

Sight Reading

Approach as a musician

Accompanist:

- a. I believe the first thing I look at is the Tempo Marking because it gives a lot of information about the style (not just the speed of the piece).
- b. Then, I look at the overall piece for patterns either stylistically in the piano part or the voice parts.
- c. Then I look for any pages that I may need to turn back (D.C. al Fine or D.S.) so I am prepared for that.
- d. Then I look at the dynamics overall – which tell a lot about the style and shape of the piece.

This must all be done in about 30 seconds, as someone is usually waiting for you to play it for them and it could be a “one time only” audition.

Teaching students to sight read/sing:

- a. I give the students 30 seconds to look over the piece before beginning. I will direct them to which pages they should look, as well as the style markings (in the tempo mark area).
- b. I do not believe it is necessary to talk about key signatures, as many students do not have a reference to the importance of that. They need to understand the melodic intervals (and sometimes harmonic relationship) when sightreading their parts. I believe the harmonic relationships are not talked about during the INITIAL sightreading of a piece, but are important to discuss during the preparation of a piece.
- c. I never have one section at a time rehearse with the piano – always at least two sections at a time so there is always something to relate their part to – harmonically or rhythmically. Ideally, I like to have two pianos, and four sections going at the same time. This forces the students to read quickly. Some students are stronger readers than others and learn by listening and relating what they are seeing to their part, as well as hearing how they should harmonize against the other parts by working with students that read better. It is important to place students where they will be most successful when sightreading. Of course, if you are testing in sightreading, that is different.

- d. I also do not believe that style and dynamics should be things that are taught after all of the notes are learned. Dynamics help with phrasing – which is really from the basic initial breath. For this reason I believe dynamics or style (percussive or legato singing) should be addressed in the first rehearsal.
- e. Because so many factors are introduced in the first rehearsal, it is not necessary to work on the whole piece but instead to have a plan of attack, even, “change up” the plan on different pieces (work back to front, or middle climax section, or beginning, for example). Also, it is not necessary to just work pitch, but rhythmic sight-reading is also great – especially when introducing a new language.
- f. I do not think it is in the music’s best interest to listen to a performance of the piece before introducing it. I think it is always good (for your choir) to hear other approaches AFTER you have taught your own nuances and styles that make it yours. This also keeps it fresh for you as a teacher. In my opinion, there is no copying or “cheating” by waiting. I would use it as a reference, without involving the choir, when there is a question.

Sight-singing Resource examples:

Masterworks Press

6706 Miner Drive SW

Olympia, WA 98512-7259

E-mail: mstrwrks@aol.com

The High School Sight Singer, By Anna Hamre

Masterworks Press

31 Bach Chorales for Sight Singing and Performance – SATB

By John Leavitt, Hal Leonard 08743236

The Choral Approach to Sight-Singing for 3-Part Mixed Voices, Vol. I, II, III

By Emily Crocker and Joyce Eilers, Hal Leonard 42115014

Sing At First Sight, SATB, Andy Beck, Karen Farnum Surmani, Brian Lewis

Alfred 28448 Level 2, 22017 Level I, 23833 Reproducible/Companion CD

alfred.com

Essential Sight-Singing

By Emily Crocker and John Leavitt

Hal Leonard

Mixed voices 08744703

Treble voices 08744699

Male voices 08744701

The Sight-Singer for Unison/Two Part Voices SVB00103S

For Two-Part/Three-Part Mixed voices SVB00102S

By Audrey Snyder

Belwin, Alfred

Review and Practice – a companion to the Sight-Singer

Successful Sight-Singing

By Nancy Telfer

KJOS V77S

Teacher's Guide V77T

Melodia, Volume I and II

By Samuel W. Cole and Leo R. Lewis

Theodore Presser Company

All-State Sight Reading (For Chorus)

Music Services Unlimited

150 Dunwoody Drive

Athens, GA 30605

Selecting repertoire is one of the MAJOR perks of what we as choral directors get to do. This is a great opportunity to push your own sightreading skills. How you initially look at a piece or read a piece gives you a lot of information on how you will introduce it to your choirs. Selection will be not only related to standards, text, beauty, genre, programming, but it always should relate to the voices you will have to work with. You may have ideas of what you want to do 3 or 4 months before introducing it, but voices change and people change, so be open to changing repertoire to best suit your group. Don't force it.

Don't always choose literature you are familiar with, but challenge yourself at least three times a year to do something totally new to your teaching repertoire. At the same time, don't always choose new material but include chestnuts that are important for students to have in THEIR repertoire.

All-State or (any) choir audition:

In my opinion, choir auditions should show your ability to read a score and sing well. If you are auditioning for a SSA(A) choir, the music you read should have all of the parts represented. You may want to hear the singer singing several different parts. It could be sung on solfege or on a syllable of

one's choosing. I do not think that one line, 8 measures in length, with no other choral indicators (a grand staff or other voice part) should be used on an audition, when there are so many choral options. Some examples look like instrumental exercises instead of a choral example. I would offer the Masterworks press sight-singing reproducible examples. There are several voicings and styles to choose from and they are a page in length in most cases. There is an explanation at the beginning (of the book) regarding the solfege, as there is in most books.

For my choir rehearsals, I ask the students to write in their solfege for all three parts so they get used to the key they are singing in, and then make them sing all three parts TOGETHER with the rest of the choir. Students did much better harmonically sight-singing when using the solfege. However, not all students/teachers have learned the solfege method of sight-reading/singing. It is important that a student is given the option of choosing the most comfortable method to audition, as you want them to do well – their best. Either method should produce the same result.

Repetition is the real key to learning a skill. Reading through something each day or week in your rehearsal as a warm up or maybe ending it will increase confidence and skill for all choir members. It could be something as simple as a hymnbook or if you have access to a library of music, anything unfamiliar to the choir. Just polishing festival repertoire doesn't really prepare the singer for the next choir experience they will have.