

# The Music Makers: An Introduction to Being a DJ

*First course, Fourth grading period, Week three*

Many people in radio produce music shows. Being a DJ can be fun for the announcer but to make it entertaining for the audience, the DJ has to step outside the glamour and learn to provide a full, diverse show. To do that well, students have to learn the basics of planning, research, play-list development, announcing and on-air presentation. These lessons teach students the basics and introduce some extra on-air options so each student can begin to develop an on-air sound.



## Enduring Understanding

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Being a DJ includes many responsibilities on and off the air. Planning an interesting musical presentation means more than grabbing a few favorite CDs. These skills are transferable to other types of feature and talk programming.



## Essential Questions

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What are the skills required of a radio DJ? What are the responsibilities of a DJ?



## Objective and Outcomes

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- Students will understand the requirements and responsibilities of a DJ.
- Students will plan and execute a short music show and be familiar with different on-air presentation styles.



## Suggested Time

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One week



## Resources and Materials

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- Life as a Radio Disc Jockey ([www.techieteens.net/dj.htm](http://www.techieteens.net/dj.htm))
- Pre-selected music shows recorded off the air or from music Web sites
- CDs available from the library
- XM radio's music shows (includes a wide range of music — of the 40s, 50s, 60s — and genres such as folk and rock)
- Archived programs of "Adventures in Good Music," hosted by Karl Haas ([www.wclv.com/skin/blurp.php?sectionId=180&contentId=24804](http://www.wclv.com/skin/blurp.php?sectionId=180&contentId=24804))
- "ASCAP Radio Licenses," The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers ([www.ascap.com/licensing/radio/](http://www.ascap.com/licensing/radio/))
- Pronouncing Dictionary of Music and Musicians (<http://iowapublicradio.org/dictionary/>)
- "Music Programming," Radio Production, pages 187-186
- "Music Announcing," Chapter Nine, Broadcast Announcing Worktext



## Procedure

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1. Ask students to name their favorite DJs. List the five most listened-to DJs on the board. After each name, list the attributes of the person and characteristics of the show that students find appealing. You might have a third column on the board where you and your students classify the approach of the DJ and style of music programming.

Does the list reflect different DJ styles? If not, add additional categories with an explanation of the style. Are students able to name DJs with these characteristics? You may also go directly to Step 2 to identify additional styles – the three categories that will be used in this lesson.

2. In class, play several announcing styles of music programming including shows that demonstrate the minimalist profile, the “brain” or specialist DJ, the “star” or personality DJ, dedications and highly produced countdown shows. Give students “Master of the Music,” an activity sheet included in this lesson. Discuss the three styles.

3. The next class period, after discussion of the homework, assign and give students the “Introduction to Being a DJ” project handout, “You Too Can Be a DJ.” Either have students choose a style to emulate for their weeklong project or make sure you have enough students doing each category by dividing the class into pre-assigned groups. The particular music style is not as important as the research component and its presentation.

Explain or remind students of the following terms: music tease, billboard, play list, narrative or script.

4. Discuss the content of the homework reading in class. If you assigned the “compilation of 10 points to remember” (See first homework suggestion), have students rate them in first to tenth order. Have students then share their 10, 9, ... 3, 2 and 1 order. This will help you home in on points they may have missed, points that will be essential to successfully completing their projects. It will also allow you to applaud their understanding of essential ideas.

5. With an understanding of the expected final project and the DJ and music programming styles, students are ready to begin work on the project. They should choose and begin researching four short pieces of music, two to three minutes each.

Research sources might include the Internet, magazines, and CD jackets. They should find at least three pieces of information to say about each piece. Questions to consider: Was the song on a hits list? Who has said what about it? If, for example, the song was written about someone such as Martin Luther King Jr. (Such as “Happy Birthday” by Stevie Wonder), include why and when it was written. Perhaps music the students chose could be built around a special theme. These could include a countdown of favorites, new music, holiday themes, songs from a particular era or by a particular artist.

Teachers may wish to discuss the lyrics of the music that students may select: problematic verbal content for the school setting, or how the school system’s speech codes impact the music that radio production students select for use in class projects and on-air shows. This discussion could include ethics, First Amendment as well as business and audience-awareness.

Teachers may also include an overview of fair use and copyrighted musical works. Although not directly related to DJ styles, teachers may wish to introduce students to ASCAP and ASCAP radio licenses at this point.

6. After the research is complete, students will decide on the order of the selections and create a play list. They need to link the songs/music together to form a coherent narrative that informs the listener. The script that results from this research needs to be completed by the third class period. This script should be written in an on-air writing style.

7. The following class period, divide students into groups of four to five members. Each student gets 10 minutes to present his or her on-air plan for the DJ show. Each student explains his or her plan for a show, its style and music selections. There will probably not be time to play the actual musical selections so students must be able to talk about the selections that are unfamiliar to other students — doing this will provide students practice in summarizing, using details and comparison/contrast.

Students should read the narrative that will run between musical selections. All other members of the group will critique the script and selections. Students should be encouraged to praise and to offer concrete suggestions for improvement. This can be done verbally or in written form with students being given participation grades for contributing to this stage of the project.

8. Teacher should assign a fifth piece to be added to each student's play list. The teacher should offer suggestions that will round out their research experience, add depth to their show and/or focus more on the theme of their selections.

9. Students record their voice tracks for their own music shows, including a small music tease and billboard for the top of their short, five-piece show. They dub their tracks into their workstation files and begin to assemble the show after importing the music that goes with the narrative they have written and recorded.

10. Students complete assembly of their music shows. They burn them onto CDs. Shows are shared with the class. If you have a functioning radio station or webcast, the best of the shows could be broadcast.



## Homework

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Ask students to read the appropriate chapters in Radio Production, Broadcast Announcing Worktext and other resources. You may ask them to compile a list of the ten most important points made about being a radio DJ.

Students should complete “Master of the Music” assignment sheet. Students may be asked to answer the questions only or do the following with their answers to the questions.

Students listen to a music show on the radio and critique it, writing a short essay (five to eight paragraphs). The essay should include the DJ’s presentation style, and what they like and dislike about the show. They must identify the show they are critiquing, its length, where and when they heard it, and all the music played for the period they listened. They must listen for at least 30 minutes and be specific in their critiques. Teachers might have lists categorized by presentation style with suggested DJ, stations and air times. This will help students select strong representatives of each style.

Students may be asked the following evening to repeat the homework assignment by listening to another professional radio DJ show and music style.

If students have not completed their research on five pieces of music, they will need to do that and write their script for homework.

Students may be asked to provide a progress report. This will help keep them focused on their project and meet the final deadline.



## Assessment

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Students are graded on their research, homework assignments, in-class participation, and completed shows. The “Introduction to Being a DJ” project may be graded on technical presentation, narrative and overall flow of the show. A research grade may include selection and number of sources, effective inclusion in the narrative, a bibliography (in MLA or other style of the teacher’s choice) and completion by deadline.



## Academic Content Standards

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Use standard bibliographic format to document sources (eg., MLA, APA, CMS). (DCPS English Language Arts, Research. 9.R.1-12.R.1)

Analyze the effect on the reader's or viewer's emotions of text and image in print journalism, and images, sound, and text in electronic journalism, distinguishing techniques used in each to achieve these effects. (DCPS English Language Arts, 10.M.2)

Create coherent multimedia presentations that combine text, image, and sound, synthesizing information from a wide range of sources, test audience response and revise the presentation accordingly. (DCPS English Language Arts, 12.M.3)



## Industry Standards and Expectations

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America's free over-the-air radio and television broadcasters have a long and proud tradition of universal, local broadcast service to the American people. These broadcasters, large and small, representing diverse localities and perspectives, have strived to present programming of the highest quality to their local communities pursuant to standards of excellence and responsibility. They have done so and continue to do so out of respect for their status as daily guests in the homes and lives of a majority of Americans and with a sense of pride in their profession, in their product and in their public service. (National Association of Broadcasters, Statement of Principles)

Distinguish among various musical radio formats. (Performance Element, Pathway KS Statement: Demonstrate the ability to deliver a broadcast production. States' Career Clusters, National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium)

Apply knowledge of equipment and skills related to audio production. (Pathway KS Statement: Audio and Video Technology and Film, States' Career Clusters, National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium)

# You Too Can Be a DJ

You turn on the radio and they're always there — the DJs. They have you dancing to the tunes or waiting on the edge of your chair for the next hit. Maybe you can name some famous ones: Kasey Kasem and his Casey Kasem's American Top 40, which established the countdown format, Karl Haas who created and hosted the longest running daily classical music program (Adventures in Good Music) in broadcast history, Wolfman Jack of raspy voice and howling personality, and Tom Joyner who earned Impact magazine's "Best DJ of the Year" award so many times, it was renamed "The Tom Joyner Award." Who do you like to hear?

Well, now you too can join that long list of people who play at work with knowledge, skill and flair. Here's how.

Being a DJ can be fun for the announcer but to make it entertaining for the audience, the DJ has to step outside the glamour and learn to provide a full, diverse show. This project will help you to learn the steps to becoming a successful DJ.

Your project will have the following components that you will burn on a CD when you have completed them:

- Music tease
- Billboard
- Play list of five musical selections (two to three minutes each in length)
- Script or narrative that includes a minimum of three pieces of information about each musical selection
- Completed program (20-25 minutes in length)

A progress report is due on \_\_\_\_\_. It is to include:

- Music programming style selected. State the characteristics of this style that you plan to include in your show.
- The five musical selections to be included in the show. Indicate why each is included. List them in order of their appearance in your play list.
- A sentence that indicates what three points you want to emphasize about each piece. Include sources of information if you did some research (CD jacket inserts, Web sites, books, interviews).

# Master of the Music

There are several approaches to developing a professional DJ style. No choice is wrong. Some people feel more comfortable with one than another. Knowing different ways that you can approach music programming as a host will give you an opportunity to hone your skills and go in a direction that suits your style of presentation. Being familiar with what other people have done will help you learn new skills and perfect your on-air presentation.

## Three categories into which DJs may be placed

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### *The Minimalist DJ*

The purpose of this show is to get the music over the airwaves. Segues of tunes are broken up occasionally with identifying information. Here the selection of the music being played and the order of artists are of paramount importance.

### *The Brain DJ*

This DJ knows the music and its history. She can say intelligent things about the performers and relate information in a context. Her challenge is to be interesting but not too dominant or wordy.

### *The Star DJ*

People tune in to hear this DJ's comments. His music may be great, but his personality is so vibrant, you'd listen to him – even if you didn't like the music. He's the focus of this show.

## Analyze a Show

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Listen to at least an hour of one DJ's show.

1. Define the style of the DJ and give a specific example of his or her presentation from the program. Include the station, program title, DJ's name.
2. What music was played by the DJ? List a minimum of five titles and briefly describe the genre (for example, rock, classical, country).
3. List three points the DJ made about the music you have identified in question 2. This can include anything from the date written to something more substantive.
4. Speculate on the order in which the DJ played the music. Was there an intentional grouping of songs? If so, what was it? Why do you think that grouping was chosen?
5. If you could add one more piece of music to the show, what would it be? Explain your selection.
6. What do you like or dislike about the show? Be specific.
7. What do you like or dislike about the DJ? Be specific.
8. What aspect of the DJ's style would you want to incorporate into your own approach? Explain why.