Teaching great music lessons in the 'new normal'

KS3/4

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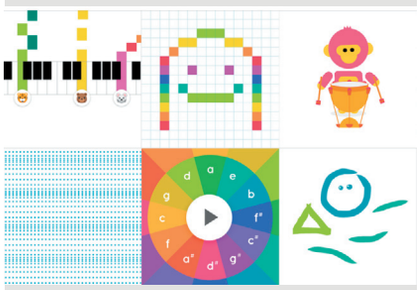


Introduction

Over the past year, music teachers have adapted very rapidly to teaching in new ways. Fortunately, we're a resilient and innovative bunch, and we've mostly been able to find solutions to all the challenges that have been flung our way. This resource aims to give you some ideas for teaching great music lessons, whether remotely, through a 'blended' approach, or even back in the classroom – whenever that might be.

It's easy to get swept up in dealing with the current circumstances and forget about some of the unique things about music pedagogy. Not many subjects have the same mixture of procedural knowledge (what some might call 'knowledge of music' – that non-verbal understanding of how music works, including the practical skills involved in making it) and declarative knowledge ('knowledge about music' – for example that the harpsichord was used in the Baroque period). Not many subjects have the same dilemmas about trying to overcome barriers to students doing practical tasks at home. Not many subjects are likely to encounter the same range of knowledge, skills and expertise within one class.

Here you'll find some ideas for planning effective lessons that reinforce and develop students' knowledge and skills, while nurturing their interest in music, and keeping track of where they are with their learning.

Lesson structure: applying Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction

Whether you base your planning around Rosenshine, or around an I/we/you model (I do it, we do it together, you do it on your own), it boils down to sensible lesson structure that revisits prior learning, introduces new material gradually, and provides scaffolding for students' applications of new skills that is withdrawn as they grow in confidence.

It could be broken down into these steps:

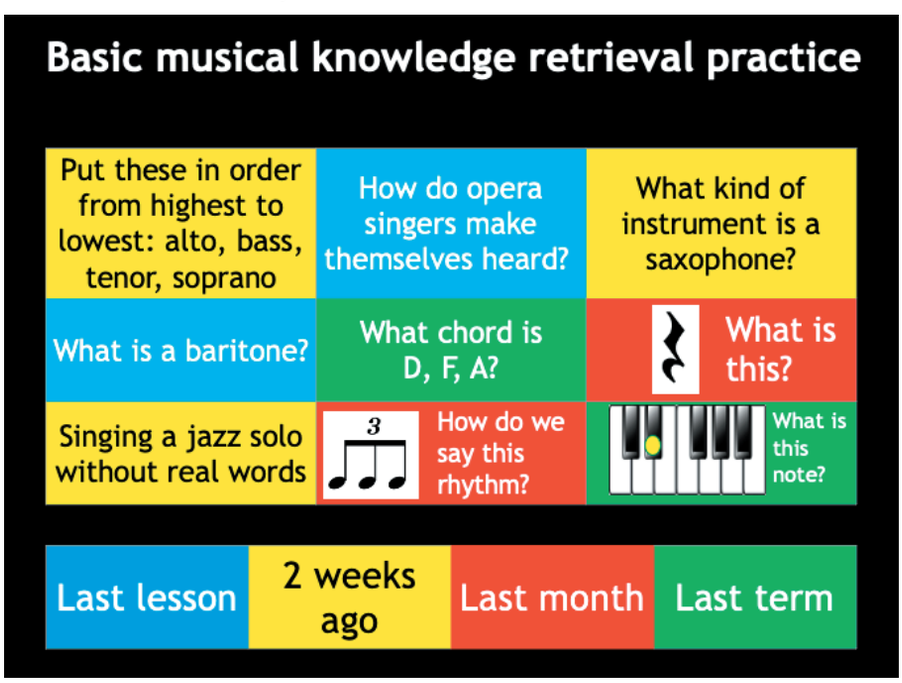
- Introduction/review of previous learning
- Development/exposition/modelling (I do it)
- Guided practice (we do it together)
- Closure/making sure everyone knows how to proceed
- Independent practice (you do it)
- Evaluation – how did it go?

Reviewing previous learning

Whatever the content of your lesson, it's always a good idea to acknowledge the 'forgetting curve' – the amount of information that your students are likely to have forgotten since they last saw you. If, at KS3, you see your class once a week, it's likely that they will have forgotten a large portion of the previous lesson's content. Re-engaging with previous learning at the start of a lesson is essential, whatever medium you're using for teaching at the time.

Fortunately, there are many ways of doing this that involve all students. Here are some ideas:

- Use **whiteboard.fi**, **spiral.ac**, or an 'open-ended question' in **nearpod.com** – all of these are free to use, and are very easy ways to collect responses from students and ensure all have contributed. They are the remote learning equivalents of mini-whiteboards. In Nearpod, students can see each other's responses, but these are anonymised (except for the teacher), which can encourage more reticent students.
- You could, of course, use the chat or whiteboard function in Teams/Google Meet, or whatever platform you're using for live lessons – but it's more difficult to monitor contributions, and the fear of being shown up publicly in front of the rest of the class can inhibit some students.
- If you would be doing a matching activity or card-sort in the classroom, an excellent virtual equivalent is wordwall.net. Here is an example of a GCSE card-sort (**https://wordwall.net/resource/9812515/music/sybg-musical-element-sort**).
- It's also good to use the start of the lesson to introduce some interleaving into your teaching: in other words, applying the principle of spaced practice, and revisiting learning not just from last lesson, but also from longer ago. One way of doing this is by using a retrieval grid, with colour-coding for how long ago each thing was covered. Here is an example that fits in with what my Year 7s have done since the start of the year:



- You could also use Microsoft Forms or Google Forms to do a very quick multiple-choice quiz at the start of the lesson. This could even be a listening test, with a link to a YouTube video at the top of the form. You can set this up to be self-marking, and watch the responses come in in real time. If you think carefully about the questions, you can use them to identify who has remembered (or forgotten) crucial points from the previous lesson, and adapt your teaching in the rest of the lesson to address these if necessary.
- **Kahoot.com** is another great way to administer a quick test. One of the best things about Kahoot for music teachers is that even the free version enables you to link a specific part of a YouTube video to a question: you can specify exactly where it starts and how long it plays for. Kahoot also gives excellent question-level data, so you can keep track of exactly where specific students have misconceptions, and use this to inform your planning. As with a Google Forms quiz, you can see answers coming in in real time.

Exposition: explaining and modelling

This is the part of the lesson that moves students on in their learning. If the review of learning at the start of the lesson throws up misconceptions or forgotten things that need addressing, then this needs doing first. However, let's move on to thinking about some different ways to introduce new information.

Think carefully about what visual information students will need, or find helpful. Creating videos has never been easier, and thanks to **screencast-o-matic.com** or **loom.com**, it's quick and straightforward to put together a videocast of your screen with an explanatory voiceover that can be shared with a simple link. If you haven't ventured into video territory before, give it a go: it doesn't need to take any longer than a step-by-step visual guide, and has the advantage that it can be used in face-to-face teaching, remote teaching, or any blended combination of the two. Students can also return to it in their own time if required.

During first lockdown, I spent a lot of time creating videos using PowerPoint as a starting point. Though time-consuming, these have proved incredibly useful in the longer term, as they can be used in so many ways during lessons, and for homework and revision. Here is an example for KS3 (**https://youtu.be/OCCVhRvBe8A**) and one for GCSE (**https://youtu.be/nWOGWxyqhfo**).

There are many ways to go about creating this kind of video, but here's a rundown of my own process:

1. Create a PowerPoint with all the information you need. Think about when you want to add things to a slide, and animate pictures and text to appear and disappear in the right order. Don't add unnecessary pictures or over-the-top animation: it's visual clutter that can contribute to perceptual overload.
2. Write yourself a script for your voiceover: you might be able to wing it, but I have found it necessary to write it out in full. Record yourself reading the script.
3. Collect all the relevant audio extracts together and put the audio files into a DAW. I use GarageBand, but if you don't have a DAW on your computer, one of the free cloud-based ones such as BandLab or Soundtrap would be fine.
4. Import your voiceover recording into the DAW, and arrange it to fit with the music audio in whatever way suits. Edit everything so that it's in the right order, and the music audio fades in and out. If you're having music running underneath your voiceover, adjust levels, and perhaps pan the music to one side at these points. Once everything is in place, bounce the whole track out as one long audio file.
5. Insert the voiceover/music audio file into the PowerPoint on the first slide, and set it to run across all the slides.
6. In the Slideshow tab, go to 'rehearse timings' and click through from beginning to end, timing all your transitions and animations to fit with the audio.
7. Export as a video (this will take a little while) and upload to YouTube, Microsoft Stream, etc in order to share with students.

Of course, there's already a huge quantity of great video content on YouTube, and useful music content has increased massively in the last year. There are tutorials and playalong videos for virtually everything. Sometimes, though, marshalling a series of video resources into an easy-to-use and meaningful learning sequence can be a challenge.

Guided practice: we do it together

Music is, by its very nature, a resource-heavy subject, whether you're teaching face-to-face or remotely. Even if instruments are not being used, you're likely to have a lot of audio and video content that you want students to engage with. Stringing these together in way that's easy to access and yet allows you to keep tabs on progress and engagement needs a little planning. Fortunately, there are easy ways to collect a range of resources together in a sequence that works for students.

Many teachers are used to using PowerPoint in school, and possibly have all their classroom resources in PowerPoint form. However, for remote learning, PowerPoint doesn't quite cut it, mainly because files containing audio and video will be very large, and PowerPoint will not open properly on many mobile devices. What's required is something that is cloud-based, works on mobiles, will convert from a PowerPoint and allow you to insert interactive tasks for students to complete. Fortunately, there are a few things that meet these requirements:

- Microsoft Sway (**https://sway.office.com**) allows you to start from an existing PowerPoint, converting in seconds, and including all your audio/video content as it goes. If you don't like how it looks, you can hit the 'remix' button to scroll through some different designs. You can edit if you wish, and embedding Microsoft Forms for student responses is simple to do. Sways work like a web page – simply share the link with your students, who can open it on any device, work through the content and provide their responses wherever you've inserted a form.
- Google Slides (**www.google.co.uk/slides/about/**) can also convert directly from PowerPoint, but has the advantage of being cloud-based and mobile-compatible. You can embed Google Forms, and of course link up with Google Classroom if that's your school's platform.
- Nearpod (**https://nearpod.com**) is well worth investigating. You can upload a PowerPoint as a starting point, but you'll need to insert YouTube videos and audio separately. Starting from scratch is a quick process, though, once you've got used to it, and there are some very useful features. You can insert questions (multiple-choice or open-ended) at specific points in any YouTube video, invite students to draw or label diagrams, easily include voiceovers for slides (this takes literally seconds), and get students to respond to open-ended questions with either text or audio: great for verbal or musical responses. It works on any device, and students simply work through at their own pace or (if in a 'live' lesson) under your supervision. Here is an example of a Nearpod lesson on voice types and sea shanties that I put together for Year 7 (**https://share.nearpod.com/e/r3noMKboxdb**).

Closure: are we ready to move on?

How can we be sure that students know what to do, and are ready to move on? The question 'does everybody know what to do?' usually elicits a positive response, whether or not the answer really is affirmative. There are a number of alternatives that can yield more effective and informative answers.

Having a resource with all necessary instructions for reference as students work is essential (see above for ideas on how you might create this). Some students will have enough understanding and independence to get going straight away, and will be able to go back to the reference material as necessary. Others, however, may not be ready to be set free with independent practice.

You could ask for red/amber/green responses to a question about how ready students feel for a task. In a face-to-face lesson, this could be done using a visual prompt such as thumbs up/sideways/down or fingers from 1-5 to show each student's response. Online, it could be done in the lesson chat as R/A/G or numbers. Those who are green/5 can be released to go and get on with the task, while you elicit further information from the ambers and reds about what help they need.

Another way of finding out whether students are ready for independent work is to use a hinge question. Hinge questions are multiple-choice questions carefully designed to identify misconceptions. The key here is to identify in advance what the misconceptions are likely to be. Here is a simple example:

Q: What is this chord?

Choose your answer from:

- A: A major
- B: A minor
- C: A flat
- D: C major
- E: E minor

The choice of answers here actually reveals a lot about a student's thinking. Clearly, if they've chosen B, they have either had a lucky guess or really do understand about the notes of the keyboard and about major and minor chords (whether it's a guess or real understanding will most likely be revealed later). If they've chosen A, they know the notes of the keyboard and but are not yet confident on how to construct major or minor chords. Students who choose C have the common misconception about minor and flat somehow being interchangeable, and will need further explanation and some re-teaching. Those who chose D or E either have a sketchy knowledge of the notes of the keyboard, or are unsure how to work out major and minor triads, and will certainly need more input from the teacher before doing independent work.

This simple question acts as a very effective diagnostic tool, allowing the teacher to discern what the student needs next. However, formulating an effective hinge question requires understanding of likely misconceptions and may take some careful thought. It could be an excellent use of shared planning with colleagues to pool ideas on this, as an effective hinge question can be an absolute power tool for supporting students' learning, especially when working remotely.

More information about hinge questions can be found here: **www.stem.org.uk/assessment-for-learning**.

Independent practice and evaluation

Work at this point in a music lesson could consist of performing, composing, or listening and appraising. Trying to develop students' procedural musical knowledge (knowledge *of* music) through practical work when teaching remotely is a challenge, but one that many music teachers are feeling more confident about in this latest phase of distance learning. Teachers are embracing free online resources such as Chrome Music Lab (**https://musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/**), with its 'shared piano' and Song Maker step sequencer, with enthusiasm and creativity. Both have the advantages of being extremely easy to use and straightforward for submission: students' work is automatically recorded (with no exchange of details to cause a GDPR headache) and a link generated that can be sent to the teacher.

More elaborate projects can be put together using sophisticated online programs such as BandLab, Soundtrap, Noteflight and Musescore. These are amazing resources that allow for students to have a real musical learning experience. Assuming that you have an effective set-up in place for communicating detailed instructions to students, this leaves the consequence of needing to devise an effective system for keeping track of where everyone is with their work, and providing feedback in a worthwhile and time-efficient way.

Many of these online platforms have a set-up for leaving feedback or some sort of virtual 'sticky note' on a piece of work. Complications can still arise, however: for example, if you're running a project on BandLab for Education, which allows for the setting-up of assignments within classes with a clear structure for submitting work and then receiving feedback, you may have some students who are working on mobile devices, which will not run BandLab for Education. These students will need to use the BandLab app, and while this provides almost the same range of features as the desktop program, students will need to submit their work and receive feedback in different ways.

For the teacher, this can provide an organisational headache: you need to keep track of students' progress, including a record of where they have got up to, what method they are using to complete their work, and the feedback they've received. Even if every student is using the same platform for their work, there's still no alternative to keeping separate records to track progress.

Keeping records as simple as possible, and creating a system that can be used with students as well, is crucial. One way of doing this is to create a set of codes, which are essentially shorthand for the stages of a project. Here is an example set: these are for a BandLab project where students are assembling loops to create a rap backing track, then writing and recording lyrics over the top, and finally adding some music production:

Letter	Meaning
A	Working towards completing 4 bars of music with 4 different loops in the same key and at the same tempo.
B	Has 3/4 loops in the same key and tempo – requires work eg lining up, checking tempo.
C	Completed 4 bars of music with 4 loops all in the same key and at the same tempo successfully.
D	Started to extend structure but is not complete.
E	Structure is complete but requires work (lining up loops etc).
F	Completed a successful basic structure.
G	Has not added any automation or additional features.
H	Has added automation and other effects successfully.
I	Has started to write lyrics – not complete.
J	Has a full set of lyrics and is ready to record.
K	Vocals are recorded.
L	Ad libs, double tracking added.
M	Effects successfully applied.

When shared with students, this communicates a 'road map' of the project (which is likely to take about six lessons) so that they can see where they are and what they still have to do. The teacher can make a note each week of where the student is up to. More detailed feedback could be supplied using whatever means is easiest: this could be a further bank of statements, perhaps numbered. For example, within code B you might have the following:

1. Ensure that each loop starts at the beginning of bar 1.
2. Extend each loop so that it lasts 4 bars.
3. Not all your loops are in the same tempo/key: choose loops from the same 'pack' and ensure that tempos and keys match.

As long as the 'key' to all the codes is easily accessed by students, you could simply give the feedback B2, and it would be clear what they need to do, and easy for the teacher to record in their markbook.

If you're in the position of needing to give more detailed, bespoke feedback on any kind of work, **vocaroo.com** is an absolute lifesaver. It's a super-simple online voice recorder: just visit the website, click record, speak your feedback and receive a link that can then be shared with students. No details to input, a minimum of clicks and fuss – and no typing.

Vocaroo could also be used for students to record and submit performance work, if a quick and easy method is required. For a slightly more sophisticated, video version, have a look at **flipgrid.com**, which is extremely easy to use and could have multiple uses, both for remote and in-person teaching.