

Master of the Alphabet

By Debra Haburay

Seven letters. Forward and backward. Starting on each letter.

Sequence of Instruction

1. Practice saying the musical alphabet going forward (repeating).
2. Practice saying the musical alphabet going backward (repeating).
3. Practice with a steady beat (hands on lap).
4. Practice from A to A (forward and back), one note per beat.
5. Practice B-to-B, C-to-C, D-to-D, E-to-E, F-to-F, and G-to-G.
6. Practice 2 notes per beat.
7. Practice 4 notes per beat.
8. Add the foot tap (matching the hands).

Teaching Techniques

1. Students match the instructor's correct playing position.
2. Students match the instructor's correct hand position.
3. Students match the instructor's tone and articulation.
4. Students match the instructor's hands (Down, Up, Down, Up). Remember to divide the beat evenly with the hands and then, the foot!
5. Students "watch the conductor," "listen to one another," "match," and "stay together."

Mastering the Alphabet and the Pass-off Game (with the sticker sheet)

1. Students perform from memory (with possible exceptions).
2. Students perform or "pass-off" one line (scale) at a time, one note per beat.
3. Students perform or "pass-off" one line at a time, two notes per beat.
4. "Master of the Alphabet" is achieved when students can perform the alphabet 2 notes per beat from A to A through G to G at a steady tempo with no mistakes.
5. "Super Master" is achieved with 4 notes per beat (2 on the down, 2 on the up).
6. "Ultra Super Master," for crazy over-achievers, is performed with 8 notes per beat.

Before students learn to play (or even hold) their instruments, many important lessons are taking root. Critical behaviors – including sitting correctly (playing position), tapping the foot and keeping a steady beat – are becoming automatic.

Benefits of “Master of the Alphabet”

1. Students are developing an internal feeling of pulse and the ability to externalize it.
2. Students are learning to feel 1, 2 and 4 notes per beat (subdivision).
3. Students are learning to perform at faster and slower tempos.
4. Students are learning to find their best performance tempo.
5. Students are hearing the words “Check your playing position;” “Check your hands;” “Listen to your neighbors;” “Match;” “Watch me.” They’re learning ensemble skills.
6. They’re practicing scales (they just don’t know it).

Alphabet Bonus Stuff

1. Students have something fun to practice starting on the 1st day of school. We are creating a culture of practicing and “playing” our instruments. We don’t do homeWORK in band. We PLAY. Band is different than other classes.
2. Right away, beginner students are performing, learning to manage feelings of excitement and also dealing with anxiety, frustration and disappointment. They are practicing their “inner game.”
3. Students experience the exhilaration of achieving something that is both challenging and meaningful to them.
4. Students learn that practicing works and can talk about good and bad practice habits.
5. Since every student has the opportunity to achieve “Master of the Alphabet,” students learn to support one another and celebrate each student’s success.
6. There is no time limit on learning and achieving. Band is different than other classes. Music is awesome!

Master of the Alphabet

A B C D E F G A

B C D E F G A B

C D E F G A B C

D E F G A B C D

E F G A B C D E

F G A B C D E F

G A B C D E F G