dean of the College of the Arts. We will also share the results among the theory/aural skills area at KSU to debate future revisions to the aural skills curriculum. If the area faculty decide on making changes to the curriculum, we will notify the entire BSOM faculty.

We are weighing options for another Continuous Improvement Grant. The team is weighing whether to record the dictation assignments (<https://www.freemusicdictations.net/homework-assignments> is the link to the assignments in Aural Skills I) using live, recorded instruments instead of exported audio files. The student feedback on the dictation assignments showed strong support for recording the dictation files using live instruments instead of using imported MIDI files (4 out of a maximum of 5); numerous comments identified a greatest need in the MIDI files for swapping out excerpts for wind quartet. We believe that students are currently struggling at identifying the meter and inner voices of the harmonic dictations. A possible explanation for these difficulties is that is that the exported MIDI files lack expected nuances (e.g., dynamic accents and micro-timings) in indicating meter and melodic voices. Therefore, we are considering recording the melodic dictations for their indicated instruments (from the webpage), and the harmonic dictations using live piano, string quartet, or wind quartet.

We are also weighing whether to include articulation and expression markings in the melodies. In the Aural Skills III survey, there was mild to strong preference for adding expression marks and composer information above each melody (scores of .68/1 and .8/1). As we do so, we will have to test the run-time of the website over PC and mobile formats, given the concern that these additional details will increase run times.