

If I Only Had One More Rehearsal!

Creating Efficient and Effective Rehearsals

Phillip L. Clements

Have you ever uttered the phrase, “If I only had one more rehearsal?” As we near a concert or contest date it always seems there is never enough rehearsal time. There are many external forces that inhibit our productivity in rehearsals; constant interruptions, scheduling conflicts, and early release days



just to name a few. However, there are many factors within our control that can increase the efficiency of our rehearsals.

Inefficient rehearsals are commonly marked by similar symptoms: students don't hear or follow the given instructions; students are not engaged in the rehearsal; you have to re-teach or rehearse sections of the music multiple times, and many more. While we cannot control many external factors impeding our rehearsal time, we are able to control our preparation, method of communication and the techniques we utilize in rehearsal to share our knowledge of the music.

PREPARE **Know the Score**

The best form of preparation for rehearsal is for directors to have a thorough knowledge of the music. An extensive knowledge of the score enables us to interpret the composer's intent and educate and assist the ensemble in bringing the music to the listener. It also assists in the development of the rehearsal timeline and plans. Without true understanding of the music and all its inherent details you are not able to effectively teach students about the piece or how to perform it with clarity and artistry.

Although your daily schedule is extremely busy, it is essential to build in time to study the music. Only you can study the score and prepare lesson plans, so keep this in mind and consider delegating administrative tasks. With constant interruptions during the school day, it may be beneficial to study away from school or before students arrive. The amount of study and planning time corresponds to the difficulty of the work, but there are common elements that should be consistent in your study.

What To Study **The Big Picture**

- Composer
- Background of the composition
- Form
- Overall melodic style
- Harmonic style and language
- Large musical events
- Emotional impact
- Technical problems (player and conductor)
- Similarities and differences (within the piece and between other pieces by the same composer)

The Details

- Metric and rhythmic structure
- Melodic content and shape
- Harmonic effect in phrases and other formal units
- Stylistic language
- Timbre and texture
- Growth and phrasing

Study with rehearsal in mind

In order to interpret the composer's intent and plan effectively for rehearsals you must analyze and study the music to determine the following:

- Those voices that are primarily responsible for pulse and pitch
- Exact balance and blend of lines within phrases and degree of dynamic contrast

If I Only Had One More Rehearsal!

- An expressive shape, direction and conclusion for every phrase
- Specific tempi and fluctuations in tempi with respect to the composer's indications
- Specific style information such as articulations, releases, note lengths, and note shapes

Know the Instruments

In order to assist your students and help them improve, it is important that you learn as much as you can about each instrument including basic function, intonation tendencies and solutions, alternate fingerings, articulation options, and stick and mallet options for percussion. The best teachers constantly strive to learn more about the pedagogy of each instrument throughout their careers. Start with the most unfamiliar instrument and make that your strength.

You must also study the music from the perspective of pedagogy. This type of study is an important prerequisite for the construction of your lesson plans. Sing through each part in the score to determine potential performance issues as well as techniques and skills the players will need to master in order to perform effectively. This could include multiple tonguing, slurring, range, mallet technique and many others. Look at the

combination of voices vertically within the score to determine potential ensemble performance issues such as rhythmic clarity, composite rhythms, intonation, or balance and blend issues. Finally, determine what musical concepts the students need to learn in order to effectively perform the music.

PLAN

Effective score study and knowledge of instrument pedagogy leads to efficient rehearsal plans. The curriculum for your program should be designed with the end result in mind. What do you want your students to be able to achieve at the end of the lesson, week, six-weeks, semester, year, or upon graduation? The curriculum should be based on expectations for four main areas: individual performance skills, ensemble skills, cognitive information (theory, history) and artistic expression. The ultimate

goal is to create independent musicians. In order to accomplish this you must utilize detailed, concept-centered lesson plans that incorporate curricular goals and the skills and concepts necessary for students to perform the music effectively.

Conceptual teaching

The most efficient type of instruction is conceptual teaching. This takes place when the weekly and individual rehearsal plans are linked to one or more musical or pedagogical concepts. Concepts can serve as links between several pieces of music within a rehearsal or between multiple rehearsals. Weekly rehearsal plans can be tied to performances and long-term curricular goals. In addition, the teaching of concepts results in a higher rate of retention and provides much easier assessment opportunities.

THE CONCEPT-CENTERED LESSON PLAN

Warm-up: Daily skill development exercises with a final exercise introducing or focused on the concept.

Teach: Explain and/or demonstrate the concept.

Apply: Apply the concept within the music; this can be one piece or across multiple pieces.

Reinforce: Reinforce the concept by putting it in a larger context within the music

Summarize: Ask the students to verbally summarize the concept

If I Only Had One More Rehearsal!

Educate Efficiently

Utilize a three-stage approach

The process of teaching concepts is ongoing. You are continually in one of three stages of teaching. The first stage, TEACH, includes the initial introduction and application of the concept. This can be teaching of any concept. The concept may be defined and then taught through demonstration of a particular exercise. The most effective concept teaching takes place when students are engaged in the rehearsal. The easiest way to do this is with questions. Although telling students the information may seem more efficient in the short-term, it does not promote long-term learning. To avoid telling; ask questions and allow the students to respond while you guide them to the correct answer. Be sure to call on students who may not be as engaged in the rehearsal as others.

Stage two, REINFORCE, includes repetition of the concept on subsequent days through abbreviated re-teaching and additional application or drill. The final stage, REMIND, includes periodic reminders during the course of rehearsal as well as relating the concept within new music.

THREE STAGES OF CONCEPT TEACHING	
Teach	Initial introduction and application of the concept
Reinforce	Reinforcement of the concept on subsequent days through abbreviated re-teaching and additional application or drill
Remind	Periodic reminders of the concept in the course of rehearsal or relation of new music to previously taught concepts

Communicate effectively

During all stages it is critical to be as clear as possible with your communication, both verbal and non-verbal. Ineffective communication results in wasted rehearsal time. Eye contact is an important and powerful tool;

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look at the students before speaking and insist that they are looking at you. Much can be shown non-verbally through your conducting, so ensure that you utilize clear and communicative conducting techniques. This is the most efficient form of communication since it takes place while the students are playing their instruments. Make sure you look at the students while you conduct and check their stand heights to ensure they can see you while they perform. If you do need to relate something verbally, be as concise in your instructions as possible, especially during the reinforcement and reminding stages. Find the most efficient way to

say something or show them non-verbally through your conducting. Remember they want to play their instruments during rehearsal.

Direct the listening

Since great ensemble playing is based on the students' ability to listen, it is critical to teach your students *how* to listen within the ensemble rehearsal. Teach them to listen for the basic elements that you discovered in score study: primary and secondary pulse givers, pitch givers (vertical and horizontal pitch reference), textural priorities (balance and blend), melodic contour, and style.

If I Only Had One More Rehearsal!

Continue to present questions to your students and instruct them to listen within rehearsals with the following questions in mind in order to increase productivity and independence.

DIRECTED LISTENING QUESTIONS:

- Who has the pulse?
- Who can you listen to in order to find pitch?
- Who has the melody?
- What should your dynamic be in relation to the melody (balance)?
- Is your dynamic indication part of an ensemble dynamic, an accompaniment dynamic or a melodic dynamic?
- How does your sound fit in (blend) with the other melodic or accompaniment voices?
- What is the shape and length of the phrase?
- What is the style and are you matching articulation, length, weight and shape of notes?

Monitor the effectiveness of the rehearsal

Following a well-designed lesson plan will help keep a rehearsal on track; just as important is that you monitor what is actually transpiring during

the rehearsal. Just as a good quarterback has the ability to change the play at the line of scrimmage, directors have the ability to move the rehearsal in a new direction if it is not going according to plan. Ask yourself questions during the rehearsal: *What is really transpiring? Are the students engaged? Is the pace of the rehearsal as expected?* Be mindful of the students' level of engagement, and if it is not as high as you'd like, be prepared to move to plan B or C or D to help re-engage them. Recording and studying your rehearsals can help you take note of the pace and help you see when students are most and least engaged, enabling adjustments for subsequent rehearsals.

By increasing the effectiveness of preparation and planning efforts as well as the efficiency of teaching methods and strategies, you can provide students with a more structured and concept-centered environment where learning will be more efficient, and therefore more productive and enjoyable. The time spent increasing your knowledge of instrument pedagogy and refining your teaching techniques will pay dividends for years to come and hopefully leave you feeling as though you don't need that extra rehearsal after all.

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Mr. Clement's ensembles have performed at the TMEA Conference, the College Band Directors National Association Southwest Division Conference and in New York's Carnegie Hall. Mr. Clements holds both a Bachelor and Masters degree from the University of North Texas. He is a member of the TMEA, TBA, College Band Director's National Association and an elected member of Phi Beta Mu.