

## Musical Terms

### Rhythm and pulse

Rhythm and pulse are often misunderstood, and it is easy to listen to and observe children's music making and not clearly understand if they are creating rhythms or playing the pulse.

**Pulse** is essentially the heartbeat of the music and is also referred to as steady beat - the beat which steadily sits underneath the sounds in a piece of music. Pulse is typically what people tap their foot to or dance along to whilst listening to music.

For example sing the first verse of *What shall we do with a drunken sailor?* Tap your knee on every underlined syllable below. This beat that you are tapping is the pulse.

What shall we do with a drunken sailor? (4 taps on your knee)

What shall we do with a drunken sailor? (4 taps on your knee)

What shall we do with a drunken sailor? (4 taps on your knee)

Early in the morn-ing. (4 taps on your knee)

**Rhythm** is the pattern of sounds on top of the pulse.

Sing the first verse of *What shall we do with a drunken sailor?* again, but this time tap every syllable of each word: The syllables that you are tapping is the rhythm.

What shall we do with a drun-ken sai-lor? (10 taps on your knee)

What shall we do with a drun-ken sai-lor? (10 taps on your knee)

What shall we do with a drun-ken sai-lor? (10 taps on your knee)

Ear-ly in the morn-ing. (6 taps on your knee)

There are different ways of experiencing and playing pulse and different skills involved, for example:

- Singing a song and tapping knees or clapping hands to the pulse is very different to tapping a drum with a beater as playing with a drum and beater requires more hand-eye coordination.
- Walking or marching to the pulse requires gross motor control and is trickier than sitting down and clapping along.
- Listening to a piece of music and joining in with the pulse whether this be clapping, tapping or using instruments is again a different skill to singing and joining in with the pulse as this requires careful listening.

.....and like with all things children's skills develop at all different rates and times.

As well as children joining in with pulse in songs and pieces of music it is important to recognise that each of us has our own pulse –the way in which we individually walk and talk has a pulse to it. Children will often create their own pulse whilst making music and you can easily join in with this. It is easy to dismiss children’s music making as noise but if you listen carefully you may also hear rhythms in their music that repeat and develop.

### Pitch

Pitch is when we refer to sounds being higher and lower in a song or a piece of music. This can be a very strange concept for children. Think about the song *Rain rain go away*. The first word starts on a higher note than the second word rain, so the pitch moves down and then goes back up on the word “go”. Again, referring to animals can be helpful – a mouse has a high squeaky voice whereas a bear has a low growly voice.

### Structure

Structure in music is the way that a piece of music has been organised. Think about a pop song. A pop song will often have verses and a chorus which is regularly visited throughout the song – the use of verse and chorus is a musical structure. Structure can be a useful musical element when working on composition with young children. A very basic structure can be that a piece of music has a beginning and an end – encouraging children to think about how to end a piece of music can be a great starting point for composing.

### Dynamics

In music, dynamics refers to the volume of a sound. This can mean loud sounds, quiet sounds or sounds that gradually get louder or gradually get quieter.

### Timbre

In music, timbre is known as the quality or colour of a sound. For example, imagine the tune of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. If this song was played on a piano and then the exact same tune played on a trumpet the actual sound would be different from one instrument to the next. This is the timbre of the instrument. When talking about timbres with young children you can refer to sounds such as spiky sounds, smooth sounds, spooky sounds, scratchy sounds, exploding sounds and so on. Children will often come up with extremely descriptive language when describing sounds so don’t always tell them the type of sounds you may be playing with – ask them to describe them.

### Texture

Texture refers to the layers of sounds in music. Imagine a band with 5 different instruments – guitar, drums, vocals, keyboard, bass and compare the layers of sounds to a solo singer. The solo singer would produce a thinner texture compared to the band. When playing with young children, if children have a selection of different instruments their music making will create a thicker texture compared to them all having the same instrument.

### Tempo

Tempo refers to the speed of music – fast, slow, medium. When talking about this with children you can use examples of speed such as running, creeping, walking and use animals as examples too – snails, lions and so on. A great example of this is to ask children to move like an animal which they think relates to a sound or music that you play to them.

### Melodic shape

This is a little like the outline of the song or piece of music, picture a line that goes up steeply when the **melody** suddenly jumps to a much higher sound, or that goes down slowly when the **melody** gently falls. This “line” gives the **contour** or **shape** of the **melodic** line.

### Genre

The type of music, eg pop, jazz, folk, classical.

### Duration

Duration is the length of a sound – long sounds, short sounds. Using instruments can be a great way of demonstrating this. Tapping cymbals together and letting the sound ring will create a long sound whereas tapping a pair of claves (rhythm sticks) together creates a short sound.