



Song Selection for Non-Verbal Participants

Song selection and playlist creation for non-verbal program participants can be challenging. Oftentimes, there may be no family members or friends to consult. This is when you need to become a music detective, working one-to-one with participants to discover their musical preferences, favorite pieces and performing artists.

Here are some suggestions for getting started:

- ❖ Begin this process by checking a participant's birth date. Generally speaking, what you're looking for is the person's favorite music from when they were a teenager, approximately 15 - 25 years of age, though this important period could begin earlier if they were listening to the music of older siblings. Use Google if you're unsure what music was most popular during that time period.
- ❖ Is there an indication of religious denomination included in their records? Religious ties make for strong musical affiliation to hymns, sung prayers and other spiritual music.
- ❖ Search their records for any other clues, e.g. country of origin, favorite hobbies.

Sample the music for the listener and look for changes in body language with each song. Reactions can be immediate and may include:

- ❖ Changes in movement and breathing patterns.
- ❖ Tapping of hands or feet to the beat of the song.
- ❖ Laughing and singing along.

When you detect a positive reaction, note the artist and song. Then select the 5 or 6 most popular songs from that artist to add to the participant's music playlist.



We recommend breaking up the process into 30-minute sessions. Remember, going slow is ok. Take it a little bit at a time and note what works best for the listener.

As you hone in on musical favorites, it's important to always avoid “filler” music and stick with the songs that are most popular or requested by that person. Ultimately you want to have 20-40 songs per playlist, but focus on quality over quantity, in the same way we select music for ourselves.

Being a successful music detective requires patience and persistence, as well as some intuition and luck. But the journey is deeply rewarding. You will learn more about the person in your care, and seeing that face light up when you uncover the right music makes all that effort worthwhile.

For questions, email info@musicandmemory.org.