



Ask Chris

This month Chris Turner invites tutors to explore using music with their students.

Music does wonderful things to the brain. You've probably read that playing classical music can help children's brains develop. Indeed, study after study has shown that music can enhance memory, motor control, and language development, as well as making people feel good.

Barb Biba, our new ESL coordinator, has inspired several of our tutors to experiment with using music to help ESL students learn English. The music relaxes their students, and the songs also stick in student's heads, making it easier for them to learn new grammar structures and vocabulary. One tutor reported that she couldn't get her class to leave because they were so engrossed in talking about the song they had just heard.

Why Use Music?

Music can create a learning environment, and aid listening comprehension, speaking, reading, writing and vocabulary. One of the most powerful effects of using music is that it creates associations in the brain that help with retention. Just as the picture cues in the Laubach material help students associate letters and sounds, musical cues, like those in the *Alphabet Song*, can help students remember what you are teaching. The rhythm of music stimulates both the kinaesthetic and an auditory parts of our brain, making it an important part of multisensory learning. One of our tutors told me about how her student discovered the power of music for himself. He was struggling to learn the multiplication table. He devised a song that finally made it possible for him to learn the number facts.

Music, which reaches deep into our brain, also has a powerful emotional effect. It can relax an anxious student or energize a tired student. Some teachers have found that using background music improves student's writing.

What music should I use?

You can use anything that your student will enjoy or which will help them learn. Teachers have used songs to create associations for years, and these are sometimes called "piggyback" songs. We are slowly developing a library of music and songs that may be helpful to you. Come check them out! Or, if you have a request, thanks to a new (legal) database, we may be able to download a specific song for you and your students.

How can I use songs in my lessons?

There are many different ways you can use music to enhance your lessons. Aside from playing background music when appropriate, you can encourage your student to play music while studying at home. A simple activity is to provide a lyric page with some of the words blanked out. As you play the song, the student fills in the blanks. Another useful activity is to ask your student to listen to the song and discuss the main idea. Then provide them with a lyric sheet and do a line by line reading of the song. This helps ESL students learn idioms and the nuances of certain phrases and it can greatly help reading students with comprehension. Some reading students will benefit from the success they experience reading familiar lyrics.

We have lots of additional idea, as well as tape recorders and CD players. If you would like to use music with your student, just ask me or Barb Biba.