

Introduction

The structure of music is based upon the various elements that make up music. These are identified as rhythm, melody, harmony, form, timbre, and expression. Many teachers choose to use these elements as the basis for their curriculum design while others use a variety of activities (songs, play-party games, dances/movements, etc.) that incorporate these elements. As a classroom teacher, the elementary education specialist selects those activities with which he or she feels most comfortable.



Classroom activities often incorporate music

[Enlarge](#)

Regardless of the choice or lesson focus, it is important for the teacher to understand the elements of music and how to interpret its symbols.

Music is conceived and experienced as a whole through the combination and interrelationship of these elements rather than between discrete segments. The teacher, in an effort to construct cohesive lessons designed to make the elements more concrete to students, is faced with the prospect of separating and breaking down the various components into their most basic and rudimentary forms. For this reason, lessons are often based upon activities that promote specific skills, such as listening and singing to highlight elements such as melody or harmony. However, the elements must be

identified individually so that students perceive and experience the separate aspects within the structure of music.

Rhythm

Rhythm is one of the most basic of all musical elements in the sense that it is found in nature through the flow of movement, the changes of tides, and the progression of day and night. Rhythm can be found in the human body and can be sensed throughout our world.



Students acquire rhythm and pulse skills in a variety of ways

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Although rhythm is the most easily perceived of the elements of music (melody, harmony, and rhythm), they are all inseparably linked and work together as a whole. To understand the function of rhythm, it is essential to think of music in a holistic way. Rhythm cannot be thought about as separate from the total musical phenomenon. Thus, we talk about melody, harmony, and rhythm as an intertwined unit that moves in time.

Very young students can sense rhythm and respond rhythmically by swaying and rocking to music. Although these responses seem natural, many children need reinforcement of rhythmic skills to fully develop an inner sense of rhythm.

The acquisition of rhythmic concepts and skills is a developmental process. As students mature, their ability to respond to increasingly sophisticated concepts improves and becomes more established. Exposure to the concepts through concrete activities can begin to move students into identifying more difficult rhythmic concepts.

Rhythm is the essential element of music that relates to the organization of sound in time. Together with pitch, duration, volume, and timbre, it is one of the five basic parameters of music.

In addition to listening to music, all of us have almost constant and varied experiences that involve rhythm—the beating of the heart, breathing, the ticking of a clock, or the passing of the seasons. However, rhythm remains one of the most elusive musical terms to define.

Regardless of the cultural environment, one thing remains true: the basic component of rhythm is *pulse*. Without pulse, there is no rhythm.

Pulse is that propelling motion in the music to which we tap our feet. Beat is synonymous with pulse. The beat can be regular or irregular, but most music that we hear has a regular pulse. The beat is, therefore, defined by *regular* points of rhythmic emphasis. In music, the beat is usually indicated by the number of beats per minute measured mechanically by a metronome.



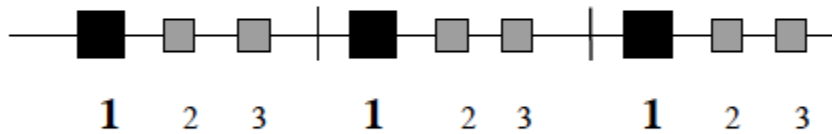
Metronome

↗ Enlarge

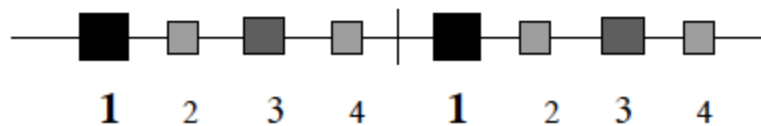
Duple meter = two pulses per group: (2/4 time)



Triple meter = three pulses per group: (3/4 time)



Quadruple meter = four pulses per group: (4/4 time)



Pulse grouped by meter

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Duration and stress are the constituent factors of rhythm. Duration refers to the length of time a sound or silence lasts. Stress refers to how emphasized or not those sounds are.

In the most general sense, our minds seek to find order in sound by interpreting time as a succession of patterns. Those patterns are created by the interplay of durations and emphasized and non-emphasized sounds. Emphasized sounds create points of rhythmic stress. Those points of rhythmic stress are the beats you tap your foot to when listening to music.

Melody and Harmony

Hot Cross Buns Trad.

Melody (indicated by a red arrow pointing to the treble staff)

Harmony (indicated by a red arrow pointing to the bass staff)

Piano

Hot Cross Buns

Enlarge

Melody is the linear succession of musical tones formed of pitches and durations perceived by the listener as a musical line. Pitch is, simply, the relative perception of how high or low a sound is.

A pitch can be the same, higher, or lower in relation to another pitch. In “Hot Cross Buns,” the melody is the primary musical material while the harmony supports the melody. If the harmony was played by itself, it wouldn’t be very interesting.

Listen carefully to the following pitch combinations.

	Pitch 1 is lower than 2
	Pitch 1 and 2 are the same
	Pitch 1 is higher than 2

Remember that listening as you learn is the key to musicianship. If you have access to a keyboard, set of bells, or another melodic instrument, try to play and, above all, listen carefully to the sounds that embody the concepts you will be learning. With practice, you will develop the ability to hear internally,

that is, hearing sounds inside your head without actually having to play them on a keyboard or any other instrument.



Melody is experienced primarily through singing

[Enlarge](#)

The concept of melody is practiced in children's early years through singing and performing. Before they enter their school years, children sing songs as part of their play activities. Song is the most direct experience that conveys the movement of pitches and rhythm and can be used as the basis for experiencing melody through listening, movement, composition, improvisation, and playing instruments.

Form, Timbre, and Expression

Form in music refers to the overall structure of the piece. Musical form is like a blueprint or a plan for a building, or an outline for a novel or story. All art forms have a plan that is conceived and articulated by its creator unless it is

completely devoid of form and in that case, the composition would be considered “free form,” which is a type of form in itself. In music, several types of musical forms have been developed and used according to the style, genre, cultural derivations, and preferences of the composer. These will be covered more thoroughly in Module Seven, but it is important to note that music has an underlying foundation of structure that can be identified and analyzed.

Musical timbre—also referred to as tone color or tone quality—references the sound qualities of the musical tone. The timbre of a voice or musical instrument conveys more than sound production through pitch or volume. It also includes characteristics such as color or texture (dark, light, warm, etc.), richness (harmonic frequencies blending high and low harmonics), or distortion as a part of style, as in heavy metal rock music. These qualities contribute to the interpretive abilities of the musician, who may use them consciously, intentionally, or intuitively to convey the meaning and emotion of the music.



A spectrogram is a visual representation of the physical sound characteristics of pitch

[↗ Enlarge](#)

Composers and musicians use musical expression as a means of emotional communication to the listener. In musical terms, expression is conveyed through the use of dynamics, phrasing, melodic and harmonic complexity,

timbre, and articulation, often notated in the music by the composer through specific symbols and words. Expression is fundamental to music as a means of relating meaning, enjoyment, and value of the composition to the listener. Although the use of expression as a means of communication has varied over the centuries depending upon taste, style, and personal preference, one central purpose of music is to express emotion either to one's self or to others.