



How To Teach Music Basics and Beat the Clock!

By Kristin M. Pugliese



Hello and Welcome!

Thank you so much for downloading our guide to saving time in your classroom! When I speak to teachers across the country, they ask me the same question over and over again: *How can we possibly teach everything we are expected to when we are given so little time with our students?*

Here we will give you some simple and fun ideas to squeeze the most out of every moment of your teaching day, so that your kids can learn all that you hope for and more!!

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- Best Ways to Engage Parents



The 4 Issues All Music Teachers Face

- **Time**
 - Most of us only see our kids once a week for 45 minutes. For some of us it is even less!
- **Amount of Material We Are Expected to Teach**
 - In spite of those time limitations, we are expected to cover all of the concepts in our state standards
- **Classroom vs. Cart**
 - Limited classrooms force some of us to push a cart around from class to class
 - Many of our classrooms are very small and impractically setup for music
- **Field Trips and Pull Outs**
 - We miss classes due to field trips and have no opportunity to make up the time
 - Teachers think nothing of pulling kids out of our classes for projects, services, or make-up work



MAKING OUR CLASSROOMS WORK



Class Schedules Systemized

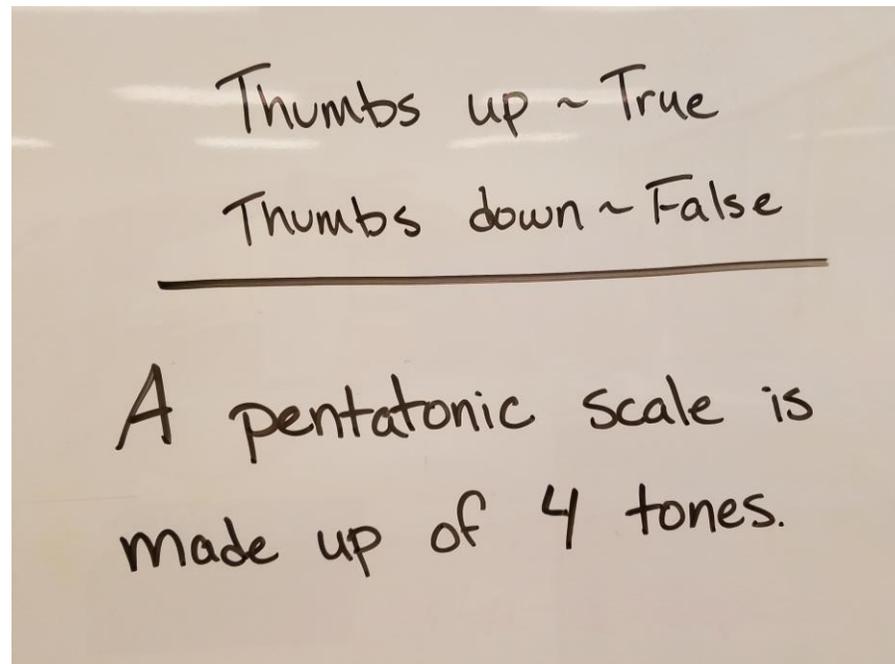
A predictable schedule is the key to beating the clock! Making sure kids always know what activity is coming next **cuts down on transition time and reduces distractions.** Systematic scheduling is also a huge help for lesson planning because you have an established time slot for each type of activity. During every class session, I strive to include the four cornerstones of music making:

- Singing
- Playing an instrument
- Composing
- Moving

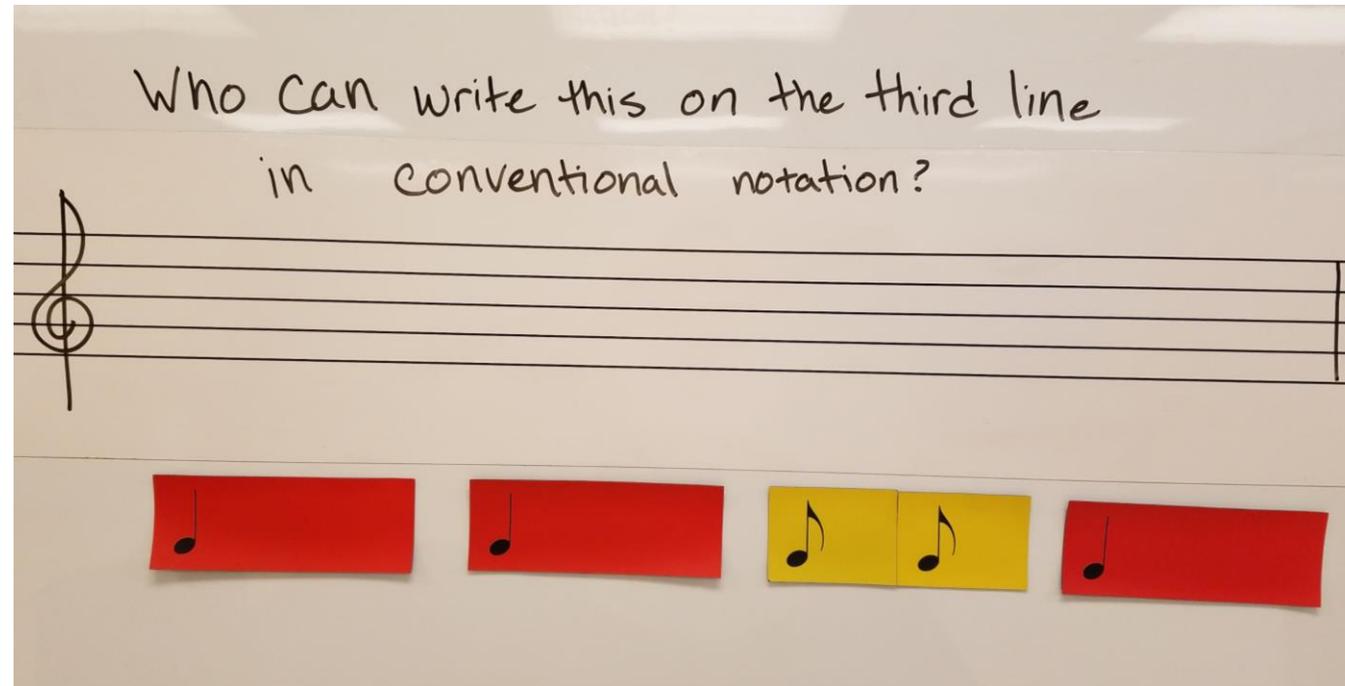
Sometimes activities will overlap, such as when kids practice their compositions on their instruments. Occasionally, you will need to devote a whole class to a single purpose like preparing for a concert. More often than not, however, these four activities are in my lesson — and in a specified order so that the kids are primed and ready to go for each new activity!

My Standard Class Session in Detail:

1. An **opening brain teaser** on the board for older kids while I am getting everyone ushered in and settled. Here are 2 examples:
 - a. A music trivia question: all students close their eyes and use a thumbs-up or thumbs-down vote to indicate their answers.



- b. A music problem-solving question: I either call upon a student to come up to the board and answer the question OR have all the kids write their answers in their music folders.





My Standard Schedule, continued...

2. A **greeting song** for the little ones and a **pitch matching exercise** for older kids.
3. Vocal and breathing **warm ups**:
 - Slide whistles
 - Sirens, etc.
4. **Practice of songs** that we have been working on
5. **Movement** activity
6. **Composing**
7. **Instrument** Playing
8. Wrap up/**Review**



Have a Behavior Plan in Place

What does your ideal classroom look and feel like? Before every school year begins, make decisions about:

- The **noise level** that you are most comfortable with. Do you want your students to enter in complete silence or can they chat quietly? What should happen while you are speaking or a student is speaking?
- The **procedures** your students should follow each day. Is there a seating chart? Do they need to take out and put back instruments in a certain way? How can you streamline these tasks so that transitions are smooth?
- Your overall **expectations** for how students will act in your classroom. What is the tone of your class? How independent do you want your students to be? How are kids expected to behave when working in small groups? Since there are different activities within each class period, make sure kids understand how to act during each of them. Also make sure to clearly define your expectations of yourself.



Enlist Students To Help

What are you doing in your classroom right now that your students could do just as well? What tasks can they take on to make your life easier and create more time for teaching? Examples include:

- Passing out music / collecting it
- Pulling instruments from shelves / returning them
- Setting up chairs at the beginning of class and putting them away or resetting them for your next class at the end
- Taking roll call and noting any absences in your attendance book.
- Erasing or cleaning the board, etc.



Turn Transition Time Into Teaching Time!

All teachers lament how much time they lose every class period to transitions: getting kids settled in when they arrive, bringing one activity to a close and launching the next, waiting for the students' teacher to arrive to usher them along to their next activity, and so on. Here are some great ways to turn those "lost" minutes into teaching wins!

- **Call-and-response:** kids echo a phrase you sing or a rhythm you speak or pat while they set up or clean up
- **Sing a "concert song"** together while waiting for the students' teacher
- Require students to answer a **music trivia question** to enter the classroom or to get in line at end of class



Lessons You Can Build On All Year Long

As helpful as a predictable classroom schedule is, it is also important to keep things fresh so your kids remain curious and excited for every class session. One of my favorite best-of-both-worlds strategies is to **introduce activities at the beginning of the year that I can enhance with fun new challenges every time we do them.**

Each new version of the activity gives your students the chance to gain a new skill while practicing old ones! Here are three of my favorite year-long activities to get you started:

- The Hello Song Extended
- Ring Around the Rosy
- Body Conducting

The Hello Song Extended

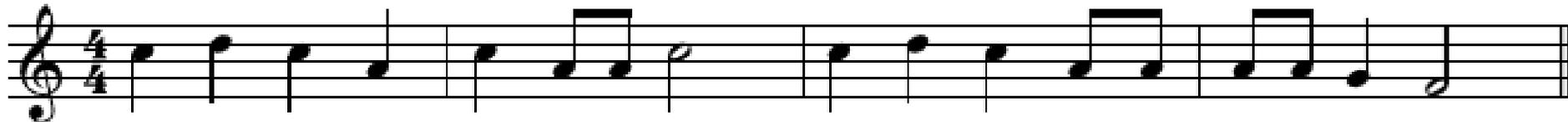
To start the first class session of the year, I take out my fish puppet and sing the “Hello Song” (see next page) to each student. When I finish the song, I invite the student to shake the puppet’s fin. I love this activity because it allows me to meet every child eye to eye and form a connection. I know it sounds corny, but when you see students as rarely as most of us do, it matters so much for them to know that you really do **see** them.



Hello Song

K. Pugliese

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Hel - lo, hel - lo, how do you do? Hel - lo your name, it's great to see you!

Where the lyrics say “your name,” I insert each child's name. At first, I simply speak the students' names. Later in the year, depending on their grade level, students say or sing their own names. From there, the possibilities are almost endless — see next page!

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Hello Song Activities

Instead of just saying their names when you cue them, kids can:

- Sing aloud, sing in their heads, shout, or whisper their names
- Play the rhythm of their names on an instrument
- Make body movements signifying their names
- Clap the rhythm of their names



Hello Song ~ Exploring Long vs. Short Syllables

1. Sing the song, but elongate the “do” on the 7th beat. As you sing the syllable, move your hands (either as if conducting or more playfully) for as long as you sing it so that students can see as well as hear the elongation.
2. Ask students what you did differently. Encourage them to sing it and decide how long the “do” should be. They can move their bodies as well to show their chosen length for the note.
3. Now sing the song again, but make the “do” syllable very short. Add a quick hand burst gesture to show the shortening (start with a fist and immediately “burst” your hand open with fingers outstretched).
4. Ask, “What did I do that time?”
5. Allow kids to experiment, choosing to sing either a long “do” or a short one.
6. Once students master the vocal activity, play the word “do” — long or short — on drums or any other instrument. Have kids sing and play the note at the same time.
7. Finally, eliminate the vocal element and have kids play the whole song on instruments, one at a time. Explain to your students that when they finish playing, they should look up at the next student to signal that it is his or her turn. This is a great way to help kids develop non-verbal communication in an ensemble setting!!

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Ring Around The Rosie

If you teach K-2's like me, you will love this activity. It gets kids up and moving to a steady beat while having a blast. I created the interlude — which can be used for all kinds of cool additions — while I was teaching in Fulton County, GA. We were working on sol, mi, la songs and the kids were getting antsy. I knew that if I didn't get them out of their seats and moving, it was going to be a long class!! This activity worked like a charm. We hit the required state standards and they got to go a bit crazy ... within reason, of course. The beauty of this activity is that it can be used for a whole class or just a portion of one — whatever time you have will work perfectly!



Ring Around The Rosie

Ring-a-round the Rosie,
A pocket full of posies,
Ashes! Ashes!
We all fall down.

Cows are in the meadow,
Eating all (of) the buttercups,
Thunder! Lightning!
We all jump up! ("Up" is sung on high DO)

(I discovered the second verse sometime in my early years of teaching, but I do not remember where. Kids love it!)



Ring Around the Rosie

Allow a count of 8 half notes between each repetition of the song. I have always used this pause to give students time to look for a new partner. Kids LOVE this challenge!! Then I discovered something even better, a cool technique from Mary Knysh called “TALA.”

So what is “**TALA?**” It is a fun, active way to create space for as many beats as you would like. To mark the first beat, start by putting your hand in front of you with your palm pointed upward. Then put your other hand on top, palm to palm, for 1 beat. The next beat is shown by flipping your top hand palm upwards. To show the following beat, flip your top hand back over so that your palms are touching again ... and so on.

The amazing thing is that you can fill these beats with whatever actions your students enjoy. Read below for my *standard Ring Around the Rosie lesson plan*, along with some simple ideas for added fun!



Ring Around the Rosie ~ Lesson Plan

Basic Lesson:

1. Each student finds a partner
2. Sing "Ring Around the Rosie" while they play the game
3. Kids fall down and stay down to pretend they are cows
4. Sing "Cows Are in the Meadow" (second verse of "Ring Around the Rosie" shown above)
 - Kids jump up at the end of the last line
5. Then say, in rhythm, "Find a new partner in 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1" (count in half notes), and restart the song at the end of countdown.



Ring Around the Rosie

TALA Ideas for playing around with the steady beat:

- Have kids say “blue” 8 times to represent the blue Note Knacks block. (This activity requires them to count in their heads!) Then, following the patterns of the Note Knacks blocks:
 - Say “red” 16 times*
 - Say “yel – low” 16 times (that is, 32 syllables, representing 32 yellow blocks)*
 - They can pat the steady beat as they look for a new partner as well!
- Ask them, “How many times would you say the color ‘gray’?”
- After students have practiced the many colors for a few classes, you can have one child hold up a block while you sing “Cows Are in the Meadow” to show what color you will say for the next count of 8.
- Some students can play drums to reinforce the chosen color!

* **NOTE:** At first, kids may need you to point to 16 red or 32 yellow Note Knacks before they can do the counting in their heads.

Ring Around the Rosie

Other TALA Ideas:

- Freeze
- Move freely
- Improvise on an instrument
- Create a 4-measure 4/4 rhythm and add:
 - Pitch
 - Dynamics
 - Orchestration



Body Conducting

One of my favorite lessons is “Dance Conducting” (from Mary Knysh’s [1-2 Let’s All Play](#)), or Body Conducting, as I like to call it. I love building on this activity throughout the year until we have created a full-blown composition as a class.





Body Conducting, continued...

Here is an example of how Body Conducting works:

I laid out 4 types of instruments (for example, triangle, drums, tambourine, and wood block), and let each student choose which instrument to play. When I moved my head, the triangles played; when I moved my hands, the drums played; and so on.

- Each group then received a set of Note Knacks and created a 2-measure piece.
- We decided on an order, with the groups playing their compositions consecutively. (The first couple of times, we added a measure in between each composition.) This sequence became the A section of our piece.
- For the B section, we used TALA to create a space for kids to improvise.
- When I presented the piece at the Texas Music Educators Conference, a session participant at the conference used body conducting to cue the 4 different instrument groups randomly while everyone was improvising for the B section. When a group finished playing its 2-measure composition, he moved on. Click [HERE](#) to hear the amazing result!



Know Your Outcomes

It is important to know what exactly you want your students to learn during each class. By zeroing in on well-defined objectives, you can get to the heart of matters and ditch anything that would eat up time unproductively.

For example, let's say your desired outcome is to prepare your students for the upcoming concert. They are singing and playing 5 songs. Of course, you would like to review ALL of the singing and ALL the instrumental parts, but the class session has yet to unfold and you can't be certain that you can fit all of that into the allotted time.

WHAT TO DO: List all of the songs and all of the specific items (tricky measures, pitch, dynamics, etc.) that you want to work on for each song. Next, star the items that are absolutely necessary. Now, if a time crunch arises, there is no need to panic because you have already made your decisions about what you can live without. You know how to proceed without a moment wasted. You can even list your starred items in order of importance for added confidence that you are ready for any situation.

(This idea comes from Tony Robbins' *Time Of Your Life*)



Making Every Moment of The School Day “Count”



Utilizing Every Moment of the School Day

- During morning or end-of-day announcements, ask a music trivia question or enlist a student to share a fun music fact
- Turn special “all school activity” days into teaching time by practicing songs during waiting periods.
- Enlist classroom teachers to help — with very little effort!
 - What are other teachers doing in their classes that you can build on?
Example: Do the [Pig's Rondo lesson](#) while kids are studying fairytales
 - Help other teachers manage their classes (to your own benefit!)
Example: Give teachers a recording of one of your students' concert songs to play during transitions, snack time, or free time.



Best Ways to Engage Parents



Connect With Parents to Enlarge Your Classroom

- How you can engage parents to supplement your classroom time:
 - Post songs online that they can sing at home with their kids
 - Encourage them to have their kids perform their compositions at home
 - Have your students teach their parents a clapped, stomped, or patted rhythm and use that rhythm in a concert as an ostinato for a song
 - Send your students home with ideas for their parents about how to add music to their homes (click [HERE](#) for some ideas)



Thank You For Reading!

These are just a few ideas on how to squeeze more teaching time out of your rushed and crazy school day! If you would like more information about Note Knacks, the simplest and most developmentally appropriate way to teach music literacy and other musical concepts to children, visit us at www.noteknacks.com.

We offer tools, lessons, simple strategies and classroom support to help you help your students to crack the code of music and share the songs in their hearts!