

Developing Music Literacy in the Beginning Year of Instruction

Presented by Rob Chilton



The Midwest Clinic

International Band & Orchestra Clinic

Monday, December 19

3:45 PM ♦ W179

What is literacy?

Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak, and listen in a manner that allows us to make sense of the world.¹

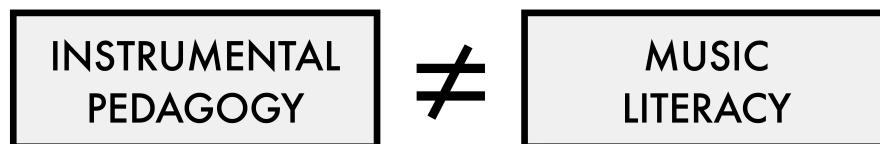
Therefore, music literacy is the ability to read, compose, perform, and listen in a manner that allows us to make sense of music.

Instrumental Pedagogy ≠ Music Literacy

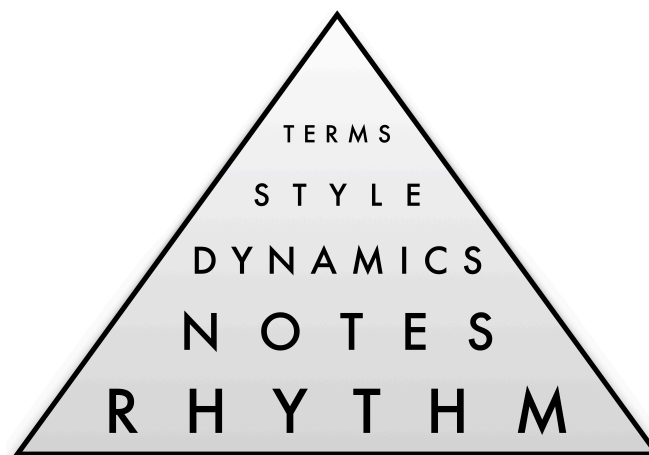
The majority of our students come to us without musical experience. Most have never played an instrument and the majority are unable to read music. These are two separate subject areas that require instruction -

1) How to play the instrument

2) How to read the music



The Building Blocks of Literacy



¹ National Literacy Trust, <https://literacytrust.org.uk/information/what-is-literacy/>, accessed October 14, 2022

Rhythm

Rhythm is the foundation of the musical language.

The right note at the wrong time is a wrong note.

1) Teach the Beat

- Turn on the metronome.
- I recommend choosing a tempo between 60 - 72 bpm.
- No subdivision.
- Explain that “every time you hear a click or beep, that’s a beat.”
- Avoid overcomplicating your explanation of the beat.

2) Develop the Foot Tap

- Ask your students to tap their foot every time they hear the beat.
- I recommend tapping the toes instead of the heel. It eliminates excess upper leg movement.
- Demonstrate a proper foot tap for your students.
- A good foot tap is a “press-up” where the toes press gently into the ground on the beat. This helps eliminate rebound tapping and aids those that have trouble maintaining a steady pulse.

3) Establish Basic Rhythmic Notation with Quarter Notes & Quarter Rests

- “For now, a quarter note gets one beat of sound and a quarter rest gets one beat of silence.”
- Practice counting and/or clapping a variety of quarter note/quarter rests patterns.
- Reinforce that rests are not “nothing.” Rests are notes that make silence!
- Rests are important because silence allows for more interesting musical patterns!

Graphic from RC Theory - Lesson 1E

The graphic displays three musical staves, each labeled on the left. All staves are in 4/4 time, indicated by the time signature at the beginning of each line.

- Line 1.1:** Shows a sequence of quarter notes and quarter rests. The first measure contains four quarter notes, numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4 below them. The second measure contains a quarter rest followed by three quarter notes. The third measure contains a quarter rest followed by three quarter notes. The line ends with a double bar line.
- Line 1.2:** Shows a sequence of quarter notes and quarter rests. The first measure contains a quarter note followed by three quarter rests. The second measure contains a quarter rest followed by three quarter notes. The third measure contains a quarter rest followed by three quarter notes. The line ends with a double bar line.
- Line 1.3:** Shows a sequence of quarter notes and quarter rests. The first measure contains a quarter note followed by three quarter rests. The second measure contains a quarter rest followed by three quarter notes. The third measure contains a quarter rest followed by three quarter notes. The line ends with a double bar line.

4) Teach Clapping Technique

- Clap - For the start of notes
- Chop - For sustained beats
- Empty Hands - For rests
- Quick Separation - For showing final releases (or when working on an isolated release)

5) Teaching Counting Technique

- "Eastman" VS. "Traditional" ("1 ti te ta" VS. "1 e & a")
- I recommend pulsing your voice with the down/up of the foot tap. (i.e. 8th note subdivision)
- Sound always touches silence. Count with connected not choppy sounds.
- I recommend the number of pulses match the exact number of 8th note subdivisions.

Q - Does pulsing while counting affect sustains while playing?

A - *Not in my experience!*

6) Counting and Clapping VS. Solo Counting or Clapping

- Recommend keeping it simple with solo counting or solo clapping.
- My preference goes to clapping rather than counting in the full group setting.

7) Scaffold Larger Note Values

- Use a "rhythm tree" or similar chart to help students clear draw connections between the different note values.

Graphics from RC Theory - Lesson 3

			
1	2	3	4
			
1	2	3	4
			
1	2	3	4

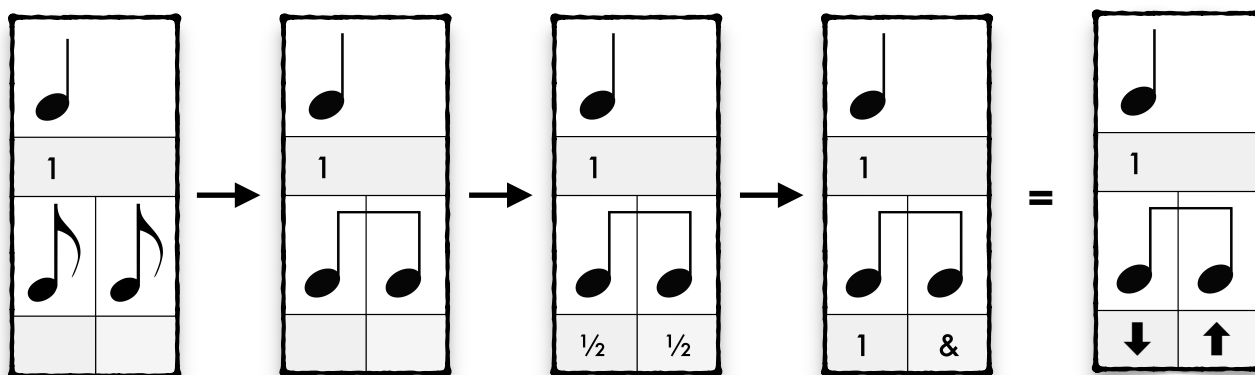
			
(1	2	3	4)
			
(1	2)	(3	4)
			
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)

8) Introduce Eighth Note Subdivision on the Metronome

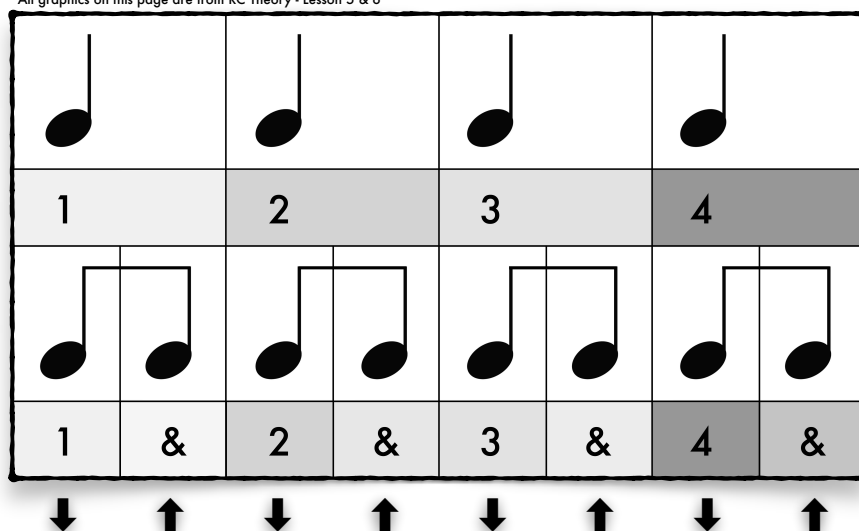
- Introduce subdivision once students can count and/or clap quarter notes, half notes, and whole notes, but before they reach 8th notes.
- Keep it simple! Just turn it on one day and explain that if the primary click represents when the foot is in the down position, the secondary click represents when the foot is in the up position.
- You will have time to relate the subdivision to the eighth note later on.

9) Scaffold Smaller Note Values

- Start with 8th notes. In the beginning year of instruction, I recommend introducing 8th notes around the 6th - 8th week of instruction.
- Once again, use a rhythm tree to help students explore the divisions of the beat.



All graphics on this page are from RC Theory - Lesson 5 & 6



9) Scaffold Smaller Note Values (continued)

- Mix and match 8th notes with previously learned rhythms and practice counting and/or clapping.
- Hold students accountable to maintain proper foot tap while working on 8th notes. This may take some time, but it well worth the investment!

Graphic from RC Theory - Lesson 6

Line 6.1 

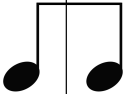
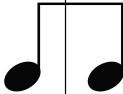
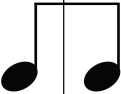
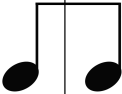
Line 6.2 

Line 6.3 

10) The Importance of Developing an Understanding of Subdivision in the Beginning Year

- Developing a complete understanding of 8th note subdivision is crucial for developing literacy.
- Start by developing a full comprehension of the number of subdivisions and down/up positions in a quarter note, half note, and whole note.

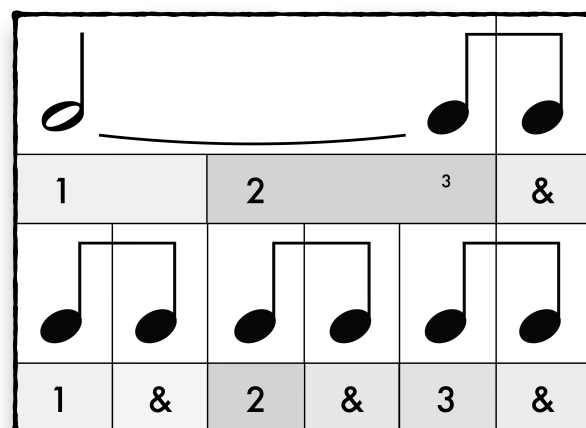
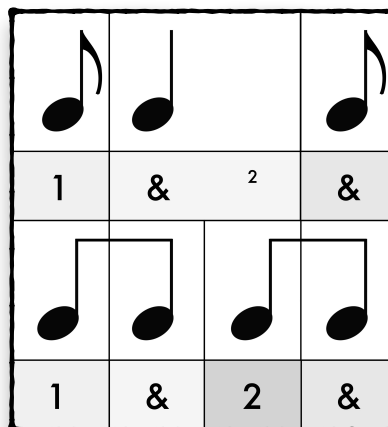
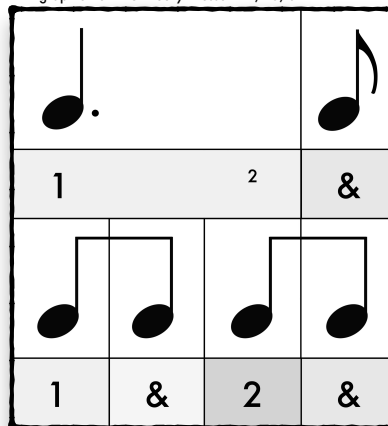
Graphic from RC Theory - Lesson 6

O							
1		2		3		4	
							
1		2		3		4	
							
1		2		3		4	
							
1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&

10) *The Importance of Developing an Understanding of Subdivision in the Beginning Year (continued)*

- Once your students fully understand 8th note subdivision with basic note values, you can deduce a large number of problematic rhythms later on using 8th notes as their common denominator².

All graphic from RC Theory - Lesson 22, 23, & 24



² The "common denominator method" is especially helpful with students grade 6 and up because they've had the chance to explore fractions in their math class.

Staff Notation

It is a good idea to teach all students both treble and bass clef (or treble and alto for viola students). It makes switching instruments easier in case you need to make a change to balance your instrumentation. It also provides students with the tools to explore music, including composition, on a deeper level in the future.

1) The Musical Alphabet

- Keep it simple!
- The musical alphabet is made up of 7 letters - A B C D E F G.
- The musical alphabet is a continuum which means it repeats over and over!

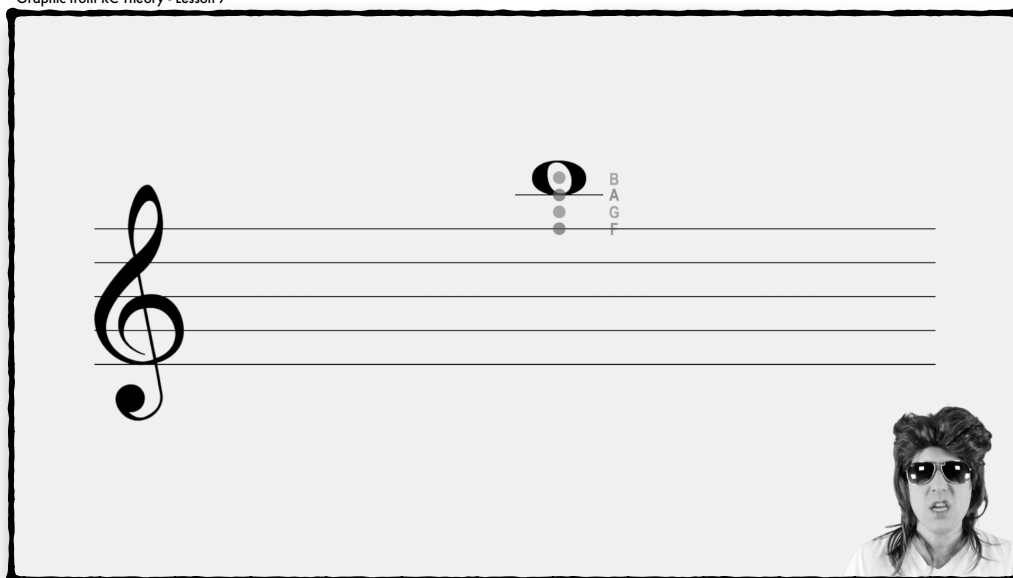
2) Inside the Staff

- Teach that the staff alternates between lines and spaces.
- I like using acronyms at first. ("F A C E," "Every Good Boy Does Fine," etc.)
- Sometime after approximately six weeks of instruction, help your students understand how the staff is a musical alphabet.

3) Above the Staff

- The notes continue to alternate between spaces and lines with the use of ledger lines.
- Count forwards in the musical alphabet.
- I recommend avoiding additional acronyms in favor of utilizing the musical alphabet.

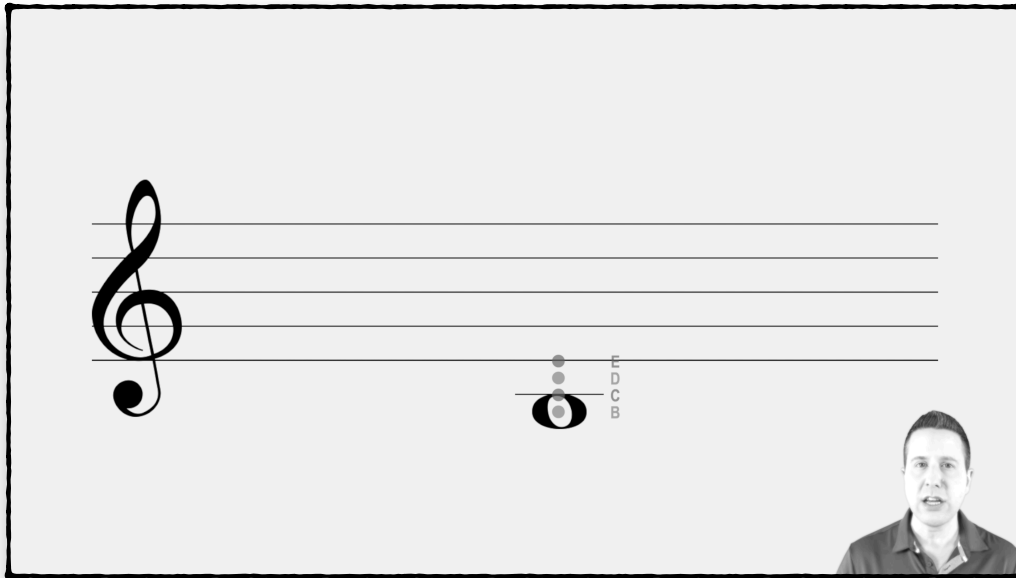
Graphic from RC Theory - Lesson 7



4) Below the staff

- Again, the notes continue to alternate between spaces and lines with the use of ledger lines.
- Count backwards in the musical alphabet.
- I recommend avoiding additional acronyms in favor of utilizing the musical alphabet.

Graphic from RC Theory - Lesson 8



5) Accidentals

- Teach the terminology!
- Accidentals are sharp, flat, and natural signs that appear in a measure not part of the key signature. (The exception is the courtesy accidental.)
- Sharps raise a pitch a half-step.
- Flats lower a pitch a half-step.
- A natural cancels a sharp or flat.
- Teach the half-step and the whole-step (more on this in the piano keyboard section)

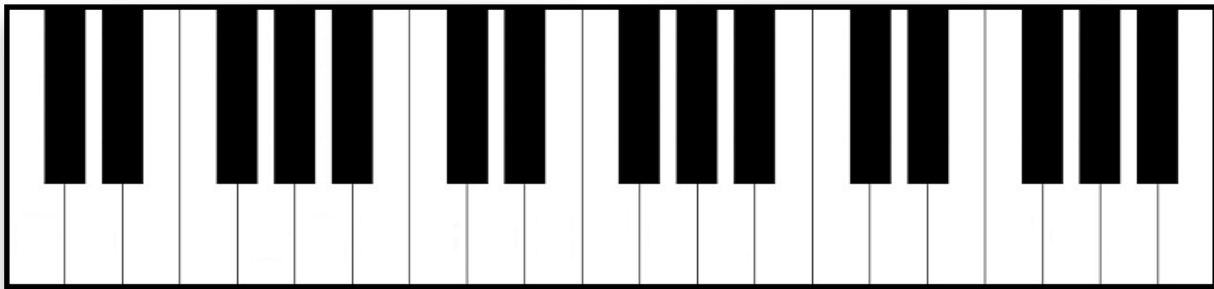
6) Key Signatures

- Recommend teaching how to identify the names of the key signatures.
- Flat Keys - The second to last flat is the name of the key signature.
- Sharp Keys - Go up one half-step from the last sharp to identify the name of the key signature.

Piano Keyboard

The piano keyboard is the perfect representation of the musical language. Understanding the piano keyboard leads to -

- A proper understanding of sharps, flats, and enharmonics
- A proper understanding of E#, Fb, B#, and Cb
- A proper understanding of the chromatic scale
- A proper understanding of half-steps and whole steps
- A better understanding of intervals
- It improves understanding of transposition for transposing instruments

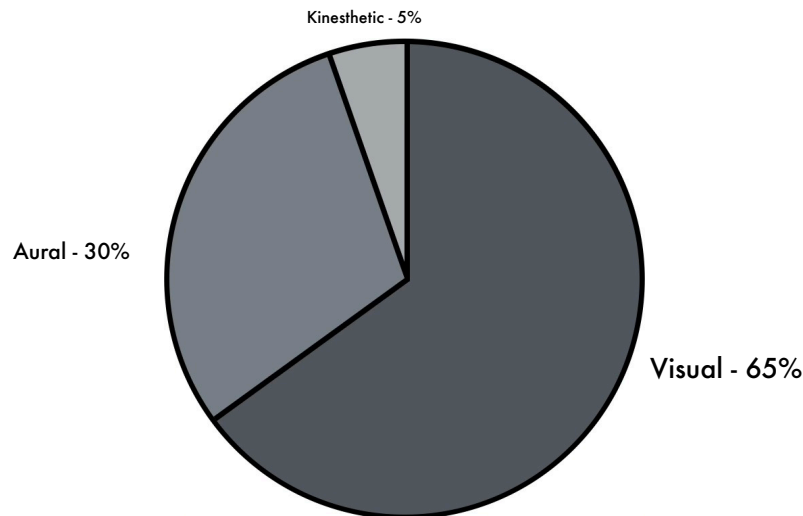


The instructional process for teaching the piano keyboard is listed below. It is not recommended that you teach all of this in one day.

- Teach the home keys - C & F (C comes before 2 black keys and F comes before 3 black keys)
- Apply the musical alphabet to the white keys
- Identify black keys by sharp names
- Identify black keys by flat names
- Teach the concept of enharmonics using the black keys
- Explain the concept of E#, Fb, B#, and Cb
- Teach the half-step and whole-step
- Connect the piano keyboard to the treble/bass or treble/alto clefs
- Teach the grand staff and middle C

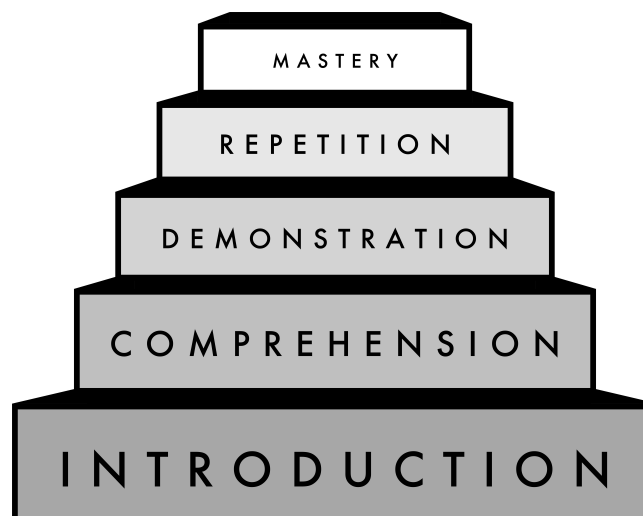
How Our Students Learn

An article from Forbes estimates that 65% of human beings are visual learners.³ Most researchers agree that approximately 65% of people are visual learners, 30% are aural learners, and 5% are kinesthetic learners.



The Hierarchy of Skill-Based Learning

Sometimes in the rush to learn new material or prepare for performances we forget to take each step in the learning process. Just as Bloom's Taxonomy works to objectify the sequence of teaching and learning, the Hierarchy of Learning addresses the order in which mastery of skill is achieved.



³ Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tjmccue/2013/01/08/what-is-an-infographic-and-ways-to-make-it-go-viral/?sh=1474b9af7272>, accessed October 16, 2022

Introduction

Skill acquisition begins with introduction or exposure. In the majority of cases, children can only do what they first see is possible.

Comprehension

After introduction, it's time to begin scaffolding their comprehension.

- Identify what concepts or material is new to your students.
- What are the key components they must comprehend in order progress to demonstration?
- Consider the simplest explanation sequence and scaffold content from easiest to hardest.
- While instructing, observe your students and evaluate your instructional pacing.

Demonstration

- Create a safe space for your students to demonstrate the new skill.
- Use individual demonstrations to increase learning accountability and avoid "hiding"
- Create an environment where repeated attempts are met with enthusiasm!

"Students only need to be able to demonstrate a skill once to know it's possible!"

Repetition

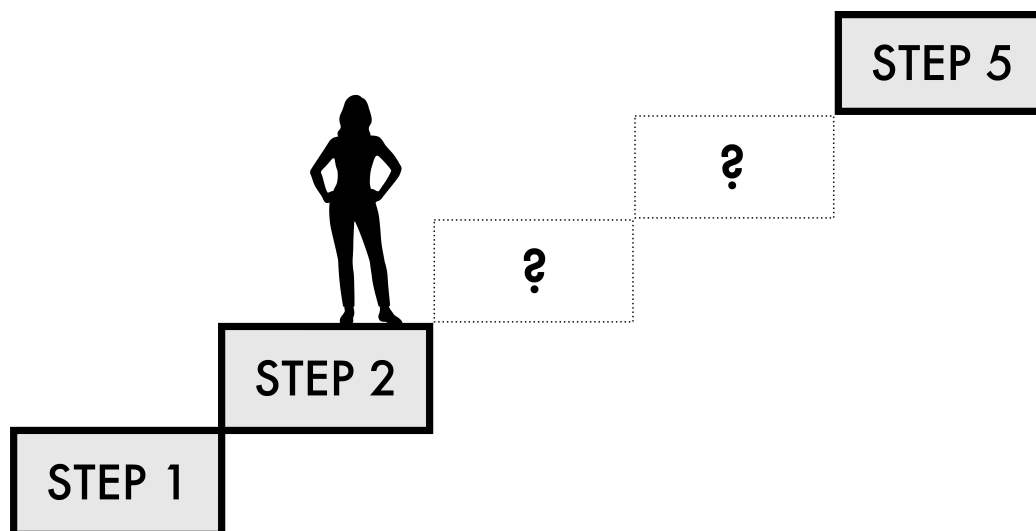
After demonstration, repetition is necessary in all skill-based activities in order to reach mastery. This may come in the form of in-class repetition. However, it's better when it comes in the form of at-home repetition known as practice! Remind your students that your job is to guide them through introduction, comprehension, and demonstration. Their job is to engage in repetition and achieve mastery!

Mastery

Mastery is when they can perform the required skill "on-demand" with accuracy nearly 100% of the time. This is where we want them to be when they walk on stage to perform.

Mind the Learning Gap!

Gaps in learning are blank or incomplete areas of comprehension necessary to progress to the demonstration stage.



Learning gaps are caused by a variety of reasons, some of which may be the following -

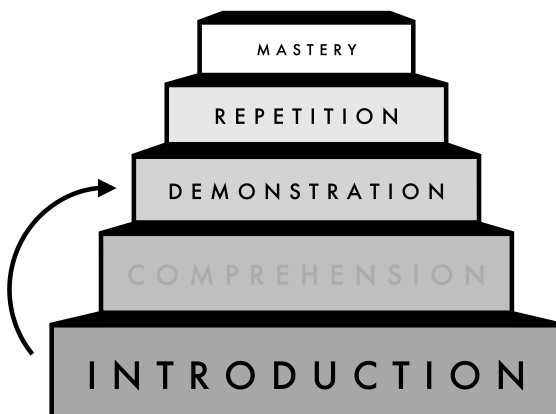
- The student was absent from school.
- The student was out of class. (ex. bathroom, counselors, or nurse)
- The student wasn't paying attention.
- The student wasn't comfortable asking questions.
- The student had prior learning gaps that led to an inability to understand current material.
- The teacher's explanation wasn't sufficient.
- The teacher's instructional pacing wasn't appropriate.
- The information was not well sequenced or too advanced for current understanding.
- The time allotted for introduction and comprehension wasn't sufficient.

What do you do when you discover a learning gap?

- Avoid displaying frustration at their gap in learning.
- Stop what you're doing and fill it with information in order to increase comprehension!
- Meet them where they are and help them connect the dots!
- Try to figure out why the learning gap occurred.

What happens if we don't fill learning gaps?

Consider for a moment what happens if we don't fill learning gaps as they arise.



- 1) Leaping - Students may attempt to leap from introduction to demonstration without complete comprehension. Although this is possible with some concepts, there will eventually be a time when the compounded lack of comprehension caused by multiple learning gaps makes progressing impossible.
- 2) Rote Teaching - Teachers may resort to rote teaching in order to assist students to achieve demonstration. As with leaping, rote teaching will work in some situations. However, at some point, the compounded lack of comprehension will make your students dependent upon rote teaching in order to progress or continued learning will not be possible.
- 3) Frustration - Frustration occurs in skill-based activities when excessive difficulty⁴ is experienced while working within the framework of the current objective. More simply, if what we are trying to achieve is too difficult for our current understanding, frustration will undoubtedly occur.

Q - What if we don't have the time to teach it right now?

A - *If you don't have time to teach it correctly right now, when will you have the time to teach it again?*

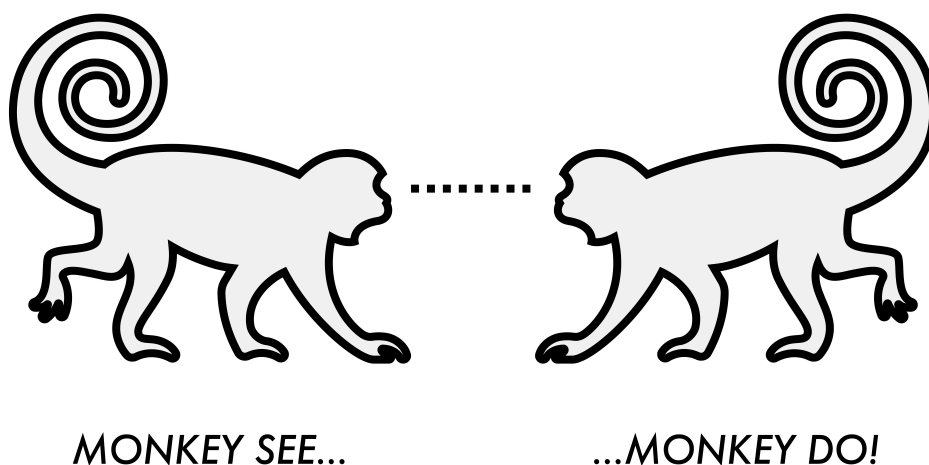
⁴ Note the use of the word "excessive." Difficulty and challenge are part of the learning process. It's when we put excessive difficulty or challenge on our students when they lack sufficient comprehension to demonstrate the objective that we risk a level of frustration that can be damaging.

What is rote teaching and rote learning?

Rote learning is memorization of information based on repetition. Although rote learning is necessary for memorizing information such as the musical alphabet, acronyms, and vocabulary, it should not be your primary instructional practice when teaching literacy beyond the basics. Rote teaching can be loosely defined as “I play, you play”⁵ and will not lead to self-sufficient musicianship if used to teach notes and rhythms.

Rote teaching can lead to -

- Dependency on the instructor
- Feelings of inadequacy and frustration for both the student and teacher
- Difficult learning new music in a group or ensemble setting
- Decreased desire to practice or participate



Rote teaching should be used cautiously when teaching music. However, it can be helpful for -

- Retraining bad habits - *“Do it like this!”*
- As a tool to help a student make the step from adequate comprehension to demonstration. Sometimes they understand, but just need to see or hear it to connect the dots. You will have to be the judge on whether or not they have sufficient comprehension or not.
- When you’ve exhausted all other methods.

⁵ Note that “I play, you play” can be a useful technique when teaching younger students to imitate certain objectives in the real of instrumental pedagogy such as creating a characteristic tone or imitating a style marking.

Ways to Develop Literacy in the Beginning Year

Making music literacy a priority in your classroom is easy! Here are a few ways -

- 1) Gather resources to assist you. Look into a dedicated music literacy program or piece together your own from various sources. Whatever you choose, make sure you're addressing the following areas in detail -

- Rhythm
- Staff Notation
- Piano Keyboard
- Vocabulary
- Composition (if possible!)

- 2) Dedicate time weekly to music literacy. I've taught on a variety of schedules including every form of block schedule. Here are a few examples of my weekly schedules from past years -

M	T	W	Th	F
Instrumental Pedagogy	Instrumental Pedagogy	Music Literacy Lesson	Instrumental Pedagogy	Instrumental Pedagogy

M	T	W	Th	F
Instrumental Pedagogy		Music Literacy Lesson		Instrumental Pedagogy

- 3) Incorporate more non-playing rehearsal techniques into your daily lesson plans such as saying note naming, counting, clapping, or playing the rhythm on a single pitch. These techniques help students isolate individual aspects of literacy without all the intricacies of playing an instrument.
- 4) Be consistent! The more you invest, the more you will get in return. Literacy takes time!

What are the benefits of musically literate students?

Your students will -

- Have the ability to learn on their own.
- Practice more.
- Have greater enthusiasm for learning.
- Learn new material more quickly.
- Sight-reading becomes much easier.
- Performing more challenging literature may become more accessible and appropriate.
- Become self-sufficient musicians with a chance at developing a life-long love for music.

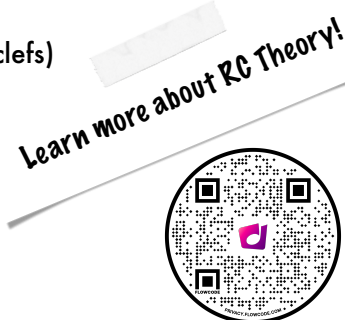
This will lead to -

- A better experience for the ensemble or group!
- More fun for the teacher!
- Less stress learning music for performances!

Need a great all-in-one music literacy resource for your class?

Check out RC Theory!

- 36 Lessons (that's one for each week of the school year!)
- Each lesson comes with a 15-minute instructional video, a worksheet, and a rhythm chart
- Your students will learn -
 - 1) Rhythm (available in Eastman or Traditional)
 - 2) Staff notation (available in Treble/Bass and Treble/Alto clefs)
 - 3) Piano keyboard
 - 4) Vocabulary
 - 5) Composition
- The videos are fun, fast, and effective and feature -
 - 1) Engaging instruction, color graphics, and special effects
 - 2) Participatory elements such as count/clap alongs and note naming
 - 3) Multiple characters that create dialogue, ask questions, and provide comic relief!
- Scan the QR code to view our 3-minute promotional video and come see us in the exhibit hall!



About the Presenter

Rob Chilton currently serves as the Director of Curriculum & Content for Williamson Music 1st and is the creator/producer of the digital music literacy program, *RC Theory*, designed to strengthen music literacy in beginning band, choir, and orchestra. Additionally, Mr. Chilton serves as a clinician/consultant for 16 schools across the Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio areas.

Prior to working with Williamson Music 1st, Chilton was the Director of Bands at Killian Middle School in Lewisville ISD from 2014-2021. Before that he was the Director of Bands at Myers Middle School in Denton ISD from 2013-2014 and the Associate Director at Rice Middle School in Plano ISD from 2007-2013.

In 2018, the Killian Middle School Honors Band placed 1st in the state in the Texas Music Educators Association CC Honor Band competition and performed in San Antonio for the annual TMEA Convention. In 2019, the Killian Honors Band performed at the prestigious The Midwest Clinic in Chicago. Under Mr. Chilton's direction, the Killian Honors Band was named a National Winner in the Mark of Excellence National Wind Band Honors Project in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019.

In 2021, Mr. Chilton was named Killian Middle School's Teacher of the Year. In 2014, Mr. Chilton was named Southern Methodist University's Young Music Educator of the Year. Mr. Chilton has presented for the Texas Bandmasters Association in 2007, 2009, 2017, 2020, and 2021. He has also presented for the Texas Music Educators Association in 2010, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Mr. Chilton holds a Bachelor of Music degree from Southern Methodist University where he had the opportunity to study music education under the tutelage of Lynne Jackson and Brian Merrill. He also spent 10 years post-graduation learning under the mentorship of John Benzer.

Mr. Chilton lives in Frisco, Texas with his wife Saria and their 9-month-old son, Henry.

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