

Effective Rehearsing: Voice, Ears, Mind

Missouri Music Educators Association

In-Service Workshop/Conference

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1. The warm-up

a. Effective vocal warmups

- i. should include a posture check
- ii. could include some breathing exercises
- iii. start in the middle of the range and gradually work their way out to extremes
- iv. start stepwise and progress gradually to larger leaps
- v. start slower and progress to faster-moving exercises

b. Effective aural warmups (general intonation as well as expanding the harmonic palette singers are comfortable with)

- i. start with tuning a unison pitch (TB high, SA low) and progress to octaves, add fifths, then thirds, then whatever else!
- ii. include minor key as well as major key patterns
- iii. sometimes include chords not in root position
- iv. sometimes include dissonances (mild or extreme)
- v. avoid using the piano too much—practice finding in-tune chords with single pitch (from pitch pipe/app, if that's what you'll use in performance)
- vi. work on matching vowels among voices—crucial for good intonation

c. Effective mind warmups

- i. **Any warmup can be a brain warmup if done mindfully!** Planning warmups to meet the above criteria can help avoid the mindless warmup.
- ii. echoing rhythmic patterns, consonant sounds

iii. echoing physical patterns

d. **The effectiveness of warmups depends on how carefully you are listening. What do you hear?**

2. The repertoire

a. Effective rehearsal practices for healthy voices

i. order of pieces

1. try to vary the amount or kind of vocal difficulty from one piece to the next
 - a. extreme or static range/tessitura
 - b. lots of leaps or crossing breaks in the voice
 - c. dynamic extremes
2. don't start the rehearsal with the piece that's the most challenging vocally
3. mix sight-reading and music they know well

ii. take breaks

1. have one scheduled for about halfway through if you have long rehearsals (≥ 90 minutes)
2. don't be afraid to take an earlier break, or more than one short break, if people are getting tired, especially after a vocally or mentally challenging piece
3. encourage everyone to take a (short) personal break from singing if they are tired/strained
4. mix sitting and standing, if your choir uses chairs

iii. try to control the environment as much as possible

1. clean space (free of allergens and dust)
2. access to drinking water
3. humidifiers

- b. Effective rehearsal practices for good hearing**
 - i. standing position**
 - 1. similar voices not too close to each other**
 - 2. about 18 inches between each singer**
 - 3. make sure crucial sections can hear each other**
 - ii. sing slowly when intonation is a problem—even go chord-to-chord**
 - iii. don't sing (!), so that you as the director can hear better**
 - iv. protect singers' ears (especially important in a cappella and jazz/pop singing)**
 - 1. musicians are prone to hearing loss due to proximity of loud noise (3.6 times more likely to develop it, in one study)**
 - 2. choral singing can produce sound pressure levels of 110 dB or more (hearing damage begins at 85 dB with long or repeated exposure)**
 - 3. encourage softer singing in rehearsal at times**
 - 4. try to avoid very "live" rehearsal spaces**
 - 5. consider musician-specific ear plugs, especially when you use amplification, but even for rehearsals (about \$280/pair)**
 - 6. If your ears are ringing after a rehearsal or performance, you have a problem!**
- c. Effective rehearsal practices for the mind**
 - i. Have a reason for everything you do in rehearsal! No mindless repetition**
 - ii. vary the mental challenges of rehearsal (intonation, rhythmic integrity, emotional expression, clarity of diction, etc.)**
 - iii. build in plenty of time for memorization**

3. Pre-and post-rehearsal procedures

a. choosing repertoire

- i. know how much you can expect them to improve, and plan for increased challenges throughout the school year
- ii. decide what areas of growth you want to focus on (more complex divisi, better diction, better intonation, new languages, more facial expressions, etc.)
- iii. consider voice, ears, and mind as you choose rep

b. conductor's score study

- i. identify potential trouble spots (intonation, rhythm, etc.), assessing whether they are voice, ear, or mind problems (or combination)
- ii. have a few plans ready for solving potential problems

c. long-view rehearsal planning

- i. work backwards from a performance date to make a rough sketch of every rehearsal
- ii. set memorized goal at least a week or two before the performance
- iii. most challenging repertoire needs most rehearsal, whether for voice, ear, or mind

d. rehearsal "post-mortem" for director and ALL singers

- i. What did you rehearse?
- ii. What problems were solved? How?
- iii. What problems didn't get solved? How might you solve them next time?
- iv. Where is each piece in the preparation process now?
- v. Does the long-range rehearsal plan need to be changed?

e. observing other directors