

Music *is* EASY

Core Book 1
Module B

Game
Supplement

Preface

When playing Games, we lose track of time and the world around us.

Writers, philosophers and academics have explored this concept in many mediums. It appears as far back as 500 BCE, in the accounts of Herodotus regarding the Kingdom of Lydia in 2000BC. I would encourage interested readers to find out more. The power of Gaming has a long and fascinating History.

As an avid video-gamer growing up, I learned many things through video games. Some, unsurprisingly, were not so useful outside of the game. Some, however, were incredibly useful. Reading Chaucer in GCSE English, for example, presented a significant challenge to those unversed in Medieval Arms, Equipment and Weaponry. Not so for me, because I had played a lot of Diablo II. I knew what a Gambeson was, what a Dirk was used for, and why Cuirassiers are named so. I didn't have to think about it, I just knew.

Yet it was not vocabulary that proved the most important learning take away from these experiences. For each new game I played, there were new systems to be learned, new variables to be analysed, new strategies to be devised. The process of learning an entirely new system was fascinating, the rewards of satisfaction through dedication and time spent 'grinding' wonderful. I learned many things, but of these the most important was how to learn effectively, and how to enjoy the process.

All I have learned, I have put into these Games. They can be played without any musical experience, or with a lifetime. As frameworks of interaction with scaling difficulty, they can be played in short or long form, by musicians of different abilities at the same time, among different instruments, in groups or by yourself, with a band, in front of an audience.

They can be used as platforms of engagement for Students to develop public speaking, confidence with groups, and interpersonal interaction. They can be used as non-verbal communication methods, allowing communicative interaction by Carers, Educators and Therapists.

Or you can just play them and not think about any of that, knowing that as you play you will become more and more fluent in the fundamentals of our musical conventions. Your interactions with repertoire and other Musicians will become easier and more intuitive, your communication more effective, and your inspiration and creativity easier to access.

Music is either easy or impossible. These Games bridge that gap.

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Speed Words

Short / easy words are called by the Leader to challenge Students. I often like to add the additional challenge of making them figure out what the word is by describing it. This makes for a great warm-up, warm-down, short focus session, or Student-led exercise.

"The sound a sheep makes : BAA"

"The insect that goes 'Bzzzz' : A BEE"

"A box without hinges, key or lid, but inside golden treasure is hid : ? "

Difficulty can be scaled in many ways, for example you could increase word length, reduce time available, implement distractions, require the application of a technique, require Students to sing the words they play, anything - the only limits are your creativity!

Variations on Speed Words

'First to X'

Students compete to see who can play the called word correctly first. The winner gets a point. First to X points wins.

Requires 2+ players

'Around the World'

Students compete in pairs to see who can play the called word correctly first. The winner then faces the next person, and so on. The objective is for a student to get all the way around the class.

Requires 3+ players

'Play it Backwards'

In classical music, this is called 'Retrograde'. I like to tell my students that 'Try playing it backwards' is a composition technique used by some of the most famous Composers in History. Nine year olds have incredible sceptical faces, they really don't hold back with the eyebrows.

Word Games

Speed Words (contd.)

'Keep it Going'

Students are challenged to repeat words with a steady rhythm in a variety of forms and rhythms. This can be scaled in difficulty -

Play words once per bar or once per 2 bars over varied time signatures 4/4, 3/4, 5/4, 7/4 etc.

Play words repeatedly with no pause, giving regular and odd metric groupings in a melody.

Speed it up!

'Change it Up'

Students are challenged to repeat words with varied rhythms. This can be scaled in difficulty -

Play words to the cadence of rhythmic phrases - eg. Coffee Tea Coffee Tea, Peanut Butter Pancake

Vary the rhythm of the word being played

Displace the rhythm of the word by specified duration

'Move it Along'

Students are challenged to repeat the key pattern of their word, but moving up or down the piano in specified intervals or interval patterns. This can be scaled in difficulty -

Play CAB, then move it up one key to the right (a 'second') - DBC, ECD, FDE

Play CAB then move it up two keys to the right (a 'third'), ECD, GEF, BGA

Play CEF GAG FE then move it up a second. This is Hanon Exercise 1 (if you do it in both hands).

Do any of the above in both hands, in octaves or in Harmony (see Core Book 2).

This can be applied to all instruments, but will be more challenging than on the Piano. See individual instrument Books for more information.

Word Challenges

Longer words or combinations of words are written down by the Leader to challenge Students. I like to sprinkle recognisable tunes in with these as little surprises, but generally just make up new sounds from session to session.

BAEEE BAFFF BAFFF BAEEE

ABADABBA FED FED FEBBA

EAAAACEEE EFDDFFAAEE

Difficulty can be scaled in many ways, for example you could increase word length, reduce time available, implement distractions, require the application of a technique, require Students to sing the words they play, anything - the only limits are your creativity!

+Variations

'Sentences'

Students try to write entire sentences using just the letters A to G.

DAD FED ED A BAD CABBAGE

'Real Sentences'

Students write entire sentences using all the letters of the Alphabet, but then play only the letters A to G in order.

For example, this sentence becomes - FEAE EECEBECE,
Abracadabra becomes - ABACADABA

'Reverse Word Challenge'

Students who have learned a piece of music via another means, for example written Music, from a friend, from watching a YouTube video, or even just something they discovered on their instrument and enjoy playing, must convert that into a word or sentence to be read by other Students.

'Play it Backwards'

What's that Song?

Leader writes down, in Word Game form, songs that Students are likely to know. Students are challenged to figure out what the song is by playing it - no audio example is provided.

It is interesting to observe at this point a function of the brain's capacity to process memory. You will find that while Students are still having to consciously think about finding the notes, they will be unable to recognise even very familiar melodies. I believe that this is evidence that the Pre-Frontal Cortex - the 'conscious brain' - is disconnected from aural memory. As soon as a Student is able to play the word in Flow, when they are able to listen to it rather than think about how to play it, they will recognise a familiar melody.

What's that Song?

GGAGCB GGAGDC GGGECBA FFECDC

CCCGAAG EEDDC GCCCGAAG EEDDC

CEFG CEFG CEFGECD EEDC CEGGF EFGECDC

In the course of figuring out these songs, if you persist, you will notice that a single line of letters is not sufficient for accurate playing. Direction of movement is important in all with some fairly wide intervals, and in one of the examples there is an octave leap. This concept represents a significant Transition Point as described in Chapter 4 of Module C - Education and Delivery, and the need to accurately reflect this is a key Self-Discovered Convention - Module C Vertical Words

Furthermore, playing them is hard! As the words get longer, they get harder to read, and harder to read quickly and accurately. Students may try to write out entire pieces using this format, filling up pages with dense letters. They will inevitably struggle to read it. At this point if they have not figured out Vertical Words for themselves I generally give them a nudge, and it is rare we ever go back to Horizontal Words.

Note : Some may choose to use an alternative method to designate high and low notes, such as dots above or below the letters. I always make it clear that this is a valid way of keeping notes, but that it has limitations. I have a dear friend who keeps an entire cheat sheet of Klezmer melodies in this format, with melody notes written out horizontally, but just for the first bar or so, enough for her to remember the rest. It does not work for longer pieces, though the attempts can be funny to watch.

+Variations

When a Student is familiar with Vertical Words to the point that they are able to follow patterns on a whiteboard or piece of paper with their eyes while playing the notes, then this game just becomes sightreading. You could : draw in stave-lines in the correct places and introduce notational convention, add root notes in another colour for the Left Hand, add rhythm notation using the rhythm game, add harmony notes in the right hand, include the latest viral TikTok melody, trick them into playing Baby Shark, RickRoll them, anything really. Endless fun, I love this game.

The Word Gameshow

This is the most fun I've ever had in a Music Lesson. The idea popped into my head on the way in to my lessons at MRF one day, and I spent the sessions refining the Rules based on how it went. The points weighting was added in specifically to encourage participants to spend time practicing the Words they can see during the 'Practice Period'.

You can adjust how strict the rules are depending on the participants. I would generally adjust the difficulty from player to player depending on age and ability level, and how close the game was. As long as Rule 1 is adhered to (see Module C), Students will not begrudge a peer being given an extra, extra chance to get the Word right.

To have an entire room cheering a 6 year old trying to play FABBA for match point, and erupting into spontaneous celebrations (both teams, I might add) when they got it right was pure magic. I will never forget the day Dread Pheonix beat The Purple Panthers by 43 to 42.

Students are split into two teams and moved to either side of a room.

A large double-sided whiteboard is placed in the middle, between the groups. Each team can only see their side of the board.

Teams are given 15 minutes as a 'Practice Period'.

During this time, each player will write a word on their side of the board, and spend time practicing the words visible on their side of the board.

At the end of the 15 minute Period, the White Board is moved away or covered so that nobody can see it.

A coin is flipped to determine which Team goes first.

The Team that goes first Nominates a player to go first.

That side of the whiteboard is revealed and the nominated player player has [5, 10, 15, 20 seconds] to play their word - this can be adjusted for difficulty.

Each member of both teams is then given the opportunity to play the word.

A team will score 2 points for a player successfully playing a word on their own side of the board.

A team will score 1 point for a player successfully playing a word from the other team's side.

Once all participants who want to (they can pass) have tried the word, the Whiteboard is turned round and the other Team nominates a player. Repeat until all Players have played.