DL5783 Course Reflection

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DL5783: Engaging Learners in Online Learning

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In DL5783, I continued development of *MT101: Introduction to Music Theory*, a high school-level online course that introduces students to the foundational concepts of music notation, scales, intervals, and harmony. Building on the course map and initial structure from DL5773, I revised and expanded the design to incorporate interactive activities, gamification elements, and increased learner engagement opportunities. The design process was informed by Cognitivism as a learning theory and Keller's ARCS motivational model, both of which shaped the instructional methods and activity choices. This reflection summarizes the interaction strategies embedded in the course, explains my rationale for the course evaluation scores, explores opportunities for future enhancements, and considers how gamification and emerging technologies may influence my instructional design practice moving forward.

Learner Interactions

The course intentionally incorporates all four major types of learner interactions: learner-to-learner, learner-to-instructor, learner-to-interface, and learner-to-self. Each plays a distinct role in engaging students and supporting their learning progression.

Learner-to-Learner Interactions.

Students engage with one another primarily through structured discussions. In the "Introductions" forum, learners share their musical backgrounds and goals, fostering community from the start. Later, in Module 2, students participate in a discussion analyzing chord progressions from popular music. This activity allows students to compare perspectives, connect theory to authentic examples, and build on the varied musical experiences their peers bring to the class. Such collaboration strengthens relevance, a key component of the ARCS model, by showing students how theoretical concepts apply across musical genres and personal interests.

Learner-to-Instructor Interactions.

Students interact with the instructor through an orientation video, feedback on assignments, and course messaging. The video introduces the instructor's presence, tone, and expectations, setting a welcoming and supportive environment. Feedback on assignments, such as the composition project, provides targeted guidance and encouragement, building student confidence. In addition, instructor availability via Canvas messaging ensures students can ask questions and receive timely responses, mirroring real-world teacher accessibility.

Learner-to-Interface Interactions.

The course makes use of several interactive digital tools to increase engagement. For example, MusicTheory.net exercises allow learners to practice note identification, scale construction, and interval recognition directly in the browser, with instant feedback. The custom-designed *Interval Challenge Game* (hosted on Wayground) further immerses students in gamified practice by adding timed questions, scoring, and opportunities for redemption. These interfaces scaffold learners' cognitive processing by breaking down abstract theory into manageable, interactive tasks.

Learner-to-Self Interactions.

Reflection activities encourage students to consider their own learning progress and connect new knowledge to personal experiences. At the end of Module 1, students write about how their understanding of notation and intervals influences how they perceive or perform music. Similarly, after composing an original melody, students reflect on the theory concepts they applied and the challenges they faced. These self-assessment opportunities foster metacognition, helping learners monitor their growth and reinforcing transfer of knowledge to their own musical practices.

Course Evaluation Scores and Rationale

In evaluating my completed online course, I assigned a score of 5 (strongly agree) across all categories on the course evaluation rubric (see Appendix A). This reflects my confidence in the clarity, alignment, and interactivity of the design, as well as its overall readiness to support student learning.

First, I rated the course highly because of its clear structure and navigation. From the "Getting Started" module, learners are oriented with a welcome video, syllabus, and introduction discussion, ensuring they know what to expect and how to participate in the course. Each module follows a consistent pattern of directions, instructional materials, interactive tasks, and assessments, allowing students to focus on learning rather than struggling with interface logistics.

Second, I gave the course top marks for the alignment of goals, objectives, and tasks. Each of the three course goals is supported by SMART objectives that are measurable and relevant. For example, Goal 2 ("Understand and apply basic scales and intervals") is linked to specific objectives such as identifying major and minor scales and classifying intervals by size and quality. The accompanying tasks, including the interactive notation exercises and the *Interval Challenge Game*, directly measure these objectives, ensuring coherence across design elements. This alignment reflects best practices in instructional design by connecting activities to intended outcomes (Spence, 2019).

Third, I awarded a perfect score for engagement and interactivity. Learners engage in varied formats: discussion boards for peer interaction, interactive web-based tools for practice, and reflective writing for self-assessment. The inclusion of gamification, particularly the *Interval Challenge Game*, adds novelty and motivation, supporting Keller's ARCS model by capturing

attention and providing satisfaction through scoring and progress tracking (Keller, n.d.). These elements move the course beyond static instruction into a dynamic learning environment.

Finally, I rated the course highly because of its effective use of technology and tools. Resources such as MusicTheory.net, Noteflight, and Wayground are not only legally and ethically appropriate but also pedagogically purposeful. They provide instant feedback, scaffold learning, and allow students to revisit activities multiple times for mastery. By combining these tools with instructor feedback and reflective prompts, the course offers both structured guidance and learner autonomy, key components of effective online instruction (Çeliköz et al., 2019).

Future Enhancements

Although the course evaluation reflected high levels of alignment and engagement, there are opportunities to expand interactivity and connectivity in future iterations of the course. In particular, the addition of dynamically delivered materials and expanded opportunities for communication could further enhance the learner experience.

One area for growth is the use of multimedia feedback. Currently, instructor-to-learner interaction is provided primarily through written comments and Canvas messaging. Incorporating short video or audio feedback for assignments, especially for student compositions, would make feedback more personalized and engaging. Research on multimedia learning suggests that varied modes of feedback can increase both motivation and comprehension by providing multiple pathways for processing information (Çeliköz et al., 2019).

Another enhancement involves strengthening peer-to-peer connections. While discussion boards already support learner-to-learner interaction, informal tools such as Flip or Padlet could encourage students to share short video reflections or visual posts about their learning. These tools would allow learners to showcase their progress and creativity in ways that go beyond text,

supporting both community building and authentic learning experiences. Unlike graded discussions, these would serve as informal interactions, focused on expression and collaboration rather than assessment.

In terms of formal enhancements, peer review activities could be added to the composition project. Students might exchange and critique melodies within a structured rubric, providing them with authentic feedback from multiple perspectives. This would not only deepen understanding of theory but also prepare learners for collaborative work common in music ensembles and future academic settings.

Gamification and Emerging Technologies

Gamification has played an important role in the design of this course by transforming skill practice into a motivating and repeatable experience. The *Interval Challenge Game* is a central example. Rather than completing drills in isolation, students engage in timed rounds of interval identification with scoring, instant feedback, and opportunities for redemption. This structure taps into the motivational components of Keller's ARCS model by capturing attention through novelty, building confidence with immediate feedback, and increasing satisfaction as learners track their progress over multiple attempts (Keller, n.d.). Gamification in this context does not replace traditional exercises but enhances them by providing variety and a sense of accomplishment.

Gamification is also well suited to music theory because it reinforces repetitive skills in an engaging way. Recognizing intervals requires consistent practice, and game-based repetition makes this process less monotonous. Students are more likely to persist when challenges are framed as interactive and rewarding. The ability to replay the *Interval Challenge Game* with new

questions each time, combined with a progress tracking feature, encourages mastery learning by promoting repeated engagement until accuracy is achieved.

Looking ahead, emerging technologies have the potential to expand the role of gamification in music theory instruction. For example, adaptive learning systems could adjust game difficulty in real time, presenting simpler intervals to struggling students while challenging advanced learners with compound or inverted intervals. Similarly, augmented reality or virtual reality applications could allow students to "see" and "hear" intervals in immersive, three-dimensional environments, reinforcing learning through multisensory experiences. Advances in artificial intelligence may also allow games to provide personalized coaching, offering targeted feedback or generating new practice items automatically based on learner performance.

Impact on Instructional Design Thinking

The combined experiences of DL5773 and DL5783 significantly shaped my understanding of instructional design by moving me from initial course planning toward the creation of fully interactive and engaging learning experiences. In DL5773, my focus was on developing a clear course map, aligning goals with SMART objectives, and selecting content and assessments that supported learning outcomes. That work established a strong foundation in backward design, ensuring that each component of the course had a clear purpose.

DL5783 extended this foundation by emphasizing interactivity and gamification. Rather than simply delivering content, I was challenged to think about how learners would actively engage with the material through tools, activities, and games. Designing the *Interval Challenge Game* and building its storyboard gave me hands-on experience with incorporating gamification elements that increase motivation and learner satisfaction. This reinforced the importance of considering not only *what* students learn, but also *how* they experience the process of learning.

The course also broadened my awareness of evaluating tools for safety and legal use. Completing the evaluation table for interactive tools highlighted the responsibility instructional designers have to ensure that all resources are appropriate, accessible, and compliant with usage guidelines. This emphasis on ethical and responsible tool selection will remain central to my future design practice.

Finally, these courses highlighted the balance between theory and application in instructional design. The use of Cognitivism provided a lens for structuring content around pattern recognition, scaffolding, and memory processing, while Keller's ARCS model guided decisions about motivation and engagement. Applying these theories to real design tasks helped me see how abstract principles translate into concrete instructional strategies.

Conclusion

Designing *MT101: Introduction to Music Theory* across DL5773 and DL5783 provided valuable experience in developing an online course that is both instructionally sound and highly engaging. Through careful alignment of goals, objectives, and tasks, the course establishes a clear structure that supports student success. By embedding multiple types of learner interactions, incorporating interactive tools, and integrating gamification through the *Interval Challenge Game*, the course creates a dynamic environment where students can practice, reflect, and connect with others.

References

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Appendix A

Course Evaluation: Introduction to Music Theory

Please take a few minutes to provide honest feedback. Your input will help improve this course for future students. All responses are anonymous.

Section 1: Course Structure & Navigation

The course layout was easy to navigate. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	◉	Strongly Agree

Each module had clear goals, objectives, and expectations. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	◉	Strongly Agree

Section 2: Instructional Clarity

Instructions for assignments and quizzes were clear and easy to follow. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	◉	Strongly Agree

The content helped me understand the learning goals of each week.   *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	◉	Strongly Agree

Section 3: Engagement & Interactivity

The activities (quizzes, worksheets, discussions) were engaging and helped me learn.   *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	◉	Strongly Agree

There were opportunities to interact with the content (e.g., labeling, listening, composing).   *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	◉	Strongly Agree

Section 4: Technology & Tools

The external tools and websites used (e.g., MusicTheory.net, Noteflight) supported my learning.   *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	◉	Strongly Agree

Links and media functioned properly throughout the course. *

◉ Yes

◯ No

◯ Some Didn't Work

Section 5: Overall Experience

The course helped me improve my music theory skills. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◉	Strongly Agree

What did you enjoy most about this course?

What would you change or improve in this course?