

Sevenoaks School Music Department Instrumental and Vocal Studies

Yearly Study Plan for Students

Introduction

The Yearly Study Plan is designed for students in Year 9 to Upper Sixth, whilst the Year 7 to 8 use the Instrumental Progress Book. It is a template, available electronically or in hard copy, with suggestions of different areas of learning that can be explored. The teacher can, in consultation with the student, fill in the template to devise a Study Plan for the academic year.

It serves as a teacher and student-led syllabus which guides the student with clearly identifiable learning objectives. The variety of topics covered are many, and two or three elements could easily take up the whole year.

The benefit and importance of having a formal Study Plan is twofold: First, the teacher and pupil will have more control and ownership over the content of study. It can be more suitable than grade exam syllabuses, which do not always satisfy every need. Furthermore the Plan gives the teacher the opportunity to explain to the student the purpose of each area of study. Second, the Plan elevates Instrumental and Vocal Studies to a par with other academic and co-curricular studies in the school, underlining music's educational value and content. All subject disciplines, including instrumental and vocal studies, can be pursued within the context of a broader vision of learning and the more particular aims of the IB Learner Profile.

Remembering that we are not generally-speaking training our students with a view of them entering the music profession, it is my suggested aim that we develop informed practitioners. That is people who play an instrument or sing, understand the cultural aspects of music, and participate in the broader musical scene as amateur performers and concert-goers. Whilst seeking to attain high standards and excel in the craft and art of making music, we remember that we are here to instil that sense of wonder in our pupils, or, in Madeline Bruser's words, 'We let go of ourselves to the power of life and music.'

Notes about the Study Plan

Personal goals- Evidence suggests that students are more motivated when they set their own aims.

Pieces/Songs to explore- A suggestion for the pieces to be studied this year.

Technical work- Scales and Exercises- Here you can explain what skills will be acquired through the chosen exercises.

Concerts to perform in/Exams- These can be one of the aims of the year.

Musical knowledge to research- The informed practitioner doesn't just do! Well-educated musicians should also know something about what they are doing. Not everyone will become a concert-artist, and not even everyone will reach Grade 8. Few are willing or able to devote hours of practice to achieve that, especially in a school with intense academic pressures and a busy co-curricular schedule.

However, generally our students have very perceptive minds and are critical thinkers- skills underlined throughout their academic studies. We can reinforce that, by guiding our students to consider the science of their instrument, the cultural milieu of the composers, the influence of famous performers, and the interconnectedness of music with other arts and disciplines. Thereby we can educate students who are adept at playing their instrument as well as engage in cultural dialogue, with an ability to compare and evaluate different musical practices.

Assignments could include a research project which the student then presents to a number of their peers during a lesson, or the writing of a concert review for the school website.

Aural training and sight-reading- In addition to working on these in lessons, aural classes are offered at school, including Dalcroze aural classes.

Collaborative music making- Instrumental lessons don't have to be just one to one. It can be fun having group lessons, where students perform to each other and carry out peer assessment, or play in ensemble. Students can learn from exemplar performances of other students, which can be a more realistic target for them than a professional recording.

Team teaching is also encouraged, where two teachers teach at the same time. Each will have their own ideas, creating a stimulating learning environment for the student. And the other teacher doesn't even have to be a teacher of the same instrument!

Theory, composition and improvisation- Some theory can be covered in lessons, and students have the option of attending theory classes at school. Simple compositions and improvisations can be a creative way of learning to make music.

Going to concerts- As part of a musical education, pupils should immerse themselves in music as listeners. They are encouraged to attend the many concerts in the Space.

When to practice, what to expect from it and achieve with it?- Homework set should be achievable, with an open-ended element for those wishing to do a little more, taking into account what time the student can devote to practice.

Avoiding repetitive styles of practising, the student needs to understand the purpose of the homework, have a choice in what they want to do, and include creative elements. Creative elements might include improvisation on the pieces they are learning, getting the pupil to think about stories or pictures that might relate to the music, trying the piece of music with alterations thinking about how it affects the expression, and thinking about stagecraft.

Students, and boys in particular, need frequent short-term deadlines to ensure that they work consistently. As much as possible, students should be taught how to work out solutions and how to apply general principles, rather than just being told in each instance what is right or wrong. By encouraging thinking skills, students can become autonomous learners.

Centre for Holistic Studies- The Centre for Holistic Studies is a body within the Music Department that provisions the use of Dalzroze, Feldenkrais and Alexander Technique in instrumental and vocal teaching. Please see separate brochure.

Assessment for Learning- The school promotes assessment for learning, rather than assessment of learning. The reports you write should enable your student to understand their strengths and weaknesses, and to identify how they can improve their learning.

It is a good idea to use the occasion of a report to discuss with your student what they are enjoying and how they are progressing. You may in addition wish to use the Assessment for Learning student self-review form, which is designed for them to reflect on their studies.

Teaching and Learning ideas

From the Sevenoaks School Teaching & Learning Manual

Each student learns differently: some learn best verbally, others visually, and yet others learn kinaesthetically. Evidence shows that students retain only 10% of what they hear. They will however retain 90% of what they say and do. It is advisable to use a variety of teaching methods to keep the pace of the lesson lively. It is good practice to ask students to summarise what they have learnt in the lesson, and for them to take their own lesson notes.

International mindedness

From the Sevenoaks School Promoting International Mindedness booklet

The school actively promotes international mindedness as part of its ethos and curriculum. Music being a universal language has the potential to participate in this.

In our teaching, we can prompt the student to consider whether a musical point of interpretation could be different or better. We can introduce music from different countries, music from different cultures, cross-cultural music and non-western music. We can challenge the pupils to be exposed to music that they have never encountered before and that they may not like at first. We can allow room for multiple perspectives on music and teach the appreciation of different performing styles. By challenging our students in this way, they will learn how to judge musical as well as life scenarios, freeing them from ignorance, dogmaticism and prejudice. In a culture of pluralistic internationalism, how do different kinds of musics achieve the common human quest for meaning and significance? We can guide our students to evaluate other cultures and consider their different insights.

Educating the whole person, according to Richard van de Langemaat, encompasses:

Criticism: educating the intellect
Creativity: educating the imagination
Challenge: educating the will
Compassion: educating the emotions
Contemplation: educating the spirit

I'm sure you will agree that the study of music is ideal for developing our students in all these capacities!

The best practice recorded here should be seen as part of a living document, constantly open to improvement and subject to regular review. Your suggestions are therefore always welcome!

August 2014, TTW