

BLITZ!
How To ~~Pass~~
Grade 1 Theory
Teacher Guide

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Introduction

When I first started writing BlitzBooks, I had been preparing students for AMEB theory and musicianship exams for more than twelve years. Over this time, I had tried several texts and workbooks, none of which my students found particularly stimulating. I also found that the various texts did not address the way in which the questions are asked in the actual exams. My inspiration to write a series of books arose from this lack of appropriate materials.

It is now 10 years on and BlitzBooks has celebrated its – you guessed it – 10th birthday. I am delighted to say that there are now some students who used BlitzBooks who have grown up to become teachers who recommend BlitzBooks.

This teacher guide is designed to support and enlighten teachers who are unfamiliar with the general expectations of AMEB examiners.

I hope that the workbooks together with engaged teachers will create confident and well prepared students. If students know their stuff and they know what to expect when they walk into the exam room, they should come out feeling like they “blitzed” it.

About Book One

Music is a language. It makes sense to learn to play an instrument and develop our aural skills before we launch into theoretical explanations. To this end, I believe students should have at least 2-3 years practical experience on an instrument before embarking on a theory or musicianship syllabus.

The student workbook for Theory Grade 1 assumes a basic knowledge of note reading and rhythm values and will appeal to children and adults of any age.

Note To Teachers Of Instruments Other Than Piano

This book is easy to follow no matter what instrument is being learnt. However, I believe there are certain sections, such as 'Tones and Semitones', that will work best with a keyboard demonstration. It is much easier to see a pattern of tones and semitones than to hear it! It is hard to hear a triad without a keyboard; concepts such as intervals and sharps and flats are also much easier to reinforce *visually*.

I recommend instrumental teachers try to organise two or three sessions over the year with a keyboard or piano. This will make a huge difference to a student's understanding of some concepts.

About This Course

These books are written specifically for those students preparing for AMEB written examinations. For each grade there is a workbook, teacher guide and answer book.

Each new concept is introduced with a 'step-by-step' worksheet which shows the student how to approach the question. Key words are missing which promotes discussion and interaction with the teacher during the lesson. The idea is that by reading through the page together (aural and visual) and by writing in answers along the way (kinaesthetic), you are sure to reach every student in some way! (This is especially good for group tuition.) The students can then go on and complete the other worksheets by themselves or for homework.

Many teachers who use BlitzBooks prefer their own methods of explanation for new concepts and leave the 'step-by-step' pages until close to the exam, when the student can use them as a revision resource.

The conversational style of the worksheets makes revision easy, and the book sets out the concepts in the same order as an AMEB exam. The multiple-choice section shows up silly (and not so silly!) mistakes in an amusing way that appeals to children. There is also a Test Paper at the end for students to mark. This is a great way to help students understand how to check their work.

This teacher guide contains suggested answers for some of the missing words, outlines certain points for discussion and shows common mistakes or variations of acceptable answers. Answer books are also available – these consist of replicas of workbook pages with answers written in.

How Long Will It Take To Complete This Book?

This depends on the type of music lesson. If theory is taught as a small part of a practical lesson, each book will last approximately 9-12 months. If lessons are solely theory or musicianship, it will potentially take much less time. However, teachers should allow a minimum of approximately six months to cover syllabus requirements and at least a further 2-3 months for revision. The workbook is designed to make revision easy: it would be quite adequate to read through all the 'Remembers' and 'Hot Tips' and anything else highlighted or boxed on the page.

The important thing for teachers to remember is that apart from this book, there are three important ways to practice for an exam:

Past papers, past papers and past papers!!

There is no better learning experience than seeing your mistakes. However, the process of giving a past paper to a student, giving them a week (or two!) to complete it for homework, getting it back from them, marking it and giving it back to them again, and allowing time for them to take in and learn from their mistakes, before giving them the next homework paper, can take about a month!!

Over the years I have been caught out by this process myself and have found that my students have only done one or two past papers prior to the exam. I have included a 'Preparation Guide' on page 15 which can help to organise the term. I highly recommend the lesson devoted to 'Exam Conditions' – this can be an eye-opener for some children!

Exam Techniques

Students need to have a few good 2B pencils and a really good eraser. Also, some students prefer/need to use a ruler for bar lines and/or stems.

I often put my hair in a tight bun, put glasses on and, just for a joke, pretend I am the "fussy old lady" who is going to mark their exam! It's amazing how their performance improves.

We all know how hard it is to proof read our own work. This course aims to help the kids to get it right the first time, but the most important thing is for them to be able to check their work properly. So I tell them they must turn themselves into the "fussy old lady", and go about marking their own paper two or three times. This works wonders!

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Guide to Workbook Sheets

For each worksheet there is an objective and comments. Some worksheets are not featured in the guide as they are either straightforward revision or self-explanatory.

Answers can be found in the Grade 1 Theory Answer Book, available from all good print music stores.

A Little Bit About Rhythm - p.3

Objective

To introduce basic rhythmic concepts.

Comments

There is no way to introduce pitch in music without representing some sort of rhythm at the same time. For this reason, there is a very brief introductory page on basic rhythmic values. It's not until later in the book that the actual concept of rhythm is covered.

♪ (quaver), ♪ (quaver rest) and ♩ (whole bar or semibreve rest) are also not on the syllabus for this grade, but students see these all the time in their pieces so I have included them on the sheet. They do not appear on any of the other rhythm sheets.

Drawing Treble And Bass Clefs - p.7

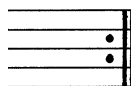
Objective

To establish a good technique in drawing treble and bass clefs.

Comments

Many students don't realise exactly where clefs should start and finish. It is good to read through this at the same time as demonstrating on a whiteboard/on paper.

The two dots for the bass are often written in the wrong spaces. This is because students confuse it with a repeat sign:



It is worth pointing this out because it reinforces the correct position.

Stems - p.10

Objective

This worksheet drills the rules for stems – both for direction and which side of the note the stem goes on.

Comments

Short stems are rarely penalised, but it is certainly worth teaching the right length.

Keep in mind that although children will find this worksheet very easy, the mistakes crop up later when they forget to adjust their stems in a scale or in the transposition question.

For a note on the middle line in a scale, the answer will be accepted with the stem going either way: the very formal rule, however, is that majority rules!

Eg.



The stem for the B goes up as most of the other notes are below the middle line.

Leger Lines - p.12

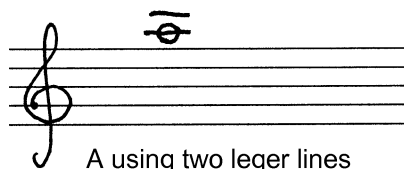
Objective

To learn the correct positioning of leger lines.

Comments

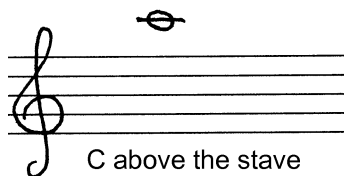
The most common reason for loss of marks in this 'section' is the fact that the question is often misread. Many kids are so absorbed in simply writing the correct *note* that they forget to check if the question says 'Use leger lines'.

Some other common mistakes are:





Children sometimes forget to consider the A *below* the staff. They write the A above, realize they have only used one leger line and figure they can just pop the second leger line on top! (This is not accepted)

Or this



The student may have had every intention of writing a C but has forgotten that the leger line for A must still be shown. I tell them that this note simply looks like an 'A' floating on helium!

The point about  vs.  might need constant drilling. Instead of 'hat/shoes' you might try 'roof/floor' – whatever appeals to your students.

Another important point to drill is drawing the leger lines neatly and not too widely or closely spaced. Leger lines are simply miniature versions of the manuscript lines and must be drawn the same distance apart. This often takes quite a bit of practice especially for younger children.

Sharps, Flats And Naturals – pp.14-16

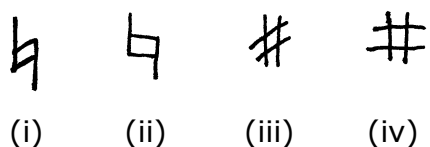
Objective

To establish a good technique in the drawing and positioning of accidentals.

Comments

Accidentals are written before the note. Most children are very familiar with these signs, but drawing them correctly is a different story. This section works best with simultaneous demonstration on a whiteboard or on paper.

Naturals look great like (i) but students will not be penalised for the 'square' version (ii) The accidental must simply be positioned correctly. The same applies to a sharp sign, eg. (iii) is great but (iv) is fine.



Students should trace and draw the accidentals *in the lesson* where possible.

Accidentals On Leger Lines - p.17

Objective

This worksheet will help familiarise students with examination-style wording of questions and provides practice in the correct positioning of accidentals on leger lines.

Comments

The following refers to the question, 'What's wrong with these notes?'

Sometimes students may encounter a question such as to draw 'A flat above the stave'. Sometimes this answer is given like this:



Children should be aware that the question will always ask for a **note** plus an accidental, and that 'A flat' should be read as the **note A!**

Naming Notes - p.18

Objective

To understand the correct way to answer exam questions.

Comments

Some kids struggle with low notes because they forget to say the letter names backwards as they are working it out. Practice saying "C—B—A—G—F—E—D—C", this helps a lot.

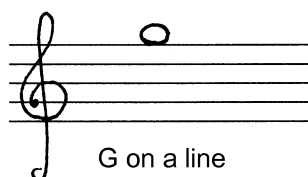
Drawing Notes - p.19

Objective

To understand the correct way to answer exam questions.

Comments

Watch out for this answer:



This *is* quite logical (!) but would not be accepted.

I find I must explain quite frequently that 'on a line' means the line must go **through** the note. Writing the accidental sign without the note is also a fairly common mistake.

Another thing worth drilling is the correct positioning of middle C in each clef. Treble is usually not a problem but in bass clef middle C is all too often written in the second space.

Know Your Notes/Yet Another - pp.14-15

Objective

These worksheets will provide practice in reading and writing notes correctly.

Comments

There are hundreds of ways this question can be asked. The best way to prepare for this is to do past papers. Teachers can be sure though that a new way will always be found! Extra practice on this might be needed; these sheets are just an example of the different ways the questions are worded.

Scales - pp.22-34

Comments

The category of scales encompasses so many different things. It was tempting to introduce the G and F major key signatures during practice in the "Accidentals" chapter, but key signatures come from scales, and scales come from patterns of tones and semitones, then scale degree numbers have to be linked to all of this. Each of these concepts needs to be understood independently, yet a single question can encompass knowledge and skills from all areas.

Tones And Semitones - p.22

Objective

To understand the concept of a semitone (and therefore a tone) and the way a major scale is constructed.

Comments

This works best with a keyboard demonstration. I highly recommend organising this; it will be much easier for the student to understand. If this is not possible, a diagram of a keyboard would work quite well.

It is important, however, to have a definition of a semitone that does not relate to a keyboard. Apart from the definition in the workbook I also describe a semitone as 'the smallest distance between two notes' - as this is correct on a piano.

Scale Degree Numbers - p.24

Comments

The important point is that the LOWEST note is number 1, otherwise the semitones will be marked incorrectly later.

Marking Semitones - p.25

Objective

To learn the positioning of tones and semitones and how to mark them in a scale.

Comments

Semitones fall between 3-4 and 7-8. I think this is easier to remember than T—T—S—T—T—T—S, but some teachers may disagree. In 1992 or 1993 (i.e. a LONG time ago!), there was a question asking candidates to mark the semitones in a melody—this was extremely difficult, and only really achievable using scale degree numbers. Fortunately, no such questions have appeared since then!

Let's Get The Semitones Right - p.26

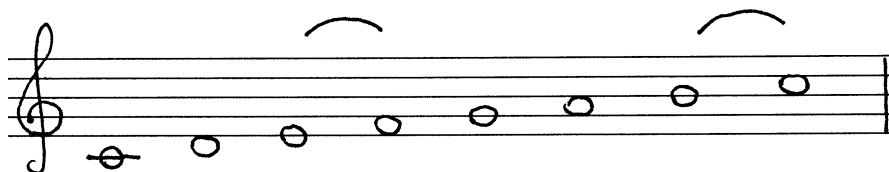
Objective

Practice in marking semitones.

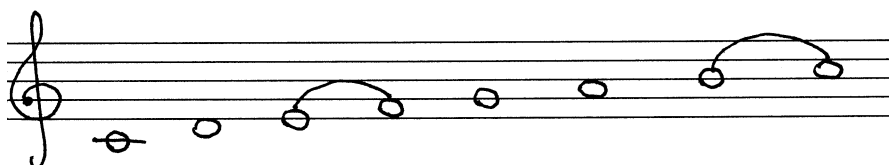
Comments

Adding the double bar line is a good habit to get into. Nowadays it is a standard 'instruction' on the exam paper.

Semitones should be marked with slurs, not square brackets. It is a good idea to put the slurs close to the heads of the notes. Some students mark them in like this:



This is not incorrect but looks strange and can leave room for error. Conversely, the slurs should not actually touch the notes either



But again, this is not incorrect.

Marking Tones - p.27

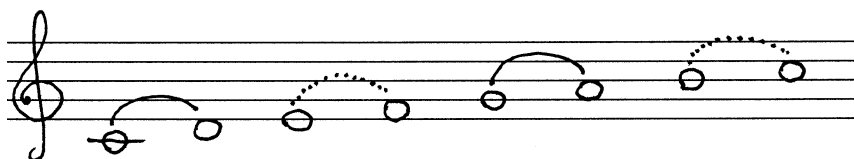
Objective

To understand the positioning of tones.

Comments

I find it much easier to focus on marking semitones for a while and then to approach marking tones as simply "everything except the semitones".

Something to watch out for is this:



The student may have the best intentions of not marking semitones, but they often forget that a slur may go both *to* a note and *from* a note. Thus, it is quite helpful to remember there should be 5 tones.

Awesome Accidentals - p.29

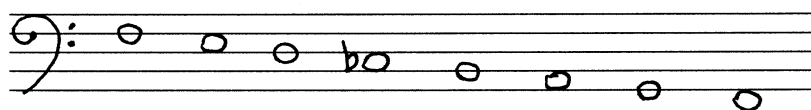
Objective

Practice in adding accidentals.

Comments

This is also a good page to use for practice of adding stems correctly and marking tones or semitones.

Also, a very common mistake is this:



The student has started saying in his/her head "F—G—A—B" going along the scale, ready to put in a B flat, but has forgotten that the scale is descending. This is certainly worth a demonstration – most kids will laugh and say how silly a mistake that is, but making the point in this way ensures they are far less likely to make the mistake themselves!

Scale worksheets pp.31-34

Objective

To familiarise students with examination-style questions.

Comments

The most common mistakes here are:

- Not observing the clef given
- Marking tones instead of semitones or vice versa
- Writing the scale in the wrong direction
- Marking tones/semitones incorrectly, usually because of the direction of the scale

These sheets will be adequate practice for some students, but I have found most need *lots* of practice for the simple reason that it is so easy to miss a step or to misread the question. The 'ticking off' of instructions works wonders!

I incorporate a small segment on scale writing at least every second or third lesson throughout the year. Mostly it's a matter of saying, 'OK, quickly follow these instructions!' and off they go!

Scale Degree Numbers In Melodies - p.37

Objective

To learn how to put the correct scale degree numbers under a melody.

Comments

This question often ends up with full marks or no marks!

It is important for the kids to focus on the **key signature** to determine the key, not the last note (as many times the given melody does not end on the tonic), and certainly not the first note! In recent papers, the melody **has** ended on the tonic, but there is no guarantee that this will always be the case. The most common mistakes are:

- Misreading the key
- Misreading the clef
- Assuming the melody starts on scale degree number 1

Use games and other activities to get students really familiar with scale degree numbers. Get them to play "F major, 4" or "G major 2" on their instrument. Writing scale degree numbers in their pieces is also great practice.

Using '1' always is very important, '8' is rarely accepted.

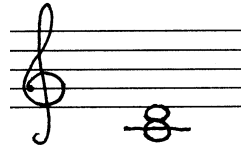
Intervals - p.40

Objective

To understand the concept of intervals and how to name them correctly.

Comments

It is worth pointing out other intervals of a 2nd and practising these. Some students try to squash the D in like this:



(Not accepted)

The interval must always be drawn ABOVE the given notes. The kids often try drawing them below to get out of using leger lines!

Writing Intervals is Easy - p.41

Objective

To learn how to write intervals correctly and to understand the need for accidentals in some intervals.

Comments

Although minor keys are not studied in this grade, the subject of intervals is an interesting one: if the students are asked to **write** an interval by number and not quality, do they need to include accidentals?

The syllabus is not too clear on this. It states that 'diatonic intervals' are required, meaning intervals that are found in major and minor scales, not chromatic scales. Although there is no such thing as a minor 7th in scales, e.g.



This answer is technically correct, as it is indeed a 7th.

I have decided to approach intervals **with** the use of accidentals because it lays the foundation for better understanding of quality of intervals in Grade 2.

Tonic Triads - p.44

Objective

To understand the concept of a chord based on scale degree no. 1 – a tonic triad.

Comments

Root position is the only position studied, so it is not necessary to drill this term but is certainly worth mentioning, as it will be good preparation for future grades when they study triads in first inversion.

It is quite true that some kids draw the tonic triad like this



They get the 'tonic' but not the 'triad'!

The correct triad to circle in the workbook is the third one. Discuss what's wrong with each of the others and draw some more on a whiteboard or paper. It's good to laugh and the students really take it in.

The triads above high F and high G are difficult to draw as they involve leger lines and may need extra practice. Once again, the triad must be drawn ABOVE the given note!

When identifying triads, students must focus on the BOTTOM note, even if that means reading notes on leger lines.

Time And Rhythm - p.48

Objective

An introduction to time signatures and accents.

Comments

The time signatures do not have to be known as simple duple, simple triple etc. for this grade, although some teachers choose to teach this anyway, which is great.

In first grade, the students will only encounter a one beat anacrusis.

For drawing time signatures, point out that the top number 'takes up two spaces' and the bottom number 'takes up 2 spaces'. Depending on the age of your student/s, you might want to explain that time signatures are not written 'like fractions'.

Drawing Rests – p.50

Objective

To establish a good technique in the drawing of rests.

Comments

Crotchet rests should not touch the top or bottom lines. These are tricky to draw; students are usually not penalised if slightly inaccurate.

Minim Rests

Students are penalised if they draw these incorrectly.

Whole bar rests

These will not be tested in the Grade 1 exam but are an important part of learning at this level.

Adding Bar Lines – p.52

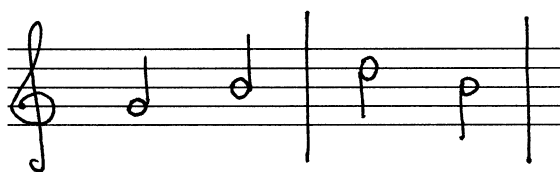
Objective

To learn how to decipher the time signature of a given passage, and to understand the concept of adding bar lines to a given melody or rhythm.

Comments

The anacrusis is *not* a bar and ties or slurs do *not* affect the counting of beats – this may need extra drilling.

Many children draw bar lines like this



This will generally not be penalised but should be addressed.

Lots of students get very put off by articulation markings when adding bar lines. This is worth reinforcing a lot – extra worksheets may be needed. When adding the last barline, a *double* barline is needed!

Grouping - p.53-54

Objective

To understand the rules of grouping.

Comments

The concept of grouping is probably the thing that causes the most grief to teachers and students! Recent papers have not asked candidates to rewrite bars correctly but this type of question could re-emerge at any time.

Students may not correct ♩ - ♩ by writing ♩ ♩ - . Notes and rests must remain in the correct order. Ask your students to clap both versions and notice that the *sound* is different.

Completing The Bar - pp.55-56

Objective

To apply the rules of grouping when completing a bar and to learn that half beats must be made up to whole beats.

Comments

It is a great idea to get students to put a circle around the word 'rests' or 'notes' or other relevant word in the question. They get so excited about completing the bar correctly that they forget to check *how* they should complete the bar.

There are hundreds of ways this type of question can be worded. The more ways you can expose your students to, the better.

Transposition - pp.60-63

Objective

To understand the concept of the same melody starting in a new key.

Comments

Transposition cannot be taught effectively without scale degree numbers for two reasons:

1. Students need to understand how the given melody is structured before transposing it, and
2. The melodies given in the exam are often so jumpy that it would be confusing simply counting up or counting down all the time.

Students may need extra sheets based on the step-by-step nature of this worksheet. However, I find very few who struggle with transposition if it is taught with patience!

Assuming all the notes end up in the right spot, the most common mistakes are:

- Omitting the key signature or time signature
- Not adjusting stems
- Not following the shape of the melody – that is, some notes end up in the wrong octave
- Transposing the entire melody to the **octave** above or below – some children follow the scale degree numbers beautifully but forget to check the *new* starting point in a *different key*.

It is a great idea to regularly give examples of all these mistakes in their lessons as it helps them to check their work.

Terms and Signs - pp.66-67

Objective

These worksheets list all the terms and signs required for the grade.

Comments

Students are only required to give **English translations** for Italian terms.

Terms and signs simply have to be memorised. Often there is no time to drill these in the context of an impending exam, but they come up so often in print music that students should be quite familiar with them anyway.

The most common mistake I find is the wrong translation for any word ending with 'ando' or 'endo'. I can only imagine that some children concentrate so hard on the spelling for "gradually becoming" that they lose track of which term they are translating, eg. I can't tell you how many times I've had this:

Rallentando = gradually becoming softer

But again, if they are made aware that this might happen, it lessens the chance they will make that mistake.

Encourage your students to **explain** a term as well as naming it, eg.



= tie = 'play first note and hold for value of both'

Also, drill the difference between Rallentando, Ritardando and Ritenuto!

Adding Terms and Signs To Melodies - pp.69-71

Objective

To familiarise students with examination-style questions.

Comments

As this is something most students have never had to do before, all I can say is that hopefully, the question will be well set out. Often the information requested is not hard, but knowing where to look for the questions or where to write the answers can be very confusing. Past examinations seem to insist on using lower case roman numerals, sometimes up to (viii) or (ix) – very hard for primary school students! I have included them in this book for practice.

Point out how to read bar numbers, especially if there is an anacrusis. Once again, doing lots of past papers is the best way to prepare for this.

Test Paper...Sort Of - pp.75-80

Objective

To find all the mistakes and therefore practice 'proofreading' in preparation for checking their own work in the exam.

Comments

In 'completing' this mock exam paper I have tried to include as many common mistakes as I could think of.

This works best when marked *in the lesson*, stopping for discussion each time a mistake is found. It is also a great idea for the student to rewrite the answer correctly on spare manuscript.

Sometimes answers are wrong for more than one reason, some answers are actually correct! This is sure to provide an amusing resource for revision and is invaluable in helping students learn how to check their work.

Preparation Guide

All students/classes work at a different pace. As they near completion of the workbook, it will be time to think about enrolling them for an exam. The AMEB conducts written exams in May, August and November of each year.

The following is a suggested plan for lessons between enrolment and the examination date. Please note that entries are due only ten weeks before the May series, so if your students are doing a May exam you will need to start this process before the summer holiday break.

Weeks prior to the exam	
14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go briefly through a past paper, complete sections together over 2-3 weeks
13-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete all syllabus requirements. Revise certain weak spots where possible
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple Choice Section
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issue homework paper Mark the 'mock' paper together
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect homework and mark while they do another paper in class. (This means they can take home 1-2 marked pieces of homework – very valuable!)
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return homework (or go last week's paper) Test on Italian Terms
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General revision of book
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issue homework paper and identify weak spots in the lesson
Holidays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is each student's opportunity to learn all Italian terms (even if they are going away!)
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect homework paper
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return marked paper Revision for next week
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Exam conditions' in lesson
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return marked papers Revision