

Topic: Tempo (fast or slow)

Some thoughts on **TEMPO**:

Much of the time as musicians, we think of tempo as being related to a melodic or rhythmic pattern. In the following activities, however, tempo can be thought of and explored as the difference between groups of notes that are played quickly, and groups that are played and slowly. It is not necessarily important, therefore, that all children play at exactly in unison, particularly during “fast” exercises; this may be a complementary skill, but it need not be the focus here.

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

==> **TIP:** 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 fast tempo, and then with a slow tempo, keeping all other aspects of the performance (dynamics, instrumentation, rhythm, pitch etc) identical. Often, simpler is better: for example, playing a drum with a fast tempo, then again with a slow tempo.

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

- a) Set up two switches, one with a fast-playing instrument and one with the same instrument playing slowly. Students can choose whether to play the fast or the slow 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 “fast” or “slow” after the student has made his/her choice.
- b) The child can choose by pointing to either the “fast” or the “slow” (M-J) symbol, and teachers/paras can make vocal or instrumental sounds in the appropriate tempo.

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

- 4. Children perform different tempo:** Through vocalizing, playing instruments or pressing switches, children perform different tempos, as indicated by teachers/paras or other children.

==> **TIP:** Tempo is a concept that can often be more readily grasped kinesthetically: through moving, walking/running, dancing etc. It is often helpful to incorporate appropriate physical activity into explorations of tempo to reinforce the concept.

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

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

Hands, palms facing the conductor horizontally, are rolled one in front of the other, quickly or slowly. If a specific pulse is desired, move hands in a crisp, rhythmic manner.

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

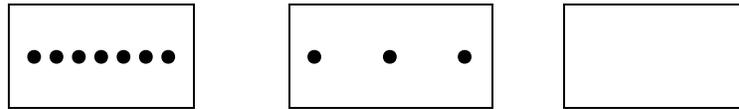
- a) A teacher/para can conduct while other adults assist children in following the conducted tempo (vocally, or with instruments or switches).
- b) Children can take turns being the conductor. Teachers/paras and/or other students can be the "orchestra."

- 6. Relating tempo to events:** Find or create a story with events that have different tempos (for example, running, walking etc.). As the story is read or told, the children can play instruments at the appropriate tempos.

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

Tempo is indicated by the proximity of the symbols to each other (close together=fast; far apart=slow).

- a) Tempo Cards: you can use (Mayer Johnson) symbols for this if the children have already been working with them; if not, make tempo cards that have close-together symbols for fast, far-apart symbols for slow, and possibly a blank card for “no sound.”



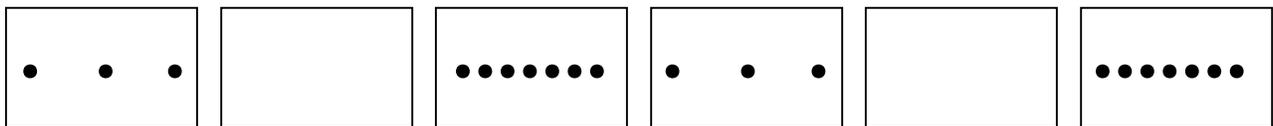
fast

slow

no sound

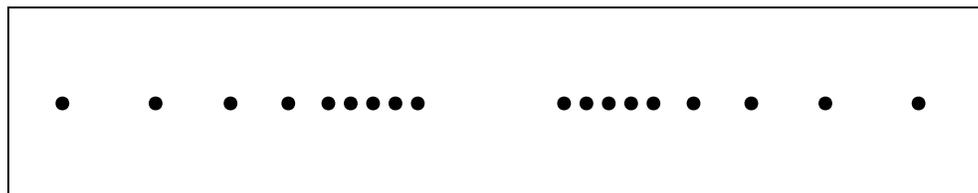
- i. Post the cards on the wall. The leader points to the cards one at a time, in the order s/he desires, indicating to the players what tempos to perform (or whether to make no sound).
- ii. Using multiple copies of the cards as manipulatives, children can compose their own music by selecting a sequence 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:



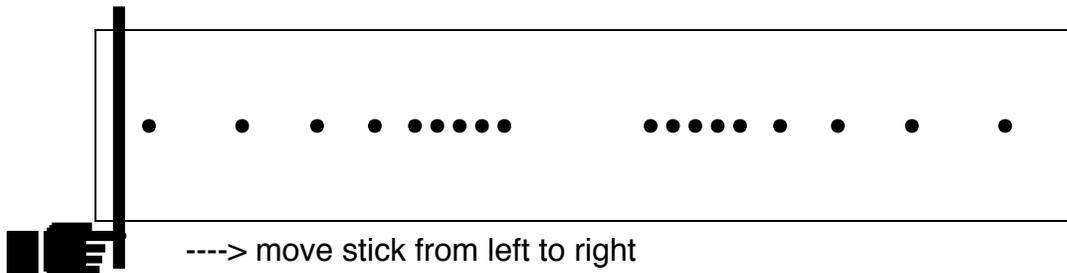
==> **TIP:** Cards can be laminated and Velcroed for ease of use. Bulletin boards and thumbtacks work for some populations as well.

- b) Creating a score: using the same principles as for the Tempo Cards, create a score by writing the symbols horizontally on a paper. When creating a score, you can represent gradations of fast and slow if desired, thus making accelerandos and ritards.



starts slow -- gets faster -- no sound -- fast -- gets slower
(accelerando) (ritard)

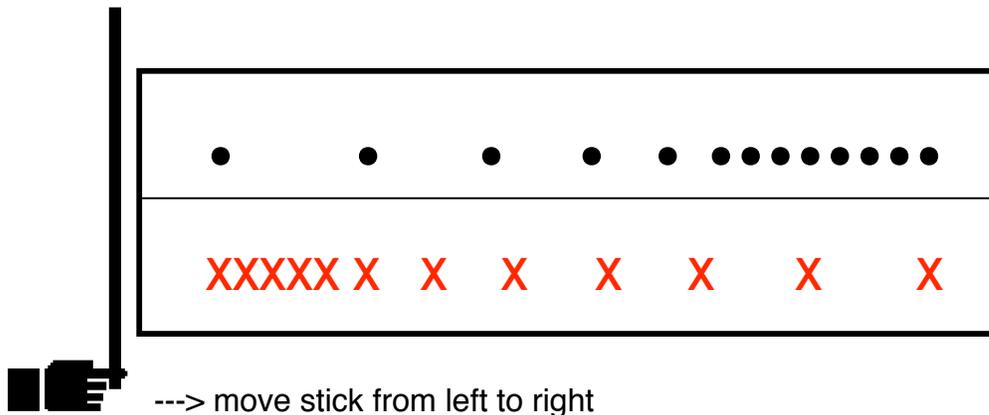
-- To perform, one person leads by placing a stick (pointer, pencil, rhythm stick, etc.) vertically on the score, starting at the left side. The leader slowly moves the stick from left to right. Each time the stick passes a symbol, the performers play.



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, and one 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 X's 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.