

## Evaluating Improvisation: A New Framework

Jeremy Siskind, Fullerton College

www.jeremysiskind.com

**Problem:** It's overwhelming or confusing to give students feedback on improvisation. Plus, they need to be evaluating themselves as they practice.

Performance v. Creation

*Melodic Phrasing:*                      *Repetitive – Organized yet Varied – Random*

*Melodic Note Choices:*              *Bland – Appropriate yet Colorful – Arbitrary*

**Scenario:** Improvising over a standard I – IV – V - I progression in a classical style

*Phrasing*

### Listening for:

- the existence of phrases with clear beginnings and endings
- variety of rhythmic units used
- variety in phrase beginnings/endings
- relationship of phrases with musical structure

<i>(Monotonous)</i>	<i>Organized</i>	<i>Varied</i>	<i>(Random)</i>
Unacceptable	(Acceptable)		Unacceptable

### Fixes:

- ask students to listen to themselves proactively (inner ear)
- teach phrase patterns (play one/rest one, play two/rest two, sentence, period)
- practice phrases with pickups
- have student sing improvisations

<i>(Monotonous)</i>	<i>Organized</i>	<i>Varied</i>	<i>(Random)</i>
Unacceptable	(Acceptable)		Unacceptable

*Melody: Notes – 4 Examples*

### Listening for:

- matching with chords
- using and resolving notes create tension
- is the number of chromatic notes stylistically appropriate?

<i>(Monotonous)</i>	<i>Organized</i>	<i>Varied</i>	<i>(Random)</i>
Unacceptable		(Acceptable)	Unacceptable

**Fixes:**

- ask students to listen to themselves reactively
- practice arpeggios that match the chords
- practice arpeggios ornamented by chromatic neighbors
- instruct students to fill in arpeggios with scales

*Melody: Shape*

**Listening for:**

- is there a mixture of (expressive) leaps and steps?
- are there changes of direction?
- are stylistically appropriate ornaments included?
- span

<i>(Monotonous)</i>	<i>Organized</i>	<i>Varied</i>	<i>(Random)</i>
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**Fixes:**

- draw different shapes for student melodies
- practice singing melodic phrases over a progression
- teach students about different possible hand shapes
- ask students to improvise “overusing” ornaments for the appropriate style

*Harmony*

- are there clear cadences or resting points?
- are non-diatonic chords like borrowed chords or secondary dominants incorporated?
- are there logical modulations

**Performance**

- balance
- pedal
- shaping (is improvisation flat?)
- timing – pausing, consistency?