

20 Questions

Music Fundamentals

Game by Rachael Rule & Frank Nawrot, 2025

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Score excerpt(s) visible to all students, e.g., printed handouts or projection of excerpts.

DESCRIPTION

The classic game of **20 Questions** with a musical twist.

STEP BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS

1. A student is chosen to be the **answerer**, and all other students will be **questioners**.
2. The instructor or answerer chooses a score excerpt.
3. The answerer picks an object present in the score and secretly informs the instructor of the object for approval (e.g., staccato, bass clef, E3 whole note, D major triad, etc.).
4. Questioners will now take turns asking a single question to which the answer must be “yes” or “no.”
5. The answerer must answer each question with a “yes” or a “no.” Lying is not allowed.
6. If a questioner guesses the chosen object or asks a question that reveals the object on or before the 20th question, that person wins the game and may become the answerer for a new round.
7. If 20 questions are asked without a correct guess, the answerer may pick a new object and repeat the game until the questioners reveal the object or the session is over.

CONSIDERATIONS

- The pedagogical utility of this activity is encouraging students to carefully examine scores focusing on specific domains and the score holistically, thus increasing their confidence and faculties in performance, conducting, and analysis situations in which score-reading is critical.
- The instructor may require more-or-less specificity from questioners to achieve a correct answer depending on the object. For example, a fortissimo marking is a clearcut object, but if an approved object is a half note B ♭ 5, you have to decide if you require the questioner to accurately guess the octave designation, the pitch class, the rhythm, or all of these qualities.

- It's okay if an object appears more than once in a score excerpt, but the instructor may choose to require that the questioner pick the specific instance of an object the answerer chose.
- The answerer must have their object approved by the instructor to ensure that the object isn't too arcane (such as the period after the middle initial of a composer's name).
- It would be wise to do a practice run of the game before the first session to help students understand how to approach crafting questions. For example, a simple but effective question could be "is the object a note?" Now the questioners will know if the object is not a note or not and they can craft their following questions accordingly. This is also an opportunity to discuss any limitations you want to put on the game, such as disallowing turning vertical simultaneities such as chords or intervals into a single object.
- Over the course of a session, be sure that every student has at least one opportunity to devise a question to pose to the answerer.
- An instructor may allow more or less than 20 questions to be asked.