

How to Use Music

HOW TO USE MUSIC: GLOSSARY AND GUIDE

There are many ways to use the power of music to enhance your teaching, increase memory, and inspire your students' motivation. This Glossary and Guide reviews specific techniques and provides a brief description of each method. If you find a technique that particularly suits your style of teaching or training, you can find out more how-to techniques in *Music and Learning: Seven Ways to Use Music in the Classroom* by Chris Boyd Brewer.

There are basically three reasons to use music in the classroom:

- Learning Information through Active Learning Experiences, Focus and Alpha State Learning and Memorization
- Heightening Attention and Creating the Desired Attitude and Atmosphere for Learning through Welcoming Music, Soundbreaks, and Community Builders
- Inspiring Personal Expression through music for Creativity and Reflection and activities that build Musical Intelligence and provide an opportunity to express through sound.

Learning Information Active Learning Experiences

Music helps create learning states that assist in holding attention and increasing retention of information. Active Concerts can activate students mentally, physically and emotionally and help the information be activated within their memory systems (see *What is a Concert?* section). It is the intensity of the experience bonds the information firmly into memory and makes learning relevant, dynamic and interesting.

What makes up an Active Learning Experience? Besides Active Concerts, we can use music to facilitate activities that involve us being active in our learning by including movement activities accompanied by music. For example, we can get physical and role-play activities---I use "Add-On Machine" from Eric Chapelles, *Music for Creative Dance, Vol 1*, while students who are studying an electricity unit create a physical depiction of the flow of electrons from one molecule to another. They never forget this principle! Or how about the first selection on the same CD which moves from fast music to slow music and back again several times----I use it for doing the Brain Gym cross-crawl-first at regular tempo, then very slowly, and back and forth. It's a great energizer for children and adults.

Background Music for Focus and Alpha State Learning

Music stabilizes mental, physical and emotional rhythms and facilitates students' attaining a state of deep concentration and focus. In this state large amounts of content information can be processed and learned. This use is particularly easy and a good starting point for beginning to use music in your classroom.

Playing Focus background music as students study, read, or write to help them stay focused for long time periods with little stress. This method is refreshing for both students and teachers.

Passive concerts, learning journeys, visual reviews, and guided imagery are also techniques using music in a focus state for memory enhancement. See our *Passive Concert* section below for information on these methods.

Memorization through Rhythm and Rhyme

Songs, chants, poems, and raps will improve memory of content facts and details and provide a hook for retrieving information easily later. You can create and perform these on your own or use the help of recorded songs like Math with MAR (see our Music and Learning catalog). Writing your own or having students write songs or raps can be fun and a good learning tool, too. See the section on Personal Expression.

Attention, Attitude and Atmosphere

Teachers have a high degree of control over the atmosphere in their classroom learning environment but may not thought much about how to create an optimal auditory learning environment. We can easily help students feel excited about learning if we create an atmosphere of caring, sharing and enthusiasm. Music is a powerful tool for helping with this! Our classrooms become much more interesting and fun when we begin with music, use music to help energize when learning has become intense, and celebrate with recorded music. Here are ways to do this.

Welcoming and Atmosphere

Background music as students enter, exit or take a break is used to provide a welcoming atmosphere and help prepare and motivate students for learning tasks. Here's where you can use music with words---upbeat tunes that relate to our topic or to learning. You can relate the music to topics, too-see our Soundtracks for Learning: Music for Specific Classroom Subjects and Soundtracks for Learning: Multicultural Music for some music ideas.

You can use music, too during breaks or transitions from one task to another. And don't forget to use music to celebrate accomplishments or just to create a pleasant environment as students leave the classroom.

Background Music Energizing and Attention

Staying focused for long periods of time while sitting and studying or writing can be deadly. But there are times when we need to spend time in this mode and background music can be used that will help keep the mind and body in an attentive state. Much of the Mozart Effect music helps with this as does music in other upbeat styles. Play some of the suggested music from our Music for Energizing and Attention category of Music and Learning, while students are reading or writing and energy seems to be low or attention lagging. The upbeat music will help keep them focused on the task at hand and energize tired minds and bodies.

What's a Soundbreak?

A soundbreak is music played to give participants a rest from learning tasks. A quick, energizing activity can recharge students' attention levels. So can a few minutes of rest and relaxation with peaceful music. Once re-energized, students are better able to continue to work effectively. Soundbreak music can be Welcoming Music played during break times, entries and exits. OR it can be a one-to-three-minute break using energizing music to reframe and refresh-it's a great way to get participants ready for more learning!

Select upbeat music (see Music for Energizing and Attention)---if it gets students up and moving a little, too, remember that just standing up increases blood flow to the brain by 10%. Since we rely on the oxygen in our blood to keep us going-this is a good thing!

Keep a sense of humor about soundbreaks and you'll find everyone enjoys them. A simple two-minute break of "The Monster Mash" while students make monster movements to relieve classroom tension not only refreshes but also builds your community!

Community Builders

Music provides a positive environment that enhances student interaction and helps develop a sense of community and cooperation. It is a wonderful way to celebrate learning and each other. Music is also a powerful tool for understanding other cultures and bonding with one another. And using music just for fun creates a motivated, enthusiastic classroom.

You can also find music to use as a "theme song" for particular topics or for your classroom. Songs like "One Moment in Time" create a memorable message and motivate students. And who would think that playing "I Can Hear You Breathe" during science studies about respiration would be as successful as it is?

Personal Expression

Music is a great motivator of thinking and feeling. There are times when this is especially important—for example during reflective times or creative writing. We have so few opportunities to explore our personal thoughts and feelings about subject matter. Yet, doing this may be the strongest tool we have for helping students remember something—by giving them time to make the subject matter personal and relevant!

Creativity and Reflection

Background music can be used to stimulate internal processing, to facilitate creativity, and encourage personal reflection. Simply play creative, reflective music while students journal about their learning, write a poem or draw. Not only does creativity increase but this provides a refreshing learning break that actually enhances the ability to focus and creates more energy for the next activity.

Personal Expression through the Musical Intelligence

The creation of music expresses inner thoughts and feelings and develops the musical intelligence through understanding of rhythm, pitch and form. In the Multiple Intelligence model, Howard Gardner suggests that we allow students to use musical language as a way to express our thoughts—create your own soundtrack to an important historical event, make up sounds to exemplify electrical current or communication between neurons, improvise the sounds for planets, create a rap about Customer Service or a mathematical function! It's fun and makes memorization easier, too.

What is a Concert?

Concerts are unique to Accelerated Learning. They may sound complex but they can be as easy or as complicated as you design them to be. Quite simply, they are content with music. The content can be in many forms:

- a story
- vocabulary
- important text
- a play
- relevant quotes

The content can even take the form of visuals with no spoken words. The basic form of a concert is to play appropriate music while the content is presented.

Active Concerts are designed activate the participant mentally, physically, and/or emotionally. Passive Concerts put students into a state of relaxed alertness where information is absorbed in a different, but very powerful way that is just a different route to memory than our traditional lecture format.

Active Concerts

An Active Concert is course content information read while music plays in the background. Music aids Active Concerts by heightening the impact of the experience. A story read aloud with music that accentuates the mood and meaning of the story increases student interest and creates a powerful memory. In Active Concerts, the music may fulfill the same purpose as a movie soundtrack, helping to gain and hold the involvement of the watcher. The more the viewer is drawn into the story, the more powerful is that persons' experience of a film. The participation and involvement in learning is no different in the classroom where music can be just as much a key to student involvement as it is in the movies.

Active Concerts are often used to present course information for the first time, as a process of decoding information. The decoding provides an overview and insights into the upcoming material, as well as motivation to learn. Creating an Active Concert means selecting information that is especially important to your content. It may be in the form of a story, selected important text, quotes by significant people, a dialogue or play, or essential vocabulary terms and definitions. This information when read with supporting instrumental music will stimulate the content.

An Active Concert is intended is to energize information and effective music to use may be:

- energizing music such as the faster movements of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos or Mozart's Eine Kleine Nachtmusik, Rondo movement, found on *The Mozart Effect, Vol1: Strengthen the Mind* recording
- content-related music--upbeat music that is from the era being studied, of the genre of the cultural studied or somehow creates a mental association with the topic--for examples, see our section on *Soundtracks for Learning: Music for Specific Classroom Subjects*

It is also possible to create an Active Concert using visuals with music. PowerPoint or overheads may be used or you can create a mindmap while you present a verbal overview (or review) of the content. For specific information on this, see *Soundtracks for Learning: How to Use Create that Riveting Drama of Content! Part 1: Visual Review*

Passive Concerts

The goal of a Passive Concert is to move the students into a state of relaxed alertness, where their bodies are relaxed and they are in an alpha or theta brainwave state, a slower brain rhythm than our normal busy, actively-thinking beta state. We are able to learn large amounts of information in this state because we are not busy thinking about other things and we are allowing our right-brain to process information in a global, holistic manner. Students love this technique because it is relaxing and refreshing. Teachers love it for this reason too, and especially because it is an effective teaching tool for high memory.

Passive Concert text material can be the same information used for an Active Concert or it may be different. Text can be formatted as:

- terms and definitions
- language vocabulary and translations
- a story
- a metaphorical story
- a learning journey
- important text from learning materials
- visual presentations of information learned in the unit

In a Passive Concert, the students spend a few minutes listening to the music with eyes closed, allowing the brain and body to slow down. As they do, they most likely switch to the alpha brainwave state, and enter a powerful learning state called relaxed alertness. You can then read your selected course information in a slow, even manner while the music continues to play in the background. When you have completed the reading, the music is played for a short time and then faded out.

Passive Concert music is:

- slow and relaxing music such as Dan Kobialka's *Velvet Dreams* and Steven Halpern's *Music for Accelerated Learning**

- calming music with a slow beat that reinforces the entrainment experience (bringing you to a new energy level) of the music like The LIND Institute's Relax with the Classics or Peace and Quiet from The Brain Store.*
- peaceful multicultural music such as Breathing Spaces, Chinese music performed by Jiang Xiao-Qing or the native flute music of R. Carlos Nakai, Journeys (see our Music and Learning catalog section, Soundtracks for Learning, Multicultural Music)

*This music can be found in the Music and Learning catalog, Soundtracks for Learning: Alpha State and Accelerated Learning Passive Concert Music.

Learning Journey

I have coined the term, learning journey, to define a form of Passive Concert that I find particularly powerful. Carla Hannaford, Educational Kinesiologist, taught me this method when we were teaching brain-based learning courses together in the 1980's. She had taught physiology courses for nurses and began leading her students on "journeys" through the various physical body systems while she played alpha-state music. She had a journey through the musculo-skeletal system, the neurologic system, the cardiac system, the digestive system. . . .and on. Her students loved these and would bring tape recorders to class to record them for later listening as part of their study regime. At the end of her first year teaching nurses they voted her the best professor at the university. It works! And it works for any topic, whether it's customer service, a review of a historic event, cellular biology, a book plot, or mechanical engineering. The beauty of Learning Journeys is that you can write these out and use your script or do it off the top of your head in class. I regularly do one taking learners through the brain structures and functions in learning---it's somewhat different every time, but easy to do since it is all information very familiar to me and I don't need to write it out.

If you choose to do a Learning Journey, play one of our suggested pieces for two to three minutes while students relax with eyes closed. Begin your journey--speak slowly and clearly and give just the basic information. Add in visual images to enhance the experience--for example, I talk about the frontal lobes and describe them as "windows to our world" that provide us with a global overview and a sense of compassion to people around the world. A student of mine did a Learning Journey of the passage of oil through an engine and talked about where the oil was hot and fluid and where it was cooler with more viscosity. His mental images helped his students remember the information better. When you are done, let the music play another minute or two, fade the music out and ask your students to focus back on the room and place they are in. This is a terrific and simple activity!

Helpful Hints for Getting Started

One of the best hints I can give you is --know your music! Play the selections you are interested in using in your classroom often enough so you get a good feel for the music before you take it in the classroom---surprise changes in tempo or a selection that ends before you are ready can be distracting.

Use CD's and know which selections you want to use. I put a sticker on CD's with the cut (selection) numbers on it to remind me quickly which selection to cue up. You will want to be prompt with taking action to put on the music you want---or your students may take action while they wait for you to find your music!

Keep your CD's in a convenient holder or a "classroom music box" which has all your regularly-used and most favorite classroom music in it. If it's ready to go you'll be more likely to use it. I use a large CD wallet because it travels well and removal of CD's is quick and easy.

Be willing to explore new recordings and push yourself into finding appropriate music in a variety of styles. Your favorite music may simply not appeal to a particular group of students. You may not particularly like music your students appreciate but remember, variety is the spice of life!

YOUR EQUIPMENT

Make sure you have good equipment-which doesn't necessarily mean it has to be expensive. A moderately-priced boombox is sufficient-just make sure it will play as loudly as you will need-before you buy it! Some boomboxes just don't get very loud and you will want enough sound to be heard about a noisy classroom and across a good-sized room.

The best volume control is the old-fashioned twist-knob. You have quick and easy control over volume. Sliders are a second choice and the boomboxes with a push-volume control are not recommended at all. You want to be able to quickly and easily fade in and out and this type of control is slow and awkward.

For travelling, a CD walkman connected to portable pre-amplified speakers works well and is inexpensive. You will want to make sure your speakers are not just computer speakers though-they need to be able to have a good playable frequency range. Listen to the sound to check on quality. Be sure to turn the volume up to what you consider your maximum when listening to potential speakers for purchase. Some lesser-priced speakers will sound "fuzzy" and distorted when music is played at higher volumes through them.

If you are teaching in an unfamiliar place---bring along an extension cord.

SHARING MUSIC WITH STUDENTS

Explain to your students, especially Middle School and High School students, why you are using music and why you selected it. You are more likely to get a positive response if they understand the theories behind music and learning. I have found that if I explain these theories first I have fewer complaints about my selections of music. In a short time, any doubting students recognize how much the music helps them enjoy learning and they are eager to have it.

If you have trouble keeping the peace about your musical selections---make a deal with your students. Suggest that each student can bring in a recording to listen to at a time you select. Pick a person once a week, or for each day, to bring in their favorite music. Play it during a selected time but make the general classroom rule that no one can complain about any one else's music-including yours. The penalty for complaints is loss of the right to bring in a selection of choice. I have found this works well every time---even with hesitant teens. I always add the stipulation that I need to have the right to check out the selection before it is played in class. This has kept me out of trouble about music with lyrics that are not acceptable for the classroom. The fun, positive part of this idea is that I have often found great music I might not have come into contact with otherwise! It has also helped develop student rapport.

Make a point of purchasing music that your students bring in which will work for any of the categories of music use-you can set aside a special classroom music library space or simply add student selections (with a note of thanks) to your music collection.

PLAYING THE MUSIC

Check out volume levels both at the front of the room and at the back. If a student complains about the music being too loud or too soft, adjust it accordingly BUT you might also ask the student to move if the levels seem appropriate to everyone else---perhaps the student's hearing is very sensitive or a little low.

If possible, place your sound equipment so that it will come into the students' left side. If you speak from the right side---the "word content" of concerts will have quicker access to the left, logical side and the music will better access the students' right brain.

When you want to play a music selection, first turn the volume down completely, then turn the music on and very slowly turn up the volume, fading in the music smoothly. Gradually turn the volume down to end the music the music before

the selection is over. Fading music in and out is much better than a quick "cutoff" of sound.

Be careful not to use music too much---the mind will tune out sounds if it heard all the time. Save music for specific, planned use.

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