

## Topic: Dynamics (loud or quiet)

### Some thoughts on **DYNAMICS**:

Children often confuse tempo, dynamics, and pitch. It is important when discussing these concepts, therefore, to keep your language consistent. In this document, the term “quiet” is used rather than “soft” or “low,” since soft is also a texture word and low technically refers to pitch in music. Some teachers choose to use “soft” because “quiet” is often used in the classroom when we really mean “silent.” Whatever you choose, be consistent!

- 1. Demonstrate loud and quiet dynamics:** Demonstrate dynamics through speaking, singing, clapping, or playing an instrument. While demonstrating, make sure to associate the words “loud” and “quiet” and/or the (Mayer-Johnson) symbols with the experience.

==> **TIP #1:** When attempting to demonstrate any type of contrasting musical element, it is helpful to **ONLY** change that element, leaving all other aspects the same. For example, one could sing the first line of “Mary Had a Little Lamb” with a loud dynamic, and then with a quiet dynamic, keeping all other aspects of the performance (tempo, instrumentation, rhythm, pitch etc) identical. Often, simpler is better: for example, playing a drum once with a loud dynamic, then again with a quiet dynamic.

==> **TIP #2:** Whenever you say the word “loud,” say it with a loud dynamic, and say “quiet” with a quiet dynamic. This consistency helps to reinforce the concept.

- 2. Offer students a choice of dynamics:**

a) Set up two switches, one with a loud sound and one with a quiet sound (preferably the same instrument; see **TIP #1** above). Students can choose whether to play a loud or a quiet sound, or choose the sequence in which they play them. Switches can have the (M-J) symbols attached to them. Teachers/paras can reinforce the choice by saying either “loud” or “quiet” after the student has made his/her choice.

b) The child can choose by pointing to either the “loud” or the “quiet” (M-J) symbol, and teachers/paras can make vocal or instrumental sounds with the appropriate dynamic (see **TIP #1** above).

- 3. Testing understanding:** Play sounds that are loud and sounds that are quiet. By speaking or pointing to (M-J) symbols, children can indicate whether the sound they heard was loud or quiet.

**4. Children perform different dynamics:** Through vocalizing, playing instruments or pressing switches, children perform different dynamic levels, as indicated by teachers/paras or other children.

- a) The leader (teacher/para or child) vocally instructs performer(s) whether to play a loud or a quiet dynamic
- b) The leader indicates the desired dynamic level by pointing to (M-J) symbols for loud or quiet.

==> **TIP:** You can help out kids who may not be able to follow dynamics but would still like to participate by using the volume controls on a keyboard or microphone: as they play or vocalize, a teacher/para can adjust the dynamic level with the volume control, based on what the leader is indicating.

**5. Using hand signals to indicate dynamics (conducting):** Although there are many different ways to conduct dynamics, the following is recommended here --

**Hands with fingers pointing up, palms facing each other (as if about to clap). Hands put close together indicates a quiet dynamic; wide apart indicates a loud dynamic.**

-- Of course, this may need to be adapted somewhat for those with physical disabilities prohibiting movement in this manner.

- a) A teacher/para can conduct while other adults assist children in following the conducted dynamics (vocally, or with instruments or switches).
- b) Children can take turns being the conductor. Teachers/paras and/or other students can be the "orchestra."

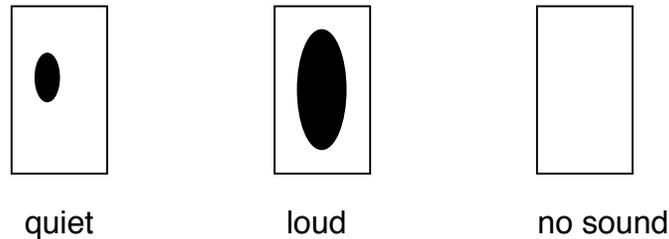
**6. Relating dynamics to events:** Find or create a story with events that have different dynamics (for example, sneaking, yelling, sleeping, things dropping, etc.). As the story is read or told, the children can play instruments at the appropriate dynamic levels.

**7. Graphically notating dynamics:** Although there are many ways to graphically notate dynamics, the following system works effectively --

**Dynamics are indicated by the size of the symbol (small=quiet; big=loud).**

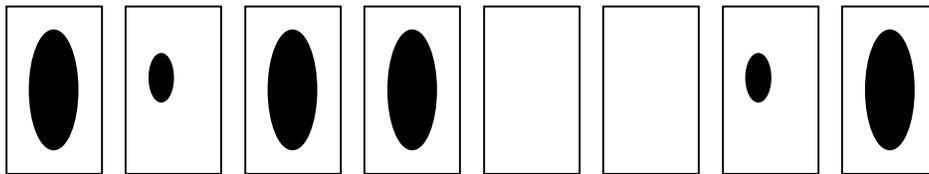
==> **TIP:** It works well to make the symbols *taller* rather than *fatter*, if possible, so they take up a similar amount of space horizontally.

- a) Dynamics Cards: you can use (Mayer Johnson) symbols for this if the children have already been working with them; if not, make dynamics cards that have a small symbol for quiet, a large symbol for loud, and possibly a blank card for “no sound.” Any symbol could work, really; the symbol shown below would work well for egg shakers.



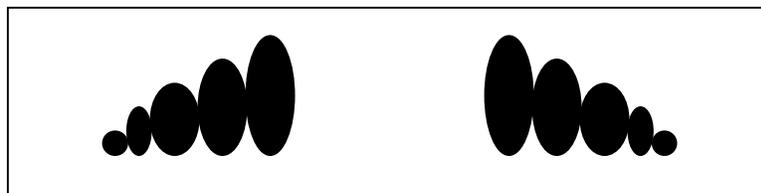
- i. Post the cards on the wall. The leader points to the cards one at a time, in the order s/he desires, indicating to the players what dynamic level to perform (or whether to make no sound).
- ii. Using multiple copies of the cards as manipulatives, children can compose their own music by selecting a sequence of cards. The composer (or another leader) can then direct the performance by pointing to each card in the sequence selected by the child.

For example:



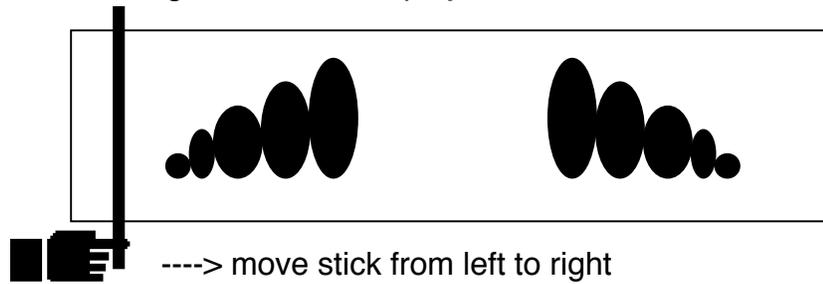
==> **TIP:** Cards can be laminated and Velcroed for ease of use. Bulletin boards and thumbtacks work for some populations as well.

- b) Creating a score: using the same principles as for the Dynamics Cards, create a score by writing the symbols horizontally on a paper. When creating a score, you can use different sizes of symbols to represent gradations of loud and quiet if desired, thus making crescendos and diminuendos.



starts quiet -- gets louder -- no sound -- loud -- gets quieter  
(crescendo)                      (diminuendo)

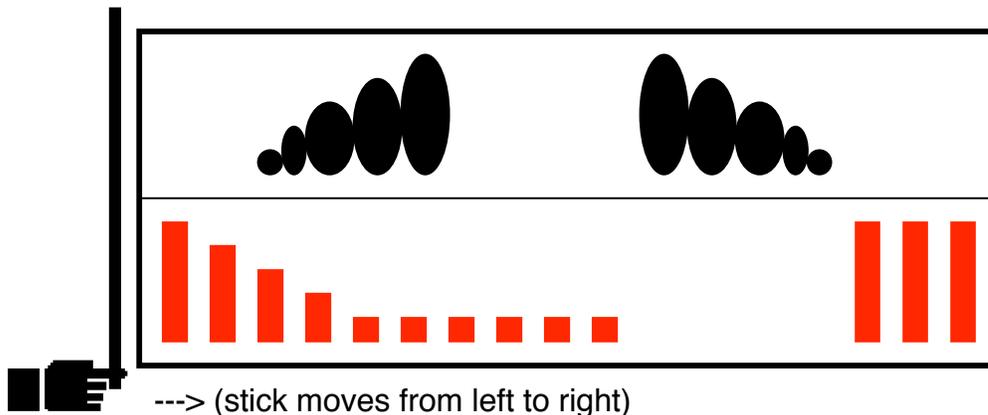
-- To perform, one person leads by placing a stick (pointer, pencil, rhythm stick, etc.) vertically on the score, starting at the left side. The leader slowly moves the stick from left to right. Performers play as indicated at the stick's position.



c) More complex scoring: Different instrument lines, independent of one another, can be added to a score for a more complex piece.

Each instrument should have:

- i. its own symbol
- ii. its own color
- iii. its own horizontal line on the score



-- In the above example, the performers would be divided into two groups: one playing egg shakers, the other playing rhythm sticks. As the leader moves the pointer horizontally across the page, the egg players would watch and play the black ovals in the top line; the rhythm stick players would watch and play the red rectangles in the bottom line. Both groups would be playing at once, but each plays their individual parts.

More instruments can be added (each with its own symbol, color and line on the score) depending on the ability levels of the children.