

Distance Learning Ideas for Music Teachers

Composition Assignment

Lesson Idea 1: Rhythm Racetrack

Comparing rhythmic variations with a car's "shifting gears" is a playful and vivid analogy to help students understand rhythmic subdivisions and rates of change. This lesson idea can be adapted for students age 6–12.

Materials: non-pitched percussion instruments or household percussive instruments, paper, pencil

Step 1: Reviewing Pulse and Rhythm

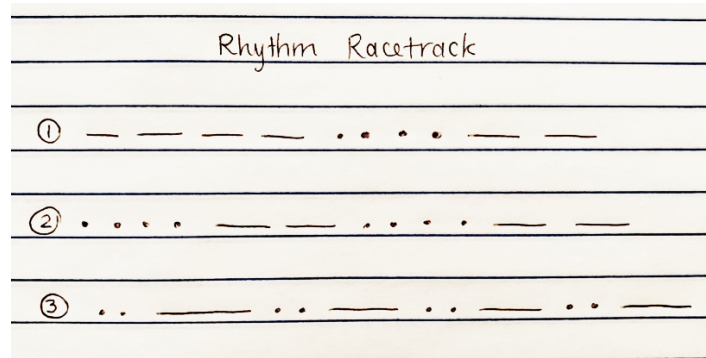
In written or video form, frame the lesson by asking students to imagine racecars whizzing around the racetrack. Inform students to recognize that racecar drivers manually shift gears to control their speed and steering, especially around turns.

Transition to a physical exploration that explores pulse and rhythmic subdivisions. Guide students to establish a steady pulse. Once students are comfortable, demonstrate via call and response, various examples of subdivisions.

Step 2: Creating Three Rhythmic Gears

Using their traditional or household non-pitched percussion instruments, have students work independently to explore and create three different repeatable rhythmic patterns that fit within the same rhythmic pulse. Once decided upon, have students order their rhythms such that "first gear" is the slowest rhythm and "third gear" is the fastest.

Have students document their three rhythms on a paper to show you on a screen or take a photo and upload it. Students may notate their rhythms using traditional or invented notation. Have young students use lines and dots. For example,



Step 3: Changing Gears

After reviewing students' work, have them experiment with playing their rhythms in different orders to mimic changing gears (e.g., 1-1-3-3-1-1-2, or 3-2-3-2-3-2-1) using some of the following scenarios:

- If on a live web platform, have the student perform their rhythms for you. Follow this by acting as the "rhythmic driver" who can "shift gears" in real time by holding up fingers to indicate the gear changes.
- If students are working alone at home, they can write three each of the following numbers on small slips of paper and draw them at random like from a deck of cards: "1," "2," and "3." The order in which the numbers are drawn will determine the gear changes that students can try.
- These shifting patterns can be forwarded to members of an online group to pass around in the style of "rhythm racetrack postcards."

Reflect on the experience:

- *What makes rhythms feel more or less active or quick?*
- *How did it feel to "shift gears" rhythmically as a performer?*
- *What was the effect on the listener?*
- *What are some rhythmic ideas that you want to carry over into your compositions?*

To Further the Exploration

This activity and students' reflections can then be the start of a piece they create and revisit over time: even if the mood of their piece is not as exciting as a racetrack, students should be shifting gears rhythmically from time to time in their piece to add interest.