

# Finding Time for Creative Musical Activities in Ensemble Rehearsals

## Practical Suggestions for Teachers

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I have never met a music teacher who has complained about having too *much* class time! It seems like I am always racing the concert date to get everything done in time. I have found that including creative musical activities designed to increase student understanding of the music actually buys me *more* time. When students learn to interact with music through improvisation and composition, they tend to learn music faster, and I spend less time telling students what to do – “That’s the melody, bring it out!” – because they have developed the ability and awareness to self-correct.

I hope you find these suggestions helpful. It’s really as simple as trying just one thing at a time. Start simple. If it works, keep doing it! Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

### IMPROVISATION

- Pick your favorite warm-up. Have students create their own rhythms.
- Make up a simple, 4-measure melody in major tonality. You can compose this ahead of time, or make it up on the spot. I’m including one I just made up. Sing or play the first 3 measures, then have your students make up the last bit. Try it out – I bet you come up with the same last measure as I was thinking!



- Pick a simple melody. Teach it to your students by ear – no letter names, scale degrees, or solfège allowed! Once they learn it, they can try embellishing (or “decorating”) it.

### NOTATION

- Approach writing notation the same way you’d think about writing in language.
- Students who write better, read better.
- Use dictation exercises to reinforce rhythms from current or future performance repertoire.

### COMPOSITION

- I think the best approach is a sound-before-sight approach. Try to encourage students to write down musical ideas they have created themselves. This may require some remedial notation basics, but that’s okay! Think about writing in language: if a student can write it, they can read it.
- Start simple. Have them notate the melody from a piece you performed in the last concert. Have them write the rhythm to a 4-line poem, then add pitches to the rhythm.
- Don’t grade! Well, at least at first. Nothing stifles creativity like the pressure of a bad grade.
- Make a compilation of 4-measure student compositions to send home to parents.

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