

The M4

(or: Mike's Method of Musical Mastery)

How to learn to sing rhyming verses in an hour or less!

Singing games and rhyming are tasks that the audience typically sees as being challenging. Unfortunately, so do players. This method will allow you to quickly and easily develop the skill of singing four-line rhyming verses on command.

Trying to write a whole verse in your head and remembering it intact is really hard. In fact, it's the opposite of how your brain wants to work! (see below) So that's not what you're going to do. Rather, you're going to remember two words that don't rhyme. That's it! ...but some explanation is obviously in order, so here's how it works:

- If I give you any word, you could obviously end a sentence with it.
 - *For example: if you gave me the word "truck" I could say, "I commute to work by driving my truck."*
 - *Try it yourself: end a sentence with the word "apple." Now create more sentences that end with "favorite," "baseball," and "running."*
- It's not much more challenging to end a sentence with the word I choose even if I give you a topic for the sentence. It also doesn't much matter if the word has anything to do with the topic.
 - *For example: if the topic is "dentistry" and the word is "tooth" I could say, "I called my dentist because I had a pain in my tooth."*
 - *Another example: if the topic is "dentistry" and the word is "tire" I could say, "I was late to my appointment because I had a flat tire."*
 - *Try it yourself: your topic is "postal carrier." Try ending sentences with "mail," "stamp," "brother," and "flip."*
- You can quickly and almost instantly rhyme with nearly any word I give you.
 - *Try it yourself: give me two or three words that rhyme with each of the following: "gift," "shout," "pale," and "finer."*
- Obviously, then, the same is true if I give you two words at a time.
 - *For example: if you gave me the pair of words "hurt" and "fast" I could come up with the name "Burt" and "last" without much trouble.*
 - *Try it yourself: read two words at a time off of this list. Give one rhyme for each word only after you've read two words. (chain and fail), (tall and quick), (short and shake).*
- **So therefore**, if you have two words that don't rhyme, you can easily make a single line that ends on the first one, create a word that rhymes with the first word and end on that one, and finally do the same thing with the other word for an additional two lines of song. ...and that's all you need to do! By starting with two words that don't rhyme you can make four lines that rhyme much easier than you ever suspected possible. ...and you don't even need to memorize them.

...and that's it! Make sure to read the above steps a few more times and make sure to do the exercises like they're listed. Spend a few minutes ending sentences with specific words, rhyming things on the fly, and slowly building your brain up to putting it all together. To be fair, this skill is easiest to learn if someone can help give you random words to end with or rhyme with, but even on your own it shouldn't be complicated or difficult. When you start to get smoother at the basics, flip this sheet over for a few tips and tricks.

Here's a few extra tips and tricks on the M4 to help you ace your verses:

- **Don't work against your brain:** As you get better with this technique you might slowly start trying to remember the general gist of the lines you planned to sing, but it's strongly encouraged that you not try to memorize the lines themselves. The looser you can keep the structure of what you memorize the better you'll be able to adapt if you mess part of it up or forget a piece of it. The reason that the "create and memorize" approach is so impossible is that your brain doesn't actually store phrases physically in a linear pattern like that. Rather, it stores phrases in chunks and then tries to track the way they're supposed to be reassembled. So the moment that you spit out a chunk that's different than it's "supposed" to be your brain no longer has any clue how to put together your phrase and you're dead in the water. This M4 approach, on the other hand, leaves you with the bare minimum to memorize and the two things aren't connected.
- **Bonus tip! When you're playing a game where you have to rhyme and sing sometimes you're in a pinch for time or ideas.** (For instance, maybe the player before you just used the exact rhyme you were thinking of!) There's a whole list of words that you'll never have problems remembering in a pinch, however. You can rhyme very, very easily with almost any word relating to the head and face (hair, ear, eye, nose, lips, etc.) or relating to your appendages (arm, foot, leg, toe, nail, etc.). And remember: it doesn't even matter if your topic has nothing to do with any of these words. We already saw that there's no problem making a sentence end with a word that seems to have nothing in common with the topic.
- It will take some practice to master the M4 technique, but if you spend even just 20 minutes of practice you'll see how quickly you improve using this approach. If you don't have enough talent with a musical instrument of your own a quick search of the internet will let you find a repetitive chord sequence that you can use to practice and sing along. Within an hour or so total you should find it much, much easier to sing four-line verses.

Games by Type

Elimination

Beastie Rap	One Syllable Words	Questions Only	Story
What Are You Doing?	World Without A Letter		

Guessing

Chain Murder	Dating Game	Five Things	Interrogation
Party Quirks	Pavlovian Response	Playground Insults	Press Conference
Shopping Spree			

Justification

Audience Sound FX	Blind Line	Columns	Foreign Interview
Home Shopping TV	Last-Second Expert	Mixed Messages	Moving People
Replay (some versions)	Two-Line Vocab		

Line

Action Zingers	Beastie Rap	Channel Surfing	Da Doo Run Run
Dr. Share-A-Tongue	Emotional Symphony	Good, Bad, Worst	Last-Second Expert
Madrigal	Newscasters	185	One Syllable Words
Playground Insults	Press Conference	Props	Questions Only
Rock Anthem (+related)	Scenes From A Hat	Slogans	Spelling Bee
Switch Interview	What Are You Doing?	World's Worst	

Musical

Ballad	Beastie Rap	Compilation	Da Doo Run Run
Emotional Symph. (kinda)	Madrigal	Musical Comedy	Rock Anthem

Scene

ABC	Addicts Anonymous	Alphabet Genre	Audience Sound FX
Blind Line	Columns	Countdown Replay	Day in the Life
Film Noir	First Date	Foreign Film Dub	Forward/Reverse
Four Rooms	Home Shopping Network	Living Scenery	Mixed Messages
Movie Preview	Moving People	Musical Comedy	New Choice
Newscasters	Number of Words	Parallel Universe	Pick-A-Play/Comic Geek
Replay (+add-on)	Revolver	Scene Styles	Shakespeare
Singing Psychiatrist	Sit, Stand, Bend	Slow-Mo Olympics	Spin-off
Superheroes	Talk Show	Weekend At Bernie's	

Volunteer-Friendly

Audience Sound FX	Ballad	Chain Murder	Columns
Day in the Life	Dr. Share-A-Tongue	First Date	Foreign Film Dub
Good, Bad, Worst	Living Scenery	Mixed Messages (phone)	Moving People
Spelling Bee			

Suggestion Prompt Ideas

Occupations and Activities

- Give me a job you wouldn't want your grandma to do.
- Who can tell me what they do for a living?
- You met someone who does something fascinating. What is it that they do?
- What's something that is always/never an adventure?
- What's something that used to be a problem for you (say, as a child) but isn't a problem anymore?
- What's an activity that you wish was an Olympic event?
- What's an activity that should absolutely never become an Olympic event?

Locations

- Where's a strange place to find yourself?
- What's a dangerous location?
- Where's somewhere that you go all of the time?
- Where's somewhere you only visit occasionally?
- Where's somewhere that you've never been but would like to go?
- Where's somewhere that you've been that you never want to return to?

Relationships

- What's a relationship that's not family?
- You run into someone you're excited/embarrassed to see again. Why are you excited/embarrassed?
- Imagine that you're going to commit a crime with someone. How do you know them?
- You just gained superpowers. Your nemesis is someone you knew before gaining your powers. How did you know that person before they became your nemesis?

Objects (Mostly)

- Give me a letter of the alphabet. What's something that starts with that letter?
- Imagine that you're alone and hear a noise. What caused that noise?
- Name something that it would be weird to be afraid of.
- What's something that would **never** make a dangerous occupation safer?
- What's a food you don't eat every day?
- What's an animal you've always wished you could cuddle (or cuddle more often)?

Potpurri

- You turn on the TV. What's the first thing you see two people do?
- What's something that no one would ever buy a self-help product for?
- You're on a road trip and see one of those tourist traps, like the world's biggest yarn ball. What's a tourist trap you've never seen before?
- Let's say you were in your kitchen. Who or what would be strange to see walking in?
- What's something you hope you never have in common with someone else besides a disease?
- Walking through your favorite store the other day you saw something that was out of place and didn't belong. What was it?
- Imagine that you're going through something. This could be physical, like going through a tunnel, or situational, like going through menopause or labor. What are you going through?

Game Quick Reference List

Name of game	# Players	Volunteer	Category, Gimmick
ABC	2-3	-	Scene , Forced language
Action Zingers	all	-	Line , Groaner Jokes
Addicts Anonymous	3-4	-	Scene , Silly Premise
Alphabet Genre	2-3	-	Scene , Juxtaposition
Audience Sound FX	2 (+2v)	x2	Justification , Audience Participation
Ballad	1 (+1v)	x1	Musical , Audience Participation
Beastie Rap	all	-	Musical, Line, Elimination
Bedtime Storybook	4-5	-	Commentary , Physicality, Silly Premise
Blind Line	2-3	(lines)	Justification , Audience Participation, Forced Language
Chain Murder	3-4 (+1v)	x1	Guessing, Line , Physicality, Silly Premise
Channel Surfing	4 (+H)	-	Line , Juxtaposition, Silly Premise
Columns	2-3 (+2v)	x2	Scene , Audience Participation, Forced Lang., Justification
Compilation	2 + music	-	Musical , Silly Premise
Countdown Replay	2-3 (+H)	-	Scene , Physicality
Da Doo Run Run	all	-	Musical, Elimination
Dating Game	4	-	Guessing , Silly Premise
Day in the Life	2-3 (+1v)	x1-2	Scene , Audience Participation
Dr. Share-A-Tongue	3-4 (+1v)	x1	Line , Audience Participation, Forced Language
Emotional Symphony	all (+H)	-	Line , Physicality, Silly Premise
Film Noir	2-3	-	Scene , Silly Premise
First Date	2-3 (+1v)	x2	Scene , Audience Participation
Five Things	3-4	-	Guessing , Gibberish, Physicality
Foreign Film Dub	3 (+1v)	x1	Scene , Audience Participation, Gibberish, Silly Premise
Foreign Interview	2-3	(Qs)	Commentary , Gibberish
Forward/Reverse	2-4 (+H)	-	Scene , Juxtaposition
Four Rooms	4 or 8	-	Scene , Juxtaposition
Game-O-Matic	?	x?	<i>varies like crazy!</i>
Good, Bad, Worst	3 (+H)	x1	Line , Juxtaposition, Silly Premise
Home Shopping TV	2-3	-	Scene , Physicality, Silly Premise
Interrogation	3-4	-	Guessing , Silly Premise
Last-Second Expert	all	-	Line , Physicality, Silly Premise
Living Scenery	2 (+2v)	x2	Scene , Audience Participation
Madrigal	3-5 (+H)	-	Musical, Line , Juxtaposition
Mixed Messages	3	(phone)	Justification , Forced Language
Movie Preview	4-5	-	Commentary , Physicality, Silly Premise
Moving People	2 (+2v)	x2	Scene , Audience Participation
Musical Comedy	3-4	-	Musical, Scene , Forced Language (<i>singing!</i>)

From the book: **ImprovWise – How to think so you know what to say and other practical tips for the short-form improv performer**

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New Choice	2-3 (+H)	-	Scene , Forced Language, Physicality
Newscasters	3-4	-	Scene , Silly Premise
Number of Words	3-4	-	Scene , Forced Language
185	all	-	Line , Groaner Jokes
One Syllable Words	all	-	Elimination , Forced Language
Party Quirks	3-4	-	Guessing , Physicality
Pavlovian Response	3-4	-	Guessing , Justification , Physicality
Pick-A-Play/Comic Geek	3-4	-	Scene , Forced Language, Justification, Physicality
Playground Insults	(4?) 6+	-	Guessing , Physicality, Silly Premise
Press Conference	all	-	Guessing , Silly Premise
Props	2-all	-	Line , Groaner Jokes, Silly Premise
Questions Only	all	-	Elimination , Forced Language
Replay (+ add-on)	varies	-	Scene , <i>varies</i>
Revolver	4, 8	-	Scene , Line , Juxtaposition
Rock Anthem	all	-	Musical , Line
Scenes From A Hat	all	-	Line , Juxtaposition
Scene Styles	3-4	-	Scene , Forced Language, Juxtaposition
Shakespeare	3-4	-	Scene , Forced Language, Silly Premise
Shopping Spree	2-4	-	Guessing , Gibberish, Physicality
Singing Psychiatrist	3-4	-	Musical , Scene , Silly Premise
Sit, Stand, Bend	3	-	Scene , Physicality
Slogans	all	-	Line , Silly Premise
Slow-Mo Olympics	4	-	Commentary , Physicality
Spelling Bee	3-4 (+1v)	x1	Line , Forced Language, Silly Premise
Spin-off	4+	-	Scene , Juxtaposition
Story	4+	-	Elimination , Forced Language, Silly Premise
Superheroes	3-4	-	Scene , Physicality, Silly Premise
Switch Interview	all	-	Line , Silly Premise
Talk Show	3-4	-	Scene , Silly Premise
Two-Line Vocab	3	-	Justification , Forced Language
Weekend at Bernie's	4-5	-	Scene , Forced Language, Physicality, Silly Premise
What Are You Doing?	all	-	Elimination , Physicality
World Without A Letter	all	-	Elimination , Forced Language
World's Worst	all	-	Line , Groaner Jokes

Warmups Quick Reference List

	Name	Type	Reminders
+	Next Week On Geraldo	Generative	Get a word. Make a phrase from that word.
+	Zip Zap Zop	Focus, Energy	Singles, doubles, triples, then open.
+	Zoom Shwartz Pfigliano	Focus, Observation	Anywhere, reflect, neighbor. Don't zoom a zoom!
+	What Are You Doing?	Physicality, Fast Thinking	Do an action. Name a dissimilar activity.

Big Booty	Focus, Timing	BB, #1. #1, #7. #7, #3. #3, BB....
Bippity Bippity Bop	Focus, Energy	Someone's "it" and catching folks off-guard
Bunny Bunny Bunny	Energy	BunnybunnybunnybunnybunnybunnyBUNNY!
Clap Focus	Focus, Connection	Clap together, across the circle
Counting Blind	Connection	Close your eyes and don't count together
Five Things	Confidence, Lat. Thinking	Give a category, get a list. Try just three.
Freeze Tag	Physicality, Lat. Thinking	Players freeze a scene and take a spot
Group Stop	Connection, Observation	Everyone moves until "that one" stops
Kitty Cow	Focus, Energy	Moo-Meow, Kitty-Cow
Road Trip	Observation, Characters	Picking up hitchhikers in an already-full car
Scene Starts: Characters	Characters	Clear, strong character choices
Scene Starts: Physicality	Characters, Physicality	Play a scene and constantly be doing an action
Scene Starts: Pimping	Characters, Physicality	Give your scene partner weird traits mid-scene
Scene Starts: Relationships	Characters	Stop quickly and ask what the relationship was
Scene Starts: Setting	Setting, Physicality	10sec to set the scene physically, alone
Scene Starts: Status	Characters	Start high/low, swap during the scene
Squeeze Pulse	Focus, Timing	Squeeze, but not too soon. Wait for it...
Three Unusual Uses	Generative, Lat. Thinking	Think of three unusual uses for an object
Try That On For Size	Physicality, Lat. Thinking	Pass along the same action around a circle
Unfunny Scene	Characters, Timing	Don't be funny. Don't crack up.
Whoosh Bong	Focus, Physicality	Invisible ball on a track around the circle
Yes Circle	Confidence, Teamwork	Say a name. They say yes. You go.

Warmups by Type

Items listed in italics are found in the games section. While not technically warmups, they're particularly useful games to focus on the skill area they appear in. If you use them as part of a warmup process make sure to keep them short and intense.

Characters

<i>New Choice</i>	Road Trip	Scene Starts: Characters	Scene Starts: Physicality
Scene Starts: Pimping	Scene Starts: Relationship	Scene Starts: Status	Unfunny Scene

Confidence

Five Things	Yes Circle
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Connection

Clap Focus	Counting Blind	Group Stop
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Energy

Bippity Bippity Bop	Kitty Cow	<i>Switch Interview</i>	Zip Zap Zop
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Focus

Big Booty	Bippity Bippity Bop	Clap Focus	Kitty Cow
Squeeze Pulse	What Are You Doing?	Whoosh Bong	Zip Zap Zop
Zoom Schwartz Pfig.			

Generative

Five Things	Next Week on Geraldo	<i>Questions Only</i>	Three Unusual Uses
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Lateral Thinking

Five Things	Freeze Tag	Three Unusual Uses	Try That On For Size
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Physicality

<i>Countdown Replay</i>	Freeze Tag	Scene Starts: Physicality	Scene Starts: Pimping
Scene Starts: Setting	What Are You Doing?	Whoosh Bong	

Speed/Timing

Big Booty	Clap Focus	<i>Last-Second Expert</i>	Squeeze Pulse
Unfunny Scene			

Helpful Notes on Types of Games

Scene games: Most games are scene games of some sort. Players will portray characters, but some sort of gimmick or complication changes it from merely being a simple scene that you might see in, say, a play. In general, the most common mistake is to assume that everyone knows what a scene should look like and thus not work on developing good scene skills in the troupe. This tends to be especially true in short form troupes, where people assume that the scenes are never long enough to really matter. The truth, however, is that strong scene skills can greatly magnify the impact of your games upon the audience, as well as inspire loyalty among your players to one another and the troupe. It is important that players understand strong character choices, physicality relating to both their own actions and the environment of the scene, how to best create tension in the scene that can be released through gags and gimmicks, and more. It is also important to realize how different these things often play out in an improv game than in a regular theatrical or dramatic scene. If the gimmicks and crazy rules of a game are the flashy decorations that catch the audience's attention, then good scene work is the structure that holds those up to be visible, and the better your scene skills then the more of that flashiness that you can put in a scene without making the scene incoherent.

Commentary games: A subset of scene games. Some players will be performing a scene or some form of a narrative while others will be making comments about the scene being played. Interplay between the two parts is a major part of the gimmick. Find opportunities for the scene players to partially direct the commentary and also for the commentary to lead the scene players to do specific things. This interplay is great for the audience.

Elimination games: All players start playing. They're given a task and, in turn, will try to complete that task as often as possible. Failure removes that player from the game. (Depending on your show format the player may merely go to the back of the line or may be removed from the game entirely.) Depending on your troupe and style, it can be a great benefit to have the audience help you spot when players are eliminated. (Teach them to use a short buzzing sound.) Elimination games can be played for time and freely rotate eliminated players back into the game, but they can also be played until only one player is left, until only one team has any players left to be eliminated, or even just for a specific number of eliminations. In a show it's important to remember that "winning" isn't necessarily the funniest thing for the audience. If you've survived as many as two other players look for an opportunity to graciously be eliminated. The turnover is exciting for the audience, especially if you've been so successful at the game so far. Also, expect that as the game goes on that the host will be more and more picky and call people out for smaller and smaller delays or mistakes. If you've "survived" one or two opponents it's advisable to find a way to eliminate yourself, ideally with a good joke.

Guessing games: At least one player has to guess unusual elements or a secret phrase in a scene based on the clues given by the other players. If the guesser has multiple elements to discover it is usually best if the team focuses on one part at a time, in order. This allows the audience to get excited as individual elements are guessed and also simplifies the job of the guesser. One part at a time makes it easier to figure out how multiple clues are fitting together. Good guessing and good clue-giving are not the same skill. Be aware that a player who's good at one may not be good at the other.

Justification games: One or more players have unusual limitations on their ability to speak or act which is explained as normal by another player in the scene or otherwise viewed as normal within the context of the scene. It is important that the justifying player doesn't comment on the stilted nature of communication from their scene partner. Rather, it is assumed that however they're talking is a perfectly normal way to speak, but maybe their content is a little wonky or problematic. The justifying player plays a huge role in whether these types of scenes go well. Justifying games are all also scene games.

Line games: The players line up and tell jokes from a static format. Most line games work better if the players are trained to put their foot out in front of them when they've got a joke they're ready to tell. Before a player steps out to tell their joke they should always be checking to see if someone else already has a foot out. This increases the speed that jokes can be told and minimizes time wasted with "no, you go first" collisions. Some line games are also elimination games. Some troupes will mix several types of jokes in a single line game. This is discouraged because it lessens the experience for the audience by watering down what makes the game unique.

Musical games: Someone's (*probably a lot of someones*) about to start singing! Although sometimes a style by itself, most often musical games are another style as well, such as a scene or line game. Musical games are a fantastic addition to a show because they seem incredibly complicated, although with the right tricks up your sleeve, they become much less challenging. (See the "M4 Technique" found both in "Rock Anthem" and the reference section for how to create rhyming verses easily!) Although it's easy to assume that you need a virtuoso of the piano to have musical games, nearly any instrument will work for most games. (The author has performed with his ukulele and knows other performers who play bass and use a looping pedal!) In a pinch you can also play a recording. The easiest test as to whether a musician is sufficiently skilled to play for your show is whether they can hold a conversation and continue the desired chord pattern smoothly, without stopping, and without speeding up or slowing down significantly. Note that it's important that a different chord pattern (for, say, a different style of music) may be easier or harder for a musician to play and you should expect your players only to play a style or sequence that they're absolutely confident they'll be able to do smoothly. It's also worth noting that playing while singing for a game is a different challenge than merely playing while another player sings. Musical games are fantastic for any show because they seem difficult, especially if players have to rhyme their verses.

Gimmick Tag Descriptions

These are the tags used to describe games in the list of all games. For clarity, they are clearly defined here.

Audience Participation: An audience member is on-stage or ends up providing massive input on the game.

Forced Language: Players have some or all of their language dictated for them or are forced to repeat lines.

Gibberish: At least one player has to communicate solely in gibberish.

Groaner Jokes: The game relies heavily on groaner jokes.

Juxtaposition: Styles, genres, or other aspects of the scene are contrasted against each other.

Physicality: Physical movement is heavily emphasized by the rules themselves (not just best practices).

Silly Premise: The entire basis for the game is centered on more ridiculous than most games, usually with a very strong theme.

Brand-New Troupe Recommended Games

For new troupes with less skill or experience, here's a recommended list of games to learn and work on mastering with your players. These will work particularly well in troupes with a large number of players whose skills are still growing and allow you to start performing shows sooner. You could certainly pick anything you want, but these tried-and-true gems are reliable and funny.

Blind Line – This easy-to-learn game consistently delivers huge laughs and is fun for the audience to prepare for you. Try to establish good habits early and encourage players to use the lines to speak directly to one another, rather than to describe other things.

Columns – The audience loves seeing volunteers put in the forefront, and this game emphatically delivers.

Forward/Reverse – While this is a challenging game to get good at, it gives the host a chance to emphasize moments that the audience is loving, which can heighten the show's energy considerably.

Good, Bad, Worst – This is a simple line game, but uses four players in a variety of character-heavy roles. It's a great way for developing troupes to have a solid game that doesn't live or die based on scene skills.

Madrigal – This musical game doesn't require actual musical skill, and uses a bunch of suggestions from the audience to create a mishmash guaranteed to make the audience laugh. If the line hasn't been discovered yet, you just keep going; the audience will gladly wait. Bonus: this game can use a large number of players.

Moving People – While the game itself uses only two players, it puts volunteers front and center, which audiences always love. Make sure to discuss potential challenges with your players, but they'll love getting the opportunity to play this game and having the focused interaction with volunteers.

New Choice – Aside from being a very strong game for shows, New Choice is an incredibly great game for rehearsals and helping players make stronger character choices. It can use as many as 3-4 players on-stage (though not all at once for the whole scene) plus a host, so as far as scene games go, it can use a lot of people.

185, World's Worst, and Switch Interview (or other line games with one-liner jokes) – These give your whole troupe a chance to shine at once, regardless of the troupe size. While these may be the first two you learn, they are both capable of being a staple of your shows for the entire life of your troupe.

Questions Only (or other elimination game) – This is probably the easiest of the elimination games to learn and master, but can reliably remain in your shows as your troupe gains skill.

Scene Styles – This is the easier alternative to one of the Replay versions, but is still great for a show finisher, if you like. It doesn't use every player for larger troupes, but is consistently a great way to add energy to your show.

Sit, Stand, Bend – Developing troupes will benefit from the fact that this scene game relies more heavily on the physical gimmick than highly-polished scene skills, but as skills improve the game will emphasize and showcase those skills easily.