

## Creating Lesson Plans for Beginning String Class Instruction

### **1. Determine the objectives of your lesson**

- select the pedagogical goals of the lesson
- select bowing, instrument position or left-hand goals, and aural skills

### **2. Research the topic as you defined it by the objective**

- based on class experiences; written or observed materials

### **3. Decide how you are going to deliver this information**

- consider the ways people learn: by doing, discussing, listening, and observing (visual, auditory, kinesthetic/tactile learners)

### **4. Develop a usable lesson plan format**

- be sure your plan is easy to follow – avoid paragraphs!

### **5. Decide how you will organize your lesson**

- What topics do you have to review to have a successful lesson?
- What new information are you presenting?
- How will you present this information?
- What function will your warm-up play in the introduction of this material?
- Will you organize your presentation so that you go from known to unknown, general to specific, or specific to general?

### **6. Choose your support materials**

- method books; technology

### **7. Prepare a definite beginning and ending to your lesson**

- How are you going to get the students' attention?
- once you have introduced the topic(s), tell your students what they will learn in the lesson and how they will learn it
- do not be afraid to review the material/skills!
- summarize or provide a short overview of what was covered in the class

### **8. Plan for and prepare assessment strategies and procedures to be used as part of the lesson plan**

- intonation; rhythmic accuracy; tempo accuracy; tone quality; musicianship
- shifting; vibrato; bowing; and fingering
- “formative” evaluations (useful feedback to students); “summative” evaluations (provide a rubric for assigning a grade)

### **9. Prepare the final written plan**

### **10. Practice!**

## Steps to Learning a New Piece

In the beginning stages, approach new pieces without the instruments by learning familiar pieces by rote. As the group advances, unfamiliar pieces can be approached using the same steps.

- **Without the instrument or bow**
  - Say the rhythm using Kodaly syllables
  - Sing or say the note names rhythmically
    - This is easy in the early stages when the music is in unison, but still useful to do in later stages done in sections
  
- **With the bow**
  - Say the rhythmic syllables and air bow
    - This is useful for intermediate and advanced groups (say up bow and down bow and/or bow divisions instead of syllables)
  - Isolate difficult rhythmic or bowing patterns on open strings
  
- **With the instrument**
  - Sing or say the note names while placing the fingers on the string
  - Pluck the notes
    - Students may pluck and say the note names
    - If fingering is a problem, individual sections may pluck and say finger numbers
  
- **Instrument and bow come together**
  - Don't rush this step – the detailed preparation insures success for the students!
  - Don't hesitate to back up to one of the previous steps to make corrections

These steps can be used with any method book or repertoire. This sequence is flexible – the teacher should monitor the level of the group and leave out unnecessary steps, or repeat steps that will further develop needed skills.



When teaching repertoire, the teacher should be aware of the following:

**1. Bow strokes and bow division:**

Awareness of the bow division and bow strokes to be used in each piece.

**2. Use of the Fingers:**

Awareness of finger placement, i.e. which fingers stay down, when to lift the fingers, and how the fingers become independent.

**3. Form and the Music:**

Awareness of form is the first step to understanding music in the beginning stages of violin playing. Other musical concepts such as dynamics, tempo markings, ritards, etc. are incorporated into learning the form. Thus each musical idea becomes a part of the total musical expression. (The awareness of form from the beginning significantly helps to organize the musical memory of students.)

**4. Practice and Isolation of Difficulties:**

Isolate and practice the technical difficulties. At every level of string playing, practicing is a matter of both discernment and informed repetition. This begins with the first lesson.

## Rehearsal Techniques – Intermediate Orchestra

- need structure and routine!
- competitions to see who can be the quietest the fastest

**Posture and Positions** – modeling! Everybody follow me! – lift violin way up high, drop it to the floor, up to the ceiling again, then flat with the floor; it is good to limit talking and just have them mimic your motions

**Incorrect/Correct** – “show me your best couch potato positions! 1-2-3 go!” “Show me a good bow hold; spider fingers (fingers on top of the stick); good bow hold; banana thumb; good bow hold; smushed fingers; good bow hold; stressed out fingers; good bow hold, etc.”

- swaying while the kids play to release tension – addresses the whole body!
- put a Starburst or any type of candy on top of their instruments and if it stays without falling to the floor, they get to eat it!
- licorice – if bow hold is tense, it will bend! Air bow and keep the licorice straight
- play a passage on the D string while playing double stops with the open A string – this ensures that the hand position is correct

**Intonation** – slow it down! You could have a student with a reading issue!

- manipulating the pitch – ex. Sing D, sing sharp, sing flat, sing D
- double check the left elbow placement!
- adding notes to the chords – start with celli and build chords from the bottom so kids see where their notes fit into the chord
- Chorales – good to work on for intonation
- playing scales in octaves – either across sections or within the same section of instruments
- play with accompaniment for tonal centre
- scale in a round – after two notes, violas come in, two notes later, celli

**Finger Coordination** – make sure that they are standing tall when something gets difficult – usually students slouch to see the music closer; stay loose and long in terms of posture

- have students march around the room while they play – large motor movement that their fingers have to follow along

- separate out the skills when practicing difficult passages – sing it! Clap rhythm, air bow rhythm, pluck it, take out slurs; echo teacher back and forth; change rhythms (dotted rhythms); change slur patterns

- practice difficult passages forte so that they are using the larger muscles

- emphasize tricky notes – every B flat, you stand up or stand up and sit down, etc.

**Disguise Repetition!!!** Have one student bow while the other student fingers the notes; separate skills out and work on repetition

- stick out tongue and play passage; stick out foot and play passage; one person points while another person plays and then switch; play the passage in different moods (ex. Sad, happy, etc.); train – every stand plays one measure (kids have to follow the music) one at a time; rotating measures – small groups play two bars; then others play next two bars, etc.

**Pitch Detective** – everyone closes eyes; if I tap you twice on the shoulder, you are going to play purposely out of tune; everyone else plays in tune and mystery detective has to find people playing out of tune; do with bowing too – different bow division and have to figure out who is wrong

**Rhythm** – make big flashcards and have them say the small rhythmic figure out loud – ex. Ta ti ta ta; rest ta rest ta; rhythms from their pieces

Subdivisions – have one section play eighth notes repeated or clapping and have other parts play; syncopated parts – play all eighth note subdivisions

Rhythmic Dictation – have them listen to rhythms and try to write them down

Internalize Pulse – march; clap; air bow; play on open string; pluck string; say it out loud

- pizzicato section – rehearse arco so that they hear the pitch; inside players play pizz and outside play arco and then switch

- pizzicato – start section in tempo and then gradually add in a retard so that they do not rush!

Bass Salute – thumb on ear; index finger between eyebrows; second finger on nose; pinky on lips – tricky to get the big space between 1 and 2

**Sound/Tone** – hold bow with left hand; big wave; finger wave

- practice with upper arm against the wall if pulling back

- mimic the sound of a train speeding up – practice string crossings with slow D-A-D-A- etc. then speed up and slow down as if the train was pulling into the station

- heavy bow weight and light bow weight – forte lane, mezzo forte lane, piano lane

- have different sections play in different lanes – one over fingerboard; close to bridge; on top of bridge – doesn't sound good! Needs to match!

**Bow Strokes** – make sure that everyone is playing in the same part of the bow; have a leader choose what part of the bow to play in and everyone matches

Pizzicato Placement – make sure that students are plucking the string in the right place and with the right part of the finger

- bass players – pizz like they are pulling a bow stroke so that the sound rings

**Musical Elements** – have the students play the wrong dynamic and then play it as printed

- competitions – who can play the passage the loudest; who can play closest to the bridge

- backwards bow – hold the tip as if it were the frog (reversed)

Hide the Bow – one person hides the bow; one person has to find the bow; one person is the guard; everyone plays and everyone adjusts the volume if they are getting hotter or colder (closer or farther away)

**Style/Phrasing** – use descriptive words and ask them to figure out their own descriptive words – allows them to have a musical voice

- match the bow strokes with the style

- verbal examples

**Balance** – section leaders at the back! Spread the students out around the room and try to stay together!

- have one person play the melody as a solo in the section and the rest of the orchestra cannot overpower the solo

Record Students – they are their worst critic! Focus on positive things first and then talk about what can be improved

**Ensemble Playing** – conduct all the wrong dynamics and they have to follow!

- have the students play a scale and tell them to move to the next note when you conduct beat 1 – so change the conducting patterns

- have a student conductor for each section and they need to stay together with their section

- follow the leader – pick someone to lead! Always be aware of students who may need this type of leadership and encouragement!

- try to mess them up while they are playing – play something different; give wrong cue; etc. and they have to keep playing!

- practice playing in a circle – basses in the middle; celli around; then viola; and violins in the outer circle

- while working with the violins, ask celli/basses to give thumbs up or thumbs down

- LIMIT TALKING!!!!

- end rehearsals with game or musical high – so that they feel a sense of accomplishment

- eye contact and use kids names!

- set high expectations!

- success breeds success!