Blue Jello - A Delicious Way to Study Rhythm
by Michiko Yurko

Music students must study rhythm so they can independently and correctly interpret a musical score. To help reach this goal, Music Mind Games brings joyfulness and creativity to the process by circumventing three traditional pedagogical practices.

In many cases, students are taught rhythm using math, learning equations such as “two quarter notes equal one half note”. Understanding the mathematical relationships of notes and rests is essential, but this information alone can be difficult to translate into sound. To make this connection between math and music, Music Mind Games uses a friendly vocabulary of more than 30 words called Blue Jello (上班族 blue and jelo jello). These words are represented on cards using correctly spaced symbols to help students visualize the math behind the rhythms.

Many teachers introduce rhythm with single notes, rests and simple combinations. However, deferring the study of patterns such as triplets, sixteenth notes and quintuplets sends the unspoken message that they are difficult, even though they are not. Instead, Blue Jello uses a full assortment of rhythmic patterns from the beginning, which is similar to how children learn to speak. Parents worldwide talk freely without simplifying their speech, allowing children to absorb language naturally.

Rhythm is often taught in combination with melody. Yet with so much to comprehend, students typically focus less on the rhythm and more on finding the right pitches. Studying Blue Jello separately from melody or time signatures helps develop musicians who can read with rhythmic accuracy and fluency.

A Useful Vocabulary: Students of all ages are enthusiastically drawn to learn and study rhythms with Blue Jello. As they learn the Blue Jello words and hand signs and see the Blue Jello drawings, their natural reaction is to laugh with glee. They are proud of themselves for understanding how to decode various rhythmic symbols and quickly realize that even complex rhythms are not so difficult. Gaining confidence early enables them to tackle advanced concepts sooner than they would otherwise, which is inspiring for everyone involved.

In most cases, one word represents each note, rest and combination of notes. This helps the eye and ear group notes and rests correctly into beats, highlights rhythmic subtleties and demonstrates how rhythms fit within a musical pulse. As students read musical scores and play games with the blue jello cards (use these first), rhythm bingo cards*, real rhythm cards*, and Blue Jello rhythm puzzles*, the Blue Jello words become associated with their matching rhythmic patterns.

The words have been carefully chosen to fit the rhythms they represent and to bring smiles and laughter. Blue Jello words are modified slightly from regular speech to match their corresponding rhythms. Teachers should listen to their own voices and those of their students to ensure rhythmic accuracy. Students in non-English-speaking countries love the Blue Jello language. They are quick to learn the pronunciations, so translations are often unnecessary.

Stylized Symbols: Music Mind Games materials use stylized notes that direct students’ eyes to the parts of the notes that indicate rhythmic duration, making it remarkably easy for students to read rhythmic patterns.

Hand Signs: Blue Jello hand signs (上班族 = blue and = jelo jello) add a valuable kinesthetic element to enhance learning, just like Curwen hand signs help with pitch. Teachers can observe whether their students accurately see and remember how notes and rests are shaped. Hand signs are also excellent for developing finger dexterity, a useful side benefit for playing instruments. While using hand signs makes it easier to hear the spoken Blue Jello words, clapping rhythms can also be useful.

Drawings and Colors: Each Blue Jello word is represented by a drawing (上班族 = blue and = jelo jello) to provide humor and engage different learning styles. Eight rainbow colors match the eight main rhythmic values, making it easier to understand the notes and rests that are equal in value (see key on page 4).

Printed Music and Composition: A natural progression is to use Blue Jello to decode rhythms in scores. When Blue Jello is used for years as a tool to read music, tempos are more even, time signatures are understandable and tricky rhythmic sections are less tedious. Rhythmic dictation using Blue Jello words contribute to the ability to write rhythms in original compositions.

Applying Blue Jello is enjoyable and effective for musicians at all levels of music proficiency, building confidence and making it possible to truly understand rhythm.

Two Tips: (1) Rather than creating words for note combinations using 32nd and 64th notes, pretend the top beam isn’t there and use the appropriate Blue Jello words. (2) When ties occur, first say the rhythm as if the tie wasn’t there. Next, whisper the word “tie” in place of saying the Blue Jello word syllable. Lastly, hold the tied note and think the word “tie”.

A Useful Vocabulary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Card Type</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue Jello cards</td>
<td>Berrygoose huckleberry jel-lo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm bingo cards</td>
<td>Blue blue tie berry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real rhythm cards</td>
<td>Blue jello blue jello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Jello rhythm puzzles</td>
<td>Blue jello blue jello</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Blue Jello Vocabulary

- **huck**
- **lo**
- **blue**
- **two oo**
- **fo o o our**
- **blue u e**
- **jel-lo**
- **jel-lo jel-lo**
- **gooseberry**

**Key:**
- *move your index finger in rhythm to show the dot (not touching) and then (touching) to show the beam.*
- *move your finger in rhythm to show the beam (touching) and then to show the dot. Memory tip: The cookie is the dot, and it's outside the cookie jar.*
- *use the large slur from the real rhythm cards*
- *a whole rest is used in all meters for one measure of silence*