

My approach to teaching is informed by both my experience in the music field and my work within the academy as a student and sessional lecturer. In both domains of my professional life I have had the good fortune to work with skilled and inspiring teachers, and continually draw on these formative experiences in my teaching work. Of particular importance to me were Don Palmer at Dalhousie University, who's teachings on jazz stressed the importance of both learning the fundamentals of a musical tradition and personal experimentation, and Rob Bowman at York University, who is able to present challenging theoretical concepts in an accessible way that encourages students to think critically about the role music plays in the world. Among other key mentors, these teachers set a high standard for music education, and instilled in me a strong sense of being part of a lineage. As these teachers were valuable role models for me, I want to be the same for my students.

After finishing my courses I hope that students will be more deeply engaged with the music they want to make or study, and will be prepared to make their own aesthetic judgments about, and develop creative responses to, the sounds they experience in their daily lives. By providing students with the resources and support to succeed in my course I not only want to help them fulfill the requirements of their programs, but to give them the necessary tools so that they can begin to teach themselves based on their personal musical goals. As my mentors did for me, by emphasizing the importance of active listening and participation in music-making – both in the classroom and in the community at large – I aim to give students the tools to pursue their creative and research priorities in the music field.

In my classes my goal is to help students succeed while holding them to a reasonable standard. I begin each course by letting the students know my expectations around the quality of their work, and give them the information, support, and resources to meet the requirements of the course as it unfolds. An essential part of this process is making it clear that while I will make myself available through office hours and prompt response to emails, the students are ultimately responsible for their own success in the course. In my experience so far, treating students like adults has proven to be an effective strategy for engaging them with the course work. By being clear about boundaries from the beginning I am able to protect my research time, which ultimately feeds back into my overall development as an educator.

My teaching career at the university level began in 2014. As an early career university instructor, I am committed to professional development activities to inform effective teaching. I have made a point of reading my course evaluations for each course I have taught; these have proven to be a valuable resource, and have resulted in some significant changes in my approach to teaching. A particular example is that while I use a lot of humour in my teaching, some students commented that they found my sense of humour to be too edgy and caustic. These comments revealed that I need to think carefully about how I carry myself in the classroom, and that humour, while generally a useful way to engage students, can sometimes exclude those who don't share my experience and outlook. I have also learned from these comments that it is important to be mindful of the diversity of musical experiences and tastes in the contemporary classroom, so it is crucial to allow space for discussion from a variety of knowledge positions. Every day in the classroom offers new opportunities to learn from students how to be a better communicator and mentor.

The increasing variety of musics available in contemporary society is mirrored in the demographics of university classrooms, as students from an ever-widening range of musical backgrounds are pursuing formal music education. This diversity in the classroom challenges educators to address the needs of students who bring a multiplicity of experiences and creative priorities to their university studies. To respond to this challenge I foster a learning environment where students feel comfortable talking about the music they are interested in—I begin each course by asking the students to tell me about themselves, including the instrument they play, the music they like, their educational experiences, and their reasons for taking a course in music. Based on this information I structure my teaching to make connections between the course content and the students' particular musical interests. This process includes: demonstrating parallels between the basic materials and structures of different musics; playing examples of music they may already be familiar with but calling their attention to aspects they may not have thought about before; introducing new musics following detailed descriptions of what to listen for; providing reference information and directions to where they might find more examples of the musics under investigation; and designing exercises (clapping, singing, playing instruments) that put the concepts under discussion into musical action. My experience as a freelance musician has demonstrated to me that working in the music field requires flexibility in practical musicianship and in how one thinks about music; the increasing diversity of the student population offers opportunities for learning new skills and concepts that can enrich students' participation in the production and consumption of music.

Based on my experiences teaching introductory music courses, I have come to believe that the most effective way to engage and evaluate students is through a combination of creative exercises, written assignments, and regular tests to gauge their acquisition of new skills and knowledge. The creative assignments that I have found to be most helpful involve asking students to compose pieces or exercises based on the concepts and materials that are being discussed in class. Research and writing are also key components of the courses I have taught; many students enter university music programs expecting to focus on performing, and are thus resistant to writing. An important part of my job as an educator is to provide support for them to develop their skills in this area. I therefore devote a substantial amount of time to addressing the mechanics of academic writing, and provide students with examples of relevant writing to illustrate the standard that is expected of them.

I have found it beneficial to create supplementary course materials as particular issues and difficulties arise in the classroom; these supplementary materials include rhythmic and melodic dictation exercises, short writing guides, and recording samples that demonstrate the particular issues under discussion. This practice of creating class-specific exercises and diagnostic materials has resulted in a continually expanding collection of resources that I can modify to suit the needs of a specific group of students. I make these materials available to the students through the course website. It is also crucial to connect with students through the technology they are using in their every day lives — examples of my use of contemporary media in my teaching include using YouTube to build and share listening playlists with students, and assignments that involve analyzing podcasts. It is important to stay current with online technology so students can maximize their opportunities for learning outside of class time.