

## Got Game? Games for the Studio

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**“It is the act of solving puzzles that makes games fun. Fun is about learning in a context where there is no pressure and that is why games matter.” —Ralph Koster**

**“Try not to have fun...this is supposed to be educational.” —Charles Schulz**

### Getting Started:

- Games are an excellent way to introduce a concept, to reinforce a concept or drill a concept and even take it to a harder level in a fun setting.
- What concept or skill would you like to work on studio-wide? Ear-training? Note names/note recognition? Chords and inversions? Rhythm? There's probably a game for that and if not, you can find a way to make an existing game work for you!

### Some considerations:

- Kids learn best when utilizing as many learning styles (visual, aural, tactile) as possible simultaneously.
- The easiest way to start is by using existing board games. Students will already understand the basic game concept and rules; they just need to know what adaptations are needed to make it a “music” game. e.g. Floor Twister; Baseball
- Look for games that work on multiple levels of difficulty or can be easily altered to challenge the star student yet easily simplified to engage the beginning student. Students should be able to see progress or success as mastery of the game is underway.
- To get the most out of your game selection, be sure to let students experience them in the private lesson first where the game can be instantly altered to suit the individual student before introducing the game into the group class or group lesson scenario.
- Games, even educational ones, need to be rooted in authentic game elements to achieve ultimate “fun”. Most of our favorite games involve some element of luck.

### Debunking reasons NOT to use games in the piano studio:

“It takes too long to set them up.” or “They take up too much space.” Not really. I'll have one game out for a whole week. They take minimal space, are pre-set and ready to go.

“We can't afford the time in a 30 (45, 60) minute lesson.” Nonsense! It only takes one minute! Use it as a warm-up, change-of-pace activity or a closing activity (aka “bribe”)

“I can't afford to buy all that stuff.” Most of these games were designed on a tiny budget (if any) using things lying around the house or picked up at a thrift store. (Insert plug for Arc's Value Village here!)

“I don't have time to make all those props.” Have a game-building night with your piano teacher friends. Or have your students design the games at a group class. They will love to “test” their products!

# Rhythm Dance Revolution

## Supplies:

- Carpet squares pre-taped or masking tape to outline cross that creates the four RDR boxes
- Rhythm drills. I use the Music Progression Rhythms created by Wendy Stevens and located on <http://www.composecreate.com/> under the "Teachers" tab, or appropriate rhythm flashes from Schmitt or Hal Leonard Music Flash Cards sets.

*Directions:* Practice various note and rest values separately. Start with quarter notes, adding eighth notes and combinations of quarters/eighths. Then add rests and long notes doing examples of each.

*Directions for dance/rhythm execution:* The four boxes indicate the four beats of a 4/4 meter. They are to be used in clockwise motion.

For quarter notes, step once in each BeatBox, alternating feet:

1. Left	2. Right
3. Left	4. Right

For eighth notes, hop twice in each BeatBox with the same foot.

1. Left Left	2. Right Right
3. Left Left	4. Right Right

For rests, both feet must jump outside the framework, straddling the frame. When rhythm continues, be sure to place proper foot into proper BeatBox.

For half notes, both feet must jump into the proper BeatBox. Right foot then drags through the next BeatBox and rhythm continues. For dotted half, right foot drags through the next two BeatBoxes and for whole notes, through the next three BeatBoxes.

*Variations:* Rhythm Dance Revolution can be done in 3/4 meter as well. Turn the carpet square sideways. The top two boxes now constitute BeatBox One which is to be done with *both feet*. BeatBox Two is left foot, back box. BeatBox Three is right foot, back box. This is a "Level Up" from the 4/4 variety of RDR but helps reinforce the emphasis of the first beat in triple meter.

# Baseball

*Goal:* Ear training: To hear multi-note (3-8) motive and be able to reproduce motive

*Materials Needed:*

- Ideally two pianos/keyboards (or 2 matching instruments of choice). Can be done with one instrument shared between players.

*Directions:*

- Student will start as a “hitter”. Teacher will “pitch”
- Define limits before play begins. For example, for the first inning, all pitches are in Middle C pentascale. To start, pitches should consist of 4 notes played approx. at 80mm. (Translation: “No fast balls allowed, but slow pitches and curve balls are encouraged.” Let them figure out what that means...) Suggestion for the first inning: the first note of the motive or “pitch” must be Middle C.
- The Pitcher (teacher) selects a 4-note motive by the guidelines above and plays pitch. The Hitter (student) attempts to reproduce this pitch. If the Hitter is successful, it’s a home run! One point for the Hitter! If the Hitter misses the pitch, it is considered Strike One. The Pitcher must then replay the *same* pitch. If the Pitcher fails to replay the identical pitch, the Hitter has been “beaned” by the pitch and may proceed to first base. If the Pitcher replays the pitch correctly, the Hitter has the opportunity to hit again for either Strike Two or a base hit. Repeat for Strike Three. If the Hitter fails after the third attempt, this is a team Out. As in regular baseball, allow 3 outs per inning, (although may be decreased to 2 outs if play is slow. Play continues until the Hitting team acquires three outs or completes the batting order once (nine players). Then the Hitter and Pitcher switch jobs and the process is repeated to complete the inning.
- Players may receive one point per run or one point per “hit”. Play can continue for a set number of innings or outs. Be sure that opportunities to Hit/Pitch are as equalized as possible.
- The teacher reserves the right to act both as Head Umpire and Pitching/Hitting Coach. Points may always be deducted for unsportsmanlike conduct, including taunting, whining, etc.

*Variations:*

- After any inning (each team has opportunity to both pitch and hit), parameters may be extended. For example, pitch may be in any C Major pentascale, but must begin with a C. Or pitch may include any notes within the Middle C pentascale range plus possible accidentals (black keys) within range. Perhaps it is enough to increase the number of notes in each pitch.
- An added bonus (extra bases) can be awarded for Hitters that can then use the motive in a sequence, retrograde and/or inversion if these are terms that have been taught.

## Floor Twister

*Goal:* Reinforcement of direction and measuring intervals on the staff. Listening and ear training reinforcement.

*Materials Needed:*

- **Floor staff:** use 2" Masking tape creates staff of five lines/four spaces. Place strips of masking tape or (preferred) painters' tape approximately 1 foot (or one 8 ½" x 11" page) apart on the floor. Length varies depending on number of students. Try to provide 6"-8" of space per student. It helps for younger students to identify Landmark line (Treble G or Bass F) with a different masking tape color.
- *Twister* spinner with or without intervals marked.

*Directions:*

- Have student start by standing on the landmark line for Treble G (or Bass F). Explain that they will be moving body parts according to intervals on the staff. Try an example or two: "Move your left foot up a third from where it is now located." Etc. Both hands and both feet start on the Landmark line. When all students seem clear on the directions and movement, play can begin.
- Spin the spinner and give the directive indicated as above. *Note: The appendage and interval are indicated on the spinner, the direction is NOT. Use your best judgment. Typically it will alternate up and down, but this may move a particular body part off the staff and should be avoided.*
- Traditional rules for *Twister* apply: If student does not move the proper appendage the proper interval length, they are "out". Students must hold each new position until the new directive is given. If any additional body part (knee, elbow, etc.) comes into contact with the floor, they are "out". The winner is the last student standing.

*Variations:*

- Use letter names for directives of where to place appendages. For example, "Left foot on D" Be prepared to accept multiple locations for "D" if not specified by "Middle D" etc.
- After spinning to determine body part, play or sing an interval to be executed. Student must listen and determine direction and size of interval and then execute it with proper appendage.

## Bell Game

*Goal:* Recognition and execution of rhythmic patterns of increasing difficulty and/or length.

*Materials Needed:*

- White Board and dry-erase markers or pre-made tagboard & markers. On white board (or pre-made tagboard) design a nine-square Tic-Tac-Toe shaped grid and number each square #1-9. In each square, write one measure of rhythm in 4/4 time. Note/rest values may vary according to student experience level and ability.
- Bell or similar device (optional). A suspended cymbal also works well.

*Directions:*

- The teacher sets a steady beat and claps/taps a selected rhythm from the grid. Players must "ring the bell" when they can identify the selected rhythm to score a point.

*Variations:*

- If one box at a time is simple, try selecting two squares from the grid at a time. Try 3 boxes or 4!
- Students can write their own rhythms based on anything from pizza toppings (e.g. “pepperoni” could be quarter notes) to their teammates' names or family members' names to fill the grid. Game play would continue as above.
- This game can be altered to be student run and non-point based. The teacher selects rhythm from the grid. If correct, the student can then assume the “teacher” role. Be sure that the teacher still supplies or enforces the steady beat.
- Of course, remember that 4/4 is not the only meter available. Try filling a grid of 3/4 or 6/8 time!! This serves as an excellent way to reinforce new or unusual meters.

## **Interval and Chord Archery**

*Goal:* Exploration of intervals on the staff and keyboard. Creation of chords and triads on the staff and keyboard. This is a great way to reinforce inversions!

*Materials Needed:*

- Magnetic dart board and darts with numbers replaced by musical alphabet (diatonic or chromatic) in fabric paint.
- **Floor staff:** see description under “Floor Twister”
- Appropriately-sized sharps, flats, and leger lines and note markers (Beanie babies, etc)
- Piano/keyboard or student’s instrument of choice

### **Round 1: Intervals**

- Student throws first and second dart and plays notes on instrument and/or marks notes on floor staff. Student names interval between notes and plays interval correctly on instrument. Notes **MUST MATCH** the notes indicated by players on floor staff

### **Round 2: Chords: root position**

- Student throws first dart and plays note on instrument and marks note on floor staff.
- Teacher identifies chord quality (Major/minor/diminished/augmented) and student creates a root position chord using markers for third, or fifth. Student then plays corresponding chord on piano. Chords **MUST MATCH** the notes indicated by players on floor staff

### **Round 3: Chords: root position and inversions**

- After following directions of root position chords, have student invert the note markers to create chord inversions and play each inversion on instrument. Again, chords **MUST MATCH** the notes indicated by players on floor staff.

*Variations:*

- Add seventh chords, diminished chords and/or augmented chords
- “Hide-the-Note” (or Archery Fast Play). Student throws the dart and names at least 3 and up to ?? chords in which that note can be present. Have student play each chord instrument and name it.

*Variation of this variation:* Have student throw **two** darts and name any chord(s) that in which **both** notes are present.

## Some additional thoughts:

- A well-designed, successful game will make the learning experience engaging by incorporating the following elements:
  1. Preparation
  2. Range of challenge
  3. Range of abilities required to “win”
  4. Skills gained by repeating the game.
- The best games will offer a good balance between educational and entertaining features. The game is carefully designed to link learning objectives, but is built for fun. The student's investment will be directly proportional to the amount of enjoyment they receive from the game. The experience needs to be authentic game play, not just worksheets involving a spinner or other device.
- Remember all games can be altered in some way. The teacher can alter the difficulty of the game making it easier or more challenging as need be. Changes in time allowed for tasks, amount of outside “help” or influence, parameters of final results are all flexible and tailored to the individual student.
- Studies have shown that one of the strengths of video games is the intrinsic motivation of achieving a higher level within a game, a so-called “Level Up” reward. This competition with oneself can lead an individual to work harder and longer to achieve a goal. As piano teachers, we can use this motivation to our advantage through the use of games.
- Winning is not a necessary mark of a game's success.

## Resources:

[www.composecreate.com](http://www.composecreate.com). Written and collected by Wendy Stevens.

[www.susanparadis.com](http://www.susanparadis.com) – Free, downloadable and printable games created by Susan Paradis particularly useful with younger students

[www.heidispianonotes.blogspot.com](http://www.heidispianonotes.blogspot.com) – Heidi has compiled an extensive Game Resource List of non-technological games divided by concept and level. For example: If you want to reinforce intervals for a Faber Level 2 student, there are nine suggested games complete with directions and links to downloadable supplies for each game.

Koster, Raph. [A Theory of Fun for Game Design](#). Paraglyph Press, 2012

Pink, Daniel. [Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us](#). Riverhead Books, 2011

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Questions? Comments? Got a great game idea? Contact me at [ruby.sue@macphail.org](mailto:ruby.sue@macphail.org)

**“Play is the work of children. It’s very serious stuff.” —Bob Keeshan**