

***th atw a squ iteas imp les enten cebu ti tsh ar dt ore ad***

You can understand that tangle of letters, I'll bet. Because you've encountered this odd concept in a Music Education forum, you were quick to crack the code. Here, you're shepherded toward recognizing a puzzle, a gimmick, or a hidden message. Your deciphering was expedited because of the *context*:

***That was quite a simple sentence but it's hard to read.***

Yes, context clues can guide you, but fluency in music performance requires more than context. We musicians read notation that's been standardized over centuries, and we've learned to recognize rhythmic figures more easily when the beaming identifies "beat-groups". But unusual beaming – like regrouping and spaces between the letters in the sentence shown above – can create tricky rhythm-reading.

*Fluency* in music performance (and therefore our connection to the listener) requires more than just good rhythmic reading. So, I invented this exercise for myself more than thirty years ago, and I continue to use strategies like this in guest-conducting appearances. It turns on the 'artistic light-bulb' by providing guidance toward something greater than "performing perfect notes in perfect rhythm."

Start by displaying this text (or a similar innovative adaptation of your own):

**Them - Us – I  
(CIA) Nmu: Stk  
Nowh Owtoog Ro  
Upno ... Teswit  
Hart is, Try?**

Students will (eventually) notice it, and the inquisitive ones among them will start to ponder its meaning. Feel free to prompt the group with words like, "*This is why we're here. THIS is our goal, and THIS is how we'll create a moving performance. Oh, if you've already figured it out, don't reveal the answer! Come see me on a break; I'll let you know if you're correct. For now, let's just explore the music together...*"

Then you'll just proceed with your rehearsal as you normally do, working to shape phrases, avoid poorly-placed breaths and spaces, highlight important points-of-arrival and other interpretive measures.

When you feel you've addressed your favorite interpretive topics, reveal the 'secret' by displaying the new version:

**The musician must know  
how to group notes with artistry.**

I'm sure you'll conceive *so* many innovative follow-up activities of your own once you've seen how students react to this simple activity. If you'd like some more inspiration, refer to my book – Chapter 9, "*The Intangibles*" – for a sample "scripted" lesson plan. I share the next two pages (posters) to save you some valuable time: just print & display, or copy-paste into your classroom Google Slides or PowerPoint. *Have fun!*



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