



Step 5: CREATE

Top Three Tips for Success

by Betsy Greene

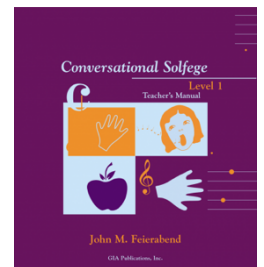
If you are like me, the Feierabend Approach completely changed my teaching and my students. And yet, after thirty plus years using this approach, whenever I talk shop with other like-minded colleagues, I always find they feel the same about using the Feierabend Approach and discover many of us have had similar challenges along the way. Step 5 is no exception.

Sometimes it is Step 5 itself that hangs up our students and sometimes it is the journey we took to get there. The three suggested tips below are what I have found to be the most helpful when coaching teachers to more success at Step 5. These are also regular parts of my practice which have made significant improvements to reaching Step 5 with joy and ease for both me and my students.

Tip #1: Choosing the Techniques: Start Simple, Then More Complex

We all know the 12 Steps in Conversational Solfege are the learning sequence which provide the structure to bring students to mastery using standard Western classical notation. More importantly, the techniques used at each step are specifically what develop student skill and understanding at each of those 12 steps. In other words, the 12 Steps would be unable to function without the techniques. They are the “fuel that makes the engine run.”¹

Because the techniques are so paramount to learning in Conversational Solfege, choosing which one to use and when may play a role in both the ease and depth of learning for your students. Consideration for which technique to use may have many nuances - age of students, student experience, past or present literacy objective, amount of time in the lesson, etc. Below is an easy chart of my favorite “go to” techniques to help guide your technique choices for a present and/or past literacy objective for Step 5. The page numbers listed are from Feierabend's book *Conversational Solfege, Level 1, Teacher's Manual* (2001) GIA Publications, Inc: Chicago, IL.



The techniques suggested for **present** literacy objectives are ones that, in my experience, are the ones that bring the most success to students of all age levels when making their first attempts at Step 5 with new rhythm or tonal content. They have a simplicity for both teacher and student (not a lot of need for explanation on how to play) which brings an ease to the learning. Eventually, I choose other techniques as students gain skill and mastery. These techniques also may serve as what I call my “back pocket techniques.”² These are techniques the students will become familiar with and ones I will consistently use to introduce Step 5 at each new unit. They are always in my back pocket to pull out when I need them. This will facilitate learning by using a known simple technique with the new rhythm or tonal content at Step 5.

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The techniques suggested for **past** literacy objectives are ones I like to use as jumping off points for student-created group music making experiences like performing an ostinato accompaniment while singing or developing a B section for performance with a song. These are perfect for revisiting past objectives and they develop more skill as a music artist by deepening students' understanding of how their improvisation fits into the group music making experience. Besides, how fun is it for students to use what they created in their music making!

Type of Unit	Present Literacy Objective	Past Literacy Objective
Rhythm	Think for Yourself p. 30 Question/Answer p. 30	Question/Answer (Later) p. 30 Take a Conversational Walk p.32 Cooperative Creation p. 34 Body Percussion Ostinato Patterns p.34
Tonal	Think for Yourself p. 36 Question/Answer p. 36	Question/Answer (Later) .36 Creative Cooperation p. 38 Create Over a Drone p. 37 Create Over an Ostinato p. 37 (for older students)

For use with a present literacy objective means students are using the rhythm or tonal content of the **current unit of study for the first time** in an improvisatory way or at Step 5. It is the introduction to creating.

For use with a past literacy objective means students are using the rhythm or tonal content of a **past unit of study** in an improvisatory way or at Step 5. They are building on and strengthening their previous skill at Step 5 for that rhythm or tonal content.

Tip #2: Individual Response with Assessment

We know from *Conversational Solfege* that most learning takes place when students respond individually. Crunched for time or having students less than eager to respond by themselves, many teachers take the appropriate group response at Steps 2-4 as the singular evidence that all students are ready to move onto the next step and eventually Step 5. However, regularly allowing opportunities for individual response with recorded assessment at every step is truly the best way for teachers to make the decisions about moving on to the next step. Please note that recorded assessment means the teacher writes down or records the assessment score.

When not ready for Step 5, students' improvisation attempts will feel stilted, difficult, and slow and will require the teacher to go back to previous steps to remedy. Student responses at Step 5 (and every step) should feel easy, fluent, and flow. Again, intentional and regular opportunities for individual responses with assessment throughout the previous steps is paramount for you to know when your students are ready for Step 5 (pacing) and to be able to bring that ease, joy, and seamlessness to student learning at Step 5.

Simple things I do to make individual responses with assessment a regular part of my classroom practice:

1. A seating chart with a corresponding assessment chart.

Old school, yes. Still works. Just like in First Steps in Music, individual response with assessment during the Fragment Singing part of the workout takes very little time. This can be the same for each step in the Conversational Solfege Stage of the 12 Steps by having a seating chart with a corresponding assessment chart. In this way, I use the simplified rubrics found in the Teacher's Edition of *Conversational solfege, Level 1* and record each individual response quickly as I move through each student.

2. Making individual responses with recorded assessment a **HABIT**.

Sometimes easier said than done. Make a new resolution to have students individually respond for one present literacy objective at one step with a recorded assessment in each lesson and see where it takes you. Check back in a month to self-reflect on how it may have impacted your teaching and your students' learning.

3. Assess only one present literacy objective from one step per class.

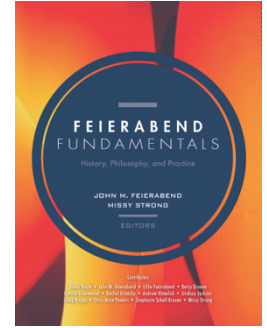
Typically, a *Conversational Solfege* lesson will involve a couple of consecutive steps with multiple present literacy objectives. Prioritize which individual present literacy assessment will be the most informative to you for deciding the pace and movement on to the next step. It would be overwhelming and too much to individually assess and record each present literacy objective at every step presented in a lesson.

4. Use the first or second technique presented at each Step in the techniques chapter of the

Conversational Solfege, Level 1, Teacher's Manual (2001) for your assessment to keep it simple and quick. For instance, technique "Spell This" for Step 3-4: Decode rhythm will take less than 2 minutes to get through an entire class. The same will be true for "Think for Yourself" for Step 5. Simply require each student to make a different pattern than the person before and then record using the simplified rubrics found in the assessment chapter in *Conversational Solfege, Level 1, Teacher's Edition (2001)*.

5. Gradually transition from group to individual responses.

If your students are new to individual responses or have been hesitant to respond individually, try sensitizing them to less and less sound using this teaching sequence I have adapted from Lillie Feierabend for use in *First Steps in Music*. It will help you build the classroom environment necessary to give students safety, confidence, and eventual independence. Lillie's teaching sequence can be found in more detail in Chapter 5 of the *Feierabend Fundamentals: History, Philosophy, and Practice* (2018).



Adaptation of Sensitizing for Less and Less Sound at Step 5:

1. Using the *Think for Yourself* technique for a rhythm or tonal unit, have all students think then simultaneously speak or sing their individual created responses. It will be cacophony. Repeat, but require them to make their next response different from what they previously said.
2. Another day, use the same technique by inviting groups of students to say their individual created response at the same time. Then invite smaller groups to respond individually - those students wearing red, those who like pizza, etc.
3. Another day, repeat the second step. Eventually, invite students to respond individually. You can also use the *Question/Answer* technique this way.

Tip #3: Find ways to make student creating a regular part of their classroom music making.

Nothing is more empowering than creating your own music and performing it. Finding ways for your students to use what they create in their classroom music making experiences will add more dimension to their growth as a music artist and bring more meaning to what they are learning. This is the main reason I like to often use Step 5 for my past literacy objective.

Here are a few easy ways to bring student-created responses into their classroom music making activities:

1. Use a student created rhythm pattern as a rhythmic ostinato to accompany any song, rhyme or chant. Have students chant the pattern while others sing or speak.
2. For older students only, transfer their rhythm pattern to an instrument/instruments or body percussion to accompany any song, rhyme, or chant.
3. Use the Creative Cooperation Technique or Question/Answer technique to develop a new section to a any song, chant, or rhyme to create form AB or ABA
4. Use the Creative Cooperation Technique or Question/Answer technique to develop an introduction or coda to any song, chant, or rhyme.

If you find yourself needing further clarification or have questions regarding any aspect of the Conversational Solfege 12-step approach to music reading or the teacher curriculum manual discussed herein, we encourage you to join the Facebook group "Feierabend Fundamentals." This vibrant community boasts over 12,000 members ready and willing to assist by answering questions or directing you towards additional clarifying podcasts and webinars.

Bibliography

Feierabend, J. *Conversational Solfege, Level 1, Teacher's Manual* (2001). GIA Publications: Chicago, IL.

Feierabend, J. and Strong, M. *Feierabend Fundamentals: History, Philosophy, and Practice* (2018). GIA Publications: Chicago, IL.

Betsy Greene teaches in Burlington, Vermont where she is the music teacher and choral director for Champlain Elementary School (K-5). Betsy earned her undergraduate degree in music education from the Crane School of Music (SUNY Potsdam) and her Master's Degree in Music Education under Dr. John Feierabend from the former Hartt School of Music (currently the Hartt School) at the University of Hartford, CT. She holds her Kodály certification from the Hartt School and her Orff-Schulwerk Levels I-III from the University of St. Thomas. In 1998, she received the Outstanding Arts Advocate Award from the past Vermont Arts Alliance and, then in 2008, the Music Educator of the Year Award from the Vermont Music Educators Association. Betsy is a founding member of the Feierabend Association for Music Education (FAME) having served as Member-at-Large and President (2017-2019). She is a frequent presenter of workshops and graduate courses as a FAME endorsed teacher trainer and a specialist for integrating the Feierabend Approach with Orff Schulwerk. Betsy is a co-author for *First Steps in Music with Orff Schulwerk: Sing, Say, Dance, Play* (GIA Publications, 2017) and a contributing author for the *Feierabend Fundamentals: History, Philosophy, and Practice* (GIA Publications, 2018).

