

Topic: Pitch (high or low)

Some thoughts on **PITCH**:

Children often confuse tempo, dynamics, and pitch. It is important when discussing these concepts, therefore, to keep your language consistent.

Although most (if not all) children can hear a difference between high and low pitches, it is important to remember that the words “high” and “low” are metaphoric terms they may never have learned in this context. It may take some time for them to correctly identify high and low sounds; although they can hear the difference, they need time and experience to learn the correct labeling.

To further complicate the matter, high and low are commonly used when speaking about *volume* of electronic devices (rather than loud or quiet), so there is quite a lot to overcome when teaching this terminology! Again, consistency and repetition are the keys.

==> **TIP:** Instruments with different pitches -- instruments discussed and recommended here include the following:

- Boomwhackers
- resonator bells (these are like xylophones, but each bar can be removed and played individually)
- slide whistles
- “ascending step” xylophones (physically constructed like stairs; highest notes at the top, lowest at the bottom)
- Remo sound shape drums (pack of six circles), or any other group of drums with graduated sizes

1. Demonstrate high and low pitch: Demonstrate high and low pitches through singing or playing an instrument. While demonstrating, make sure to associate the words “high ” and “low ” and/or the (Mayer-Johnson) symbols with the experience.

==> **TIP #1:** Whenever you say the word “high,” say it in a high-pitched voice, and say “low ” in a low-pitched voice. This consistency helps to reinforce the concept.

==> **TIP #2:** When introducing the concept, use pitches as far away from each other as possible in order to exaggerate the contrast between high and low.

2. Offer students a choice of pitch:

- a) Set up two switches, one with a high sound and one with a low sound. Students can choose whether to play a high or a low 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 “high” or “low” after the student has made his/her choice.
- b) The child can choose by pointing to either the “high” or the “low” (M-J) symbol, and teachers/paras can make vocal or instrumental sounds with the appropriate pitch (see **TIP #2** above).

3. Children perform different pitches: Through vocalizing or pressing switches, children perform different pitches, as indicated by teachers/paras or other children.

- a) The leader (teacher/para or child) vocally instructs performer(s) whether to sing, or select on a switch, a high or a low pitch.
- b) The leader indicates the desired pitch level by pointing to (M-J) symbols for high or low; children sing or play switches as directed.

4. Testing understanding: Play or sing sounds that are high, and sounds that are low. By speaking or pointing to (M-J) symbols, children can indicate whether the sound they heard was high or low.

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

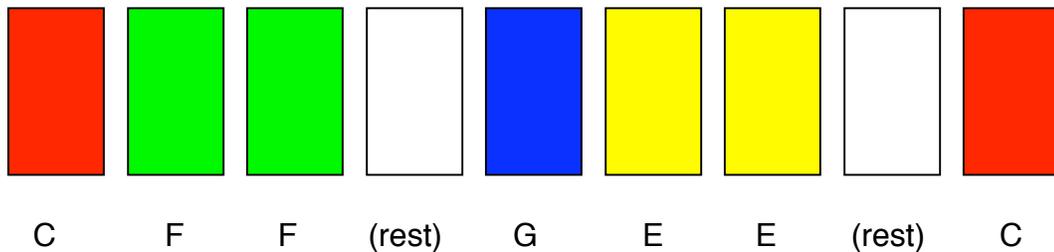
Hands with palms facing the floor, rising higher for high pitches, going lower for low pitches.

-- 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 pitch (vocally, or with instruments or switches).
- b) Children can take turns being the conductor. Teachers/paras and/or other students can be the “orchestra.”

- a) 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 which pitch should play (or whether to make no sound).
- b) 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, if C=red, F=green, G=blue and E=yellow, then:



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