

Brain Breaks for the Lead Guitar Classroom

Brain Breaks are short activities that should be done every 30-60 minutes during classroom instruction. These activities help to get students out of their seats and engage in physical activity which will enable them to focus better and be more engaged in learning activities. Depending on the time of day when we see students for guitar class, they could have spent anywhere from 1-6 hours of their day sitting in a classroom! Utilizing these breaks helps to break up the monotony of a school day or class.

HUGE PDF full of Brain Break ideas. This one has a Table of Contents on page 9 that can be helpful.

<https://www.coloradoedinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/CEI-Take-a-Break-Teacher-Toolbox.pdf>

Another giant PDF has more Brain Breaks than you could use in an entire year. Various grade levels. Some have video examples.

http://www.msmspe.com/uploads/4/7/1/1/47116129/brain_break_ideas_for_teachers.pdf

Three Minute Brain Breaks for younger grades:

<https://minds-in-bloom.com/20-three-minute-brain-breaks/>

Shakeout - All Ages - submitted by Nick Lenio

Best used as an “energizer”. Participants stand up. We will use all four limbs to “shake out”. First, the right arm goes up in the air and you shake your right hand, then left arm, then right leg, then left leg. As you shake out each limb, ALL participants loudly and quickly count to a number (5, for example) and as you move to the next limb, you count again. After doing all four limbs, you go back to the where you started but now only counting to 4. Continue all the way to one.

Example:

RH - 12345 LH - 12345 RL - 12345 LL - 12345

RH - 1234 LH - 1234 RL - 1234 LL - 1234

RH - 123 LH - 123 RL - 123 LL - 123

Etc...

This is most effective when done loud, fast, and energetically! It is also fun to use other languages, count down instead of up, by 2's, or any other variation you can think of.

Bear, Ninja, Hunter - All Ages - Submitted by Nick Lenio

This is a twist on rock paper scissors. Partner up, partners stand back to back facing away from each other. Count "1 2 3 GO!" and jump, spinning around to face each other. When you land, you are in one of three poses:

Bear - mean face, arms/hands up like claws

Ninja - your best fake karate stance

Hunter - I've utilized a "bow and arrow" motion to avoid pointing "gun" fingers at each other. If you are uncomfortable utilizing the Hunter, feel free to brainstorm another idea here.

Bear beats Ninja

Ninja beats Hunter

Hunter beats Bear

Zhivko Nikolov-

1. I tend to use clapping exercises to reset the atmosphere in the room when I see that students need a break.

I also make it competitive if I see students are into it. Very often I would stick to a rhythm we have just played a minute ago, or are about to play after the game is over. Also, I tend to escalate the difficulty of those exercises and I spend about 3 minutes doing the entire activity. The rhythm I demonstrate does not have to be something we have, or will study any time soon. I focus on the feel rather than the theory for those exercises.

2. Another idea would be playing a piece, which I know is a strategy we all use, or talking about emotion through music using Major vs Minor key relationships.

3. Telling a funny story about music from a personal experience always works too.

Would You Rather? - All Ages - Submitted by David Sewell

In this "game" the teacher will take two scenarios, both of which should be pretty ridiculous, and then have the students vote on which is the lesser of the two evils or which would be the most fun to do. Here's some possible ways/examples to incorporate/apply this to guitar:

1. If you are working on "Twinkle Twinkle" ask the students, "Would you rather play this with your eyes closed? Or would you rather play this only using your index finger?" Let everyone discuss and then take it to a vote. Whichever vote wins, the whole class will have to attempt the ridiculous scenario.
2. If you are working on "Ode to Joy" ask the students, "Would you rather play this backwards? Or would you rather sing it forward?"

The possibilities are vast and the more ridiculous the better and more fun the class will have. It will take some creative thinking and ideas by the teacher to keep it going, but it has some fun potential.

Buddy System - All ages but probably more suited for med-adv - Submitted by David Sewell

Buddy System (We can change the name, it was my first thought) would require students to partner up into groups of two. One student would be the left hand and one would be the right hand. The two students would then have to play only using one guitar. One would pluck the strings and one would fret the notes.

This could help students better understand and become more aware of what they are actually doing when playing whatever piece they are working on. They will be able to focus solely on the mechanics of whatever hand they are assigned to. It could be a great practice tool for everyone as well as a fun challenge.

Hear It, Clap It, Write it - All Ages - Submitted by David Sewell

This is a game designed to work on rhythms and dictation skills with students. Here's the general procedure to this game:

The teacher would instruct everyone to take out a pencil and paper. While the class is doing this the teacher can write out a rhythm on a sheet of paper that the students can't see or use a rhythm from an upcoming piece the class will be working on.

The teacher would give the time signature and a count off and then proceed to clap the rhythm. You can clap it twice or how ever many times you desire all while letting them take notes/dictations.

I think it would be fun to hear what the whole class has dictated after the second go of clapping. Have everyone try to clap what they have written all together and see if everyone matches up. Most likely most of the class will be off when everyone tries to clap together and everyone will get a good laugh.

Give them a few more listens to help them try to get it down. You could also ask the class "who thinks they have this rhythm written perfectly?" and give them a chance to show the class. After a few more tries, more than likely most of the students will have it down or close.

It seems like a great way to get them to understand rhythm in a deeper manner. Rather than just knowing for example, what a half note is, this will help them use their ear and also write it down, which is a whole other skill set than just knowing the note values themselves.

Animal Sounds- All ages- Submitted by Freddy V

This could be done more as a game at the end of the class or beginning. It will require space to move around. A circle is formed with the class and one student is in the middle. Student in the middle has eyes closed and the circle of students move around. Student in the middle says "Stop" and points to a student (still having eyes closed). Then Student in the middle asks the pointed student to make an animal sound (can use the animals of the Song of the Wild

book) and then guesses the name of that student. If the student in the middle guesses right, then they switch, but if the guess is wrong then another round continues.

Circle Count- for middle/highschool- Freddy V

This could help to center the class or unify them. Never done it with younger students because it may be too complicated for them.

Class huddles together in a circle, everyone has eyes close or is staring down to the ground. The objective is to count consecutively from 1 to whatever amount of students in the class. But only one person can say a number at a time. If multiple people say a number or talk at the same time then we have to restart. Absolutely no discussion or planning of who says what during when. Goal is to practice mindfulness.