GRADUS SCHOOL OF MUSIC — GRADUSMUSIC.COM

Gradus

Homeschool Credit Guide
Music Theory & Composition

Documentation for awarding high school fine arts credit.
For families using the Gradus 4-Year Composition Program.

FINE ARTS CREDIT | HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL | GRADES 8–12

This guide provides everything a homeschool parent needs to award 0.5 to 4.0 fine arts credits for Gradus study — including transcript course names, credit hour calculation, and National Core Arts Standards alignment for the composition portfolio.

gradusmusic.com · Revised 2026

§ 1 What Gradus Qualifies As

Gradus is a complete, sequential **Music Theory & Composition** curriculum that teaches theory as it unfolded historically, from Fux's species counterpoint onward — the method behind the composers you already know. It is taught ear-first and composition-first: students write original music from the first lesson, advancing over four years from single-voice melody through fugue, classical harmony, Romantic chromaticism, and 20th-century technique, and closing with orchestral score study and an original composition portfolio.

For homeschool transcript purposes, Gradus qualifies as a **Fine Arts** credit under the category of **Music Theory & Composition**. This is a recognized, accreditation-accepted course category distinct from Performance (instrument lessons) — it satisfies fine arts requirements in all 50 states and is accepted by colleges and universities as academic fine arts coursework.

> **How it differs from instrument lessons.** Instrument lessons develop *performance* technique. Music Theory & Composition develops *compositional* craft — the ability to create and analyze music. Most states accept both; many colleges specifically value composition study as evidence of higher-order musical thinking. Gradus and your child's instrument lessons are complementary, not competing.

AP Music Theory comparison. The College Board's AP Music Theory exam covers melody, harmony, voice leading, and form — material Gradus covers in Years 1–2. Gradus Year 3 (Romantic and 20th-century harmony) and Year 4 (masterworks score study and an original composition portfolio) go substantially beyond AP scope. A student who completes Years 1–2 of Gradus is prepared to score a 4 or 5 on the AP Music Theory exam without additional preparation.

§ 2 Credit Hour Calculation

The standard definition for one high school credit is **120–150 hours** of instruction and practice. The Gradus program runs **five practice days a week, about 30 weeks a year** — roughly an hour a day. **The student writes music every day:** every lesson ends with a composition challenge, and each week builds toward a finished original piece. A typical week:

Day	Focus	What the student does
Day 1	**Lesson**	Learns a new concept through reading, audio, and notation — then writes a short piece that uses it.
Day 2	**Ear training**	Hears intervals, chords, and progressions and names them by ear — sing first, then write what they hear.
Day 3	**Notation & reading**	Builds fluency reading and writing music on the staff, and sketches with the day's new material.
Day 4	**Listening & score study**	Studies how a master used the week's idea — then borrows it into their own writing.
Day 5	**Composition**	Drafts, revises, and finishes the week's original piece in the composition studio.

Five sessions a week of about an hour each, across ~30 weeks, comes to **roughly 140–150 hours a year — one full fine arts credit.** Older students routinely go longer; hours spent on related composition (writing for a recital, a family event, or their own projects) count toward the total.

> **Documenting hours.** Keep a simple weekly log noting which lesson step was covered and how many minutes were spent. A printable log template is on the last page of this guide. Hours spent on related composition work outside of Gradus (writing music for a recital, composing for a family event) may also be counted toward the total.

§ 3 Transcript Course Names & Descriptions

Use the course names and descriptions below verbatim on your homeschool transcript. They are phrased to be recognized by colleges, accreditation reviewers, and state oversight bodies as legitimate fine arts coursework.

YEAR 1 · STAGES I–III · STEPS 1–16

Music Theory & Composition I

1.0 Fine Arts Credit

TOPICS COVERED

- Intervals, scales, and staff notation
- Rhythm, meter, and melodic contour
- Introduction to two-voice counterpoint
- All five Fux species (note-against-note through florid)
- Three-voice harmony and basic progressions
- Minor mode and ear training foundations

STUDENT OUTCOMES

- Writes original two-voice counterpoint in all five species
- Harmonizes a given melody in three voices
- Identifies intervals and chords by ear
- Reads and writes music in treble and bass clef
- Completes a portfolio of original exercises

TRANSCRIPT COURSE DESCRIPTION

A complete introduction to music theory and composition covering intervals, scales, rhythm, melody, and all five species of two-voice counterpoint following the Fux tradition. Students complete daily composition exercises and ear-training drills, culminating in a portfolio of original two- and three-voice works. Instruction follows the historical species method that trained Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven.

YEAR 2 · STAGES IV–VI · STEPS 17–25

Music Theory & Composition II

1.0 Fine Arts Credit

TOPICS COVERED

- Phrase structure: period, sentence, binary, ternary, rondo
- Modulation (five techniques: pivot, chromatic, direct, sequential, enharmonic)
- Fugue: subject design, exposition, stretto, episodes
- SATB voice leading and figured bass
- Classical harmony through Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven
- Non-chord tones and suspension

STUDENT OUTCOMES

- Writes a fugue exposition with two to four voices
- Realizes a figured bass in four-part SATB style
- Composes a complete binary or ternary form movement
- Demonstrates modulation using at least three techniques
- Portfolio of original compositions in classical style

TRANSCRIPT COURSE DESCRIPTION

A second-year theory and composition course covering musical form, five modulation techniques, fugue construction, and the classical SATB voice-leading tradition. Students study scores by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven and write original compositions in each form studied. Equivalent in content to the AP Music Theory curriculum with substantial extension into counterpoint and fugue.

YEAR 3 · STAGES VII–X · STEPS 26–39

Music Theory & Composition III

1.0 Fine Arts Credit

TOPICS COVERED

- Romantic chromatic harmony and voice leading
- Augmented sixth chords (Italian, French, German)
- Enharmonic modulation and altered dominants
- Impressionist modal color and parallel motion
- Extended tonality, atonality, and twelve-tone serialism
- Neo-Riemannian transformations and the composer's ear

STUDENT OUTCOMES

- Writes in the harmonic language of Schubert, Brahms, and Wagner
- Employs impressionist techniques (Debussy, Ravel)
- Constructs a twelve-tone row and composes with it
- Applies Neo-Riemannian transformations and advanced tonal techniques
- Portfolio of original works spanning the Romantic, Impressionist, and modern eras

TRANSCRIPT COURSE DESCRIPTION

An advanced theory and composition course tracing the harmonic expansion of the 19th and early 20th centuries — from Romantic chromaticism and augmented sixth chords through impressionist modal writing, 20th-century atonality and serialism, and the Neo-Riemannian transformations and advanced tonal hearing of the composer's ear. Students compose original works in each style studied and develop their own analytical voice through score study.

YEAR 4 · STAGES XI–XII · STEPS 40–49

Advanced Composition & Portfolio

1.0 Fine Arts Credit

TOPICS COVERED

- Masterworks score study: Beethoven, Ravel, Stravinsky, Bartók, Mahler, Holst
- Form, harmony, and orchestration analysis of full orchestral scores
- Orchestration and re-scoring technique
- The capstone: brief, original composition (40+ measures), revision
- Artist statement and four-year composition portfolio

STUDENT OUTCOMES

- Analyzes form, harmony, and orchestration in six orchestral masterworks
- Completes and presents an original extended composition
- Writes an artist statement explaining compositional choices
- Produces a curated four-year composition portfolio
- Earns the Gradus 4-Year Composition Certificate

TRANSCRIPT COURSE DESCRIPTION

A capstone year pairing deep score study of six orchestral masterworks — Beethoven's Fifth, Ravel's Boléro, Stravinsky's Rite of Spring, Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra, Mahler's Fifth, and Holst's Planets — with an original extended composition. Students analyze form, harmony, and orchestration in full scores, then write, orchestrate, and revise a work of their own, assembling a curated four-year portfolio. Successful completion earns the Gradus 4-Year Composition Certificate.

Partial-year credit. Each year stands independently as 1.0 fine arts credit. If your student completes only one or two years before graduating, award credit for the years completed. You may also award 0.5 credit for a partial year (minimum 60 hours documented).

§ 4 National Core Arts Standards Alignment

The National Core Arts Standards (NCAS) are the nationally recognized framework for K–12 arts education. Gradus addresses three of the four NCAS domains strongly, with light coverage of the fourth — an appropriate profile for a composition-focused curriculum.

NCAS Domain	How Gradus Addresses It	Coverage
Creating	Students compose original music at every lesson step. The Capstone produces a complete portfolio work. The four sub-processes — Imagine, Plan & Make, Evaluate & Refine, Present — are embedded in the lesson–practicum–critique cycle.	Strong
Responding	Score study of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy, Stravinsky, Bartók, Mahler, and 80+ catalog works. Ear training throughout all four years. Every era's theory is taught as it emerged, so students analyze music in its historical and cultural context.	Strong
Connecting	Theory is situated in its historical moment at every step — from Fux's 1725 *Gradus ad Parnassum* through Nadia Boulanger's Paris classes. Composers are studied through their compositional approach. Students learn *why* rules exist by learning *when* they were discovered.	Strong
Performing	Light coverage — Gradus is a composition curriculum, not a performance curriculum. Students sing and play their own compositions in practicum exercises. For the Performing domain, count your child's instrument lessons as the primary evidence.	Supplemental

For college applications. Describing Gradus as "four years of Music Theory & Composition, including advanced study in counterpoint, harmony, and orchestration" is accurate and compelling. The four-year portfolio is a strong supplement to a college audition or arts supplement application.

§ 5 Certificate & Portfolio Language

Upon completing each year of the program, students receive a digital completion certificate from Gradus. The certificate for Year 4 (Capstone) is the **Gradus 4-Year Composition Certificate**. Use the language below to reference these certificates on your homeschool transcript.

Transcript note language (copy and paste):

Music Theory & Composition I–IV completed through Gradus School of Music (gradusmusic.com), a sequential composition curriculum. Curriculum follows the historic Fux–Boulanger method. Year 4 recognized with the Gradus 4-Year Composition Certificate. Composition portfolio available upon request.

For College Applications

When a college application asks your student to describe their arts coursework, use language like:

> *"Four years of sequential Music Theory & Composition through Gradus, a composition curriculum covering counterpoint, fugue, classical harmony, Romantic chromaticism, and 20th-century techniques. Culminating work: an original composition of [X] measures presented in a four-year portfolio."*

If the college asks for a syllabus, attach the course description from Section 3 for the relevant year.

> **Portfolio tip.** At the end of each year, have your student select their three best compositions, write a one-paragraph note about what they learned in each, and compile them into a portfolio PDF — a tangible artifact for co-ops, accountability groups, or college applications.

§ 6 Weekly Hour Log Template

Print and complete one log per semester (15 weeks). Keep in a binder with composition work samples.

Wk	Date Range	Lesson Step(s) Covered	Activities (lesson / ear / compose / score)	Hours	Running Total
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
Semester Total					**hrs**

STUDENT NAME

SCHOOL YEAR & SEMESTER

COURSE

PARENT / TEACHER SIGNATURE

Note for accreditation oversight bodies: This log, combined with the student's composition portfolio and Gradus completion certificates, constitutes a complete record of music theory and composition study for fine arts credit documentation purposes. Contact gradusmusic.com for additional verification.