



Learning Centre

## Music Tutoring Techniques: Sight Singing and Ear Training

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Music students come from diverse musical backgrounds and many are new to the technical aspects of Sight Singing and Ear Training. Tutoring is often sought for these courses in order to develop greater proficiency. I have compiled some techniques and strategies from my experience to help students improve their solfege, rhythmic fluency, and aural skills.

### Sight Melodies

*The student opens their Sight Singing textbook and points to one of the melodies listed on the page. How should you begin?*

- **Step 1: Identify Key**  
Ask the student to identify the key of the melody.
- **Step 2: Identify Starting note**  
Ask the student to confirm the solfege of the first note (does the melody start with do/tonic?).
- **Step 3: Speak Solfege Syllables**  
Ask the student to speak the solfege syllables in their notated rhythm, but do not let them sing the pitches yet. If the student is required to sing with hand signs, include it in this step.
- **Step 4: Set-up Key**  
Ask the student to play the tonic chord on the piano to aurally set-up the key. Make sure the student has the tonic fixed in their mind before the next step.
- **Step 5: Sing with Solfege**  
Ask the student to sing the pitches with solfege at a moderate pace, paying attention to rhythm and leaps between notes.

- If the student is struggling with any of these steps, the tutor can demonstrate or join the student in speaking the solfege, using hand signs, and/or singing with solfege. Once the student shows competence, the tutor can step back and let the student demonstrate ability on their own.
- If the student gets lost or loses their tonality, ask them to go back to the trouble spot and identify where things went wrong. If they are unsure, show them the location of the error/s and discuss how they can fix it. Then ask them to restart the melody with the necessary corrections.

## **Sight Rhythms**

*The student is learning rhythms with the Takadimi system. They show you an example rhythm from their textbook and explain that they are having difficulty with speaking the syllables and conducting at the same time. How should you begin?*

- **Step 1: Takadimi Reference**  
Ask the student to locate information on the Takadimi system from their notes or the textbook. Refer to it throughout the session.
- **Step 2: Identify Time Signature**  
Ask the student to identify the time signature and meter (simple or compound) of the selected rhythm.
- **Step 3: Identify Conducting Pattern**  
Ask the student to determine the conducting pattern (duple, triple, or quadruple).
- **Step 4: Review Takadimi Syllables**  
Ask the student to look over the rhythms and review the Takadimi syllables that are required.
- **Step 5: Conduct with Beat**  
Advise the student to keep track of the main beat while conducting. This can be done by tapping the foot or snapping their fingers as they conduct.
- **Step 6: Speak Rhythms**  
Ask the student to speak the rhythms while conducting at a slow tempo. If the student is struggling more with rhythm rather than Takadimi, tell them to resort to a neutral syllable ('ta' or 'da') until understanding is established.

- If the student is struggling with any of these steps, the tutor can demonstrate or join the student in conducting and speaking rhythms. Once the student shows competence, the tutor can step back and let the student demonstrate ability on their own.
- If the student gets lost or forgets the Takadimi syllables, ask them to go back to the trouble spot and identify where things went wrong. If they are unsure, show them the location of the error/s and discuss how they can fix it. Then ask them to restart the rhythm with the necessary corrections.

## **Aural Skills and Ear Training Tips**

### **CHORD ID**

- Play each chord individually at first, helping the student become accustomed to the sonorities before you start the drills.
- Ask them to listen specifically for the quality (Major, minor, diminished, or half-diminished) as you play the chords.
- For inversions, ask them to focus on the bass note and listen for the pull to the tonic, “hearing” the descent to the root of the chord (in their mind) in order to determine the type of inversion.
- Break down the chord if they are having trouble distinguishing the quality, especially for different 7th chords (MM7, Mm7, mm7, mM7).

### **INTERVAL ID**

- Start with the “easy” intervals until they reach a level of confidence before increasing difficulty (Ex. P8th, P5th, M3, m3, etc.).
- Suggest familiar melody associations to help them recognize trickier intervals. (Ex. The Star Trek Theme=minor 7th, The Simpsons=tritone, Here Comes the Bride=P4, etc.)
- A helpful resource for ascending and descending interval recognition with songs: <http://www.earmaster.com/products/free-tools/interval-song-chart-generator.html>

**SOLFEGE ID**

- Demonstrate the “Blind Solfege Drill” to help students practice identifying the solfege of a note played within a given tonality.
  - Blind Solfege Drill:
    1. Sit at the piano and play a C Major triad or an A minor triad.
    2. Close your eyes and play any random white note above. Listen to the quality of the sonority, and try to determine the interval/solfege relative to the tonic.
    3. Look at the note that was played and compare it with the tonic in order to check your answer.

**CADENCE ID**

- Make sure that they have a sufficient understanding of the theory behind Cadence types:
  - Perfect Authentic=PAC
  - Imperfect Authentic =IAC
  - Plagal=PC
  - Deceptive=DC.
- Play through cadence examples, reminding the student to pay attention to the solfege of the bassline and the STF (Soprano Triad Factor=the highest played note) to help them determine the type of cadence.

Remember to encourage students and acknowledge their progress. Keep the session as optimistic as possible, especially if the student is struggling and feeling discouraged. In order for them to succeed, they will need to have a positive attitude to keep motivating themselves to practice on their own. I hope that these techniques and tips from my experience will be helpful to other music tutors in the future.