

MUSICAL PATTERNS IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

What are musical patterns and why are they useful?

Musical patterns can take many forms, including, for example:

- Metre (beats-in-the-bar) and rhythms
- Melody (tune) and phrasing (musical sentence) patterns
- Sections / structures within a piece of music
- Dynamic (loud and soft) patterns
- Harmonic (chord) patterns
- Other contrast patterns, for example using textures (layers) and timbres (natural tones)

Because the human brain recognises patterns naturally getting children to focus on musical patterns can be an effective way of introducing various musical concepts and elements.

What is a good way to start with a group of children?

Unless you have done lots of it before always start with **counting** and **rhythms** as these patterns are the foundations of most music.

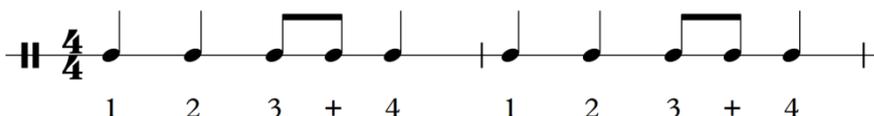
Understanding metre / time-signature / beats in the bar

It will be very useful for you, the teacher, to understand the concept of **metre (the number of beats in a bar)** if you are going to do rhythm work with children.

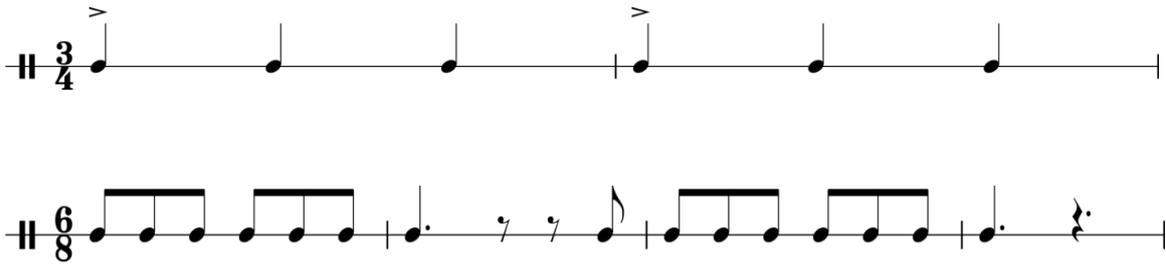
- Most music has a metre of **4**
- This means that each bar (groups of beats) feels 'stronger' on beat 1, while beats 2, 3 and 4 are 'weaker'.



- The time-signature (e.g. 4/4) tells you how to count the beats.
- The **top** number is the **number** of beats; the **bottom** number is the **value** (length) of the beat (e.g. 4 = crotchet or quarter beat)
- Encourage your children to count aloud in 4's, emphasising beat no.1. You will quickly find you can introduce rhythms in 4 time e.g.

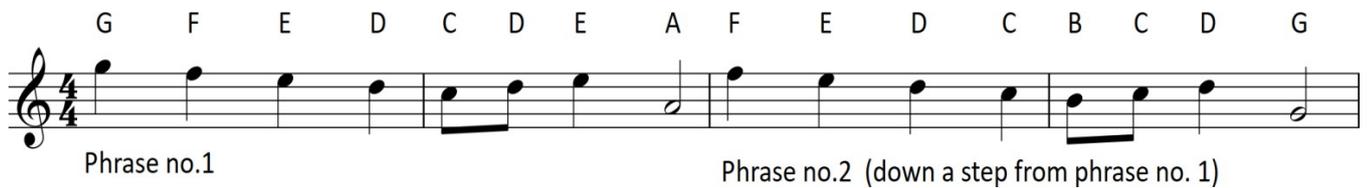


- Get them to experiment with various rhythms, but stick strictly to a steady 4/4 time.
- Once you have established that you can introduce metres of **3** and **6** (these are the most common after 4)



How can we use melody patterns in classroom music activities?

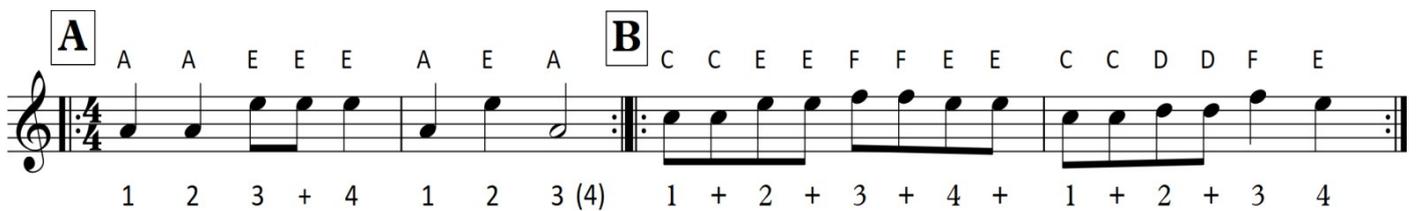
A concept that children will immediately ‘hear’ is melodic sequences. This is where the same pitch pattern is repeated up or down a step:



Using tuned percussion and voice, getting your children to experiment with sequences like this will encourage creativity and well as improve their sense of pitch (high and low).

How can we use structural patterns?

Take two simple contrasting ideas, e.g. see ideas **A** and **B** below:



Tip: musical structures work better with even numbers of repeats e.g. **4** or **8** and not, say, **3** or **7**.

Organise the two ideas into symmetrical **forms** (form is another musical word that mean structure)

For example

A B binary form

A B A ternary (or ‘sandwich’ form)

How can we use dynamic (volume) patterns?

Build this into the structure patterns, for example the ones used above.

A (loud) **B** (soft) A (loud)

By making, say, section **A** loud and section **B** soft, you are also making the piece more musical and interesting.

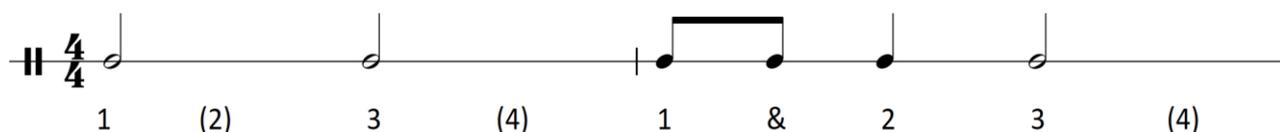
Can we use chord (harmonic) patterns?

Yes, but this is a slightly more advanced concept that will take a little more time to introduce.

What the simplest way to do it then?

Revisit the idea of step sequences (see above) and apply it in this way:

- Explain that chords are two or more different notes played together.
- That they sound best when spaced in 3rds i.e. play a note / miss a note / play a note
- This is probably best organised by splitting your class into three and getting each sub-group to play a different note.
- Get them to play an example chord to a rhythm e.g. **C / E / G**



- Repeat 4 times and then move either up, or down, a step.
- Here's a simple four chord sequence that works well:
C / E / G D / F / A E / G / B F / A / C
- You can then repeat this 4 chord sequence as many times as you like to make a longer piece.

How can we experiment with texture patterns?

Textures are 'layers' of sound. For example you could say the exercise described above is a three layered texture, with each sub-group of your class playing one layer (i.e. one note of the three note chord).

A nice simple activity focused on textures *and* timbres is to play using several different instrument types e.g. glockenspiel, wood block and shaker (or whatever you have to hand).

Using even numbers of repeats (e.g. 4 or 8 times) bring in each instrument group one at a time, explaining the texture is getting 'thicker' as each group is added.

Then do the same process in reverse so the texture is getting 'thinner.'

Add some rhythm and dynamic variation, and lo and behold you have a nice little classroom composition!

Useful vocabulary

Sequence: a pitch pattern (e.g. repeat down a step)	Bar: a group of beats
Beat: the underlying pulse of the music	Duration: length of notes
Rhythm: note values (duration) & patterns	Form: the structure of the music
Timbre: the natural tone of an instrument / voice	Note value: how long the note is
Texture: layers of music	Dynamics: volume (loud / soft)
Metre: patterns of strong and weak beats	Harmony: two or more notes together
Pitch: how high or low a note is	Time-signature: beats in the bar