



JAZZ IMPROVISATION I

SYLLABUS - FALL 2026
MUJS 2360

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CLASS TIMES

Mondays and Wednesdays
11:15 a.m. – 12:05 p.m.

CLASS LOCATION

Music Building - Room 262

COURSE PREREQUISITES

Successful completion of MUJS 1131 and MUJS 1132. Jazz majors only, or consent of instructor.

COURSE DESCRIPTION and LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This course will provide varied strategies along with basic materials and practices for jazz improvisation. The general learning objectives for the course will focus on basic skills leading to bebop era harmony, melodic language, and rhythmic concepts. Students will learn selected tunes, phrases, progressions, and techniques. Detailed learning objectives will be outlined in class and will be tied to the various assessments.

- Students will learn by memory ten (10) standard tunes:
 - *Groovin' High*
 - *On The Trail*
 - *Blue Bossa*
 - *Yardbird Suite*
 - *Up Jumped Spring*
 - *How High the Moon*
 - *Relaxin' At Camarillo*
 - *Joy Spring*
 - *Cherokee*
 - *Half Nelson*
- There are three Assignments.
- There are three Transcription projects, each progressing in scope.
- There are three Exams.
- There is no midterm exam or final exam. The Final Transcription Project will be in lieu of a final exam.
- There are no make-up exams or retakes.
- No Extra Credit is planned for the course.

COURSE MATERIALS

1. You must have your **instrument** and note taking materials, including a **music manuscript paper notebook** of some kind. Class notes are part of your participation grade!

2. All topics and concepts will be introduced in respective class lectures throughout the course. As such, no dedicated text is necessarily needed. There is no shortage of jazz methods or related texts available to today's jazz student. These include method books, history books, theory books, transcription/analysis books, artist biographies, and related field texts. Some of these texts may be referenced or utilized to supplement material or concepts presented in this course. You are not required to purchase or obtain these texts, but they may enhance your understanding and application of concepts presented in the course. A very small sampling of supplemental texts include:

1. *How to Play Bebop, Vols. 1, 2, & 3* by David Baker
2. *Comprehensive Technique for Jazz Musicians* by Bert Ligon
3. *How to Improvise* by Hal Crook
4. *Thinking in Jazz* by Paul F. Berliner
5. *Jazz Improvisation for Keyboard Players – Complete Edition* by Dan Haerle
6. *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization* by George Russell
7. *Clifford Brown* by Nick Catalano
8. *To Be or Not to Bop* by Dizzy Gillespie
9. *Jazz Handbook* by Jamey Aebersold
10. *Fluent Forever* by Gabriel Wyner

3. Required tunes will be posted in Canvas. Other handouts, or readings may be utilized and will be made available via Canvas in the module, "Additional Materials."

4. You will need access to a **reliable notation software** such as Sibelius or Dorico to submit your transcription projects. Part of the transcription grade is clarity and a clean copy, so freeware or web-based software is discouraged. This software can be accessed via the CoM Computer Lab.

5. Unless otherwise instructed, exams will be submitted by audio and/or video upload via Canvas, so you must have a reliable digital **recording device**. Typically, this is your phone, but it is your responsibility to make sure your equipment can handle the requirements for both file size and quality. You may also record your exams with studio equipment via home studio software such as Logic Pro.

6. Special note for drummers: Many of the concepts or assignments in the course will naturally be harmonic or theory-based. Drummers should have a basic understanding of these concepts and may be asked to complete some of these assignments either singing or on vibes, mallets, or piano. Drummers will also have alternate assignment options which will be completed on drum kit. Drummers may participate on vibes or mallets for melodic portions of the course if desired (or a secondary instrument by instructor approval).

7. Special note for vocalists: Due to the unique nature of vocal performance, vocalists will have alternate options for particular assignments (i.e. vocalise options for transcriptions, range considerations and alternate options for 12 key assignments, scat specific applications, etc.).

7. Optional: iReal Pro app (highly recommended) for exercises or application; Bluetooth speaker.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

- Be ready for class to begin at 11:15 a.m. on class days. This means in your seat with instrument, manuscript notebook, pencil, etc. ready to go.
- Be musically prepared for class.
- This course will be a minimal technology use environment. **Cell phone use is not permitted during class**, and phones should be put away, silenced and/or turned completely off. Tablets/iPads may be permitted for limited use during class with instructor approval, but for course content only (i.e. music reading or note-taking). Text or email (and other apps) must be disabled for tablet/iPad usage. If you disrupt the instructional cycle in class with cell phone (or other technology) use, you will be called upon to adhere to the policy, and repeated infractions will result in direction for you to leave the classroom. See section on Student Behavior below.
- Course information will be disseminated in class, Canvas announcements, or Canvas page postings. Check often for updates and new information.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

- Attendance is required for all class activities and is factored into your grade (see Grading Criteria below).
- Absences may be excused on a case-by-case basis with **advance notice**. **In the case of an excused absence**, it is your responsibility to obtain class notes or assignments.
- Absences that do not fall under Pregnancy and Parenting, Military Service, Religious Holy Days, and Official University Functions, as defined by the official University policy (see link below) are deemed a matter between the student and their faculty member. If the absence is an illness or extenuating circumstance that exceeds five (5) consecutive days, the faculty member may request for the student to provide documentation through the Dean of Students' office.
- If you miss class without prior notice it will be considered an unexcused absence until you communicate with the instructor. It is your responsibility to inform the instructor as soon as possible after an unexpected absence.
- It is important that you **communicate** with the instructor prior to any expected absence, so you can mitigate the impact of the absence on your attainment of course learning goals.
- Concerning other extenuating circumstances, per official University policy, the decision to excuse any absence remains with the faculty member.

GRADING CRITERIA

The final grade will be determined according to the following criteria:

- Attendance: 10%
- Class participation, preparation, and notebooks - 15%
- Transcriptions and Assignments - 25%
- Tunes - 25%
- Exams - 25%

PERFORMANCE GRADING RUBRIC

Assignment Grading Rubric					
0	F (0- 60) / 1	D (60-70) / 2	C (70-80) / 3	B (80-90) / 4	A (90-100) 5
Not completed Not done correctly in virtually any regard	Many mistakes Unable to play without stopping Almost no attention to detail with regard to phrasing, style, accents, dynamics, etc..	Executed with little confidence Many mistakes in melody Multiple stops or hesitations Very little attention to detail Rhythm, intonation, stylistic errors abound	Timid execution and inconsistent flow Rhythmic hesitations and/or isolated stops Contains some errors with regard to melody or rhythms Some attention to detail is apparent in accents and phrasing	Played with generally good confidence and flow No hesitations or only isolated incidences Mostly error free Attention to detail is apparent in accents and phrasing	Well-executed with confidence, consistency, and fluency. Virtually error free High level of attention to detail with accents, phrasing, style, etc.

The following factors will also affect your grade in various measures:

- Professional attitude at all times.
- Quality and consistency of preparation for class exercises or assignments. All printed work must be neat, ordered, and legible. All recordings for exams must be of high quality, clear, and easily reviewed.
- Timely submission of all assignments. Late work will not be accepted.
- Adherence to the attendance policy. This is a lecture AND performance-based class! Various materials and concepts will be presented in each class via the lecture method and at times information will move quickly. In addition, you will play collectively in EVERY class and selected individuals will be called upon to demonstrate current exercises or assignments. EVERY student will be called at some point for individual class participation both for performance or discussion. Be prepared!
- Chronic UNEXCUSED absences from class will result in the loss of a letter grade. This circumstance may require a meeting with the student, the instructor, and/or the Chair of the Jazz Division. These meetings will determine any subsequent actions to be taken.
- Extra Credit: Extra credit is a privilege and not guaranteed. No extra credit is currently planned for the course; however, there may be opportunities to receive extra credit during the semester via special projects at the discretion of the instructor.

EXAMS

Unless otherwise instructed, exams will be performance-based and will be recorded individually during class time (11:15 a.m. - 12:05 p.m.). The exams will be available on Canvas at 11:00 a.m. on exam days. Your submission must be posted to Canvas by the listed due date, which is typically 12:30 p.m., but may be extended depending on the assignment. Exams may have specific parameters, so be precise when completing the test.

We will not meet in the classroom for recorded exams! You must arrange to be in an adequate location where you can access the exam via Canvas, record yourself executing the test, and submit it to Canvas. Some exams may require a written portion in addition to the audio portion which will be completed on Canvas.

SEMESTER SCHEDULE

The table below is the general organization for the various classes and planned topic presentations. All of this information will be presented, but class acquisition and flow will be taken into consideration. Class time is relatively short in relation to all of the information that must be presented and, with a class this size, the schedule may need to be adjusted to achieve class learning objectives.

Therefore, the **course content is subject to change** as necessary to meet the collective needs of the class based on actual progress and comprehension. The goal for the course is not simply to present information, have you memorize it, and then reproduce it on a test. Rather, we would like to foster an engaging environment where you can be inspired to build and apply your improvisational language organically with initiative and energy.

The below schedule is just a general guide. Check Canvas for actual assignment/exam due dates and times! In the event of any changes, you will receive notice in class and via Canvas of any necessary adjustments. Every effort will be made to keep the dates for Exams, Assignments, and Transcriptions the same as listed below, but **stay flexible**. If any class change precludes the inclusion of certain information for an exam or assignment, the task will be altered accordingly.

WEEKLY CLASS SCHEDULES	Assignment/Transcription Due Dates and EXAMS
WEEK 1 Monday 17 AUG - Course introduction, syllabus review, explanation of assignments and expectations, philosophy and purpose - Discuss Pre-assessment - Record yourself (audio only) performing three choruses over blues changes in any key. Use the iReal Pro app (or other backing track) at the tempo of your choice.	
Wednesday 19 AUG - Welcome Exercises! - Foundational Concepts, Language, Music & Emotion	Pre-assessment Due
WEEK 2 Monday 24 AUG - Nomenclature - Foundational Exercises: The Cycle - Ear Training Primer - Discuss Assignment 1: Sets of 3s – Players/Performances/Phrases	
Wednesday 26 AUG - Listening - Elemental Interest - Dramatic Devices - Discuss Transcription 1 <i>Groovin' High</i>	Assignment 1 Due - Choose two earlier jazz artists that inspire you - Identify a representative solo from each - one recorded BEFORE 1940 - Transcribe one 2-4 bar phrase from each
WEEK 3 Monday 31 AUG - Jazz Calisthenics - Anatomy of a Tune - Types of Tunes	
Wednesday 2 SEP - Strategies for Learning Tunes <i>On the Trail</i>	<i>Groovin' High</i> Due
WEEK 4 Monday 7 SEP - LABOR DAY - NO CLASS – HOLIDAY ROUTINE	
Wednesday 9 SEP - Rhythm – Developing a Feel for Swing - Feeling the 'And'	Transcription 1 Due 8 bars from one of the selected options (Armstrong, Teagarden, Young, Wells, Hawkins, Lil Hardin A., etc.) Must SING and PLAY along
WEEK 5	<i>On the Trail</i> Due

Monday 14 SEP	
Exam review	
Wednesday 16 SEP - We will not meet in the classroom! EXAM 1 is recorded individually and submitted to Canvas by 12:15 p.m. - It is YOUR responsibility to be in a location where you can access the exam via Canvas, record it, and submit it by the end of class.	EXAM 1 – Playing & Written - Triads in all 12 keys around the cycle 7th scales up and down - Listening and Analysis: Parts of a Tune <i>Etc. - Similar concepts will be tested</i>
WEEK 6	
Monday 21 SEP - Approaches to Improvising Over Tunes - Embellishments	
Wednesday 23 SEP - Review Assignment 2 - Elemental Interest – Part II - Space & Melody - Limiting Exercises - Developing the Ear	Blue Bossa Due
WEEK 7	
Monday 28 SEP Chords/Scales/Chickens/Eggs	Assignment 2 Due - Choose 3 Essential Phrases from the list of artists - At least one phrase must come from Louis Armstrong or Jack Teagarden - Must SING and PLAY along - Must play one of the phrases in three additional keys (Four keys total – original and three others)
Wednesday 30 SEP - The Möbius Scale & Chord <i>Yardbird Suite</i>	
WEEK 8	
Monday 5 OCT - Guide Tones - Voice Leading - Perpetual Motion	Transcription 2 Due 12 bars (one blues chorus) from one of the options - Written, analyzed, performed (sing/play) Class Notebook Check - Notebooks will be checked in class - Entries must be legible and ordered by class date
Wednesday 7 OCT <i>Up Jumped Spring</i> Interlude 1	Yardbird Suite Due
WEEK 9	
Monday 12 OCT - Constructing a Chorus - Making a Statement - Telling a Story	
Wednesday 14 OCT - The Melody of Life - Triad Embellishment	Up Jumped Spring Due -Guide Tone Chorus
WEEK 10	
Monday 19 OCT - Non-diatonic Tones & 8-Note Scales - Exam 2 Review <i>How High the Moon</i>	
Wednesday 21 OCT	EXAM 2 Enclosures

- We will not meet in the classroom! EXAM 2 is recorded individually and submitted to Canvas by 12:05 p.m. - It is YOUR responsibility to be in a location where you can access the exam via Canvas, record it, and submit it by the end of class.	- Outlines - Triad Embellishments - Guide Tones
WEEK 11 Monday 26 OCT - Bebop Scales - Perpetual Motion - Please Enter Your 4-Digit PIN Code	
Wednesday 28 OCT Assignment 3 review	How High the Moon Due
WEEK 12 Monday 2 NOV - Clues for Blues to Pay Your Dues - Ear training <i>Relaxin' At Camarillo</i> - Other considerations: from Modal to Free	Assignment 3 Due - Choose 3 Essential Phrases from the list of artists, then write 2 of your own phrases - At least one phrase must come from Lester Young or JJ Johnson - Include song name, recording information, and excerpt info - Analyze each phrase and use them to write an etude over a standard or blues progression - Play each (one key) and your etude
Wednesday 4 NOV - Transcription 3 review Interlude 2	Relaxin' At Camarillo Due
WEEK 13 Monday 9 NOV <i>Joy Spring</i> - ii – V7- I Progression	Transcription 3 Due 32 bars (or 24 bars if doing two blues choruses) from one of the options - Must be able to SING from memory - Must be able to PLAY from memory - Extra Credit: Include analysis highlighting previously covered topics (Guide tones, Outlines, Scalar Patterns, etc.)
Wednesday 11 NOV - Ear training <i>Cherokee</i>	Joy Spring Due
WEEK 14 Monday 16 NOV <i>Half Nelson</i>	Class Notebooks Due Notebooks will be checked in class
Wednesday 18 NOV - Random tune and skill review - Exam 3 Review	Cherokee Due
WEEK 15 Mon 23 NOV - THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS – HOLIDAY ROUTINE	
Wed 25 NOV - THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS – HOLIDAY ROUTINE	
WEEK 16 Monday 30 NOV - We will not meet in the classroom! EXAM 3 is recorded individually and submitted to Canvas by 12:05 p.m. - It is YOUR responsibility to be in a location where you can access the exam via Canvas, record it, and submit it by the end of class.	Half Nelson Due EXAM 3 - Tune performance – play head, play specified exercise, and improvise
Wednesday 2 DEC LAST CLASS! - Conclusions and Consequences	Post-Assessment Due Record yourself improvising over the same Blues Changes as your Pre-Assessment.

UNT OFFICIAL POLICIES/STATEMENTS:

ODA STATEMENT

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter. You can now request your Letters of Accommodation ONLINE and ODA will mail your Letters of Accommodation to your instructors. You may wish to begin a private discussion with your professors regarding your specific needs in a course. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester. For additional information see the Office of Disability Access.

<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>

(940) 565-4323

UNT OFFICIAL ATTENDANCE POLICY

<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-039>

STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

<https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>

HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION

<https://music.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness>

DEFIBRILLATOR LOCATIONS IN THE COLLEGE OF MUSIC

- Music Building: Across from the west side of the Music Commons, directly across from the elevator
- Music Building: Third floor hallway, across from the staircase that comes up from the Copy Room. Next to Room 322
- Music Building: Across from the Copy Room next to Room 293
- Music Building: Voertman Lobby by the big double set of doors that lead out to the courtyard
- Music Building: Main Office (247) under the student worker's desk
- Music Annex: Next to room MA117, near the triple set of doors on the east side of the building
- Music Practice Building North: First floor on the Avenue C side
- Music Practice Building South: First floor on the Avenue C side
- Bain Hall: First floor by the restrooms
- Murchison Performing Arts Center: Located off the main lobby, beyond the grand staircase, across from the single occupancy restroom (next to the public water fountains)

REGISTRATION INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

Link: <https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/spring-academic-calendar.html>

SEMESTER CALENDAR, FALL 2026

<https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/fall-academic-calendar.html>

FINAL EXAM SCHEDULE, FALL 2026 - See above

FINANCIAL AID AND SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Please visit the webpage and search for criteria for either undergraduates and graduates.

<http://financialaid.unt.edu/sap>

RETENTION OF STUDENT RECORDS

<http://ferpa.unt.edu/>

COUNSELING AND TESTING

<http://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services>.

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

<https://disparities.unt.edu/mental-health-resources>

ADD/DROP POLICY

See Academic Calendar (listed above) for additional add/drop Information.

<https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/spring-academic-calendar.html>

STUDENT RESOURCES

The University of North Texas has many resources available to students. For a complete list, go to:

<https://success.unt.edu/aa-sa-resources>

CARE TEAM

The Care Team is a collaborative interdisciplinary committee of university officials that meets regularly to provide a response to student, staff, and faculty whose behavior could be harmful to themselves or others.

<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care-team>

EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION & PROCEDURES

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to the Jazz Division Canvas page for contingency plans for covering course materials.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION – EAGLE CONNECT

Your access point for business and academic services at UNT occurs at my.unt.edu. All official communication from the university will be delivered to your Eagle Connect account.

eagleconnect.unt.edu/

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

The University of North Texas promotes the integrity of learning and embraces the core values of trust and honesty. Academic integrity is based on educational principles and procedures that protect the rights of all participants in the educational process and validate the legitimacy of degrees awarded by the University. In the investigation and resolution of allegations of student academic dishonesty, the University's actions are intended to be corrective, educationally sound, fundamentally fair, and based on reliable evidence.

<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Academic Integrity - Academic misconduct is present in an academic work wherever AI assistance has been used when unauthorized, or when authorized, has not been disclosed as required.

Expect changes - The developments around generative AI are in flux and the rules that are expressed in this syllabus may need to change on short notice. This may affect the contents of assignments, as well as their evaluation.

Generative AI Use Is Prohibited - The use of generative AI is strictly prohibited in this course.

General Writing - The use of generative AI tools is not permitted on any writing, arrangement, composition, or transcription assignments in this course. By submitting a writing assignment, you attest that you are the only and original author.

<https://guides.library.unt.edu/artificial-intelligence/AIfaculty>

STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

<https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>

COURSE SAFETY PROCEDURES

Safety during rehearsals and performances is of the highest priority. Various procedures will be discussed in class to facilitate proper actions during a campus emergency.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON ANY UNT or COURSE RELATED TOPIC please visit the university web pages.

<https://www.unt.edu>