

Using a Metronome

Rhythm and the ability to maintain a pulse is fundamental to music making. Being able to 'groove' and play 'in the pocket' are essential skills for ensembles and successful performances. In fact, the Dalcroze methodology of music education emphasizes the use of rhythmic movement. Some cultures embrace dance and movement while others inhibit it. Either way, every music student will eventually be asked to play with and practice with a metronome. The student's success with that ominous clicking depends on many factors but the right approach can increase the odds of success.

The metronome is probably the single most important tool in a student's musical development. I encourage all my students to purchase and use metronomes. Most students who own a metronome purchased it after playing a few years. Therefore, much of this is designed for that situation - sometimes even re-learning counting.

However, owning a metronome is only one step in the path to rhythmic success. Before a beginning musician practices with a metronome they need to know what it does and how to work with it.

First, let me say that I teach students to count using eighth notes from the very beginning - just as the *Essential Elements* series does. I have students count out loud. This is a great advantage to playing a string instrument. Subdividing the pulse is the key to the student's rhythmic ability. Within a few lessons everyone is able to pluck quarter notes and say 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &. I firmly believe students should count out loud. This transforms a thought into a real physical manifestation where teachers *and* students can easily identify errors.

When teaching beginning musicians quarter notes, I say each quarter note has 2 halves. The first half is a number, the second half is an '&'. We need to count both halves. This makes subdividing an easy transition and a logical result.

Several lessons later I add foot tapping and tell the students "the foot goes *down* on a number, *up* on an '&' ". We work on counting out loud and tapping the foot at the same time. I devote a lesson or two just to counting, clapping, and subdividing. This is easy to work into the public school schedule if you are flexible. There are times when you have to group lessons together due to field trips or testing and this heterogeneous mix is the perfect opportunity to work on counting and rhythmic skills.

