

How to Teach a Song by Rote

Prepare at Home

By preparing ahead of time, you will be better equipped to teach the song. Listen to recordings or study a score. Choose a simple verse or chorus that you intend to teach and break it into smaller parts (consider the phrasing, melodic and rhythmic patterns, etc). You should be able to sing the song comfortably before teaching it to the group.

Teach the Song to the Group using Call-and-Response

To teach the song to the group, first sing the song (or the part of the song you intend to teach) in its entirety. Then use **call-and-response**: sing one phrase or part of a phrase and have the group echo you. Repeat as needed.

Other Strategies

If the song or certain parts of it are particularly challenging, consider these additional strategies:

Chant the Rhythm

Keeping a steady beat on your lap, chant the rhythm on a neutral syllable such as 'da'. Use call-and-response. Repeat as needed.

Sing the Melody

Sing the melody on a neutral syllable such as 'doo'. Use call-and-response. Repeat as needed.

Speak the Text

Speak the text in rhythm. Use call-and-response. Repeat as needed.

INTRODUCE THE SONG

Invite a volunteer to introduce their song and tell their story. Listen mindfully. Allow space for conversations. Allow other stories to emerge. With permission from the participants, record the stories and responses.

Sing or play a recording of the song

If the volunteer feels comfortable doing so, have them sing the song. If not, play a recording of it. Ask the volunteer how they feel upon hearing it again. Does it conjure any memories for others in the group? Record the responses. Talk about the song: Who wrote or performed it? What is it about? What does it mean?

Repeat

Sing or play the song again. Invite the group to tap or sway to the beat and hum along.

TEACH THE SONG

Teach the Song by Rote

Rote learning is based on listening, imitating and repeating. Teaching a song by rote is an excellent way to help your group develop listening skills and work on technique. It encourages auditory memory without requiring any formal musical training or musical literacy making it accessible to everyone.

Depending on the comfort level of the individual who chose the song, they may be willing to teach the song or may instead wish to have the facilitator do it. In either case, refer to the how-to guide in the sidebar for guidance. Depending on the song and depending on the group, you may wish to provide lyric sheets. In the beginning, try shorter, simpler songs or consider learning just one verse or the chorus.