

TIPS FOR TEACHING IMPROVISING SKILLS

TRINITY
ROCK & POP
2018

SET 'STYLE STUDIES' AS HOMEWORK

Make a list of the styles that are listed in the Improvising Parameters for the grade – reggae, blues, funk etc. Choose one of the styles as a 'Style Study', then as a 'homework' task, ask your student to find out about the style, and be able to name at least three famous performers who play in that style.

Make a list of famous performers in each of the styles that are listed in the Improvising Parameters for the grade. Check this against your student's list of famous performers and then as part of the current 'Style Study', ask your student to watch/listen to examples for 'homework' tasks in-between their lessons.

So that the student remains focused, give them just one performer each week to check out, and specific questions for them to answer, such as: How does the keyboard player fill out the harmonies in a reggae song? What is an appropriate use of the snare drum in a funk style? What expressive techniques could a guitarist use when playing a solo in a metal song?

STYLES & GENRES PLAYLISTS

Check out our set of [Spotify playlists](#) exploring styles and genres, from blues to boogie-woogie.

Work with your students to build a library of stylistic 'licks', scales, grooves etc. in each style – these are the basic 'building blocks'. Pentatonic and blues scales are essential, along with an understanding of other scales and modes, arpeggios and rhythms. The student could write some of the 'building blocks' out, in different keys, and start to keep a written 'style portfolio'.

EXPLORE INSTRUMENT SOUNDS

Make sure the student understands that the sound of the instrument is important to convey the style of the music – on a keyboard you need to select an appropriate voice, on a guitar an appropriate tone quality etc. Take some time exploring what sort of timbres the student can produce to fit the style.

SPEND TIME IMPROVISING IN LESSONS

Practise, experiment, make mistakes – the best way to improve improvising is to improvise. In each lesson spend a few minutes improvising with your student. One idea: play a riff/groove from one of the songs your student is learning and ask the student to improvise over the top, using the building blocks.

APPLICATION EXAMPLE

Keyboards Grade 2 – the teacher repeats the Em/D chord pattern from the first four bars of the song whilst the student improvises in E minor and then D major. They can start off with using only the triad notes – E, G, B and then D, F#, A – and then add some passing notes. Then try the notes from the E minor and D major scales; then try the blues scales in E and D.

With all improvisation, it's important to build confidence by doing lots of practice, never saying something is 'wrong' but encouraging pupils to use their ears to decide what 'works' and what is less successful. Have fun!

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REAL SONGS. REAL SKILLS. REAL PROGRESS.