The Complete Choral Musician: Striving for Musical Literacy in Choir
MENC All-Eastern Conference 2011
Kyle J. Weary, presenter

Philosophy of Music Education

Music Literacy music be at the CORE of the music curriculum
We must teach our students to become independent musicians
The fundamental goal of music literacy instruction is to connect sound to sight!

How?

Using our daily work to introduce small concepts will build our students into independent musician over the course of their time in our class. Using warm-ups, *daily* sight reading and then teaching our students how to apply what they have learned into their repertoire. If we don't help them connect everything together, a disconnect occurs between the learning and the application.

Teaching our students how commit this to memory, helps the students recall their information. We must teach them how to organize it so it is committed to stored knowledge. When it is committed to long term memory, it becomes anchored in their memory.

Principles

"Womb to Tomb" - creating a common system used for all instruction at all levels in every music setting.

Sound to Symbol

Even though most music research advocates "sound to symbol" learning, but most music reading books start with symbol BEFORE the sound. We are throwing too much information at our students (staff, meter signature, key signature, clef, key signature, rhythm notation, bar lines, and tonal notation. *The fundamental goal of musical literacy instruction is to connect sound to sight (symbol).*

Skills Learning Sequence

1. Neutral Echoing (Neutral to Neutral)
2. Syllable Echoing (Syllable to Syllable)
3. Echo Translating (Neutral to Syllable)

Connecting Sound to Symbol

1. Reading (symbol ---> syllable ---> sound)
2. Notating (sound ---> syllable ---> symbol)

How to teach it?

1. Warmup's - not only use to warm up the body, voice, and mind, but the EAR as well!
2. Sight Reading - read as much as possible every time you see your choir!
3. With Sight Reading - once they are ready teach them the process!
   First - separate pitch and rhythm
   Second - choose whichever is easier for you (pitch or rhythm)
   Third - do the other (pitch or rhythm) that you didn't do first!

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Pitch Process:

Key signature, time signature
Find "do"
Use hand signs, chanting the solfege
If in multiple parts: read through each part together, then combine!

Rhythm Process:

Time signature
Rhythm chant methods (Kodály, Orff, Takadimi, etc.)

Other ways for teaching sight reading skills

Read it backwards (both rhythms and pitches)
Two handed rhythms (how?)

How to apply what they have (and you have) learned!

-In repertoire, use solfege when reading through a new piece.
-Use solfege to polish a difficult section or polish a part...keep them on their toes
-USe hand signs as they sing their part
-Teach a section by rote in solfege and then look at the music...apply what they already know…

Other tips...

-Worksheets
-Hand sign ladder

Resources

www.takadimi.net
www.lightandmatter.com/sight/sight.html a free sight singing text book
Masterworks Press
Melodia (now in public domain)

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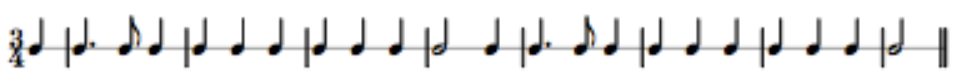
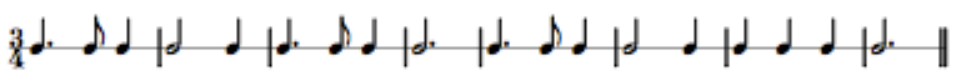
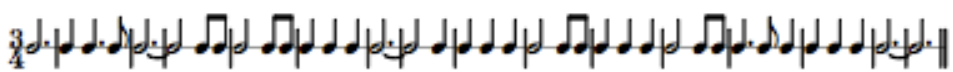
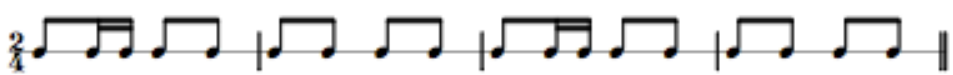
14 

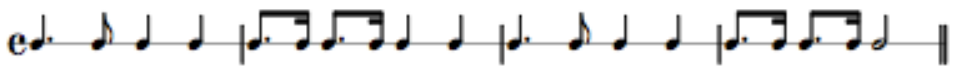
15 

16 

I-5 Sixteenth Notes

17 

I-6 Dotted Eighth Notes

18 

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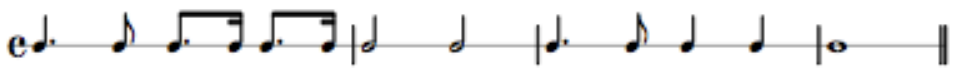
20 

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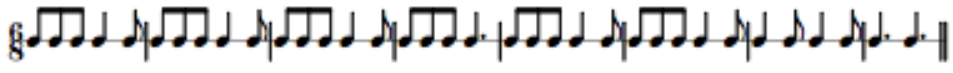
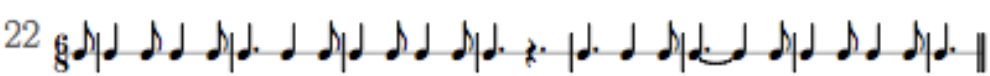
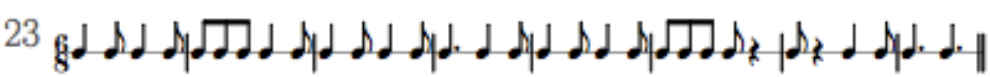
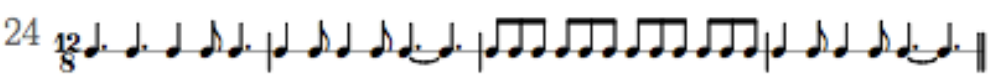
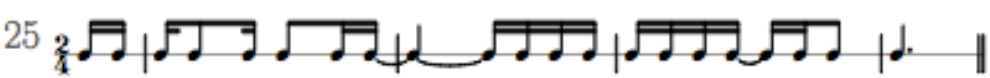
21 

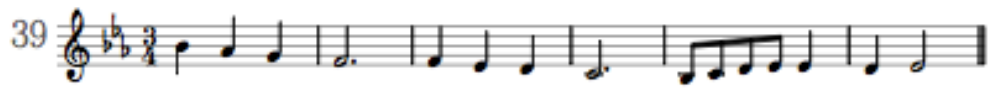
22 

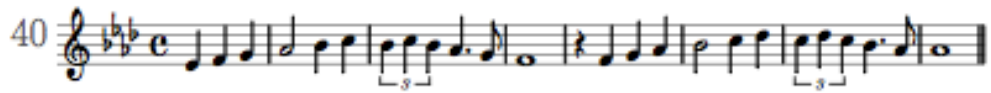
23 

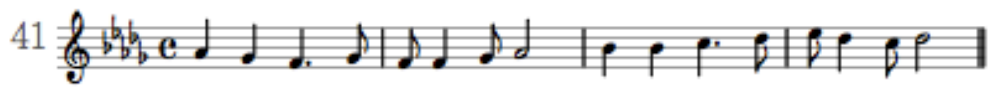
24 

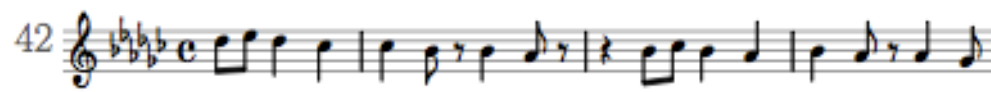
I-8 Syncopation

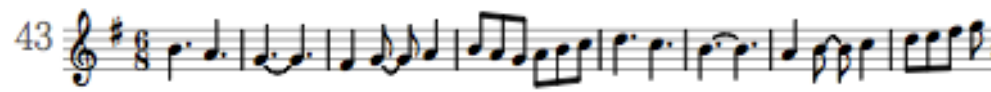
25 

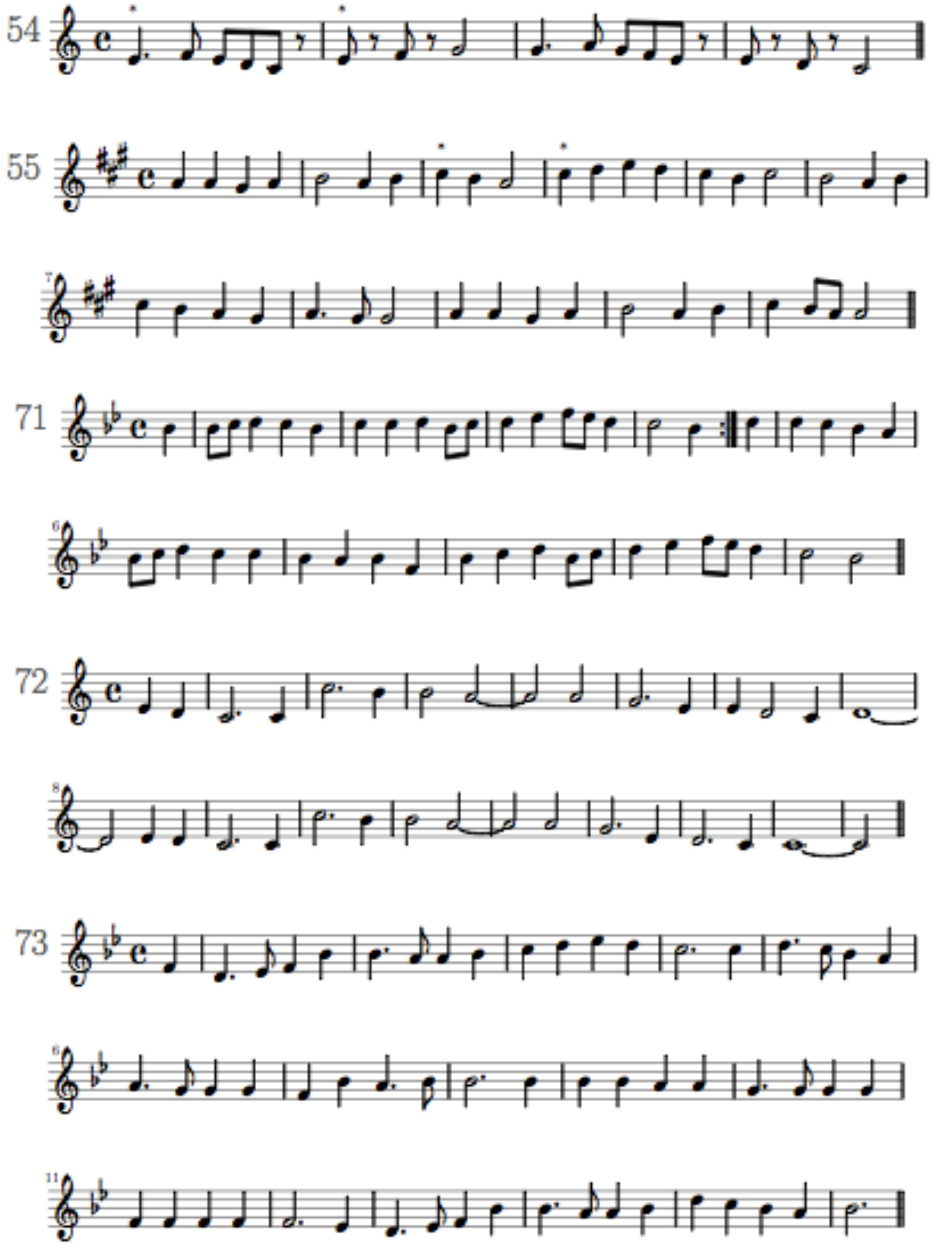
39 

40 

41 

42 

43 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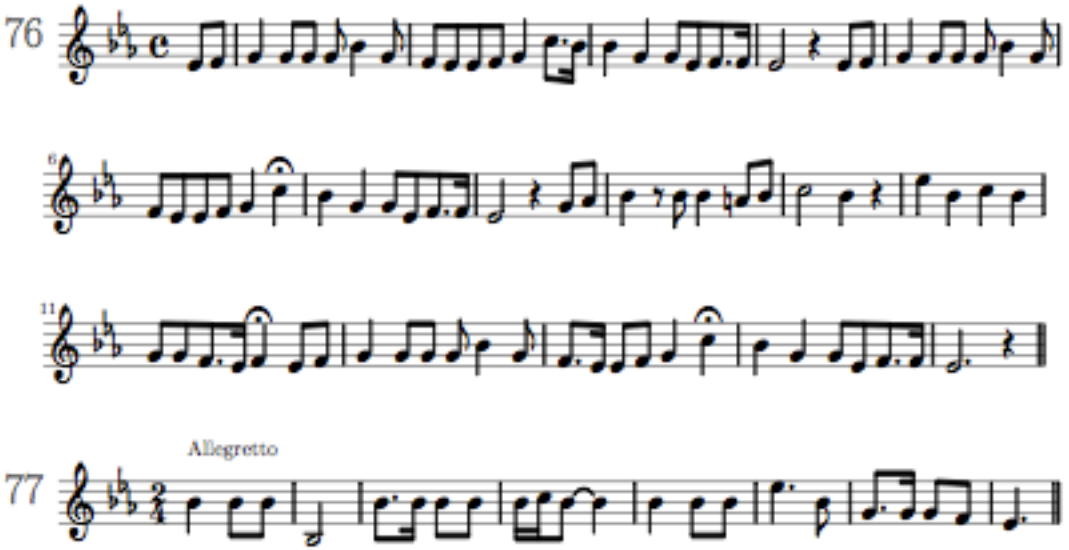
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Allegretto
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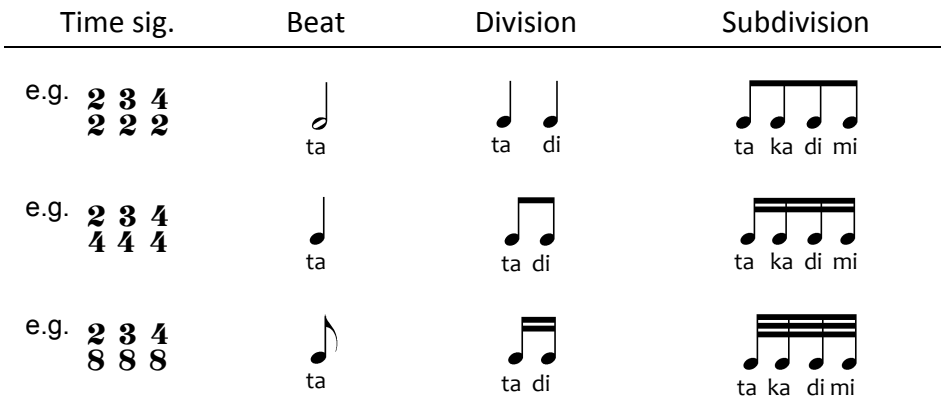
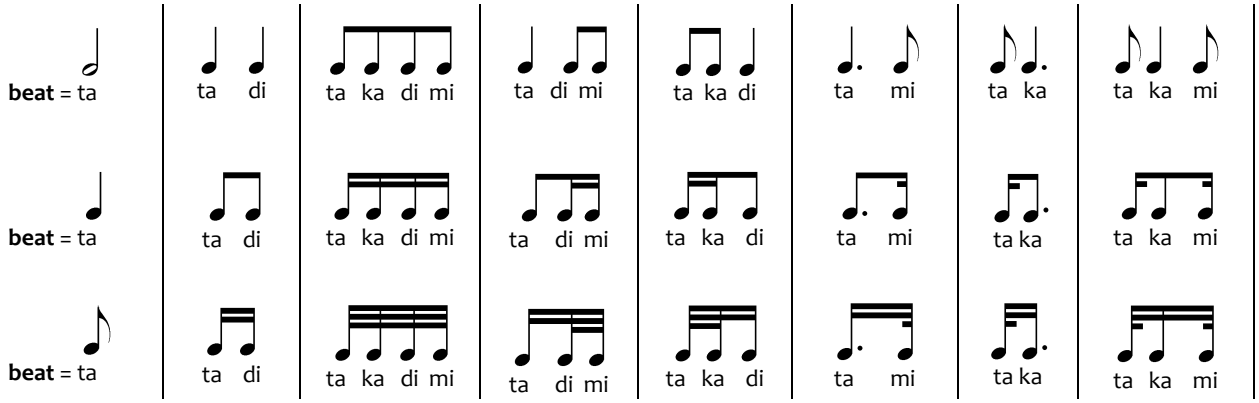
Learning rhythm with the TAKADIMI system of rhythm solfege

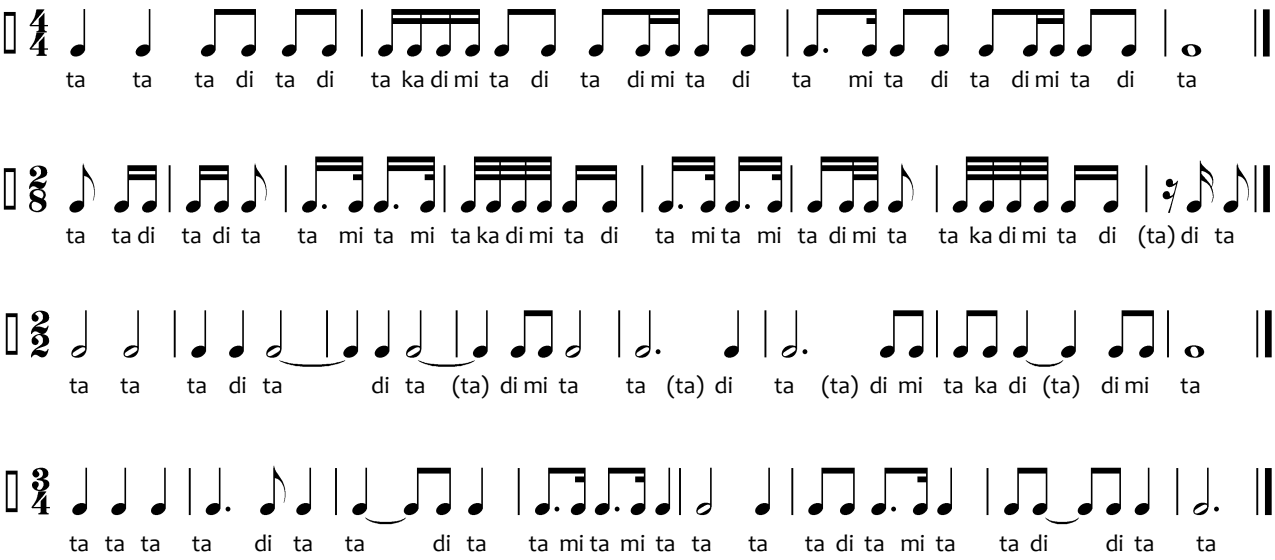
Simple Meter — The beat is always voiced with *ta*. The division and subdivision are always *ta-di* and *ta-ka-di-mi*. Any note value can be the beat. Three common values are shown.



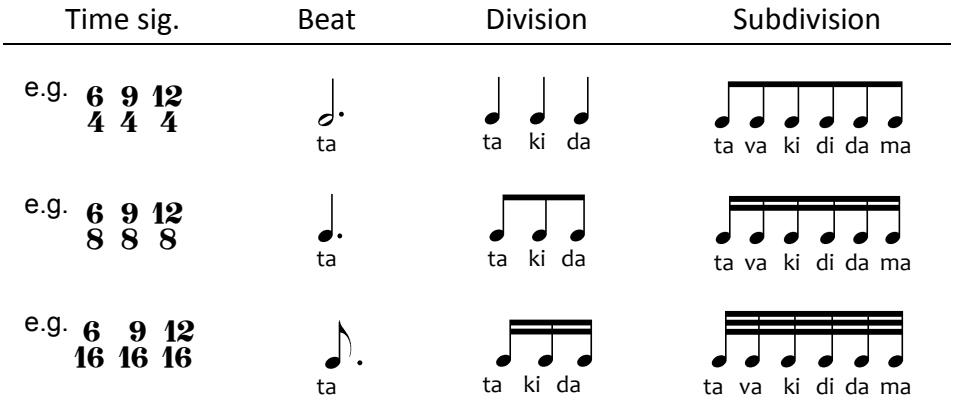
Common Patterns (beat-length)



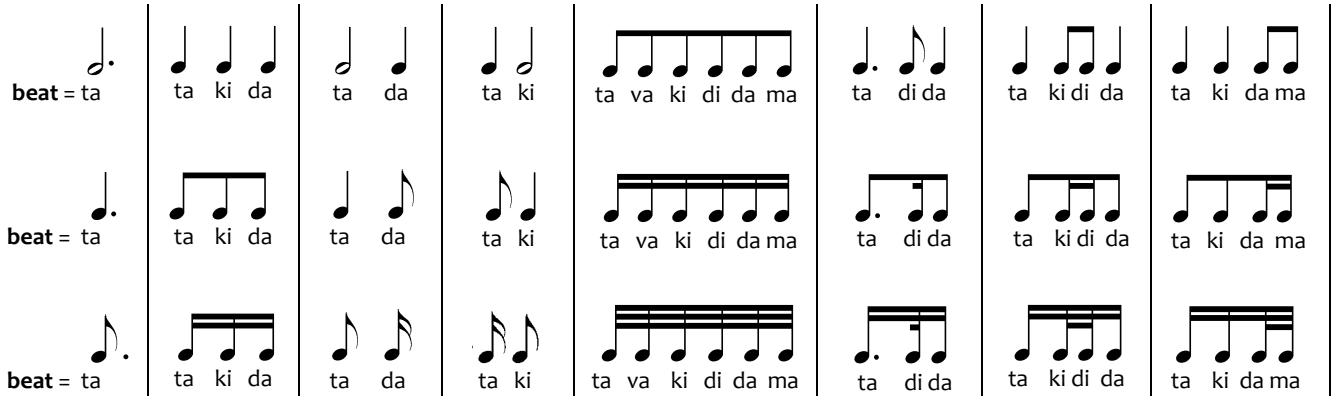
Examples (A *ta* in parentheses is not voiced but may be thought or "felt.")



Compound Meter — Compound meters have dotted beat notes, and the beat is always voiced with *ta*. The division and subdivision are always *ta-ki-da* and *ta-va-ki-di-da-ma*. Any dotted note value can be the beat. Three common values are shown.

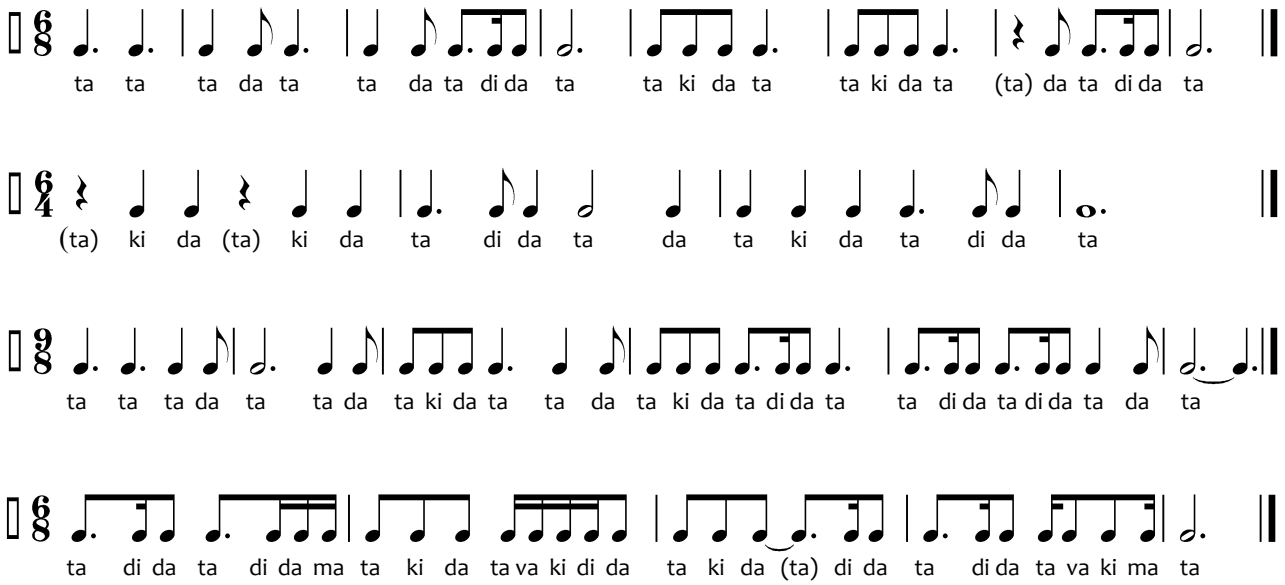


Common Patterns (beat-length)



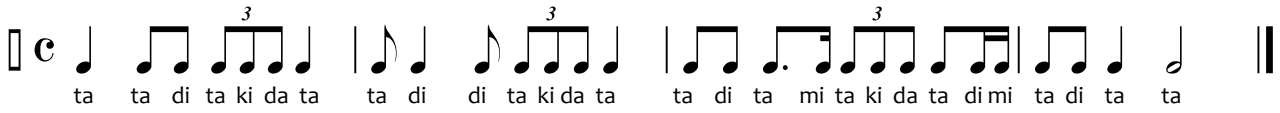
Additional patterns are possible. Some occur in the examples below.

Examples

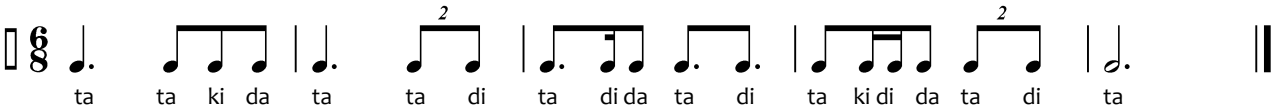


Advanced applications

Duplets and triplets — Use the same syllables for any division of the beat into two or three.

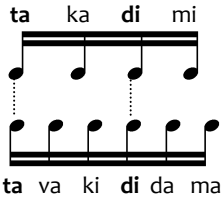


The duplet in m. 3 is performed just like the others in mm. 2 and 4. The syllable *di* falls at the midpoint of the beat in both simple and compound meter. A duplet can be written either way.

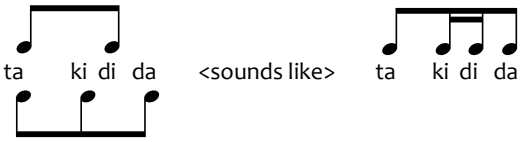


Two against three

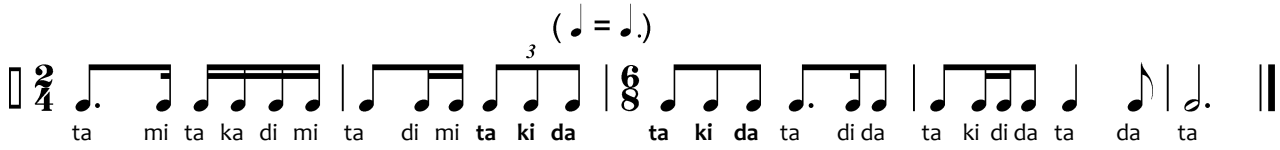
Ta and *di* align at the beginning and midpoint of the beat in both simple and compound meters. Rhythms that involve both simple and compound divisions will share this attack point.



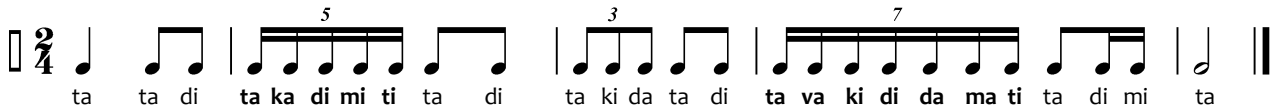
"Two against three" rhythms will produce the composite rhythm *ta-ki-di-da*. Work with the composite rhythm first, then emphasize the *ta-di* and *ta-ki-da* separately. Listening for the *ta-ki-di-da* composite will help ensure accuracy.



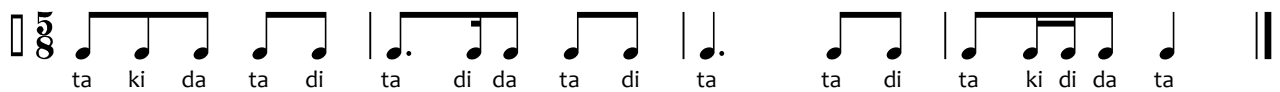
Changing meter — Changing meter can involve either the beat staying the same or the division staying the same. In this example the beat stays the same. Syllables can help make the distinction plain. The *ta-ki-da* triplet in m. 2 and the regular division of the beat in m. 3 will sound exactly alike.



Irregular divisions — To perform irregular divisions of the beat, add a syllable to a common pattern.



Asymmetric meters — Asymmetric meters combine simple and compound divisions. Keeping the divisions equal will produce beats of varied lengths.



Takadimi is helpful in teaching other advanced techniques including super-tuplets (triplets and duplets over more than one beat), 4:3 relationships, syncopations, and metric modulation.

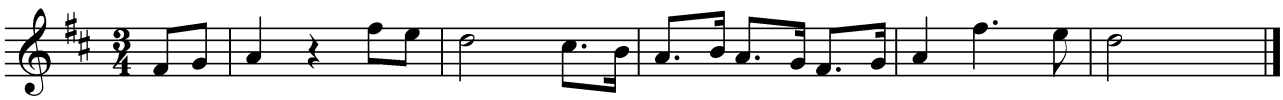
Rhythms for practice — Always practice rhythm with appropriate musical expression. Use vocal inflection to show lines and gestures.

1. Here's an example in simple meter. Can you improvise a second 4 measure phrase to go along with this one?

2. Cut time or "alla breve" indicates the half note gets the beat. In this case there are two half notes in a measure, so 2/2.

3. Perform the rhythm as a duet, or for a challenge, speak the top line on syllables and clap or tap the bottom line.

4. Reading rhythm from staff notation can be different from reading traditional rhythmic notation. Let the contour and melodic groupings suggest an expressive reading.



Teaching with Takadimi

Takadimi is beat-oriented and pattern based. The beat is always *ta* regardless of notation; the syllables help students learn common beat-length patterns. It can be used pre-notationally with preschool children and can help in learning highly complex rhythm throughout the college curriculum and beyond.

Takadimi is great for reading rhythm but it can also be used apart from notation. Try translating the rhythm of popular songs and jingles to takadimi syllables. "Call and response" games are a fun way to practice rhythm patterns and learn important musical skills at the same time. Improvising on syllables is a valuable learning tool. Improvise a short pattern—one or two measures, or even a phrase—then have a student improvise a response. Takadimi syllables encourage play, and play is a powerful learning tool.

The Rhythm Book, a comprehensive college-level rhythm textbook based on Takadimi is available. Contact Richard Hoffman at info@takadimi.net for more information. For an excellent guide to using Takadimi in the elementary classroom, see Micheal Houlahan and Philip Tacka, *Kodály Today: A Cognitive Approach to Elementary Music Education* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2008.

The ***Takadimi system*** of rhythm pedagogy was developed by Richard Hoffman, William Pelto, John W. White along with a number of colleagues at Ithaca College in the 1990s. More information on the system, its origins, and pedagogical rationale can be found in Hoffman, Pelto, and White, "Takadimi: A Beat-Oriented System of Rhythm Pedagogy," *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy*, 1996.

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