

***ENSEMBLE FUNDAMENTALS
WHAT? WHY?
AND WHERE TO BEGIN***

**PRESENTED TO:
TEXAS BANDMASTERS ASSOCIATION CONVENTION
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ENSEMBLE SKILL DEVELOPMENT EXERCISES **FOR USE IN THE SYMPHONIC BAND REHEARSAL**

The initial part of any rehearsal should be much more than simply a daily warm-up period. Although the warm-up purpose is served, this period of time should also contribute to the overall conceptual growth of the director and ensemble. The exercises discussed here are not revolutionary. Their use and evolution in the interest of improved ensemble skills and concepts are the essence of their worth.

The following exercises with their variations can be used to help achieve any ensemble tonal concept. There are a few absolutes, however, which I believe desirable no matter what 'wind ensemble / symphonic band' sound one is working toward. These are:

- A. An emphasis should be made on breathing and breath control. The purpose here is to encourage a heightened sense of awareness on the part of the student of tension in the body and efficient use of air.
- B. Notes should be square, not move, should respond instantly, and be started and stopped as much together as possible.
- C. Each note should have good core and body (solidity) to it, and the sound should be as even as possible moving from note to note.
- D. Different types of articulation should be explored and should match within and between individuals and sections.
- E. Matching pitch is possible to the extent concepts A, B, C and D are successful.
- F. An emphasis should be made on making each exercise have as much musical sense as possible.
- G. There should be constant reinforcement of the transfer of these ideas/concepts into the body of the rehearsal.
- H. **THESE CONCEPTS WILL BE SUCCESSFUL ONLY TO THE DEGREE THAT BOTH STUDENT AND DIRECTOR ARE ACTIVELY INVOLVED BOTH MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY. GETTING INFORMATION IS NOT DIFFICULT. FOLLOW THROUGH IS WHAT COUNTS.**

The order in which these exercises are presented is one of individual preference. It is important to note that the exercises should be varied daily based on the amount of time allotted for rehearsal and the proximity of a performance. As a general rule, about thirty to thirty-five percent of each rehearsal is reasonable to spend on development of individual/ensemble skills.

1. BREATHING – BREATH CONTROL EXERCISES

A. Procedure - Standing or sitting

1. Breathe in and out for a specified number of counts through the mouth (occasionally through the nose)
2. Breathe as deeply as possible, keep the rib cage elevated and expanded, keep shoulders and neck soft
3. Use hand as visual aid for timing and not holding air
4. Decrease the number of counts for the inhale to one or one-half
5. Do a series of one count breaths and increase the number as students are able

B. Objectives

1. The body should feel the same all the time – respond to this feeling in music
2. Develop the ability to take quick breaths efficiently and without creating tension
3. Learn to get air out of body before taking a new breath
4. Increase capacity and ability to control more air
5. Eliminate holding air when breathing

2. LIP VIBRATIONS ON REMINGTON SERIES

A. Procedure

1. Woodwinds play Remington series in whole notes moving F down to Bb and/or F up to C (or more)
2. Rest for four counts in between each note
3. Brass vibrate the Remington during the woodwind whole rest

B. Brass instructions

1. Hold the mouthpiece with two fingers and your thumb
2. Start exactly in the middle of the pitch – not above or below (it will help if brass players hum note while WW's play)
3. Send your sound away from you
4. Keep your lips soft inside the mouthpiece
5. Make your vibrations as colorful as possible
6. Imagine your vibrations traveling in the middle of the shank
7. Don't press against your face
8. No silence between brass and woodwinds

C. Variations

1. Play in half notes descending or ascending and going back to
2. Use 'berp' or 'buzz-aids' for brass
3. Do with half, quarter, etc. articulations

3. REMINGTON SERIES – BRASS ON INSTRUMENTS

A. Procedure

1. Play F series down to Bb
2. Play F series up to C
3. Always return to F
4. Play F series split or rotating

B. Variations

3. Singing to work on ear training
4. Stacking from different groups to work on specific timbres encountered in music
5. Back to back, in half or whole notes
6. Blocked – dotted half notes
7. Split-series – half go up, half go down (return to F)
8. Rotating – go down a half step (e) – then immediately up a whole step (f#) – then back to F – continue to an octave or more

C. Objectives

1. Matching energy and resonance from note to note and section to section
2. All notes should sound & feel like the concert F
3. Learn to balance and match octaves
4. On split series – learn to match energy of intervals played together with energy of a single note, to learn to tune intervals, and to hold dissonant intervals steady
5. Rotating series – smooth changes, no color changes, correct interval
6. Ear training

4. F EXCHANGE – (F AROUND THE ROOM)

A. Procedure

1. Band play F (or any other note), then note is exchanged between sections and individuals – usually low to high
2. Done in whole (touching or with rest in between), dotted halves or other note values

B. Objectives

1. Matched tonal energy, volume, and strength of articulation between voices and individuals
2. Smooth (seamless) exchange on whole notes
3. Matched starts and releases
4. Matched pitch

C. Variations

1. Exchange on measures of quarters, eighths, etc.
2. Dove-tail – each person holds for a maximum of eight counts – first person holding releases when matched with second person
3. Exchange on intervals and notes other than F

5. ARTICULATION / NOTE LENGTH EXERCISES

A. Procedure

1. Begin with a whole and proceed through shorter note values to 16th notes
2. Start with notes that touch and work on a firm legato articulation and later a highly defined, very firm articulation
3. Work on notes that don't touch – long lifts, short (staccato) notes
4. Do touching and non-touching notes separately at first, then put together

B. Variations

1. Go to and from 16th notes
2. Do on intervals (divide)
3. Do while changing notes

C. Objectives

1. Matched note lengths
2. SAME STRENGTH OF ARTICULATION ON EVERY NOTE WITHIN THE VARIOUS AREAS
3. Direction of line
4. Same body of sound on every note – **ALL NOTES FEEL AND SOUND LIKE A WHOLE NOTE**
5. Feel of subdivision in silences & overall precision
6. Same result going forward or backward

D. Emphasize

1. Tongue must touch in the same place on reed or in mouth every time (within a style)
2. Tongue must touch with the same strength within a given style
3. Never breath at a bar line/style change

6. F DESCENDING/ASCENDING EXERCISE

A. Procedure

1. Concert F scale is played descending two notes at a time with a whole rest after the second note; after the whole rest, repeat the second note and continue the pattern
2. Scale is played in half notes with no rests
3. Same as # 1 & 2 but going up from middle F

B. Objectives

1. Improved tone quality in extreme registers – try to eliminate interference in lower notes and thinning of upper notes
2. All notes sound and feel like the concert F
3. Move with no bumps or gaps between notes

C. Variations

1. Woodwinds play – brass answer on mouthpieces
2. Add measures from articulation series
3. Play either slurred or articulated
4. Use different scales (moderately advanced to advanced)
5. Eventually have horns, clarinets, oboe go into extreme upper register (advanced)

7. CHORALE

A. Variations

1. Back to back
2. Short lifted notes
3. Subdivided in 8th, 16ths, or triplets
4. Exchange between brass and WW's
5. Brass play on mouthpiece
6. Sing
7. Use of quartets and soloist

B. Objectives

1. Transference of everything worked on to this point to music
2. Choral recognition and tuning
3. Phrase direction and shape
4. Matching energy throughout voices
5. Proper balance
6. Cadence recognition and execution

SING EXERCISES AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE

USE METRONOME 80/90 PER CENT OF TIME IN MIDDLE SCHOOL & 60/70 PER CENT OF THE TIME IN HIGH SCHOOL (TRY PLACING MET. IN CENTER OF THE ENSEMBLE & HAVE A STUDENT WORK

PICK ONE OR TWO OF THE FUNDAMENTALS & CONCENTRATE ON THEM IN SECTIONAL

HAVE STUDENTS PLAY-OFF FUNDAMENTALS JUST AS YOU WOULD MUSIC OR SCALES

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE 'RONALD REAGAN HIGH SCHOOL WIND SYMPHONY,' AND THEIR DIRECTORS, MARK CHAMBERS AND MARK KOEHLE FOR THEIR GENEROUS PARTICIPATION