

# **Tips and Techniques For Choral Rehearsals in Grades 7-9**

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### **Part I: Improving Tone and Intonation - Starting With the Boys**

#### **A. Test Each Boy's Voice and Divide Boys Into At Least Two Sections**

- At the beginning of the year, make sure every boy can match pitch with you
- Get the boys in groups of 5-6 around the piano.
- Marginalize your girls so they don't pay attention to the boys.
- Have an index card for every boy.
- Play a pitch on the piano (Bb below middle C)
- Sing the pitch, and ask the boys to sing it back to you.
- Find the most confident boy, and have him match pitch again.
- Immediately compliment the boy on something.
- Work lower until you have found the singer's low note.
- Tell the boy what his voice part will most likely be.
- Note the pitch on the index card.
- Repeat for all boys.
- If the boy doesn't match your pitch, you should match his.
- The pitch matching can be in octaves.
- You may need the help of another student if the pitch is out of your range.
- After class, make a new seating chart that has the boys in sections.

#### **B. Develop a Unison in Each Section, and Expand the Range of Your Tenors and Basses**

- For several days, have each section sing a note and listen for non-tuning.
- Essentially, you are going on a "witch hunt."
- When you hear a wrong note, find the boy and determine if he is high or low.
- For real beginners, if they are too low, sing louder. If too high, sing softer.
- After attaining a unison, develop accuracy with "voice echoes."
  - \* Teacher prompts with a 3-6 note pattern.
  - \* Use minor. Use an "oh" vowel.
  - \* Voice echoes are essentially "target practice."
  - \* Voice echoes need to happen every day for beginners.

C. Choose Vocal Exercises That Are Mindful of the Boys' Ranges

1. Have a good idea what the range of each boys section is.

7th Gr. Tenor	7th Gr. Baritone	7th Gr. Bass	8th Gr. Tenor	8th Gr. Baritone	8th Gr. Bass

2. Be mindful of what the “common range” is for your boys.

7th-Grade Common Range	8th-Grade Common Range

3. Choose exercises in the common range, OR choose exercises that are in two parts.

- Common range exercises (usually done on the vowel, “oh”.)
- Girls sing up an octave.

T/B

(minor third)	(major third)	(perfect fourth)	(perfect fourth)
Do re do ti do	Do re mi re do	Do re mi fa mi re do	Do mi re ti do

- Parallel Fifth Exercises

T/B

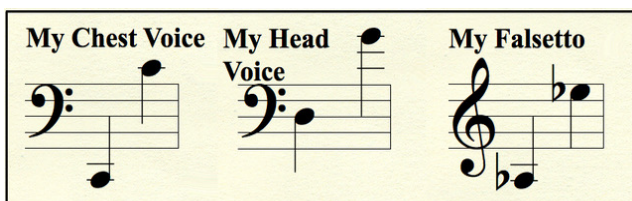
Oh _____	Oh _____	Oh _____	Oh _____

T/B

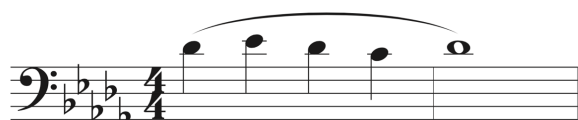
Oh _____

#### D. Teach Your Boys about Chest Voice, Head Voice, and Falsetto

- Male Teachers – Sing the full range of the three voices to demonstrate.



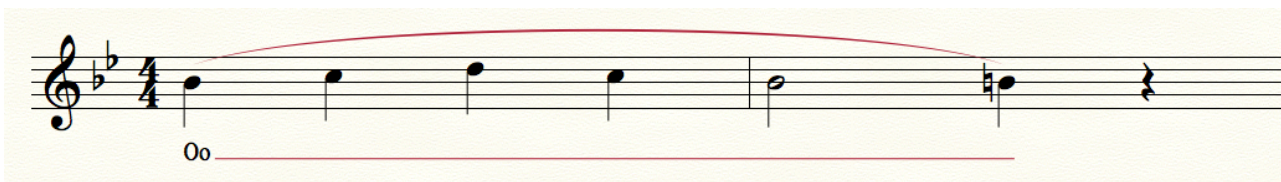
- Male Teachers – Teach student at first by speaking.
  - \* Use “Hercules, Wimpy Guy, Girl”
    - (Wimpy Guy says: “You guys, knock it off!”)
- Female teachers, get a recording of a man demonstrating the voices.
- Free videos found on YouTube (Google “Davison”, and one of these titles)
  - \* Overview: Chest Voice, Head Voice, Falsetto
  - \* Using Speech To Learn Each Voice
  - \* Exercises For Chest Voice, Head Voice, Falsetto
  - \* Singing Through The Passaggio
  - \* Transition From Chest Voice to Head Voice to Falsetto
  - \* Vocal Transitions in a Phrase
- Most importantly, do a “narrow range” head voice exercise daily.
- Do the exercise from Bb below middle C to F above middle C.
- Have the girls join in the same octave.



Oh \_\_\_\_\_

#### E. Build a Good Tone in Sopranos and Altos - - For Male Teachers

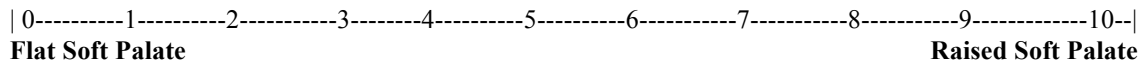
1. Start in the upper register, and learn to make a realistic female sound.
  - Show that high notes require vowel modification. (mouth open)
  - Show the similarity of “ah” and “oo” in the high register.
  - Do three-note exercises on an open “oo” vowel.
    - \* Start in the key of Bb. Go up to the key of Db or D.



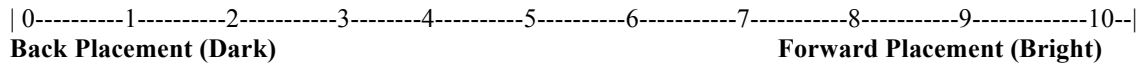
Oo \_\_\_\_\_

F. Developing Good Tone by Demonstrating Three Tonal Spectrums

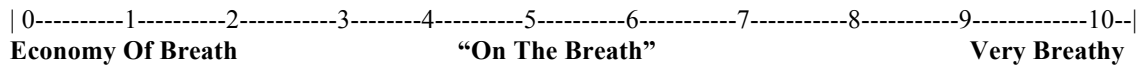
1. The Spectrum Of Lift



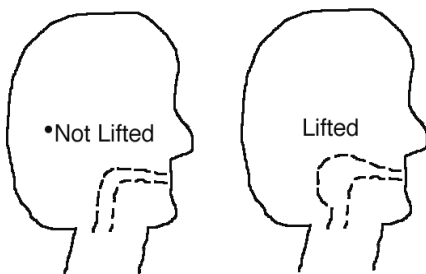
2. The Spectrum Of Placement



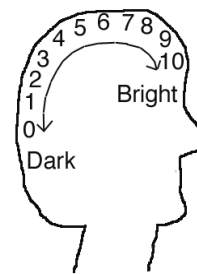
3. The Spectrum of Focus



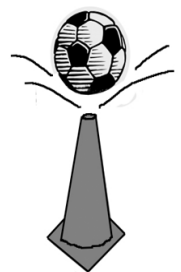
Lifting The Soft Palate



The Spectrum Of Placement



Singing “On The Breath”



G. Develop Good Blend by Demonstrating The Four Parameters Of Pitch Matching

- Pitch
- Placement
- Vowel
- Volume
  - \* Demonstrate incorrect and correct versions of each
  - \* Let the students really hear what “blend” sounds like.

## Part II: Finding Music for Your Choirs With Boys

### A. Music For Mixed Choirs That Are Unbalanced

- Consider the problem of the choir with 35 girls and 8 boys
- The boys need two different parts (but there are only 8 of them).
- The one part they are given is good for almost none of them.
- One solution: Find music in the “common” range.
- A better solution: SA(T)B music.
  - \* Written for boys that are few, varied, and energetic.
  - \* Written for choirs with 40 girls and 8 boys
  - \* Separate parts for tenors and basses.
  - \* The boys always get support.
  - \* Found in the SAB section.
    - Exultate Justi – Davison – SA(T)B
    - Regina Coeli – Davison – SA(T)B
    - Laudate Dominum – Davison – SSA(T)B
    - Ritmo – SA(T)B (don’t get confused and buy SATB)

### B. Music for Mixed Choirs That Are Balanced

- Several publishers have improved at writing music for middle-level boys.
- Alfred BriLee Shawnee Chorister’s Guild Hal Leonard Heritage
- Closer To The Flame – Susan Boersma - SATB
- Invictus – Andrew Marshall - SSATB
- Old Joe Clark – Davison - SATB
- Who Will Be a Witness? – SATB
- Dance Today With Joy – Vijah Singh – SATB
- The Wide Missouri – Schram - SATB

### C. The Difficulty of Finding Music For TB Choir

1. Not as many composers write for this genre
2. Much of the music that does exist is not conceived with the middle level in mind
  - The Storm – Davison – TBB
  - A Cowboy’s Life – Davison – TTB
  - Tu Es Petrus – Davison – TTB
  - O Sing To The Lord – Davison – TB

### D. A Few Songs That Do a Good Job of SAB

- The Cuckoo – Hugh – SAB
- Elijah – Davison – SAB
- Nothin’ Gonna Stumble My Feet – Gilpin – SAB

### E. Find Sophisticated Music That Can Work in a Young Choir

- Requiem – Craig Hella Johnson – SATB

### Part III: Making Choir Their Favorite Class – Foundations For Great Rehearsals

- A. Establishing a Connection with every student.
  - Greeting Students on the way in.
  - A fist bump or an “elbow” handshake are equally good.
  - See if you can put a smile on every face.
  - Make every student feel like they are wonderful to you.
  
- B. Get the students into “expressive mode” as soon in the period as you can.
  - Sing: 500 Miles – by Hedy West
  - Giving the “expression” award
    - \* One affirmation draws a response from everyone.
  - When students are expressive, they quibble less.
    - \* The story of the beach in Hawaii
  
- C. Helping the students in the choir to become a “pack”
  1. Name memorization is critical for the teacher and all students
    - This can take 15 minutes of class over eight days.
  
  2. Two-minute interviews help students to know each other
    - Have a list of open-ended questions
    - Divide students into four groups. Group A interviews group B. C with D.
    - One group rotates, like speed dating.
    - Teach kids how to keep the conversation going with follow-up questions.
  
  3. Be the “pack leader.” Don’t let students be the dominant person in the class.
    - Use proximity to establish calm assertiveness
    - The story of the Dog Whisperer
    - Take power back from power-hungry students
      - \* How to politely derail student suggestions
  
  4. Use seating charts to avoid “clustering” of popular students.
    - Especially on the first day of school.
  
  5. Teach your students to have a “one for all, and all for one” mentality.
    - Students who struggle are the most important person in the class.
    - Visitors and new students require extra love.
    - Teach your students to greet substitutes.
  
- D. Understand the Power and Importance of Affirmation
  1. Many students go through an entire day without any affirmation.
  2. When you praise one student, you encourage all the rest.
    - Example: Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 Praise
    - Example: The “Dude - - Wow!” popsicle stick
    - Example: Trying out for solos
  
  3. The story of Meghan

## E. Learn to Manage Boredom

1. Boredom is our enemy. Learn to see the early symptoms.
  - Stretching; yawning; a dull look on the face; slouching
  - Know when you have talked for too long.
    - \* Do you remember the teacher who talked too much?
2. In your lesson plans, try to predict when boredom might occur.
  - If you can't avoid a long boring activity, at least warn the students.
  - "This next part of the lesson is going to take about 15 minutes."
  - Even YouTube coaxes us to stay on the page with a countdown.
3. If you see signs of boredom, insert a high interest activity.
  - A student coming to the front for a task or for a solo.
  - Inviting one student to demonstrate.
  - Stretches; standing for a moment; telling an interesting story or joke
  - Example: "Drama Echoes"
4. Always keep your eye on "customer satisfaction."
  - Only electives need to "recruit"
  - Choir students are happiest when they are singing.
  - When possible, give directions and get them singing within 15 seconds.
5. Use student judges to add interest and focus on your goals.
  - Appoint a "watcher" go point out the best stage presence.
  - Appoint a "listener" to judge things like dynamics

## F. Use Extrinsic Motivators to Get a Tough Class Going

- Example: The 3x3x3 Point Ice Cream Contest
- Example: The "Comfy" Chair

## G. Make Good Use of a Very Good Motivator – Grades

1. Grades are like a "currency."
2. Don't be afraid to grade on participation. (60% in my classes)
  - What types of student behaviors do teachers really want?
    - \* Musical Skills: Singing Effort, Reading Music, Posture
    - \* Rehearsal Skills: Readiness, Focus, Listening
  - What is really important to us at a concert?
    - \* Showing up!
    - \* Doing your best!

## **Part IV. Introducing The Most Important Domain In Education – The Affective Domain**

- A. Remember Bloom’s Taxonomy?
  - 1. A Cognitive Assessment: What does the word “ritardando” mean?
  - 2. A Psychomotor Assessment: Sing a phrase with a catch breath after the third word.
  - 3. An Affective Assessment: Show that “being focused” has become a habit for you.
    - Notice the highest level is characterization.
- B. The affective domain is all about building habits, values, and character.
  - Affective learning is on par with cognitive and psychomotor learning.
  - What do most employers want in a new hire?
  - What is it that normally gets a person fired?
- C. Introducing: Non-Academic Learning Requirements (NALR’s or “Nailers”)
  - NALR’s are some of the most important things we learn in school.
  - These are the qualities that most employers ask for.
  - Most people who get fired, get fired for the lack of an affective attribute.
  - You would never recommend a student who lacked an affective attribute.
    - \* The story of the private choir reference.
- D. Not all NALR’s can be graded. Not all NALR’s should be graded.
  - “Work Ethic”, “Cooperation in Groups” are things that might be graded.
  - Most NALR’s are simply addressed as the occasion arises.
- E. Since all NALR’s have to do with forming habits, they are not graded with a final test.
  - NALR’s are assessed by showing consistency over time.
- F. Teaching NALR’s can be some of the most impactful things we teach.
  - How do you teach a student to be confident when singing a solo?
  - Confidence can be greatly enhanced with affirmation from students and staff.
  - Confidence often takes many repetitions to develop.
  - Students can be taught how to handle fear when it rears its ugly head.
- G. NALR’s can be taught by simply knowing what they are, and taking time to address them.

## **Part V: Finding Music for Your Treble Choirs**

- Most selections for treble choir are lyrical.
- We have a need for more rhythmical music for treble choirs.
  - \* Feel Good – Baker – SSA
  - \* Bandyrowe – Brumfield – SSA
  - \* Come, All Ye Fair and Tender Ladies – Davison – SSA
  - \* Sleepsong – Lawson – SSA
  - \* Sesere Eeye – O’Leary – SSA
  - \* The Storm Is Passing Over – Baker – SSA
  - \* Shout For Joy – Davison – SSAA
  - \* Samba de las Escrituras – Berg – SSA

All workshop notes are available: Website: [dandavisonmusic.com](http://dandavisonmusic.com) Tab: “ACDA Notes”