

Music Dictation

In presenting a rhythm piece for dictation, it is important to establish a clear beat and a steady tempo. And, to help the student determine the meter (time signature), emphasize the first beat of each measure. You might have a young student practice learning to distinguish meters as a preliminary step to dictation. Have the student nod his head or drop his arms to show the “big” beat which is always the “one” in counting the time. After the meter has been established, have the student write down the meter and then write measure lines for four blank measures. Now begin the dictation. Establish the beat and tempo by tapping on a hard surface or a small drum. Ask the student to tap the beat with you. Then you stop but tell the student to continue tapping a silent beat while you play the rhythm piece. Remind the student to count with his beat so that he will know when you play notes that are longer or shorter than one beat. For students taking dictation for the first time, always do a few pieces out loud, remind the student to tap the beat, to count the beat out loud, to tell you what kind of notes you are playing, such as two beats, three beats or two to a beat, etc. Then ask the student to write the correct note for the number of beats. Then play some sample measures which contain notes of different rhythm values and have the student tell you how many beats are in each of the notes you played. This is all in preparation for rhythm dictation.

When you feel the student is ready for a four measure rhythm piece, make it a very simple one, with the same rhythm pattern occurring in two of the measures, perhaps the first and third, the second being different and the fourth containing a single note. Tell the student to write down whatever he remembers, even if it is only the first or last note. Then play the piece again and remind him to tap as you play and to count. **Do not** have the student write as you play. Stress the importance of listening to the whole piece and remembering. Again, have him write however much he remembers. Coax it along until the student has the whole piece.

When melodic dictation is introduced (Level 6), stress the importance of writing the bar lines through two staves so that the melody line will go directly under the rhythm line. Remind the student that the melody will have the same rhythm as the rhythm piece. Then give the rhythm dictation several times and when the student has written it correctly, play a melody on the piano (or whatever instrument you play). Tell the student what note the piece begins on and play a melody line that ascends or descends stepwise. Again, it is a good idea to have a repeated measure within the four measure pattern. After the student has developed confidence with stepwise melodies, try to include small intervals within the melody and gradually extend the interval jump from a third to a fifth, then a sixth and finally an octave.

Always give the student time to write something before asking if he would like you to play it again. Discourage the student from calling out “Play it again.” Suggest that he try to remember and write down what he thinks he heard since it can always be erased. In all aural work, it is important not to extend the listening session too long and not to spend too much time on any one aspect. Do a few minutes of listening to intervals, then move on to scales, then perhaps to chords, then one or two dictation pieces. By working in short sessions, the student does not lose concentration. And students of all ages seem to enjoy the challenge of this activity that has many of the characteristics of a TV game show.