

Handbell Lesson Plan

Health and safety (of the bells & humans)

1. Explain why it is necessary to be consistent in always holding the handles with the rivet in a certain way – it reduces the strain on leather handles if not continually being bent one way and then the other.
2. Explain why the bells 'at rest' are not stood on their mouth/clapper – to reduce the likelihood of damage to the spring holding the clapper in the bell.
3. A convenient and safe way to place the bells 'at rest' is on a chair/table (not the floor where they could be kicked) and with their handles interlocked – rotate one handle through 90° and thread it through the other handle, finally reverse the rotation to lock the bells and prevent them rolling off the surface.
4. Posture – feet flat, back straight and resting knuckles on knees after the down stroke – all to reduce neck/shoulder strain.

Basic Handling

1. Ringing up (handstroke) and down (backstroke) and rhythm in rounds.
2. Don't double clapper – the upstroke to be flipped right over so the mouth of the bell is facing the ringer's chest.
3. Open handstrokes at the lead.
4. Counting the sounds of the bells and anticipating your place.

Rhythm

1. The importance of natural rhythm. Handbells have no intrinsic rhythm – if the ringer hasn't got rhythm then there is no hiding that fact (unlike tower bells).
2. Establish if the student has rhythm – ring fast rhythmic (hopefully) rounds. If this is a struggle then play some tunes to help establish rhythm and use handclapping to reinforce counting place/rhythm, then try again.
3. Rounds on 6. Write it out and then ring rounds *rhythmically*.
4. Swap two bells, write it out and then ring it *rhythmically*.
5. If your student is not an experienced tower bell ringer discuss the place of the swapped bells.
6. Listen to some good handbell ringing.

7. Hear the rhythm of even handstroke sounds then backstroke sounds then a gap, repeat.
8. Clap the rhythm.

The theory of Plain Hunt on 6 – one bell at a time

1. Explain/remind (depending on whether you are teaching an inexperienced/experienced tower bell ringer) the theory of Plain Hunt Minor – from rounds, the next row has 3 pairs swap, in the next row front and back bells make a place and the 2 internal pairs swap, in the next row 3 pairs swap, then front and back make a place again with just 2 internal pairs swapping, then 3 pairs swap, etc. until rounds are achieved again.

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X X X
I X X I
X X X
I X X I
  
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2. Colour the line of any one bell as part of a course of Plain Hunt. Use a different colour to pick out another bell. Explain they are all describing the same pattern they have just started somewhere different on the 'circuit' – much like singing 'London's Burning'.
3. Explain 'front of the change' and 'back of the change'. Explain that it is called hunting up to the back' but hunting down to the front. Explain what is meant by 'lie behind' and 'lead'.
4. Up, down and away. There is no long draught to negotiate – so handbell ringers are expected to achieve perfect rounds *straight away* and then immediately off into the method. Ring the handstroke in rounds, the backstroke in rounds and then the next handstroke starts the method.
5. From rounds, show how the ringer must leave more time to allow for an extra bell to sound when hunting up and conversely the ringer must ring quicker when hunting down as there is one fewer bell to sound between their consecutive strokes. A line | depicts steady ringing, leading or lying (after sounding once allow 5 others to ring before sounding again). A line sloping \ depicts slow ringing, (6 others sound). A line sloping / depicts quick ringing, (only 4 sound).
6. Line up your ringers and get them to walk the Plain Hunt on 6. Every time they arrive in a new place they should ring one stroke of their bell. Ringers/walkers moving up to the back should walk behind the ringers moving down to the front. Eventually the routine is established of ring upstroke, move to new place, ring downstroke, move to new place, ring upstroke (handstroke), move to new place, ring downstroke (backstroke) – and the exercise assumes a ballet-like choreographed exercise. If anyone is looking vague then tie a ribbon around the wrist of the most competent student and repeat with the students who are unsure sitting out and watching the ribbon progress up and down the change.

This should bring non-method ringing students up to speed with their method ringing colleagues.