

## Preparing the Score

Determine the overall form. Make a graph of the piece's structure.

Play through the piece and sing through the piece as you are able.

Read the text; analyze the phrases as the composer has set them in the music.

Determine the tempo from external and internal evidence; do all practice from this point forward in the tempo suggested. Use a metronome religiously.

Analyze the work harmonically. Identify the cadences, the points of harmonic tension, and the difficult pitches.

Determine phrase lengths and their points of rise and fall.

Figure out which voice parts have melodic importance and which are accompaniment. Assign dynamics accordingly.

Learn to sing each part without the piano

Learn to sing each part while playing a second part.

Practice singing each voice part while conducting—your conducting must be responsive to the nuances of the music.

Be able to speak every rhythm while conducting—know the underlying rhythm at all times.

Be able to sing the vertical chords at any point in the music—bass, tenor, alto, and soprano.

Indicate dynamic levels of all points of a crescendo and diminuendo.

Note the seams or transitions and tempo changes and practice these until they are automatic.

While going through the score, note the difficult places and factor these into the overall rehearsal plan you are developing.

The conductor must have a full grasp of the music, a clear idea of what you want to hear.

If at all possible, the conductor should memorize the music and especially the text. Learn to conduct, if possible, without music.

## **Rehearsal Order**

Rehearsal atmosphere must be inspiring and conducive to fine singing.

Clean, neat, organized and cheerful  
Well-lighted and ventilated  
Chairs well spaced  
Risers: 3-4 levels of seating  
Good piano, in tune.

It is important that each person have their own music and a pencil. They should be encouraged regularly to mark their score according to the conductor's directions

Always begin and end rehearsals on time.

Begin each rehearsal with something they can do well and to immediately build confidence.

Next should be the most demanding work while they're fresh and confident.

Close rehearsal with something that is relatively easy and exciting, thereby sending the singers on their way with high spirits and positive morale.

## **The Learning Process:**

Sing completely through a new song up to tempo, prior to "tearing it apart" later. (At the beginning level, have the accompanist play through the music to give the singers an idea of what they are about to tackle.)

Always keep in mind the structure of the music. Identify those sections that are alike and those that are almost alike. Occasionally work from the back to the front of the piece.

Rehearse only those passages that need it. Refrain from saying: "Let's go back to the beginning"

Correct one thing at a time. Hear a problem, correct, and go!

Don't mention problems that might arise. Wait until they do miss something, then fix them.

Do, however, give advance warning (and teaching) concerning a very difficult or tricky phrase coming up, so they can have a better chance for some degree of success the first time they sing it.

## Neutral Syllables

Limits the number of variables which may cause problems for the choir both musically and vocally.

Forces the choir to focus on the musical elements, i.e. rhythm, pitch, line and tone quality—in essence, this means the choir members must learn to read the notes and the rhythms.

An amateur choir which learns a piece immediately with text will find it difficult to separate out music elements for repair, such as accurate pitch and rhythm, because the notes and rhythms of the piece are psychologically married to the text.

Teaching text too early inhibits music expression and spontaneous music making. It also does not allow for accurate pitch and accurate rhythm in a consistent tempo to be “schooled in.”

## Which Syllables--vowels

Use only pure vowels—no diphthongs. Diphthongs such as “doe” or “tay” will produce unclear sounds. How to produce diphthongs must be taught, but they impede the early learning process.

Suggestions are “oo,” “ee,” or the German “u.” All three should be sung with a “fish-mouth” shape.

“oo” encourages blend and the development of head tone for all voice parts.

“ee” fosters a brighter sound in the choir.

“u” combines the best qualities of both of the above vowels.

“ah” should be used with caution because it fosters a chest quality in all voice parts. Because it is more open, it also is produced with less uniformity and reduces the possibility of true blend. If it is used, it should be sung very bright with the same “fish-mouth” lip shape. It is useful in building a darker choral sound.

“aw” also helps build a darker sound. Both the “ah” and the “aw” need to be sung lighter without heavy chest feeling.

## Which Syllables—consonants

*Non-legato Consonants*— t, p, b, and d are the most likely choices. The choir should be reminded to spring quickly into the vowel with the shortest possible consonant, thus creating a long vowel.

*Legato Consonants*— m, n, ny, v, and z are good possible choices.

The choir should be told to voice the consonant and lengthen it so that it has time to sound the pitch before moving to the vowel sound. The voiced consonants are also useful to build a “connection” between the “support” and the voice.

*It is helpful to intersperse humming and chewing of the sustained sound between periods of rehearsing with the above consonants. Humming and chewing with “thick lips” that are lightly touching helps bring continued relaxation to the jaw and vocal mechanism in addition to continuing to foster a healthy and resonant forward placement.*

*Tip of the tongue “l” cautions. Care must taken to instruct the choir to articulate the “l” with the portion of the tongue immediately behind the tip, touching that area to the gumline above the upper front teeth.*

*Alternate neutral syllables and consonantal combinations to reflect changing textures.*

*The choice of which consonant is determined by the style of the music. The consonant which will most closely re-create the rhythmic style of the music is desired.*

### **Chanting the Text:**

Speak the text with attention to inflection and flow.

Speak the text in the rhythm of the music—speak above conversational level.

Chant the text in rhythm on a single pitch.

Speak and/or clap difficult rhythms until accurate.

### **For the Conductor:**

Keep the pace of a rehearsal incredibly fast! Singers should hardly be able to keep up. However, do not let it become a hyper feeling, just really fast moving. Never stop and think on their time. If they can easily keep up with you, they’re probably bored.

Except for early-rehearsal “note-watching,” keep your eyes focused in their eyes, not in your score. Maintain a phenomenal communication between the conductor and singer.

Plan effective warm-up exercises based on sound vocal techniques, which thoroughly prepare the voices for singing and are, in part, concerned with demands of the music to be rehearsed.

### **Keep Thinking Forward Motion**

No two consecutive notes, syllable, or words should ever receive equal emphasis. Every note has its own special function within the continual process or rise-stress-fall of phrase after phrase.

Weak beats have energy into so-called strong beats.

Learn the music from the beginning with attention to phrasing, motion, and flow.

Remember: It is phrasing that transcends mechanics into music!