



by Steve Kloser

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Dedicated to drummers everywhere.



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Teaching Rhythms

Introduction

Throughout this brief course we will integrate several approaches to teaching rhythms, consolidating them into a fairly comprehensive teaching guide. Beginning with TEEs and TAHs and ending with syncopated rhythm patterns, it is intended to be an A to Z resource, preparing students for high school band or choir.

This course is for you - not your students. It is a walk-through of concepts and examples and a different way of looking at rhythms for you to make your own and adapt to your class.

The focus of this course is the relative value of the notes to each other. So when the time comes, we'll start with a whole note.

The bigger the white board in your room is, the better.

There is no expectation or definition of how long it takes to 'get through' this course. Take your time; you can make up games and challenges, or teams and Rhythm Olympics, or take it further and practice sight-reading new, more difficult melodies. The only boundary is your imagination. Let's get started.

TEEs and TAHs

TEEs and TAHs are time-tested and they work.

It could not be simpler - say two TEEs in the same time it takes to say one TAH.

It does not need a confusing time signature.

It is a great way to introduce "*bars*".

[Use the term 'bars' instead of 'measures'. The 'barlines' look like **bars**, and *measure* has too many other distracting meanings.]

It is great for having any number of beats in a bar.

It transfers seamlessly to actual notes by just adding the note heads.

Start with this:

On the board, write



Say it: "TAH TEE TEE TAH", as you point to each mark - hereinafter referred to as point & say - with TEEs lasting half as long as a TAH... or, with two TEEs in the time it takes to say one TAH.

[To begin, all TEEs will be in pairs.]

Ask the class to note that you can say two TEEs in the same time as one TAH. Demonstrate again and then ask the class to say it with you as you *point & say*. Repeat until they are solid.

Add a little. On the board, write



Point & say it: TAH TEE TEE TAH TEE TEE TAH
Ask the class to say it with you as you *point & say*.

Get Creative!

The rest of this class period is up to you and your students. Keep it simple - just TEEs in pairs and TAHs. Do not yet put them in groups or worry about a pulse. Get your students up to the board as soon as they 'get it' and try to give everyone a chance to write a phrase and do the *point & say*. Ten or twelve characters max.

It may be tempting to end the class with a real long phrase, but end with a couple short ones that you write, and *point & say* them yourself - end on a big win.

Clapping

From this point forward, incorporate clapping - either instead of reciting TEEs and TAHs, or together with reciting TEEs and TAHs. Begin a pattern by only reciting the TEEs and TAHs, then clap and recite, then just clap.

There is an old jazz maxim that states, "you can't play it if you can't sing it" —meaning that internalizing a musical phrase in your mind and voice is required before you can truly execute it on an instrument (including your clapper). Once your students begin to get good at each step, experiment! Try beginning a new phrase with having them clap and recite, without reciting first. When they can do that, try beginning with clapping only. When they can do that, it is because they are saying the TEEs and TAHs in their heads - they can '*sing*' it - and you have done a good job.

The next step:

The next step may be to repeat the *last* step for several class periods, or part of several class periods, especially with 3rd and 4th graders. When your students give an inkling that they are getting bored, or if they are nailing it and anxious to move on, do so.

Those Social TEEs & TAHs

First, introduce the idea that TEEs and TAHs might be put into groups! And that in order to see the groups, they could be separated by vertical lines.

[We are headed toward accenting the first beat in a bar. If you start giving the first beat in a bar a little extra *umph* - be it a little louder clap of stronger TAH - your students will already be doing it when you introduce it.]

Reinforce the concept of two TEEs 'equaling' one TAH, that you've already mentioned a few times, and suggest that we should put the TEEs and TAHs in groups of five TAHs. (To students: "so how many TEEs would that be?")

On the board, write



and *point & say* all ten TAHs.

Ask the class to say it with you as you *point & say*.

Add a little. On the board, write



Point & Say without accenting any TEEs or TAHs.

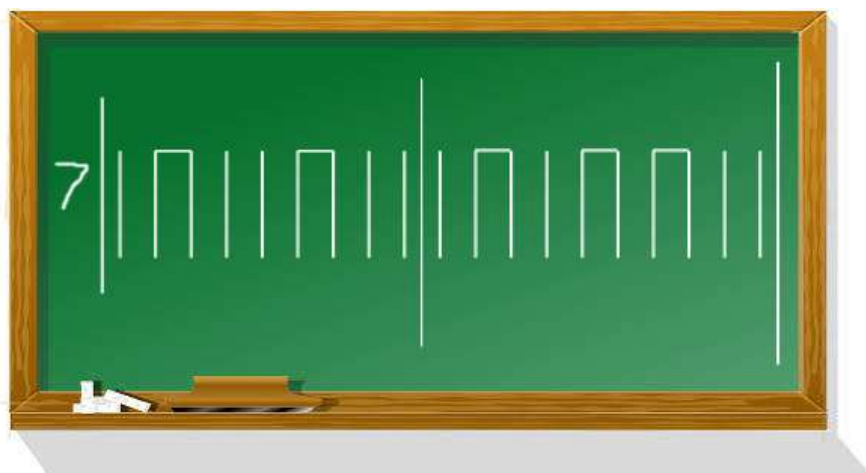
Ask the class to say it/clap it with you as you *point & say*.

Create a couple more examples with five TAHs in a group.

Ask the class to say them/clap them with you as you *point & say*.

Suggest that you might try a different number of TAHs in a group, or [introducing the term] "*bar*" - which (as an explanation and hopefully a memory key) are confined by the "*barlines*" you've already been using.

Do the same thing with 6 TAHs in a group and then 3 in a group. It will quickly become convenient to write the number of TAHs in each bar at the beginning of each phrase - just so we can keep track. On the board, write something like



with the number of TAHs in each bar now identified on the left.

[If it seems like we are purposely avoiding putting four TAHs (beats) in a bar (measure), it is because we are. Your students will probably spend 80% of their musical life with four beats in a measure. Before that becomes 'normal' or 'standard' or 'the basis upon which I am going to relate everything else in my musical life forever', it is our responsibility to reinforce the idea that there can be any number of beats in a measure (TAHs in a bar), and that neither we nor they should place any limits or boundaries on their imaginations.]

Get Creative!

The rest of this class period is up to you and your students.

Declare a number of TAHs in a bar (probably best to keep it under ten) and have students write appropriate phrases on the board, with barlines, and then *point & say* (then *clap*) them. Make sure they remember to notate the number of TAHs in a bar at the left of the phrase!

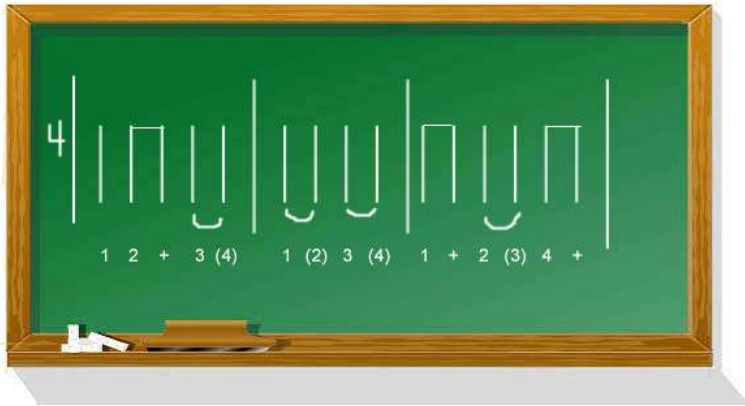
You could also have a worksheet ready, or create an assignment such as, 'create three bars with 3 TAHs in a bar and create four bars with 4 TAHs in a bar' and have your students hand that in.

[This may be the most important day/class/practice for your students. We want to instill in them the notion that there are no limits; that music can be whatever we want it to be; that there is more to this rhythms thing than "a quarter note gets one beat and there are four beats in a measure" which sadly is/has been how millions of young would-be musicians get introduced to and instantly confused about them. As long as your students are having fun with this, keep at it - they'll let you know when they are ready to move on.]

Dressing Properly: Ties

"Ties" are pretty simple: when two TAHs are tied together, they last twice as long as one TAH. It is voiced as 'tah-ah'.

On the board, write



Point & Say using TEEs, TAHs and TAH-AHs.

Point & Say using numbers - Choose the method you prefer from below and then use it exclusively.

The first bar above could be:

"one two and three-ee"

"one two and three (quieter or whispered) four"

"one two and three {a physical acknowledgment of four, e.g. a nod or four fingers} ^{*author's choice}

When clapping, only clap the first of the tied TAHs.

Have several examples ready for you and/or your students to *point & say (& clap)*, and have your students create and *point & say* examples. For now, we can only tie a TAH to a TAH.

Go through this exercise with four TAHs in a bar.

[If you have older or very sharp students and they want to tie notes with 7 or 11 TAHs in a bar and they can really do it, then fine. But since most of our music in America is in four or in three, it will be easier and more natural for students to deal with ties in those meters.]

Splitting the atom - I mean the TEEs

In order to split the TEEs, we need to swap them, and the TAHs, for numbers. This should be a fairly easy transition for your students at this point, as they have been counting all along.

On the board, write



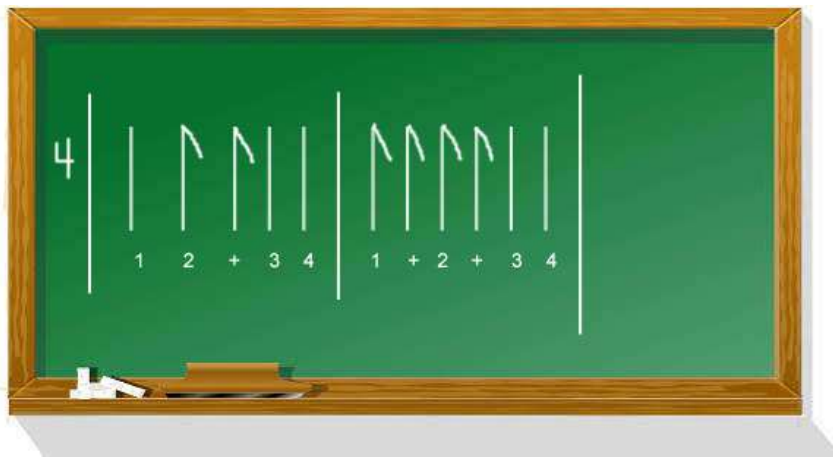
The plus sign is voiced as 'and'. So, "one two and three four and".

Point & Say.

Ask the class to say it with you as you point & say.

Ask the class to say it/clap it with you as you point & say.

Add a little. On the board, write



Point & Say.

Ask the class to say it with you as you point & say.

Ask the class to say it/clap it with you as you point & say.

Create a couple more examples with three, four or six TAHs in a group; with TEEs still in pairs but written with flags instead of joined stems.

Ask the class to say them/clap them with you as you point & say.

Have your students create and *point & say* examples, using pairs of TEEs with flags or pairs of TEEs that have connected stems - or a combination. Encourage them to include the tying of two TAHs in their example.

It seems prudent at this point to say that while you want your students to get good at this stuff, it needs to be fun or they will get bored. Have a couple worksheets ready. Drill until they are proficient then move on.



A Fork in the Road

We are about to enter the land of syncopation. Generally speaking, getting 3rd and 4th Graders to this point in this course is a WIN! Unless there is a reason that they'll need to perform syncopated rhythms in the near future, have the younger students rejoin us on page 13 - "*At Last We Meet Notes*".

5th & 6th Graders and Middle Schoolers should be able to complete the syncopation section below, especially if band and choir are available classes that they can or might sign up for.

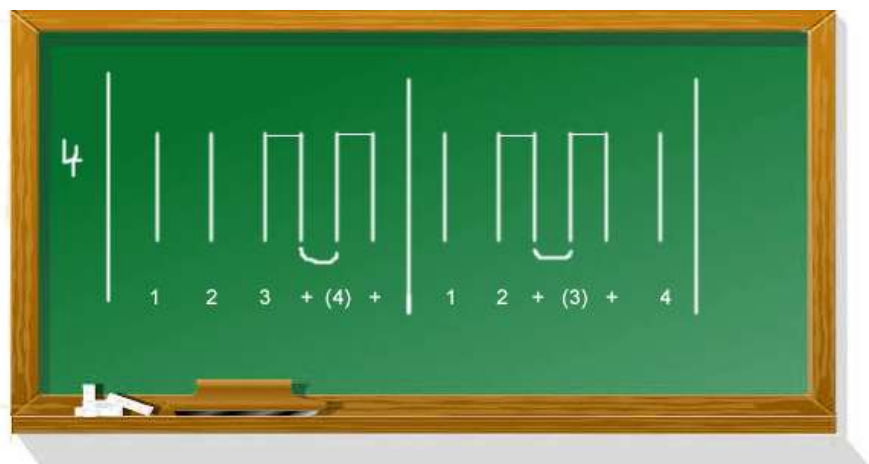
Middle Schoolers that have aspirations to play in the high school Jazz or Marching Bands should complete the section below, and you probably will want to amend it, by finding things for your students to practice sight-reading on/with. Sight-reading hymns (just the rhythms) is a great way to get started, and there is no real end ... maybe the REAL BOOK or one of the other fake books available - full of tricky rhythms just waiting to be read.

Evaluate your students, your goals for them, their goals, available classtime and make a syncopation plan before delving in.

Syncopation Doth Make the World Go 'round

When we tied notes (TAHs) above, the first TAH was on the beat; or directly on either one, two, three, or four. Syncopated rhythms tie notes with the first on the "*backbeat*" or "*offbeat*".

Here we go! On the board, write



voiced:

"one two three and and | one two and and four"

Here's the thing:

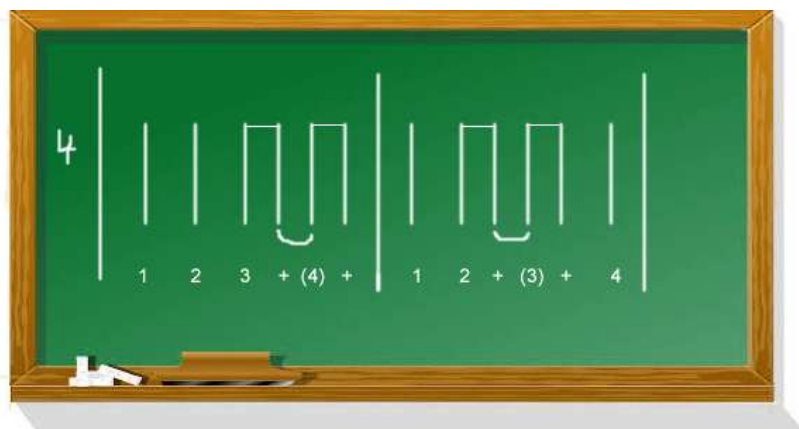
you must have high, to have low;

you must have hot, to have cold;

you must have beat, to have backbeat ... and when the beat isn't said or sung or clapped or played,
it must be felt.

What we really want, which you won't find in any music ed textbook, and which is hard to describe, is for your class to basically be "*chair-dancing*" as they do these syncopated rhythms. So, moving with the "*pulse*" or beat of the exercises, as if a fav song was playing.

So this pattern from above



is voiced:

bar1: "one two three **and** {dance -move on four} and" |

bar 2: "one two **and** {dance-move on three} and four"

or, as I like to think of it:

"one two three **and** (umph) and | one two **and** (umph) and four" |

In the same way that you can't play it if you can't sing it is true, you can't play the backbeat if you don't *feel* the beat.

Have your class sing 'When the Saints go Marching In' while marching in a circle, stepping on the beat. Once they can do that, have them first march on the beat and clap on the backbeat, and then add the singing.

Pick a song with a medium tempo, and as the class either listens to it or sings it, have half the class clap on the beat and the other half clap on the backbeat.

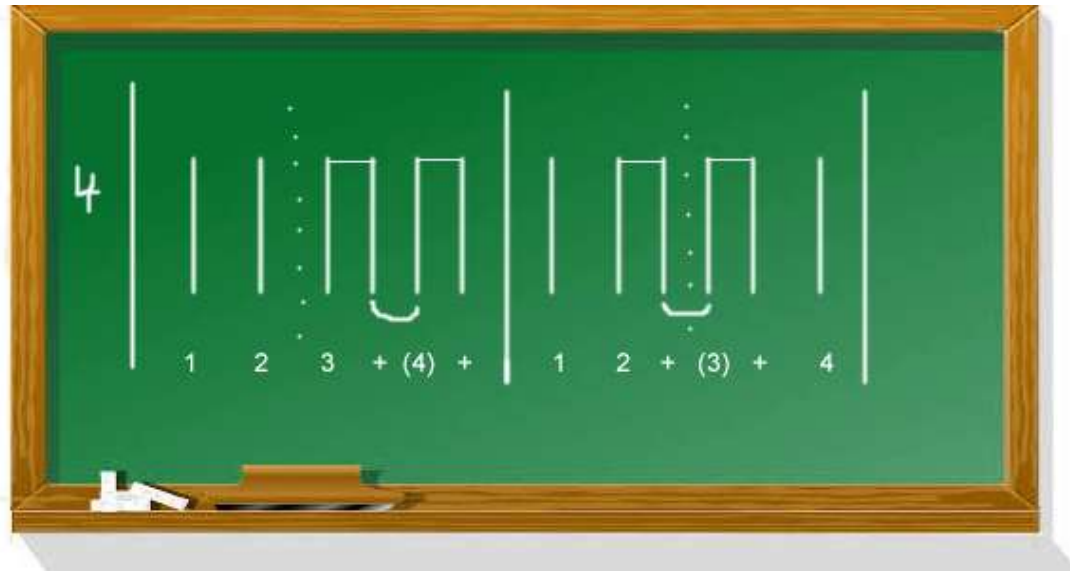
If you want to have a bit of fun, divide the class into four groups. The bass drum group only claps on one. The snare drum group claps on 2 and 4. The hi-hat group claps lightly on 1,2,3,4. The claves group claps on the **and** of two and the **and** of four. Start with the bass drum group and add the groups one by one. Create your own groups and patterns ... or better yet, have your students create them.

Have your students create and *point & say* examples, using TEEs with flags or TEEs that have connected stems - or a combination. Encourage them to include the tied TEEs / TAHs in their example.

Kettle of Fish

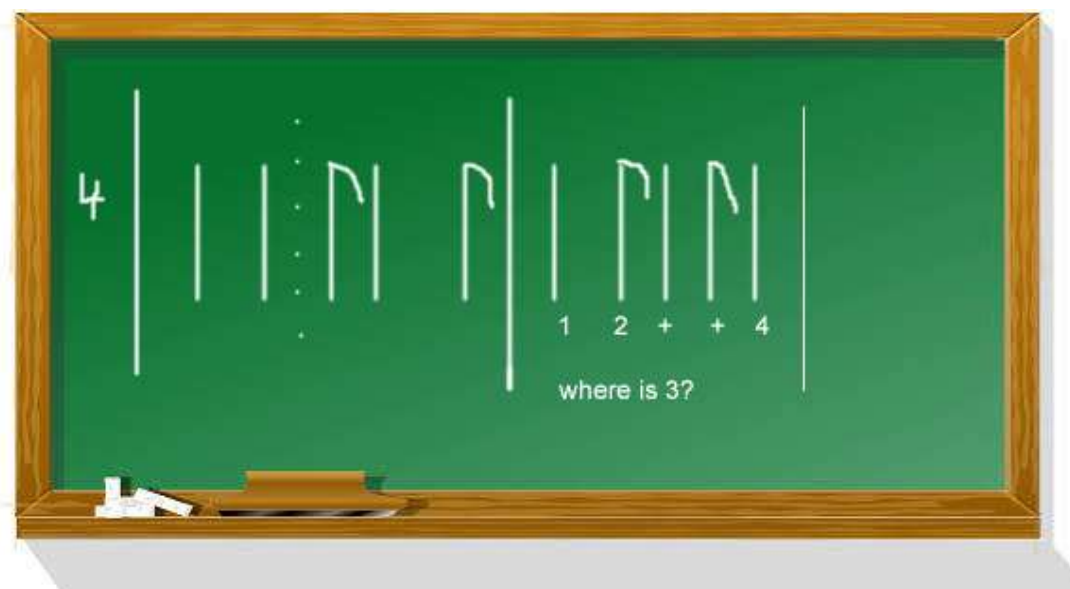
There is a matter of convention that we must address at this point, which is, that when writing rhythms - especially syncopated rhythms - the singer/player must be able to *visually divide the bar in half*.

Using the same example



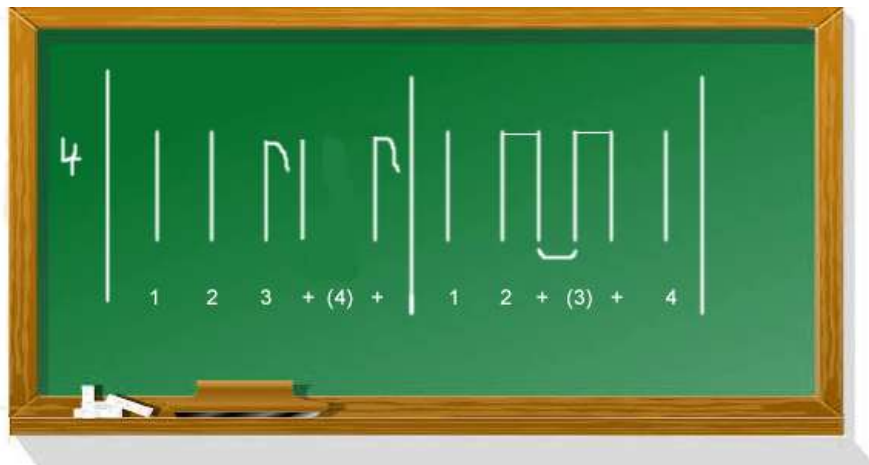
there are clearly two groups, each with the value of two TAHs, in each bar - as separated by the dotted line.

If we replace the tied TEEs with one TAH, we get



which is OK for the first bar, but leaves the second bar as difficult to read.

So in a real-life situation, the pattern would probably be written as:



with a TAH in bar 1, but with the tied TEEs in bar 2.

Below are a couple real-world examples - correctly notated on the left, then the same *sounding* pattern, but too hard to read, on the right.



This is important for two reasons. One is to maintain a standard. But the practical reason this is crucial isn't so much that the singer/player needs to know where beat 3 is (in the chalkboard example at the top of this page) as much as they need to know when the next note *after* beat 3 (which they can *feel*) should occur - without having to think about it or count half-beats. When beat 3 is visually clear, it is easy to see when the next note comes, relative to it, *whether beat 3 is played/sung/sounded or not*.

At an advanced stage of musical development, musicians begin to see and recognize patterns and rhythmic phrases instead of TEEing and TAHing note by note, just as we all recognize groups of letters as words, without the need to 'sound out' each group of letters. If you'd like a long-term goal to shoot for, there it is!

One Last Concept Before We Switch to Real Notes

Introduce the word 'pulse'.

Using input from your students, create a list of things that have a pulse:

Clock / Watch, Oil pump, humans, windshield wipers, pendulum, lawn sprinkler, fan,
jack hammer

Talk about the pulse in music and play excerpts from recordings where the pulse is obvious.

Discuss the Conductor's role in defining and keeping the musical pulse, called the "*beat*". [See 'Conducting Basics' in the brief appendix.]

Onward

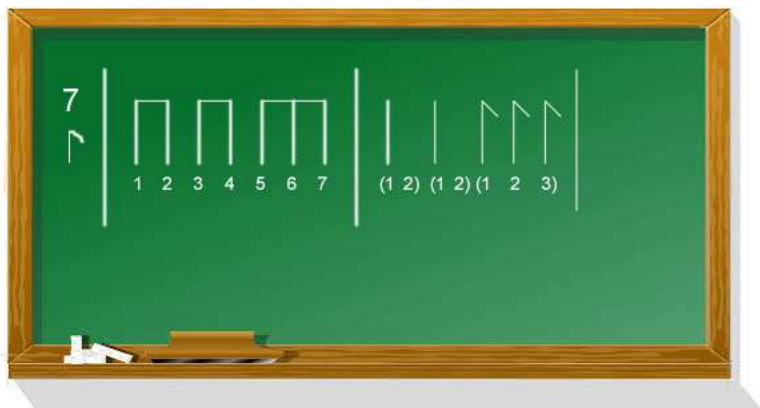
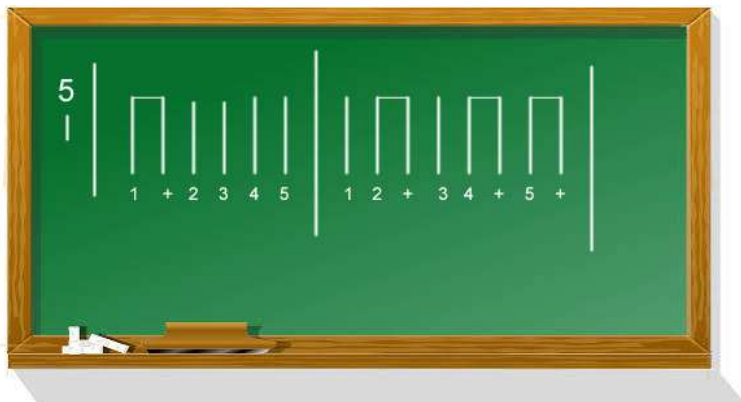
Let's say you have a student (possibly imaginary) of Greek decent who knows all too well that when he/she dances at weddings, there are seven beats/pulses in a group - and he/she asks about making a bar with seven TEEs. Not seven TAHs, that you have already done to death, but seven TEEs.

[If you have a 'visible' Principal, perhaps he/she can be invited make a timely 'impromptu' visit to your class, and pose the question, which generically is: "what do we do if we want {an odd number} of TEEs in a bar?"]

Work this through with the class. [Obviously the answer is that it can't be done, but let your students decide that. Assure your students that there is a solution, and try to hang in there until one of them figures it out.]

Since it is impossible to have an odd number of TEEs in a bar if the bar is defined by the number of TAHs it shall contain, we need to create a bar that is defined by the number of TEEs it contains instead.

That makes sense. How shall we notate that? What if we keep the number that tells us how many beats are in a bar, and below it, write which type of note gets one beat?



[In bars with an odd number of beats it is impossible to visually divide the in half, as before, but they should still be visually dividable! For our wedding dancing Greek, the songs are usually divided 2 2 3. Or thought of in terms of 12 12 123. See the example above.]

Have your students create and *point & say* examples, using TEEs with flags or TEEs that have connected stems - or a combination - with either a TEE or a TAH notated as the definition of the pulse. Practice until your students can switch between measures in which the beat is defined by either a TEE or a TAH. *Point & Say & Clap*.

At Last, We Meet Notes

We have firmly established the concept that one type of note can last proportionally longer or shorter than another. This is the approach we will continue to take. The following little section is a suggested lesson for your students:

The More You Add, The More You Take Away

Every time something (a stem, a filling or a flag) gets added to a note it lasts half as long as the one that was added to.

This is the simplest note.



It is called a whole note.

It can last for as many beats as we like.

When we add a stem to it,



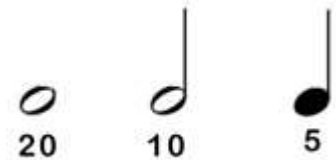
the newly formed "*half note*" will last exactly half as long as the whole note.

When we ***fill in*** the half note



it will last exactly half as long as the half note.

If the whole note lasts for 20 beats then the half note lasts for 10 beats and the filled-in half note, or "*quarter note*" lasts for 5 beats.

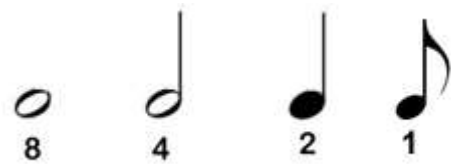


From here the only thing we can do is add flags. Every time we add a flag, the note lasts half as long.

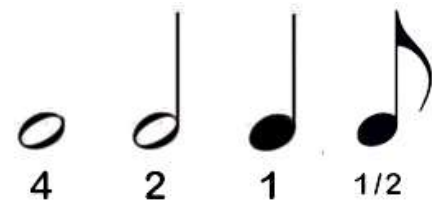
 A filled note with a stem and one flag will last for half as long as a filled note with a stem.

 A filled note with a stem and a two flags will last for half as long as a filled note with a stem and one flag.

If the whole note gets 8 beats, the half note gets 4 beats and the quarter note gets 2 beats and a quarter note with a flag added - an "*eighth note*" gets 1 beat.



In a more typical situation, if the whole note gets 4 beats, the half note gets 2 beats, the quarter note gets 1 beat and the eighth note gets a half beat.



Choose various {even number} values for the whole note and have your students figure out the values for the other notes. Whether or not you split the eighth note further is up to you!

[Caution: If your students are learning/studying fractions in another class, remember how silly "this is an eighth [note] and it gets a half [beat]" sounds, when in math class an eighth surely gets an eighth. Remember that it is called an 'eighth note' because it lasts as long as 1/8 of a whole note, and in that context it makes sense and matches math class. Where things typically go awry is when teachers begin with "this is a quarter note and it gets one beat" and approach things as if 4 4 time IS the 'standard' or 'base' or 'point of reference'.]

Back to the Beginning

On the board, write



This will look very familiar! 'TAH TEE TEE TAH' or '1 2 and 3' or 'clap clap clap clap' through it with the class. Remind the class that 'two TEES = one TAH' just like 'two eighth notes = one quarter note'.

We have now transitioned from TEE and TAH to full notation. Ta Da!

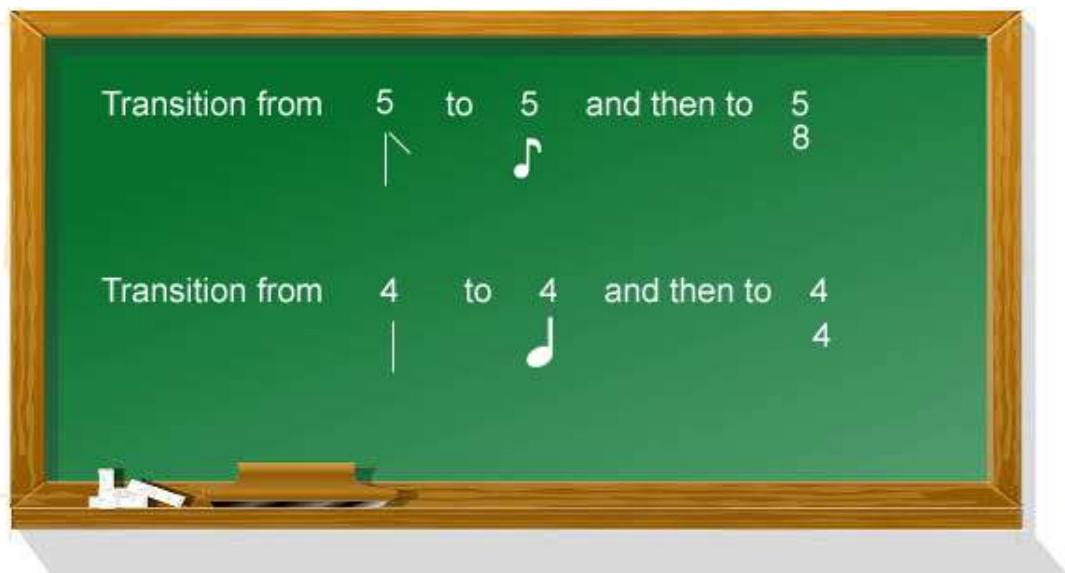
And that's about it. You and your students can write and read rhythms in virtually any meter, including syncopated figures and other tied notes, notated correctly and within convention. Where you go from here is up to you and your students, and so this is a good time to revisit your initial student evaluations, your goals for them, their goals, and the amount of available classtime going forward.

On the other hand, you've just begun. Have your students write and read and recite and clap and practice and practice. Push their imaginations and encourage them to write hard and tricky and interesting patterns to *say & point & clap*. Map out lesson plans and worksheets for (at least) the next couple weeks to get your students on a path to success.

[Remember that your job is to make sure the measures can be visually divided, and either just quietly correct them when they are not, or make the decision to explain the divided bar thing to your class. We do not want students to see "hard to read" examples and become confused.]

There are a few things to clean up

- First, as you move forward drilling with note heads attached, gradually shift over to a standard time signature.



- Introduce the idea that the pulse is a bit stronger on beat one, and incorporate that into their clapping. Depending on your class, you could then (in 4/4 time) show how *beat one* is strongest, but *beat three* is second strongest - a bit stronger than two and four but not as strong as one. Bring in different musical examples to illustrate the point. The next step would be to write using meters in which there are an odd number of beats ... so back to the Greek wedding (as one example) and accent beats 1 3 and 5 - remember? 12 12 123
- As you drill, remember that any kind of note can be the note that gets one beat; have your students explore time signatures such as

4	7	3	8
2	1	8	16

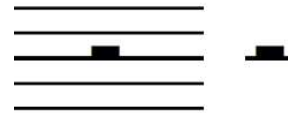
Express the Rests

The main thing about rests is that they must be felt. Again, some folk are much more comfortable being physically demonstrative (chair dancing) in public than others and we have to let each be themselves, but whether an 'umph' or a toe-tap or a nod or an air-fist-bump, encourage your students to express the rests.

Start by introducing the whole rest, then the half rest, then ... you guessed it: the quarter and eighth rests.



It can be helpful to note that a **HA**lf rest looks like a little **HA**t.



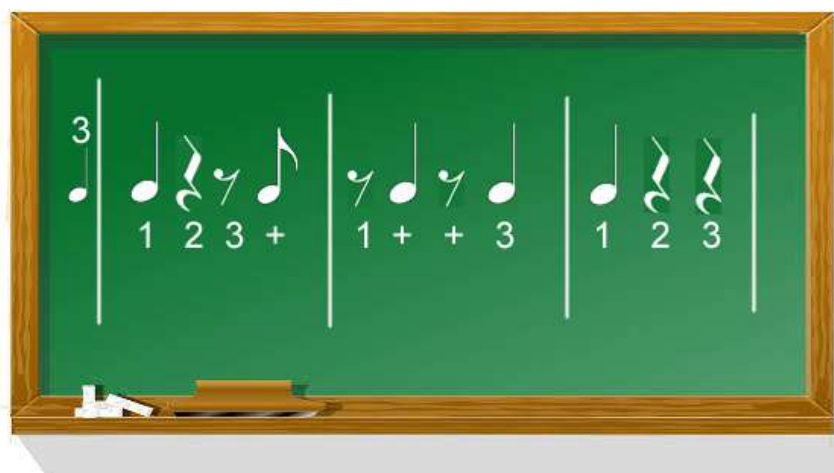
Have your students create and *point & say & clap* examples that include rests. [We do not tie rests. Just place them next to each other.]



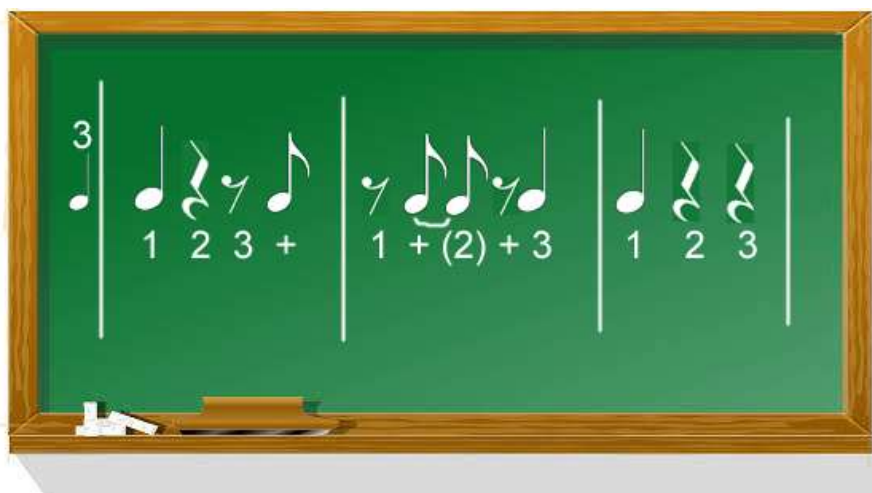
The above example could be voiced:

one rest three rest | one rest a-----nd a -----nd rest |
 1 2 3 4 1 2 + 3 + (4) +

[For a little while it will help to have your students say 'rest' instead of just resting.]

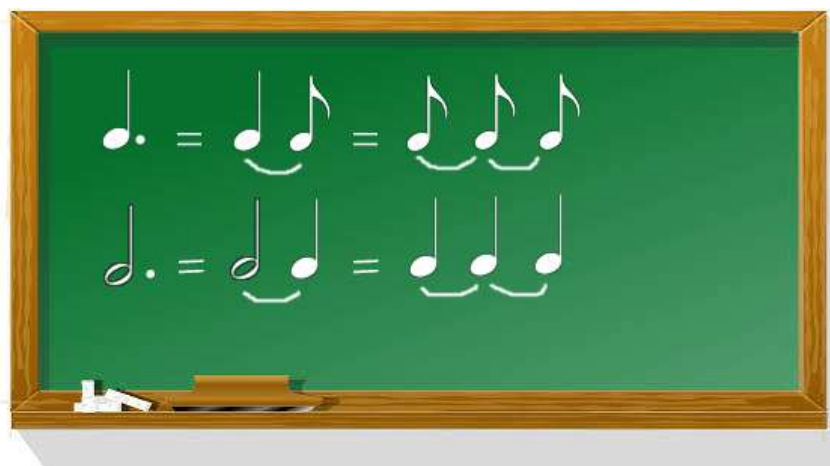


Note that even though the above example is not really 'incorrect', because there are only three beats in a bar, it is easier to read when you can see each beat:



Dotty

At some point along the way "*dotted notes*" will generically come up, either because you need one to fill up space in a bar or because a student sees one, or the need for one, and asks about it. Relate the value of the dot (half the value of the note to which it is attached) to fractions of that note.



Have your students *write & say & point and clap* patterns that include various combinations of rests, ties, syncopated figures, *and* dotted notes, all in different "*meters*" ('the number of beats in a bar' and 'which note gets one beat'). Really, there are no limits here. But here's a phrase you can use as a benchmark test in 4 4 time:



Follow Through

With your students, explore music with exotic meters.

Trumpeter Don Ellis was obsessed with mixed meters, odd meters, and constantly shifting rhythmic groupings, and his music is exciting and worth checking out, Dave Brubeck is famous for bringing unusual time signatures into mainstream jazz, e.g. Take Five (5 4) and Blue Rondo À la Turk (9 8) are classics. Chick Corea was a genius in everything he did, including unusual use of meters.

The author's recommendation is "First Circle" by Pat Metheny, which seamlessly shifts from the base 11 4 to 4 4 and 6 8 and back to 11. An amazing piece.

Thank-you for teaching music and thank-you for using this course. We'd love to hear from you.
music@kokopellipress.com

Conducting Basics

The conductor's responsibilities include setting and maintaining the tempo, executing clear preparations and beats (meter), and listening critically and shaping the sound of the ensemble. However, the conductor's primary responsibility (especially in a beginning class) is to unify performers.

Almost any movement you make that helps keep your students together might be classified as conducting. Clapping, or tapping a stick, or holding up your hand and repeatedly displaying one, two, three, four fingers will help keep your students together more or less. So why do all the arm wagging?

The thing conducting patterns have that tapping does not, is a bounce. Conducting patterns are easy to follow because the bounces happen at a visually perceptible specific spot in time, which is much clearer than trying to decipher exactly when the second, third, or fourth finger 'appeared'. Even more importantly, the bounces give the overall motion a flowing quality that allows the performers to sense when *the next* bounce (beat) will happen; that's what keeps the performers together.

Begin practicing by making a downbeat. In order to have a downbeat, there must be an upbeat, or preparatory beat. The upbeat happens at the same speed as the downbeat – this is how the players or singers know when the downbeat will happen. Just dropping your hand from a stationary position does not give the group members enough information for them to come in together.

For a right-handed conductor:

- Hold your open hand in front of your shoulder.
- Move your hand to the left a bit, and bounce it off the make-believe tiny trampoline, causing your hand to ascend straight up.
- Drop your hand at the same speed with which you raised it, and bounce.
- Open your hands palms up & open, signifying that you want the playing to continue.
- When you are ready for the playing to stop, make a sweeping motion with your hands that results with your palms open but facing away from your body; what you can see is just the back of your hands.

Do it in front of the mirror. Practice until the bounce happens without you having to think about it. Then conduct a two pattern. When the upbeat and downbeat are equally long, and both are bouncing happily, learn the three and four patterns. Remember that a downbeat isn't a downbeat without an upbeat.

One way to practice is by air-conducting your favorite recorded music.

Conduct with your hand or a baton. Avoid using a finger, as it isn't as easy to see and sometimes people don't like being pointed at.

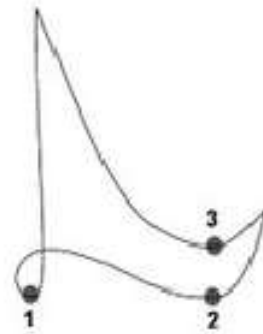
Two pattern

- Conduct the down beat, veering to the (right) side after the bounce.
- Return your hand to the focal point for beat two, and then bring it straight up again.



Three pattern

- Conduct the down beat, bringing your hand straight up after the bounce.
- Return your hand to the focal point for beat two, veering to the (right) side after the bounce.
- Return your hand to the focal point for beat three, and then bring it straight up again.



Four pattern

- Conduct the down beat, bringing your hand straight up after the bounce.
- Return your hand to the focal point for beat two, veering to the (left) side after the bounce.
- Return your hand to the focal point for beat three, veering to the (right) side after the bounce.
- Return your hand to the focal point for beat four, and then bring it straight up again.

