social studies

/ James Saunders

/ 2021

ABOUT

This set of short exercises can be used as material for exploring group interactions in ensemble situations, and can be also developed for performance. They were originally made as material for an abandoned ensemble piece but work well as separate studies for group playing. The title refers to the fact that each piece plays with a different aspect of social behaviours in ensemble music making.

PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS

Any number of players, although some pieces may work with large or small groups as necessary.

Some pieces can be played by any instruments, while others are for specified resources.

Octave transpositions are possible to make the material available for other instruments.

The specific instructions for each study are found on the individual pages.

In general, the material can be repeated as necessary, so if a player gets to the end of a system, then repeat from the beginning.

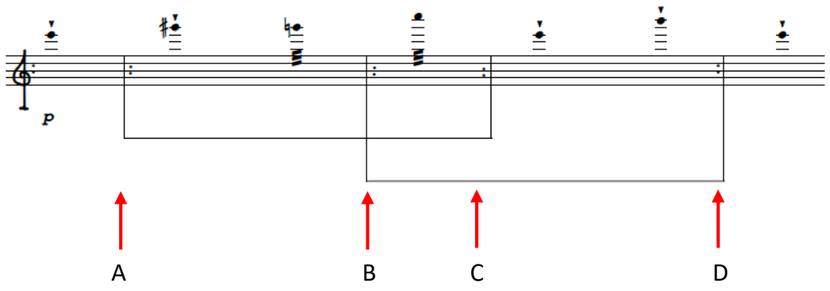
Sound in parentheses can be played or omitted as required.

Generally short sounds

Generally longer sustained sounds

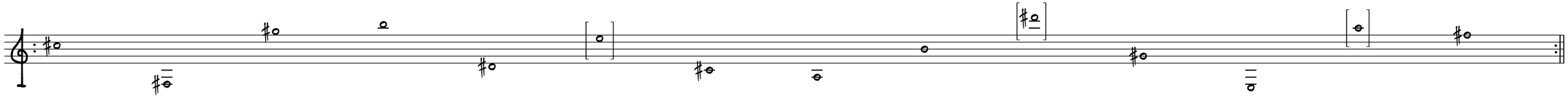
o–pppp (----) The sound should be on the edge of silence, and stop and start irregularly, or have an inconsistent quality due to any associated playing techniques.

o–ppp(<>) The sound should centre on the indicated dynamic, but allow any micro-variations to emerge naturally (do not try to play them though)



Repeat brackets: sections between repeat marks may be optionally repeated any number of times. Where repeats overlap, any of the possible units may be repeated (in the example below A-C, B-D or B-C).

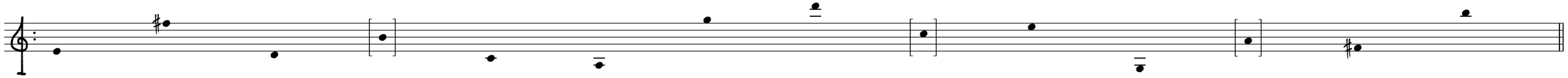
1. continuity



there should be sound at all times
restart if there is a break in the group sound

durations are variable, but generally long
octave transpositions are possible where necessary, but try to maintain contour
individual players can pause as needed

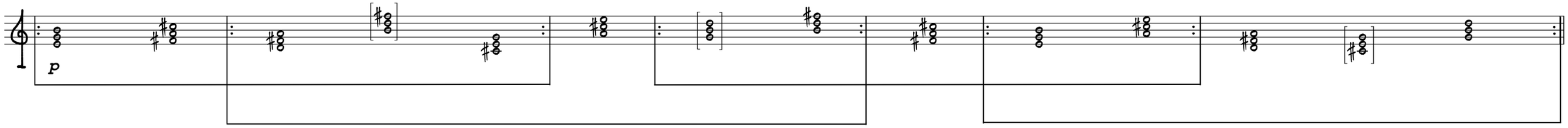
2. waiting for others



play immediately after another player
if everyone is waiting, make a sound

durations are short, with irregular gaps
pause as needed
start anywhere

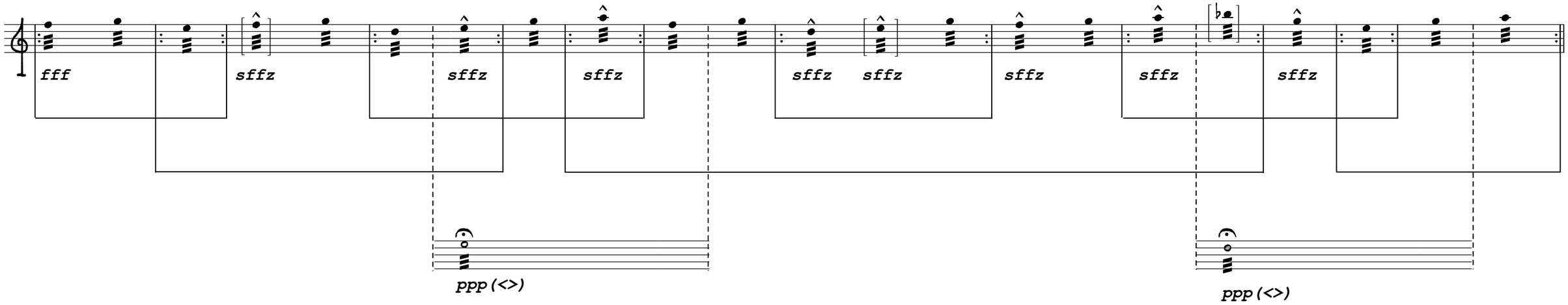
3. limited opportunities



no more than three players playing at a time
if more than three, some players must stop

triads are either sustained or allowed to ring
slow movement
move at different times to others
pause as needed
start anywhere

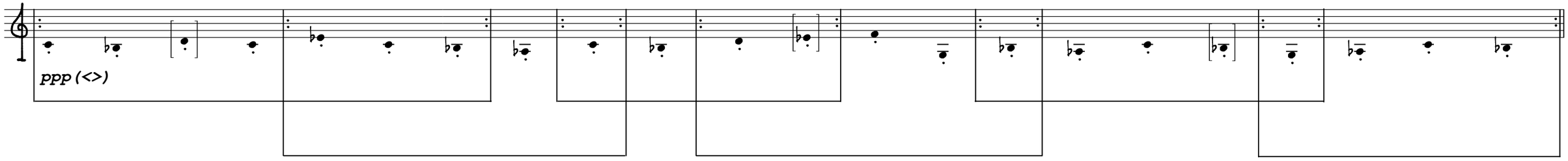
4. taking responsibility



only one player playing at a time, with others taking over when needed

tremolos, flutter tongue, rolls, fast repeated notes etc.
highest register possible
durations are irregular, with continuous sound
start anywhere

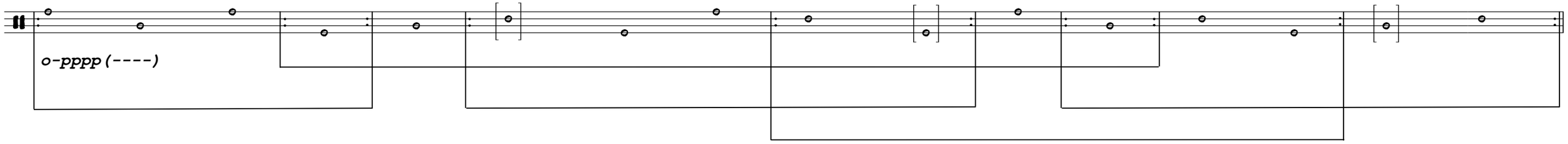
5. synchronising



play each sound at the same time as at least one other player

pizz, muted, tongued, dead strokes, damped etc.
lowest register possible
durations are very short, with irregular gaps
very detached, dry
pause as needed
start anywhere

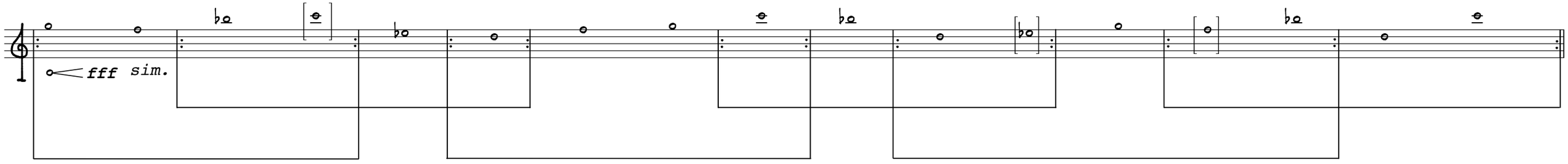
6. blending



if you cannot hear other people's sounds distinctly, either play more quietly or stop playing

four different noise sounds (breath, friction, vocal, electronic, objects etc.)
continuous sounds, with occasional irregular gaps
start anywhere

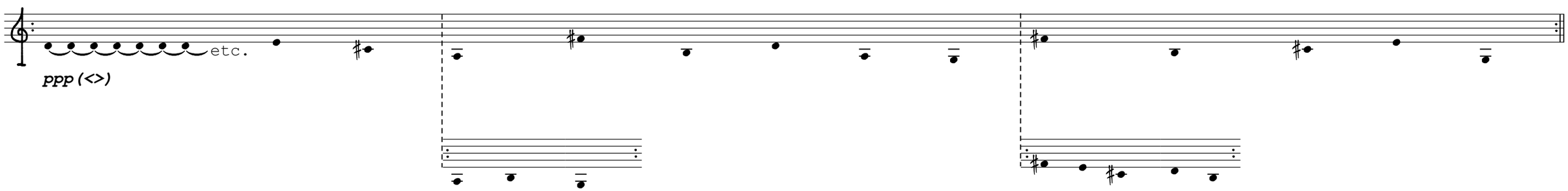
7. dominating



try to be the loudest

durations are relatively long and irregular, with irregular gaps
always crescendo from nothing
pause as needed
start anywhere

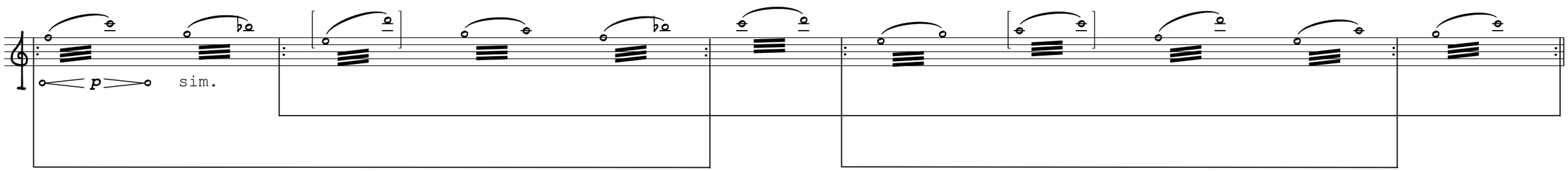
8. co-existing



always at a different tempo to others in the group
adjust your pulse to maintain difference if necessary

repeat a pitch as a constant slow pulse (c.30-50 bpm)
number of repetitions of each pitch should vary (c.10-20 repetitions)
pause between each pulse group
option bars: repeat pitch loop at constant pulse (e.g. a-b-g-a-b-g-a-b etc.)
start anywhere

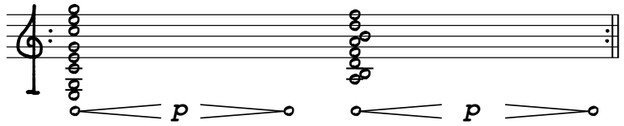
9. transferring



choose another player and begin your next tremolo as they stop playing

durations are relatively long and irregular, with irregular gaps
pause as needed
start anywhere

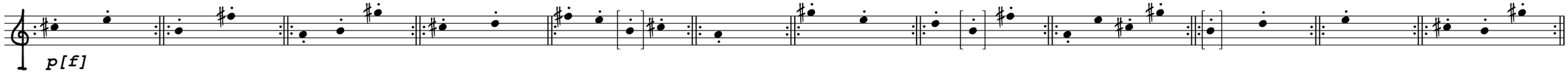
10. giving ground



the peak of each swell should not coincide with those of other players

diatonic harmonica in C, but G also possible
other free-reed instruments possible too (accordion, concertina)
any chords available on the harmonica (free-reeds play pitches from the same chords)
full breaths (bellows), out and in
pause as needed

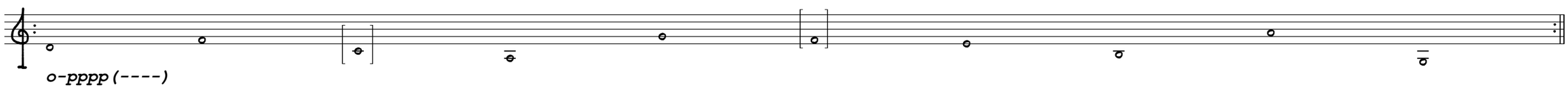
11. avoiding collisions



play in gaps between other players' sounds
return to the beginning if you play at the same time as someone else

repeat each bar multiple times
short and irregular
mostly quiet, with occasional loud sounds
pause as needed
start anywhere

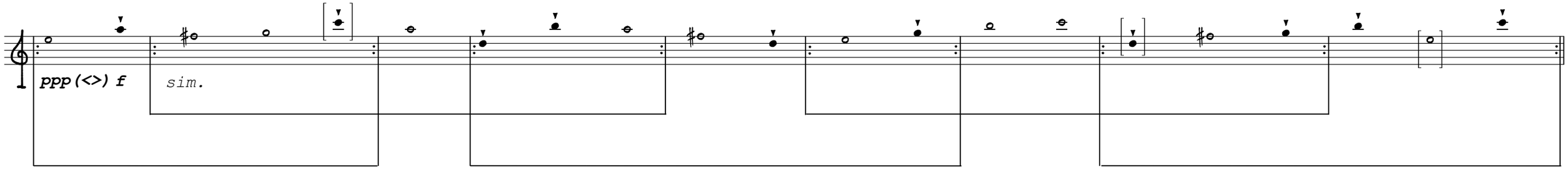
12. avoiding coincidence



if someone else plays the pitch you are playing, either stop or move to the next pitch

very long sounds
always on the edge of silence, sometimes not sounding
pause as needed
start anywhere

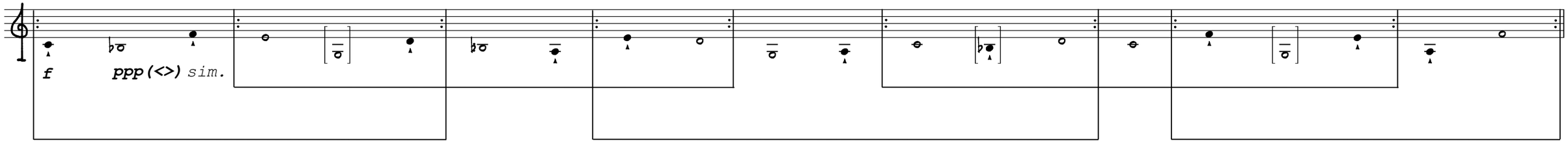
13. changing states



short sounds cut off sustaining sounds being played and cue new sustaining sounds

play in the highest possible octave
long sounds should be very long
short sounds should be very short
gaps between sounds should vary
pause as needed
start anywhere

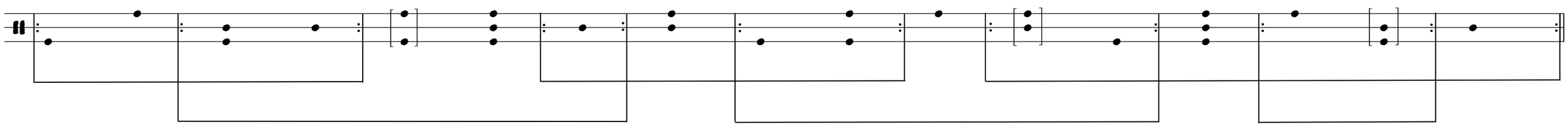
14. interrupting



all short sounds cut off all long sounds

play in the lowest possible octave
long sounds should be very long
short sounds should be very short
pause as needed
start anywhere

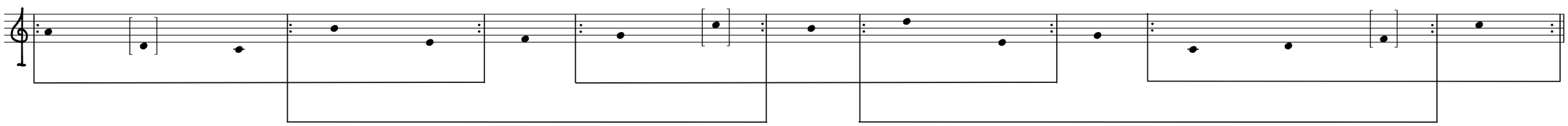
15. not enough resources



share the available objects between you

only 10 objects available for everyone to use
choose three objects and use these throughout
drop the indicated objects onto a surface
ideally they should not break
gaps between actions should vary
pause as needed
start anywhere

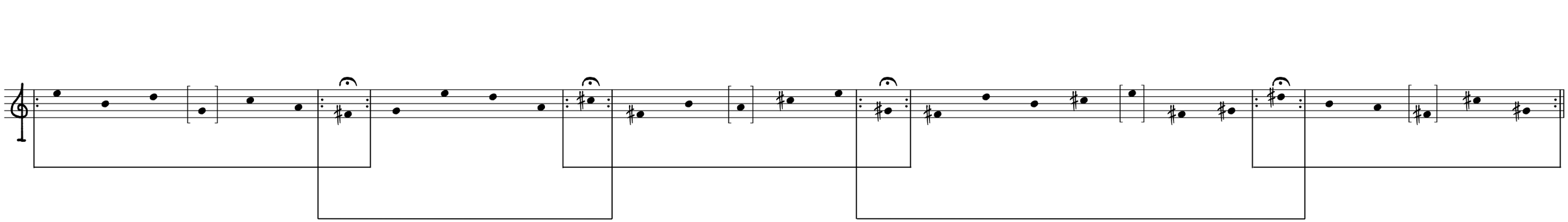
16. sharing space



make space for each other

one set of desk bells for the whole group to share
let ring
pause as needed
start anywhere

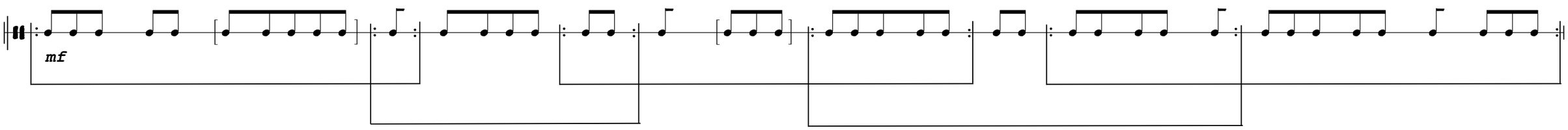
17. congregating



pause occasionally at the fermata pitches, and wait for others to join you on the same pitch before continuing

fermata pitches can be repeated while you are waiting
play pitches separately or join into phrases, or both
durations are variable
start anywhere

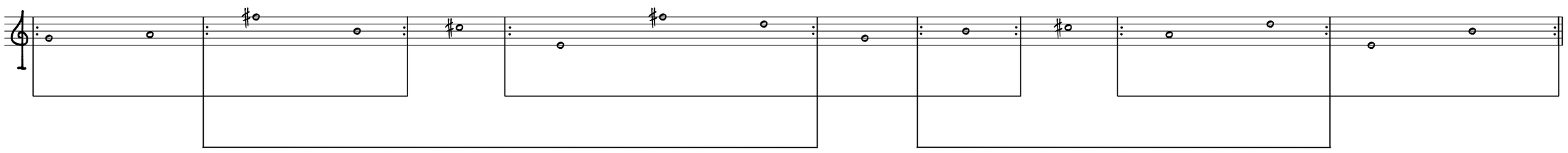
28. something different



only play if your next rhythm is different to the last rhythm played
only one person playing at a time

tapping on a table, or other similar dry unpitched percussive sound
constant tempo, but with some occasional variation
pause as needed
start anywhere

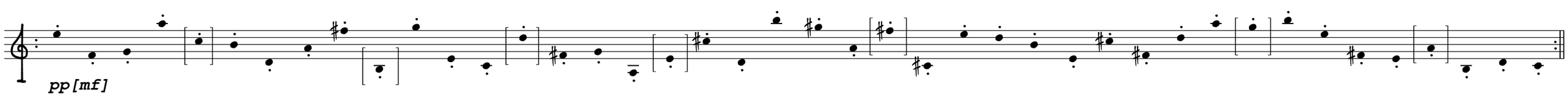
19. no interruptions



if you begin at the same time as someone else, stop and wait before continuing
only one person playing at a time

durations are generally long, but can also be short
pause as needed
start anywhere

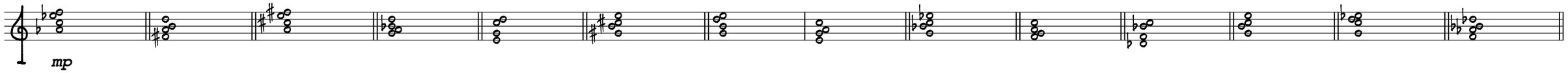
20. ordered contribution



in a fixed player order, one player at a time
play your own next pitch
as fast as possible, no gaps

durations are short
start anywhere

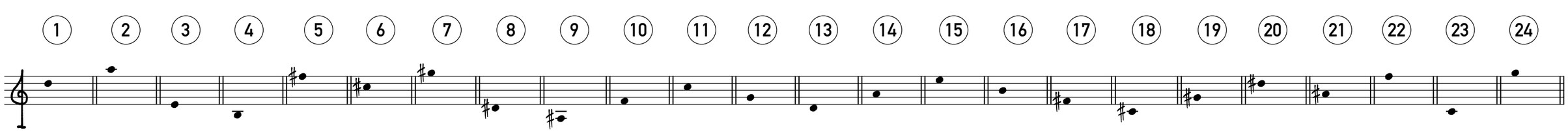
21. general guidance



only one player plays the sustained chords
everyone else sings a note from the chord

triads are either sustained or allowed to ring
free choice of chord (pick and choose to create a sequence)
soft, and calm
not too fast
pause as needed
start anywhere

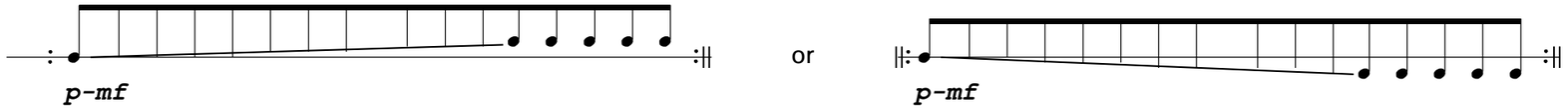
22. suggestions by others



anyone calls out a number, and the other players play the associated pitch

numbers can be in any order, and can be repeated
dynamics are free

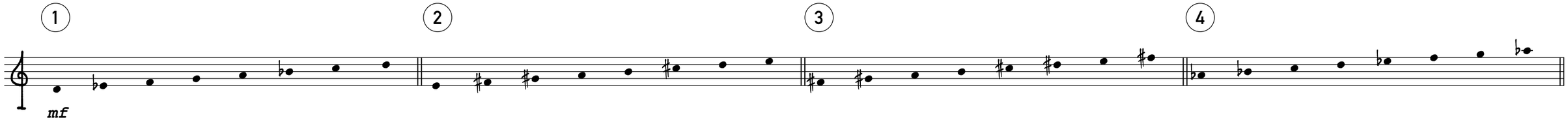
23. finding common ground



play fast repeated notes and gradually change pitch until everyone is playing the same pitch (or the same pitch in a different octave)
when everyone is playing the same pitch, either jump or gradually move to a new pitch and repeat the process

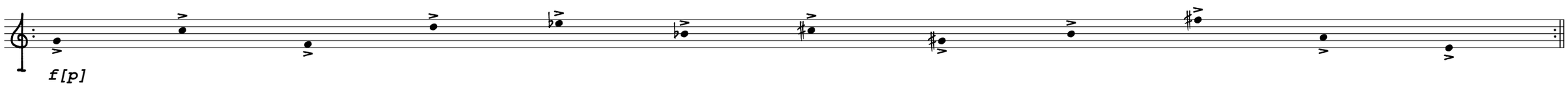
very fast repeated notes
number of repeated notes required to reach target pitch is free
pause as needed

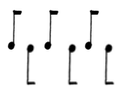
24. reaching consensus



at the same time, everyone plays a sequence of the eight pitches from the same set (1, 2, 3 or 4)
repeat, aiming to play the pitches in the same order as a group
no discussion
continue repeating until consensus is achieved and everyone plays the same sequence

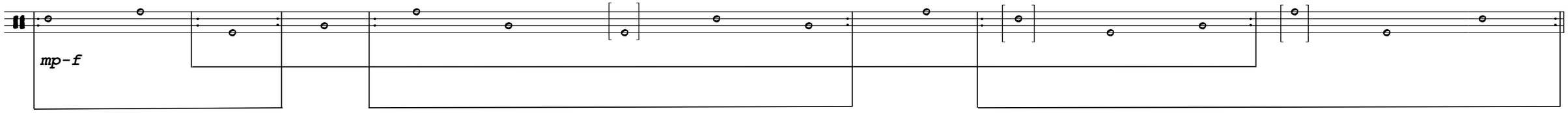
25. factions



alternate in two (or more) sub-groups as a hocket: 

individually choose a pitch and use it for a few repetitions, then move to the next pitch
chords are built out of individual player pitch choices and gradually change as players move to new pitches
moving to a different sub-group if desired
start anywhere
any octave

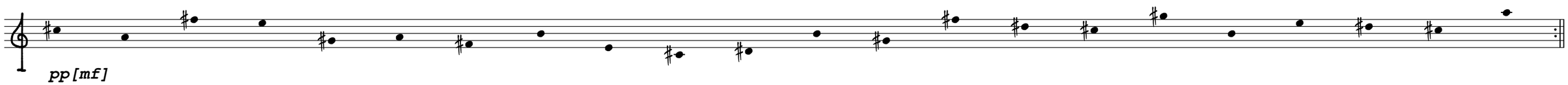
26. exchanging



player ends a sustained sound with a cue to a player not currently playing
cued player begins sound on this cue

four different noise sounds (breath, friction, vocal, electronic, objects etc.)
continuous sounds, with irregular durations
start anywhere

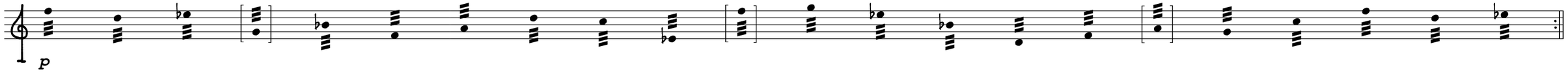
27. conflicting sequences



build sequences, adding one pitch at a time (1, 12, 123, 1234... etc.)

start anywhere, everyone in a different place
if an error is made, begin again starting in a different place
quite fast, with everyone at the same tempo
a short break between each repetition if needed

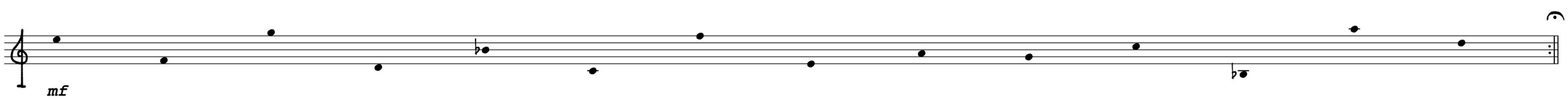
28. accumulating



join in one at a time
when everyone is playing, stop and begin the sequence again

fast repeated notes (not tremolos, flutter tongue etc.)
start anywhere, everyone independently choosing a starting pitch
use one pitch for each sequence
use the next pitch for the next sequence, or repeat the current pitch

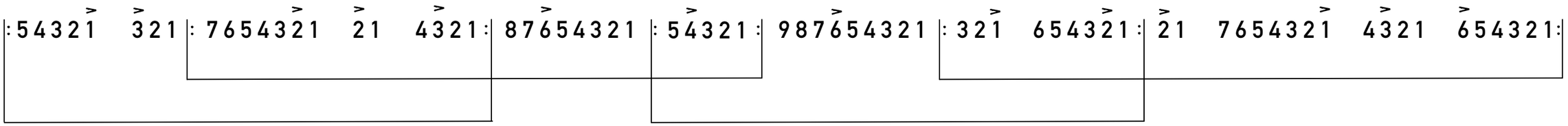
29. queuing



independently pick only one of the pitches
the group plays the pitches in the order indicated, with each player contributing their single pitch (a hocket)

more than one player may coincidentally choose the same pitch
if it becomes clear a pitch has not been chosen, leave it out and move to the next pitch
pause at the end of the sequence
repeat the sequence either with the same pitch choices, or with new pitch choices

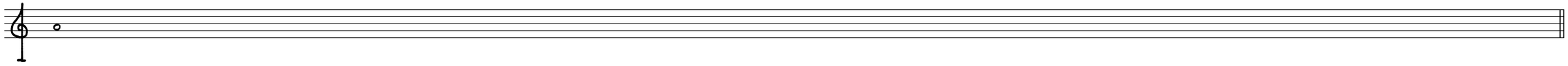
30. overlapping



start your next counting block in synchronisation with another player reaching '1'
more than one player may begin a new block on another player's '1'
avoid breaks in the counting
if a break occurs, pause then begin again

speak the numbers (in any language)
constant tempo, but with some occasional variation
the accented numbers should be emphasised
start anywhere

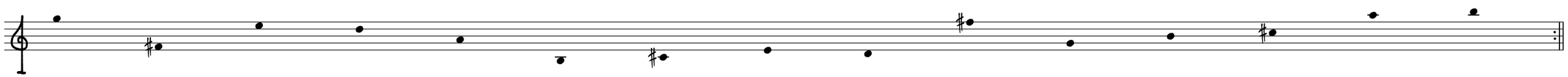
31. unity



minimise any differences

keep the sound going
as consistently as possible
individual players can pause as needed

32. reacting quickly



when someone plays a sound, everyone else plays their next sound as quickly as possible afterwards
the last player to play a sound in each sequence drops out

start anywhere, everyone in a different place
(possibly) long gaps betweeneach sequence
if it is not clear who was last, everyone plays again