



# Music & Motor Skills

## Tips

### INTRODUCTION

Given the rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic patterns inherent in music, musical stimuli is an effective external timekeeper and means to structure functional movement on a variety of levels. In particular, rhythm acts as an “entrainment” stimulus to cue patterned movements such as walking. Additionally, pitch patterns can simulate and cue spatial positions, while harmonic patterns cue force and strength. Below are classroom-tested tips to help your students tune in!

### USE OF RHYTHM INSTRUMENTS

Musical instruments can be used as a motivating way to encourage grasp/release, bilateral integration, eye-hand coordination, crossing midline, cause & effect skills, and basic motor imitation. Instruments with both a high visual appeal and a pleasing auditory sound will be most effective to encourage sustained participation (visit [www.westmusic.com](http://www.westmusic.com) or [www.musicselementary.com](http://www.musicselementary.com) for instruments). Strategies include:

- **Holding an instrument across midline** and having the student reach with the opposite hand to produce a sound.
- **Using instruments that require mallets**, such as drum or woodblock to improve functional grasp. Mallets can be adapted with built-up handles or Velcro to assist (visit [www.adaysworkmusiceducation.com](http://www.adaysworkmusiceducation.com)).
- **Using smaller rhythm instruments** such as finger cymbals, castanets, or a mini-keyboard to target fine motor skills.
- **Placing a highly preferred instrument at a distance** and having the student walk the specified distance or reach to obtain the instrument.
- **Having the student play an instrument to the beat** for the duration of a song in order to sustain purposeful movement or increase strength.

### MUSIC & HANDWRITING

- For pre-writing activities, engage students in **free drawing while listening to a fast or slow piece of music**, trying to match the drawing to the music style and pace.
- For students who are writing but are difficult to motivate, provide them the **lyrics to their favorite song to copy**; allowing them to sing or listen to the song as a reward when completed.
- The book **“Sing Write Along”** by Teacher Created Materials, Inc. ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)) has a simple tune or rhyme to say while writing each letter of the alphabet to help with recall of letter formations.

# Music & Motor Skills



Page 2

## USE OF RECORDED MUSIC OR SINGING

In addition to music's ability to increase motivation for movement, research also supports rhythm as an effective timekeeper to structure movement and increase coordination.

- **Rhythmic music** at a pace appropriate for the student's motor skills can be used during gait training (walking) or other patterned movement activities in which the student is encouraged to move with the beat.
- **Calming music, or the student's preferred music** can be used as a distractor during challenging or non-preferred motor tasks during which the student typically displays frustration or anxiety.
- **Theme Songs** can be used to pair with various motor tasks for a play-based approach. For example, a Beach Boys surfing song could be played while the student is standing on a bolster, or "Row Your Boat" could be sung while a student is rocking back and forth.

## TEACHING RESOURCES

Much of traditional dance music contains fast paced lyrics and complex movements that can be overwhelming for students with physical challenges or cognitive delays. The Tuned in to Learning® Adapted Dance and Movement CD was designed with the needs of special learners in mind, breaking down movement sequences into easy to teach components. Songs with entertaining themes and a range of musical styles give students an opportunity to practice simple dance steps, partner activities, warm-up stretches, and follow the leader games. Songs also include adaptations for students who utilize wheelchairs.

**TuNed In to LEARNING™**

**Volume 9: Adapted Dance & Movement**

To learn more, visit  
[www.tunedintolearning.com](http://www.tunedintolearning.com)



Includes a 10 song Music CD, sample IEP objectives, and activities addressing bilateral coordination, motor planning, sequencing, balance, posture, strength, and endurance.