Don't dump all the instruments in one big bucket--they are not toys. Store instruments in clear boxes and categorize them by materials, by type of sound, even shape. This also facilitates sound discrimination and labeling.

1. The following are some routines that keep order while still allowing creativity:

A. Introduce instruments one at a time so children can get to know each without over-stimulation or confusion. Pass one instrument around so that everyone has a short turn to tap or jingle it. Teach respect for the instrument by modeling the proper way to play it and take care of it. Playing musically means to treat instruments with care and to play with a medium sound so that singing or recorded music can still be heard. Talk about what the instruments is made of and how it may have been made.

B. Sets of instruments for an entire class to play at the same time include rhythm sticks, jingle bells, and shakers. Before passing out instruments, establish strict guidelines. Instill safety rules such as not poking others with instruments, and no throwing. Students should play only when given permission. Establish start and stop signals. For example, one effective start signal is to gesture with open hands. To stop, hold up a closed fist or make a chopping motion with both hands. It is best to have silent signals rather than shouting. Silent signals encourage listening and watching. If a student cannot follow the rules, they lose their instrument for 1 minute (this gives an opportunity to get the instrument back again). Instead of playing their instrument, they can pat or clap.

C. When handing out instruments for a group session, put the instruments on the floor behind students and have them place their hands on their head or in their lap. Keep students occupied by singing a song, chanting, or have everyone count. With rhythm sticks, students can make a shape on the floor, or put them on top of their head as "listening antennae." As students learn respect and how to play the instruments, they can start choosing what they would like to play in the group sessions. Occasionally let everyone play their own instrument freely for 20 seconds (follow the safety rules and play musically). Put the instrument down at a pre-arranged signal. It's noisy, but controlled fun.

D. In taking up instruments, assign one or two children to pick them up, or call out the name or description of each instrument and whoever has the instrument puts it away.

E. Children do not always have time in the group to really enjoy playing an instrument at their leisure. Keep a set of the more quiet and sturdy instruments in the play area for free exploration. This will allow more than one child at a time to play. However, students must still follow the rules of playing musically.

F. Often, young children are expected to play to a steady beat. However, this is a learned skill, and should not be expected of Pre-school children. This is a time for discovery--identifying qualities of sounds and how sounds are made. Children will find ways to use instruments in expressive, experimental ways.

2. Activities to do with instruments and recorded music:

A. Establish “When the music stops, we stop.”

B. Use music that has definite changes in it, so the music, not the teacher, dictates when to pass the instrument, have only one child play the instrument to the music (or two from both ends of a row). When the music changes they pass it to the next child, and so on.

C. Give all students the same kind of instrument (rhythm sticks, maracas, or jingle bells) and have them copy the teacher's motions. The teacher can play high, low, to the side, behind, in front, by their ear, in an arc, or stand up and turn around. As students get more familiar with a song, they can take turns being the leader.
D. Give half the class one kind of instrument and the other half another kind. Leader has one of each. During the music, students play only the same instrument that the leader is playing should play. When the leader plays both instruments, everyone plays. Have children switch instruments and do the song again. As students' patience matures, do the same with 3 or 4 kinds of instruments (only part of the group will be playing at any one time).

E. Follow the leader in a marching band around the room.

F. Rhythm Stick Activities--one stick is plain and the other fluted. To help distinguish R from L, direct all students to put the fluted one in a designated hand, then check that they have done so. Remind students that these are musical instruments. Practice controlled motion by having students tap on their thigh (if they start with tapping the floor, they may not know their own strength, hit too hard, and break the sticks). Make "rain." Start with tapping on thighs, then a button or zipper, rubbing the sticks together, tapping shoes, then tapping the floor (but not too hard). Stop the "rain" by directing students one at a time to hold sticks over their head like antennae.

3. Activities to do with instruments without recorded music:

A. Wearing ankle bells, students follow a leader around the room. Notice the differences of sound with marching, hopping, and galloping.

B. Play the rhythm of language. Say a short poem (e.g. Hickory dickory dock. However, do not say it too fast). Have students clap it first, then play the rhythm with their instrument. Experiment with different sounding instruments and how they make the rhythm sound different.

C. Assign an activity to do to a certain sound, such as tiptoe when the jingle bell plays, slide for a maraca, stomp for rhythm sticks. Teacher plays each sound and children move as long as that sound is played. Assign 3 students to play as teacher points to them. Have a student "conductor" to point to the players.

D. Categorize the sounds of instruments. For example, metals, woods, drums, and shakers (some sounds could be in two areas, such as jingle bells--they are metal, but shaky). Hide a few instruments behind a screen. Play one, and have students guess the category. As the game gets more familiar, students go behind the screen to play as the rest of the students guess. This could be a useful assessment to see what students hear and perceive.

E. Group instruments into families to create ensemble experiences. The leader "conducts" by signaling to each group when to play and when to stop.

F. Play shakers softly (slowly) or loud (fast). Have one student leave the room and hide a toy. When the student comes back in to search for it, the other students direct him/her to the toy by playing soft (far-cold) or loud (near-hot).

G. Make patterns with the sounds. Play one kind of instrument for A, then another kind for B, repeat A, and then ask students what should come next (B).

H. As time goes on, do this with other patterns such as ABC, AABB, AAABBB, or ABACAD, to name a few.

I. Have students use percussion instruments to create sound effects for a poem, story, or dramatic experience. Children benefit from choosing sounds and discussing their choices in an accepting and nonjudgmental environment. Students can examine the various sounds and their combinations and the effect these combinations have on the resulting sound piece. When instruments are available to explore, children often create their own ensemble experiences.

J. Play different sounds as cues for activities, such as a certain pattern tapped on the wood block to line up for recess or lunch, or simply to get the class's attention.
K. Control how fast or slow the students walk by playing the woodblock fast or slow.

L. Utilize the earth bell quality of sustained sound. Children move in slow motion with several long tones, or wiggle like Jell-o with the "wa-wa" sound.

M. Students could also play these instruments under the supervision of the teacher.

N. Instrument cards: each child gets a set. When an instrument is played, they hold up the corresponding card. This can be done with pairs of students.

O. Instrument cards: used as cues. Have one student put the cards in random order and point to them as other students play.

P. Instrument cards: use for group instrument activities in pattern making and recognition (may need to enlarge them).

4. Found Sounds:

A. Use found sounds in the same ways as instruments--to create sound effects, to accompany a poem or song, to create patterns. Play the sounds with different expressions (slow-fast, soft-loud). Ask students to describe and compare sounds, discussing similarities and differences in materials.

B. Make use of classroom or household objects for sound exploration. Hold a “sound hunt” to find things that make interesting sounds. Some examples of found sounds are tapping with chopsticks on tin cans, plastic containers, metal chairs, or cardboard boxes, crumpling paper, shaking bottles of water, shaking clean prescription bottles filled with rice or beans, jangling keys, or scraping a ruler or comb on the edge of a desk.

C. Use the mallets to make drums out of plastic tubs, cardboard boxes, and garbage cans. Other found sounds include mouth sounds (whisper, high and low voices, repeated words, clucks, pops, etc.) and body percussion (stamping, clapping, patting legs or upper chest).

5. Resonator Bell games:

A. Set up bells in a pentatonic scale (like the black keys on a piano). Children improvise an accompaniment to songs.
   - Key of C: use CDE GA (no FB)
   - Key of D: use DE GA (no FCB)
   - Key of F: Use CD FGA (no EB)

B. Several students play at the same time on certain bells to create chordal accompaniment. The first letter of each of the following groups is the name of the chord:
   - Major chords: CEG FAC GBD
   - Minor chords: DFA EGB ACE

C. Use color cards as cues. Have one student put the cards in random order and point to them as other students play.

D. Each child has a bar in front of them, and all the cards are face down in a row in front of teacher. When their color card is turned over, that's when they play. Don't worry about playing a rhythm--play for about 10 seconds. When their card is turned back over, they stop--reinforce by saying "stop" in case they are not looking. Later, a child could be the card turner.

E. One variation (much slower) is to share one mallet--when a card is turned over, everyone looks around to see who has that color and says their name, then the mallet goes to them.