

TEACHING YOUR BAND TO SIGHTREAD

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Sightreading is a test of music literacy. It is your job to make sure your students are literate. Teach the fundamentals of music, all year, every day, every rehearsal, and sightreading will be easy for your students.

TONE

1. Use these words, or others of your choosing, to describe the tone you want students to strive for: beautiful, clear, steady, firm, supported, rich, resonant, vibrant, characteristic.
2. Breathing exercises at the start of rehearsal get the body ready. Work for noiseless intake and full exhale.
3. Move lots of air.
4. Starting in your beginning classes, stress correct formation of the embouchure. Continue to monitor older students. Don't forget that posture affects the air intake and support, and therefore, the sound.
5. In your daily warmup use Remingtons, lip slurs, and scales (played slowly) to develop embouchure and tone, and to extend range. Include practice on mouthpiece alone to develop embouchure and tone. Work to make the same quality of sound in all registers, at all dynamic levels.
6. Introduce vibrato for appropriate instruments.
7. Provide examples of great players: symphony performers, commercial recordings (video and audio), and class role models. Encourage student attendance at live recitals and concerts by professional players.

TECHNIQUE AND KEY AWARENESS

1. Scales and scale exercises are tried and true technique builders.
2. Include major and chromatic scales (minor for high school.)
3. Additional scale things to try:
 - Students play scales and recite the order of sharps and flats individually as others listen and determine accuracy.
 - Students write the sharps and flats in their proper locations on the staff and name scale notes in the various keys or write scale notes on the music staff, placing proper sharps or flats where needed.

ARTICULATION

1. Work for consistency throughout the band: "matched articulation."
2. Remember that the ends of notes are just as important as the starts of them: "matched note length."
3. The Taffanel-Gaubert Mechanism Studies for flute gives twelve different articulations to use on scale studies. Use these on exercises you devise, or use the woodwind option 3 warmups, in eight articulations, in the Foundations for Superior Performance band book by Jeff King and Rich Williams.

RHYTHM

1. Young, inexperienced students have the most rhythm trouble on long notes, ties, and rests.
2. Teach your band to look at stems, not just the note heads.
3. Have a counting system and use it. Make sure that individual students actually understand it and are not parroting what others around them are counting. Use foot tap, and clap rhythms while counting aloud. Individual counting aloud is mandatory.
4. Sightread rhythm sheets for chair tests.
5. Write notes and rest patterns on the board, and have students identify note values as well as count the rhythm.
6. Written tests give you a good picture of whether or not students understand subdivision. Also have students draw notes, compose their own rhythm patterns and write rhythms you dictate.
7. On new music or new lines in the book, have students count out loud, tap, clap, air band, buzz, or sing exercises prior to playing. Or, divide the class in half: one group claps while the other half plays.
8. Supplemental materials: pages of teacher prepared rhythm drills, commercially prepared slides or flash cards, and Master Theory workbook/ worksheets

Here are some good books to use for rhythm, technique, learning music reading, and warmup:	
<i>14 Weeks to a Better Band</i>	Roger Maxwell/Barnhouse Publications
<i>25 Lazarus-Concone Studies</i>	Harold Rusch/Belwin Mills
<i>101 Rhythmic Rest Patterns</i>	Grover Yaus/Belwin/Warner Bros.
<i>204 Progressive Sight reading Tunes</i>	Roger Winslow/Gore
<i>Division of Beat</i>	McEntyre, Haines/Southern Music
<i>Division of Measure</i>	Grover Yaus/Belwin
<i>Exercises for Ensemble Drill</i>	Fussell/Warner Bros.
<i>Foundations for Superior Performance</i>	Williams, King/Kjos
<i>Hal Leonard Intermediate and Advanced Methods</i>	Hal Leonard
<i>Harmonized Rhythms</i>	Forque, Thornton/Kjos
<i>The Logical Approach to Rhythmic Notation</i>	Phil Perkins/Logical
<i>Rhythm and Rests</i>	Frank Erickson/Alfred
<i>Rhythm Master</i>	Southern Music
<i>Rubank Advanced Methods</i>	Rubank
<i>Sight reading for Band Series (1-4)</i>	Evans, Nelson/Southern Music
<i>Symphonic Band Technique</i>	Rhodes, Bierschenk/ Southern Music
<i>Teaching Rhythm</i>	Joel Rothman/JR Pub.
<i>TRI (Technique, Rhythm, Intonation)</i>	Garner, Haines, McEntyre/Southern Music
<i>Winning Rhythms</i>	Ed Ayola/Kjos

LISTENING SKILLS

1. Focusing on listening skills in the band classroom will continue to develop sound awareness, sound discrimination and sound sensitivity. Developing listening skills will assist students with these things:

The ability to concentrate

- * The ability to understand what one is listening to
- * The ability to remember sounds and sound sequences.

The ability to concentrate is essential to the listening process. Students must be able to remember what they have heard because of the abstract nature of the music, which is sound passing in time.

2. Choose music that will capture the attention and interest of students. Music that has strong rhythms, appealing melodic flow, obvious contrasts or unusual tone colors will usually spark the students' interest. Students will need time to develop their listening skills to be able to listen objectively to music that is unfamiliar to them.
3. Students will bring their own varied perspectives and associations, including their unique cultural and personal perspectives to the listening process. If students feel comfortable bringing in and discussing their own music, they will be more receptive to approaching other less familiar music in a similar fashion.
4. Remember, people respond to music in various ways and at different levels.

ANALYSIS

1. As your band learns music during the year teach them to analyze the music. Focus on the elements present within a piece of music and look for the relationships between and among these elements. Teach the band to recognize the pattern of organization and overall structure of the music (form).

2. The following are examples of questions to consider during analysis, AND THEY ARE THINGS YOU WILL LOOK FOR IN THE SCORE OF THE UIL SIGHTREADING PIECE:

Does the music have repetition? Contrast? Is the repetition exact or a variation?

How does the composer/musician create variety?

Is there tension in the music? How is it created? Is the tension resolved?

Can you identify phrases that are alike and similar?

What timbres are present and how are they created?

What does the composer/musician do to try and catch your attention ("hooks")?

Is there syncopation involved? How is it used?

What is the tonality used? (Major, minor, pentatonic, other?)

Can you identify the sections of a song (introduction, chorus and verse) and the organization or form of the music (for example; two- part, AB; three-part, ABA; rondo, ABACA)?

3. The particular way the ingredients of music are combined or put together creates **style** in music. Style refers to the musical characteristics of a particular composer, musician, culture, region or period. This might refer to the music of the Romantic era, music from South America, or the music of the Beatles or Percy Grainger.

PREPARATION FOR SIGHTREADING

1. Students should be able to make a beautiful sound, play scales, read rhythms, read articulations, and know common terms and signs, terms such as *andante*, *moderato*, *allegro*, *allegretto*, *maestoso*, *grandioso*, *cantabile*, *sostenuto*. Common signs would include repeats, 1st and 2nd endings, railroad tracks, fermatas, D. S. (al Fine, al Coda), D.C (remember that you do not take repeats when you have a D. S. or D. C. unless the music calls for repeats.)
2. Students need to know where they are in the measure, which beat they are on, and which beat YOU are on.
3. You can find out the criteria, (keys, time signatures, and rhythms) that composers use to write the music for your school's classification. This information is available on the UIL website.
4. Start preparing for sightreading contest at the beginning of the year. Read EASY tunes, and many of them so that your band will feel confident. When they are successful, they will enjoy reading at sight.
5. Closer to the actual event, practice sightreading the way you will do it on contest day (timed, etc.)

PREPARATION FOR THE ACTUAL CONTEST

1. Read the sheet to see what criteria the judges use in evaluating your band's performance. Share that information with your students.
2. Teach your band how to study their parts. I use KTTDC (key, time, tempo, dynamics, changes). Some beginning books use STARS (Signatures, tempo, accidentals, repeats, signs). Students should look for repetition of rhythms and melodies. My band touches the key signature in the upper left hand corner, then slides down to the bottom, touching the key signature at the start of each line to discover if and where the key changes.
3. Coach your students in the art of asking questions (1) LOUDLY (2) First identify a place, like "Square 32" and count from there, before or after, rather than saying "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 before 32." (3) Have the question in mind before they ask it to avoid stutters (4) Ask all questions at the end UNLESS you miss some pertinent piece of information, like "Mrs. Lambrecht, is there a key change at 36?"
4. First chairs should ask questions they think members of their section might miss, such as, "Is C flat the same as B natural?"
5. Pre-assign parts, perhaps putting your second best player as first chair second part.
6. Since many students get lost on rests when they sightread, train your band to count rests on their fingers and aloud (but softly). First chairs can check the section counting. I used to teach beginners to bring their instruments to the knee two bars before the end of extended rests, and to the face on the downbeat of the last measure of rest. If anyone was lost, they quickly got with the rest of the section, and we had fewer missed entrances.
7. Vary your warmup tempo, or volume, or style, to train your students to watch closely and to follow you.
8. Touch your music. Use this sense to enhance sight and hearing. We have five senses. Students use two of them – sight (looking at the music), and hearing (listening to your instruction.) Add touch, as in touching the music at important spots such as repeats, accidentals, key signatures, and changes of key and time and tempo and touching the instruments (fingering the notes). Please, touch with fingers, not instruments or sticks. As Jim Sudduth used to say, "Absorb through the skin to the bloodstream, to the brain."
9. Teach your band to "Air Band" with instruments in play position. Put the brass mouthpieces on chins. Place flute lip plates to the right or left of the lips. Then use fingers, valves, slides, sticks and AIR. You can practice articulation in this way.

JUST BEFORE THE BIG DAY

1. Make a set of time cards (10, 9, 8, 7, 6, etc.) large enough that you can see them from the podium when your assistant or spouse holds them up behind the back row of your band. I use time cards to eliminate the spoken interruptions from the timekeeper which tend to distract my students.
2. Arrange for water (cold) for your band between the stage and SR room (not just a bottle for you). And you will probably want additional water for yourself after talking nonstop for ten minutes.
3. Put into your coat pocket paper clips for any D. C. al Coda, etc.
4. Tell the band what warmup note they will play after the explanation at contest. I prefer not to play a new scale or note (Concert Eb instead of our usual Concert F or our Remington exercise) just because of the key of the sightreading piece. If, in your at-home practice you vary the scale before you sightread, then, by all means do that in the room.

YOU HAVE CHOICES

1. You can speak in a loud voice, talking at a fast speed to get everything done in the time allotted. Or you can speak softer, in a calm voice with slower talking to instill confidence.
2. Tempos are yours to set. How slow or fast is your decision. Allegro - fast enough to be convincing in style, but not so fast that the band cannot look ahead or control technique. Avoid "tempo di Kamikazee"
3. Should you start talking immediately to be sure you cover everything, or should you study the score a minute to find the pitfalls to make sure that you talk about the most important spots?

DID YOU KNOW?

1. The score for the sightreading music has each measure numbered, but the individual parts do not. They have only the numbers in large squares.
2. There are not supposed to be solos in Texas UIL sightreading music. But remember that all percussion parts are, in reality, solo parts.
3. Courtesy accidentals are confusing to students. After a key change some composers use courtesy accidents for a few measures and then remove them. The students wonder, "Was that Ab an accidental, and now I have A natural, or were they reminders that now I have Ab?"

REMEMBER

1. Judges do watch the band during the explanation period.
2. Good tone is always going to be the most important factor.
3. Phrasing counts.
4. Intonation is important in the sightreading room too.
5. Balance to the melody.
6. Judges are looking for bands that read confidently, with good style, balance, and convincing changes.
7. Good bands are flexible and respond to their conductors. They listen to themselves play and correct errors quickly.

"When musicians are trained carefully and given a sound practical routine in basic fundamentals, they require no special coaching to become good sightreaders and players. Those who are not routined in basic fundamentals will be so weak in important phases of sight-playing that no last minute coaching will be of value." E. C. Moore

Good readers do two things: (1) they read ahead; (2) they memorize the patterns of sound they have just read. These are the things performers must be able to do in order to sightread:

1. Recognize and understand key signatures. Be able to identify the "critical" note(s) in the key.
2. Recognize and understand time signatures, including cut time and 6/8 and other triple meters.
3. Recognize the sound of notes by their position on the staff. Be able to hear intervals correctly (especially important for brass players.)
4. Recognize and understand note values and be able to relate those to note groupings and rhythmic patterns. (Instant comprehension of note groupings spells success in sightreading.) Realize that although the actual values of notes change when the bottom number of the signature changes, the relationship of notes never change. eg. quarter notes are always twice as long as eighth notes.
5. Recognize and be able to execute articulation patterns. Foundations for Superior Performance lists eight articulation patterns that can be used in its warmup exercises.
6. Recognize and understand the words and symbols by which tempo, dynamics, expression and style are indicated. (Be bilingual; speak "music.")
7. Have an understanding of basic music theory.
8. Have the ability to play in tune with good tone quality, throughout the entire range of the instrument.
9. Be able to count time accurately and incisively. Foot tap is important. (Use the left foot as it will jar the body less. Also, students have to **think** about using the left foot, especially if they are right handed.)
10. Be able to control breathing to make intelligent, musical phrases and play with expression.
11. Have the ability to tongue correctly.
12. Have a thorough knowledge of the correct fingerings, including alternate fingerings, for all notes in the playing range.
13. Be able to play at a steady tempo, even in technically challenging passages.

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