

SML Curriculum 2025

Important Notes:

Every student's musical journey is different! Thus, this curriculum is more a loose overview of what, in my years of experience, is generally achieved or is considered a goal at each "level" of proficiency rather than a one-to-one guide of how a student must develop in every case. The student is not expected to progress through these sections in a linear progression; jumping from section to section is encouraged!

The many milestones in this curriculum are taught through building **repertoire**. It is our belief that learning songs – rather than repetitive exercises or drills – best develops musical skill and musical intuition.

There are currently no standardised tests at Spears Music Lessons. These various milestones in this curriculum are primarily intended to be used for self-assessment purposes. However, the student (or the parent of the student) can request an assessment from their teacher if they want to see where they are succeeding and where they can improve.

The Basics:

- Tuning the instrument,
- Basic technique for holding and playing the instrument properly,
- Necessary equipment and basic mechanical understanding of instrument,
- Role of instrument in a musical ensemble.

Starting To Play:

- Musical terms and concepts (ex. tempo, chords, harmony, melody, treble, bass, bars, time signatures, etc.),
- Basic musical structure,
- Reading classical notation, tablature, chord charts, and lead sheets,
- Naming notes and identifying their position on the instrument,
- Reading and feeling common rhythms and patterns in music,
- Developing strategies for learning songs and new concepts,
- Playing with dynamics,
- Diatonic harmony and scales (major and minor scales).

Building Musical Vocabulary:

- Learning wide ranges of songs across various genres,
- Common chord patterns across multiple genres,
- Common "stock" musical phrases used across various genres,
- Blues harmony and scales,
- Memorising and applying fundamental musical scales (major, minor, harmonic minor, and melodic minor),
- How to play off mistakes when they happen.

Building Understanding:

- Reading and feeling advanced rhythms with complex syncopation,
- Jazz harmony and scales,
- Incorporating and understanding chromaticism,
- Memorising and applying advanced chords, scales, and harmony,
- Basic improvisation,
- Playing live with other musicians.

Musical Proficiency:

- Playing by memory and by ear,
- Fluent improvisation,
- Extensive understanding and advanced usage of harmony, chords, structure, and rhythm,
- Playing with a full dynamic range,
- Improvising live with other musicians,
- Full technical control over the instrument (can freely express self on instrument and understands personal strengths and limitations).

Active Listening / Ear Training:

- Developing an attuned musical ear (learning songs by ear, “mixing” self when playing in a group, able to tune instrument by ear, etc.),
- Learning how different musical choices evoke different emotion and applying those choices to playing and/or writing,
- Learning to associate songs and memorable musical phrases with chords, notes, and intervals,
- Learning to reproduce chords, notes, and intervals heard on instrument.

Specialty Focus:**Writing Music:**

- Learning how to best preserve musical ideas,
- Learning how to use music theory to write compelling music,
- Learning how to arrange songs,
- Learning how to produce music and to compliment songs with production elements,
- Learning how to use structure creatively and effectively in music,
- Learning how to write complimentary parts in songs,
- Learning how to complete songs.