

Guidance for using Colour Awards in small groups

Learners' tasks fall into the following categories:

Care of the Instrument – applicable to Red only

As appropriate for each instrument.

Technical/Physical Skills

These will be different for each instrument. There will be two or three tasks specifically related to this aspect. Techniques will vary, but must ensure physical health, and allow for sustained progression: for example a hand position or posture should accommodate the demands potentially, of the widening palette of sound required for Red through to Indigo.

Regarding the reference to a 'wide variety of speeds' in Green Award, a helpful way to view this is to equate the slowest speed to that used in an Air or Ballad, and the fastest to that used in a quick dance e.g. Jig.

Rhythm/Ensemble Skills

This is fairly self-explanatory and goes from purely keeping a pulse whilst a tune is being played (Red) to directing an ensemble, being responsible for the speeds and balance (Indigo).

Creative Skills

These tasks will be concerned with interpretation, improvisation and composing.

For interpretation there are tasks requiring pupils to, for instance, choose dynamics, tone colour and articulation.

For composition it is important to encourage pupils to experiment with sound **first**, then when a satisfying result is arrived at, record the musical ideas. Pupils should **not** start writing first, as they will almost certainly write something without knowing how it sounds, and so the task ceases to achieve its objective, which is to encourage **musical** decision making.

Regarding improvisation, when 'question and answer' is referred to – this means different material is expected from the pupil in the answer – it is **not** a copying exercise. For Orange (pitched instruments) 2 bars of 4/4 would be appropriate as a 'question' from the teacher, followed by 2 bars of 4/4 'answer' from the pupil. For Yellow a pupil should be able to improvise both question and answer - four bars of 4/4, making an entire phrase, or 'simple tune.' This will be the same for Green but the pupil will need to improvise the short, simple tune in different keys. Untuned percussion pupils are required to improvise for longer. Pupils normally feel more satisfied with their results if they maintain a sense of pulse, appropriate phrase structure, and for pitched instruments, a sense of key. They will often need help with this. For pulse, counting in helps, first by the teacher, then by a pupil, and then for Yellow Award, counting in using 'thinking voice' i.e. internally. For phrase structure, this can be internalised by initially playing for two bars, resting for two bars, playing for two bars on a loop. This procedure also works with four bar units. For sense of key, pupils can be encouraged to finish on the key note, and useful discussions can be had about keys.

Aural Skills

The most important thing about these tasks is to ensure that they are accomplished **aurally** and not **visually**. The tasks are set with the appropriate amount of difficulty so that pupils should not need visual aids such as watching the teacher's fingers, or looking at tapes and spots. Depending on the particular task, you may wish to sing a phrase to be copied, ask a pupil to turn around, or to close their eyes. Tasks are sometimes related to intonation, where this is appropriate for the instrument, and sometimes require pupils to copy phrases back accurately. With regard to Orange, for pitched instruments copying back two bars of 4/4 would be appropriate. Accurately reproducing dynamics would not be expected till Green. It should be noted that 'working out by ear' is not the same as copying back – here pupils need to work out the notes themselves, of a tune they already have in their heads. Pupils may need help with this. For pitched instruments a good starting point is to ask learners to work out whether two notes are the same or different, if they are different is the second higher or lower – by much or by little, and so on. Other tips are to listen out for repeated phrases, to melodic figures that sound like scales and arpeggios, and to keep starting from the beginning if in doubt. Some good examples of appropriate tunes for Yellow are Frere Jacques and Jingle Bells.

Learning a Piece of Music in Different Ways (e.g. with or without notation) and, for more advanced Awards in different genres

For tasks referring to reading music, this should include staff notation, and teachers should check that it is being understood. So for instance, if tab also appears on the page, or if every note has a letter or number above it, care needs to be taken that pupils can interpret the symbols of the staff notation alone, and are not using the other symbols. Pupils are not expected to know and understand how to read all notes immediately, rather it is expected that they will be familiar with the notation of the pitches and rhythms they can play so far.

When 6/8 is first mentioned, it is recommended that pupils are made aware of the meaning of the '8' i.e. that a quaver equals one beat. For higher levels e.g. Green, pupils need to understand the different feel of compound time signatures, particularly in faster pieces, so for instance the two in a bar feel in 6/8 and three in a bar feel in 9/8.

'I Can Play.....' in the easier Awards is just an opportunity for pupils to choose their favourite piece, or one that they feel that they can play particularly well.

When 'playing from memory' is referred to in, for example Yellow, Blue and Indigo, this is a piece of music previously unknown to the pupil, which is taught to them either with or without notation, or a combination, and subsequently memorised. Assistance can be given to help pupils remember material by referring to various features in a melody, or using memorable words for rhythms.

Performing Skills

Performance tasks are increasingly challenging from Red through to Yellow. However, performance skills don't always develop in a linear way as other skills – teenagers may find performing more challenging than they did as children. Therefore there is no reference to performing from Green to Indigo. Please use situations such as school concerts, G.C.S.E recording and Violet Night as performance opportunities.