

Teaching Aural

Aural is an area in music education that is often overlooked in early high school years and an area that students tend to struggle within their final years of high school. This document aims to provide some advice, strategies and resources for teachers to help facilitate best practice in aural.

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Leading into Year 11/12

Tip 1: A holistic approach. Get students to listen to the entirety of the phrase before writing down rhythms/melodies. A common problem is students start writing dictations immediately (after one or two beats) as the melody/rhythm is played, thus focusing on the first few sounds only. Students need to hear a melody/rhythm in its entirety before being able to analyse and notate it. This way they can start feeling the music; the similarities and differences.

Example: Try speaking the alphabet as quickly as you can but skip every second letter... ACEGIKM.. whilst someone is simultaneously (at a similar speed) speaking the alphabet slightly louder in the correct order. Difficult right? This is similar to what is happening in the brain when students are trying to analyse, evaluate and write the notes while the rest of the dictation is being played.

Tip 2: They need to feel it. Get the students to sing/clap the dictation. Or point/draw the contour of the melody. By feeling the dictation in their bodies provides another element to use when working out dictations.

Tip 3: Memory skills. After a dictation is played get students to ‘inner hear’ (silently) the rhythm/melody. For example if the following was clapped: ta, titi, tikitika, ta, ta, ta, titi, ta. First listen (no writing), optional second step: students clap/sing or say time names back, third step: repeat step 2 silently (in your head). Inner hearing is a crucial tool to develop for aural success.

Tip 4: Analysis. Students need to be able to analyse the dictation before being able to write it. To do so, you need to “teach analysis” (teachers often forget to do this!). So give them a scaffold with steps on how to analyse. Assist students by asking questions such as: How many bars were there? How many phrases? Were any bars the same? What was the fastest rhythm? Was there any syncopation? Where was the highest/lowest note? Did the first note start at the same pitch as the last note etc. Have regular set of questions (even leave them on the whiteboard) so they remember how to analyse. Eventually you can reduce the number of questions you ask them. By doing this helps them to engage in critical thinking to start analysing and deciphering possible answers in a methodical approach.

Tip 5: Written Cues. Teach students how to quickly write dictations under pressure. Essentially, get them to develop their own ‘shorthand’ approach. There are various ways of doing this and I suggest you provide different suggestions and let the students choose what works best for them. Also indicating the strong beats is important to note on the score and how many sounds they heard.

Example > subdividing bars. Then adding shorthand.

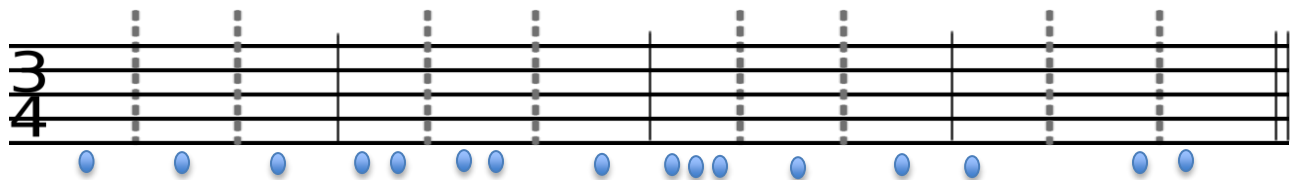
1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3



or



If rhythm clapped: ta ta ta, titi titi ta, triplet ta ta, tam ti ta. Shorthand below



Even just using the dots as a guide you can already work out potential rhythms for most of this melody. Some people will use lines and dots or dashes, whatever method suits them

For a melodic dictation, the same method applies but use contour – move the dots higher or lower on the staff

Advice for melodic dictations: Get students to plot out the tonic, dominant (and sub-dominant). – The 1st, 4th and 5th degrees of the scale. Often the melodies will be based around them. Also students can see what chord progression frames the melody. It is unlikely a melody would follow the chord progression iii, IV, V, vi. Rather more use of primary triads with a strong ending cadence such as I IV V I.

SACE Music Studies Examples

The following is scaffolding based on the SACE Music Studies sample paper.

Multiple choice questions.

1. Get students to analyse the rhythms. Which bars are similar, which are different and which have unique characteristics. Also get students to clap them before the answer is clapped so they can better familiarise themselves. I have highlighted key aspects to recognise with various colours.

$\text{♩} = 72$

(2 marks)

Already in the example above we can see how the bars are unique. Firstly bar one is all the same so can be disregarded. If bar two starts with a dotted crotchet (long note) or one sound before the three quavers, already we can eliminate options to the first or third rhythms.

In the next example (next page) which is melodic, one area to note is the key. Three sharps would indicate A major or F sharp minor. If we think of F sharp minor the middle two options would start on the seventh note (if F sharp natural minor) which is unusual. However the notes of the middle two fit better with the notes consistent with A major. Therefore we can already note the difference in timbre between major and minor.

Chord progressions – working out possible chord progressions also supports potential answers. The common chord progressions are more likely to be chosen than those less common. For example common progressions would be (also in minor) I IV V I, I vi IV I etc. So getting the students to work out each example in both F sharp minor and A major would be a great analysis homework task. Below in colour I have noted some key aspects to the extracts.

(b) Tick the appropriate box to indicate which melody is played.

$\text{♩} = 100$



Minor 3rd





Perfect 4th



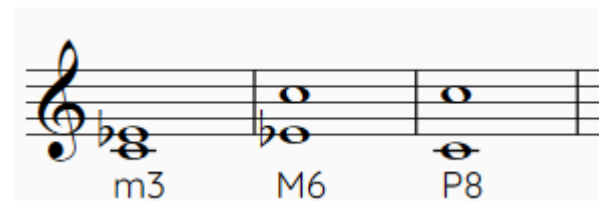
Steps (2 marks)

The next question requires students to identify intervals. Whilst knowing the interval ‘songs’ is useful (ie. Minor 3rd = Greensleeves), there are several other ways of deciphering the answer.

- Write it on a staff. Pick a starting note, say C. So the first option would be C > Eflat > C. On a staff gives students a clearer visual tool and helps them to internally hear the options.
- Another way is working out the outer intervals. Whilst this does not apply to this particular example, it is often helpful for similar questions. Often the middle note is hard for students to hear, so working out the highest and lowest notes can assist. For example the first option of C > Eb > C has a perfect octave as the outer interval.
- Otherwise using solfege, the number system, a piano or guitar tab diagram also help with visualising intervals.

(c) Tick the appropriate box to indicate the two consecutive intervals played.

- A minor third followed by a major sixth.
- A perfect fourth followed by a perfect fifth.
- A perfect fifth followed by a perfect fourth.
- A major third followed by a minor sixth.



m3 M6 P8

In the next example, students are required to distinguish time signatures. Often students will get something like the “2s” – simple duple, compound duple, confused. For these examples, whilst the tempo varies, they will still all be at a moderate pace. For example, if you are counting 1-2 1-2 really quickly, it is probably the subdivisions you are counting rather than the beats. For the compound time you should be able to still count the subdivisions (such as 123456). If you can’t (because it is too quick) it is likely to be a simple time.

Another area to consider is typical rhythms. Triplets are found in simple time and duplets are found in compound time. Get students used to common rhythms found in the time signatures.

(d) Tick the appropriate box to indicate the time signature of this eight-bar extract.

- Simple duple. *March like*
- Compound duple. *1 2 3 4 5 6*
- Simple triple. *Waltz like*
- Compound triple.



The next example involves interval identification. One area that often confuses students is the instrument. However, unless you have perfect pitch, the instrument is a mute point – it doesn’t make a difference. This often applies to several questions in the sample example such as question 4. No matter then key, a mixolydian scale (or whichever) will always sound like a mixolydian scale).

3. Two short melodies ((a) and (b)) will be played which you are to write the interval produced by
- Name each interval by both quality and size (
 - Write the second note of the melody on the s first note is given.

(a) This melody is for trumpet.

(i) Name of interval: _____



Don’t forget to check the circle of fifths for any accidentals.

With identifying scales there are many possible ways of determining the answer. Some include:

- Tone and semitone pattern.
- Solfege or number system.
- For modes, compare to the major or natural minor (ie. Lydian is the same as a major scale just raise the fourth)
- Get students to write them out starting on the same note and look for the differences
- The overall sound quality - happy, sad, dark, happy start and sad ending...
- The intervals. Whether it is clearly a major scale but has a lowered note (such as Mixolydian with a lowered 7)

(a) This melody is for Clarinet in E

- Mixolydian scale.
- Harmonic minor scale.
- Melodic minor scale.
- Natural minor scale.

(b) This melody is for viola with cello accompaniment.

- Blues scale.
- Harmonic minor scale.
- Melodic minor scale.
- Dorian scale.

The next question asks students to write the melody. One key way of doing this is first analyse the chords/chord progression in the accompaniment. Then making sure the melodic notes in the dictation fit harmonically with the notes in the accompaniment/chord progression. Also determine if there are any accidentals or key changes throughout.

Flute

F major chord

Piano

Passing note

$\text{♩} = 90$

C Lydian Mode

C Ion

C Mixolydian Mode

C Dori

C Aeolian Mode

C Phryg

C Locrian Mode

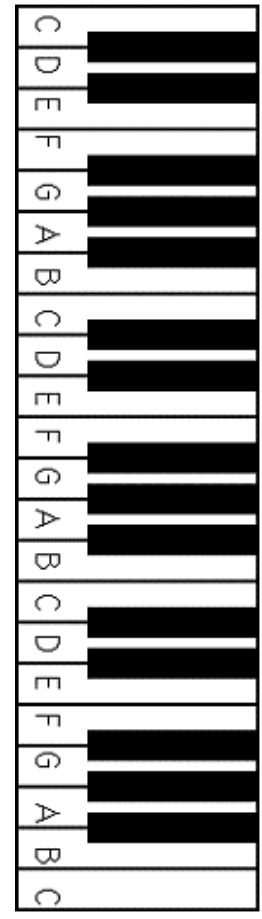
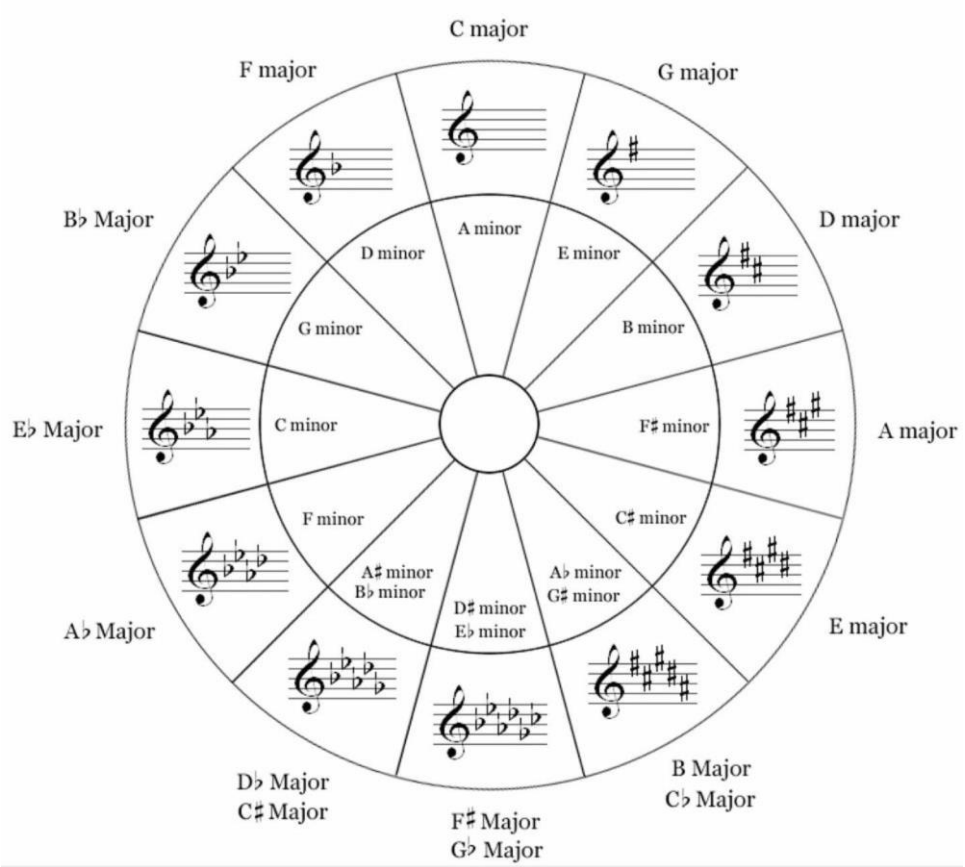
For harmonic analysis checking to see whether the melodic notes (minus passing notes) fit in the chords indicated). Also looking for cadence points: the first two answers have a plagal cadence at the end, whereas the last two answers are inconclusive. Again as using the method previously explained, a process of elimination, similarities and differences in the chords will also assist.



Traditional harmony					Chord symbols						
<input type="checkbox"/>	I	ii	vi	IV	I	<input type="checkbox"/>	C	Dm	Am	F	C
<input type="checkbox"/>	I	V	vi	IV	I	<input type="checkbox"/>	C	G	Am	F	C
<input type="checkbox"/>	I	V	IV ⁷	vi	I	<input type="checkbox"/>	C	G	Fmaj ⁷	Am	C
<input type="checkbox"/>	I	ii	IV ⁷	vi	I	<input type="checkbox"/>	C	Dm	Fmaj ⁷	Am	C

Minor vs Major *Plagal cadence*

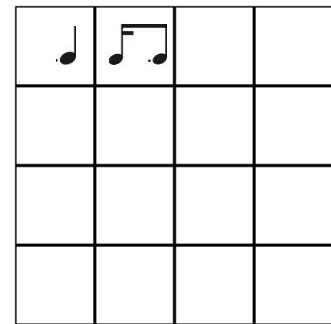
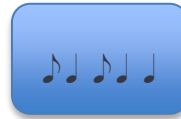
(2 marks)



Teaching Aural in Years 7-10.

A non-threatening approach to aural where student CAN succeed is essential. Lots of aural games and activities which are fun, challenging but also enable student success is essential. Here are some examples:

- Flash cards. Match the correct order that was clapped/sung/played (melody or rhythm)
- Use a grid to ease dictation. Clap one line or the whole grid and get students to fill it out (one beat per bar). Then ask students to write it on a staff. Give hints on some bars to assist students. This can easily lead to an analysis > which beats are the same / different.
- Create a rhythm pizza. Students need to pick which slices of the 'pizza' were played and in what order. Then re-write in the correct order.
- Play "knockout solfa" / echo rhythm games. Get students to clap a one bar rhythm and add the persons rhythm before them – continue around the circle
- Get students to pick a riff from their favorite song and try and write it out. They can play on their instrument to check (could be a good group or individual task?)
- Rhythm/melodic/interval bingo



More resources: head to <http://music.tabor.edu.au> and click on 'Teacher Resources'

Upcoming workshops also get listed on this site.

About the author

Dr Janelle Fletcher is Head of Music and Senior Lecturer at Tabor where she leads the Bachelor of Music. Janelle is a regular music education presenter having experience teaching in schools, moderating/assessing with SACE and having published research in music education. She is on the ASME committee and immediate past-president of Kodaly SA. She has also previously lectured in Aural Studies and Music Education at Adelaide University. Janelle completed her PhD in Music Education at the University of Queensland under Professor Margaret Barrett and Masters in Aural Studies at UQ under Dr James Cuskelly.

