

# Rainbow Harp for Students with Dyslexia

Using the Rainbow Harp for students with dyslexia requires that the practitioner has some musical background or has taught themselves through the Rainbow Harp materials before attempting to teach students. We recommend at the very least going through all of the videos in our resources area to make sure hand techniques are correct.

Luckily the Rainbow Method is straightforward and practitioners, whatever their prior musical experience, can teach themselves in preparation for working with students with dyslexia.

The Rainbow Method was created by a dyslexic harper as a way to enable herself to continue learning. The principle is simple. The strings are coloured and the notes are coloured. If the note on the page is green then the student plays the green note.

Dyslexia is a spectrum, the materials below will cover how to use the harp with varying levels of impairment.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE:** teaching students with dyslexia note lengths, time signatures and accents, as well as their positions, is too much visual auditory information!

With this in mind, it is essential that the student becomes very familiar with the sound of the piece they are going to learn before they begin to learn it. Play it to them many times so they can hear the rhythm and note lengths and any accents without having to visually process it into auditory information.

## Severe impairment

With students who struggle to access anything on the page and who cannot follow sequencing we recommend using A4 sized pieces of coloured card. The practitioner can then hold up the cards one at a time. The basic principle being when they practitioner holds up the red piece of card, the student plays a red string. A blue card and blue string, and so on. The practitioner would need to pre stack the cards in the order of the desired tune, and make sure they move at the speed of the student even if that impairs the timing of the tune itself. This technique minimises visual clutter and needs no sequencing skills. For students with faster reaction times but who still struggle with sequencing, the same can be done by using a tablet PC. Create a full screen colour slide show in the sequence of a melody. This technique can be very useful for students with sequencing difficulties to join in on simple accompaniments in the school orchestra.

If the practitioner is confident playing the Rainbow Harp themselves, one of the most empowering ways to use the above techniques is for the practitioner to accompany the student by playing two or three finger chords along with them. This may need a third person holding up the cards. The great thing is that the practitioner playing the harp can also use the cards to remember which chords to play. Please see the PMLD information sheet for basic chords and harp techniques.

Alternatively the practitioner can play a melody on the harp and the student can play a few accompanying single notes. This can be harder due to timing.

## Moderate

For students with moderate impairment, who are beginning to follow some sequencing, we recommend starting by printing large dots on a page of A4 in landscape orientation. Start with just 4 notes, to represent one bar. This minimises the visual distraction but still demands following a sequence. Start by pointing at the dots to help them move along in the right direction.

Building on this: The practitioner should begin to only point when the student loses their place, as a prompt.

When a student is comfortable with four notes on each card you can see if 8 notes (with a vertical line in-between each four) is manageable. Follow the same method by pointing and then just prompting. When this is achieved you can add another 4 notes. If a student can manage 16 notes with vertical lines separating each set of four then they are ready to move onto coloured sheet music.

When starting with coloured sheet music, print it nice and big. The student is already used to following the colours in a line and having the bar lines grouping the notes. The only major change is that the notes sit on horizontal lines and are not in a straight line.

We recommend taking any un-necessary markings off the page such as treble clef, time signature and sharps and flats to begin with.

Once a student can follow basic sheet music it gives them a feeling of real achievement. It also allows them to play independently and practice at home.

## Mild

For students in mainstream education who have dyslexia and who are otherwise neuro typical, we recommend that the Rainbow Harp is taught to them by music teachers. Piano and harp teachers would be able to adapt to using this with students very easily. If the student is 12 years or above they could teach themselves using the Rainbow Technique, with an emphasis on hand health.

A student with mild dyslexia can use the Rainbow Harp just like any other student would use an instrument. The only difference is that the colour of the strings match the colour of the notes on the page.

A student must listen to the piece they are about to learn plenty of times before beginning to learn it. This allows them to use all their visual auditory processing on the note position.

## Introducing two hands

When it becomes tricky is when the student is ready to progress to using 2 hands. This will require them to either memorise the combination of strings one bar at a time or follow two lines of notes.

Most students with dyslexia will find it extremely difficult to follow two visual lines at the same time. They will, however, be able to memorise it chunk for chunk. Students with dyslexia have been using memory to hide the extent of their disability for years, this coping skill comes in very handy when progressing to two hands on the harp.

Don't start a student off with a complicated arrangement! We recommend practitioners teach the student the basics of chords. Teach two and three finger chords and even four if they are ready.

Then simply get them to match the chords to the notes they are playing on the top hand. This takes visual processing away from the page. A student with dyslexia will in most cases be able to memorise a melody using only one hand. Once they have done this the introduction of adding supporting chords is the next logical step.

Information on a page can seem so abstract to students with dyslexia, that is why we recommend teaching the left (or bass) hand using a much more hands-on approach.

***ABRSM and Trinity have both approved the Rainbow Harp for their exams should a student with dyslexia choose to do their grades.***

Trinity are also offering video exams which is very useful for students with anxiety.

## Composition

Students with dyslexia are often known for their creativity. For these students, learning pieces of music alone may not ignite their passion. We highly recommend exploring composition with them.

Allow them creative music time in a quiet room with a set of coloured pencils (to match the colours of the strings) and some blank paper. Let them explore their instrument and their relationship with it. Encourage them to group their notes in groups of 4 and draw a vertical line to break them up. The results can be astounding.

If a student composes a piece of music, we offer a sheet music service. Just send us a video of the student playing their piece and we can convert it into standard or rainbow sheet music.

The Rainbow Harp should allow a student with mild dyslexia to progress just like any other student and remove some of the major barriers to becoming a great musician.