

Timeline Teaching Tips

1. Tips on distributing timelines

Timeline files (.tim) are simple XML files that are actually quite small and easy to send by email or to post on an LMS. But they do *not* include any audio, pointing instead to an external audio file (a local mp3, wav, or m4a file—Audio Timeliner will not work with online or streaming audio). If the audio file is not available, you can still open the file and view the diagram, but you will not hear any music when you press play.

Distributing an audio file to your students may be tricky. For legal reasons, you will probably not want to make copyrighted recordings available publicly. A password-protected LMS is a good option for sharing audio with students (assuming fair use). Another possible option is to set up a shared dropbox with students. The benefit of this approach is that everyone should be able to run the timeline directly from a shared folder, without needing to download anything.

Make sure your students understand that in order to view timeline files on their laptop or computer, they need to install the Audio Timeliner application (which is not available for smartphones or tablets).

Make sure students understand that they need both the .tim file and an audio file to open and view a timeline (and they may need to navigate to the path of downloaded files upon opening the timeline).

2. Tips for grading timelines

One effective way to grade timelines is to generate an annotation list. Choose “Save as Web Page” from the file menu for each timeline that you are grading (I generally use student names for the requested file name). This will generate an HTML file that you can open in any web browser and that contains a list of all of the annotations in the timeline, presented in outline form. The document contains an overview image of the timeline, followed by complete annotations for the bubbles, timepoints, and markers in the timeline, in hierarchical consecutive order. With a list like this, you can read through student comments much more naturally. You might also print out and annotate the annotation list so that you can return it to students along with their grade for the project.

If you are concerned about student dishonesty—for example, taking another student’s timeline, changing some colors, and submitting it as their own work—you can always verify that a student’s work is original by looking at the “Timepoint list” at the end of the annotation list. These timepoints are displayed in milliseconds, so it would nearly impossible for two lists to be identical.

3. Tips for timeline assignments

Timepoint annotations can be used for measure numbers or cadence types.

Markers can be used to indicate and label chord changes (harmonic rhythm) or mark other important events not associated with formal boundaries.

Bubble colors can be used to convey relationships between sections, using different colors for contrasting sections and similar colors for repetition or variation. The creative use of color can communicate different moods and characters, particularly in texted works. See for instance, the rosy “[Heidenroslein](#)” and the dark and sinister “[Erlkönig](#).”

You can create a “[floating label](#)” above a timeline by attaching the label to an invisible bubble that groups all of the lower bubbles together. An invisible bubble is created by setting its color to the same color as the background.

Some students may prefer “[square bubbles](#)” to the regular rounded bubbles. This and other timeline properties can be altered in the “Edit Properties” window.

4. Tips for creating high-resolution (publishable) diagrams

The Audio Timeliner can be used to create publishable diagrams of musical form. If the timeline is going to be published in print, the best quality image can be obtained by using a PDF printer, such as Adobe PDF (packaged with Adobe Acrobat Pro) or [CutePDF Writer](#).

You can choose to print in black and white (better for most publications) or in color (good for online publications). The image quality in the resulting PDF file is very high.

Here is a [printed PDF](#) of the timeline for Mendelssohn’s Songs without Words op. 30, no. 3. (Note that the image is rotated -90 degrees to use the wider dimensions of an 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper. You can use Acrobat or Photoshop to rotate the page clockwise.)