



# **Lessons Learned in 50 Years of Band Directing Session 1**

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## **Texas Bandmasters Association 2014 Convention/Clinic**



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# Texas Bandmasters Association, 2014, Session 1

Gary Garner, WTAMU (ret.)

**The teacher's fourfold challenge:** Information, communication, motivation, evaluation.

**The credo:** The right note, in the right place, at the right volume, in the right style, perfectly in tune, with a beautiful sound.

**Rhythm** has two fundamental components: 1) The intellectual (Eastman counting system recommended — see separate page); and 2) The physical (sub-divided foot-tap).

Most common rhythmic pitfalls: Rests, long notes, dotted notes, tied notes, syncopation.

## Developing reading skills

- Trite but true: 1) You learn to read by reading; and 2) You can only sight-read a piece once.
- Learn to read ahead, taking in “clumps” of notes at a time, just as in reading the printed word. RhythmBee™ is ideally suited for this.
- Ensemble members must know and understand conducting patterns.

## Fundamental to good sight-reading

- Rhythmic skills
- Technical skills, especially mastering scales and arpeggios (the stuff of which most music is made).

## Prof. Church's Conducting Tenets

- Rule 1: Prepare for a note coming on the beat by moving after the preceding beat.
- Rule 2: Prepare for a note coming on the upbeat by moving on the first half of the beat.
- Rule 3: Prepare for a note coming after the upbeat by moving after the preceding beat (same as rule 1, but applied in a different context).
- Rule 4: Prepare for a note coming after the downbeat and before the upbeat by moving quickly on the preceding beat, stopping, then moving sharply on the rest.
- In short: Give them as much preparation as needed, but not an instant more.
- Principle of negation: If there is no or little rhythmic activity on a beat, use either a light, passive pulse (no “impulse of will”) or no pulse at all.
- Avoid excessive duplication.
- Rebound on every stop.

## Phrasing

- Director should plan breathing spots carefully, but be prepared to change.
- The bar line is most often not a good place for a breath.
- Phrases should ideally end at a point of having arrived somewhere.
- Two things must be taken into account in determining where to breathe— needs of the music and physical limitations of the player.
- When necessary, in lyrical music especially, allow extra time for a breath in order to avoid clipping the last note before the breath.
- Take care to avoid explosive releases in preparing to take a breath.
- When stagger-breathing, don't breathe at what would otherwise seem a logical breathing point, at a bar line, or when your neighbor breathes. All breaths should be planned and marked so that decisions about where to breathe are not made “on the fly.”
- Slurs are not sacrosanct.
- It's not always necessary — or advisable — to take more air than required, but do take care that the air supply is not exhausted before taking the next breath; often, breathing through the nose and corners of the mouth, while maintaining the embouchure setting, will reduce the possibility of a cracked or too-heavy attack.
- On occasion, it's necessary to make a bad breathing place sound like a good one.
- There are times, in rapid staccato, when you do stop the tone with the tongue.
- There are also times when a breath attack or lip attack (flute) can be helpful.

## Shaping the Phrase

- “Every note is constantly on its way to becoming the next note” (source unknown).
- Tabuteau: “Use the inner notes of each beat to lead to the next beat or use the inner beats of a bar of music to lead to the next downbeat.”
- Thurmond: “The over-accentuation of the first beat in a measure is at the root of unexpressive playing.”
- The two main tools available for playing expressively are: 1) changes in volume; and 2) changes in time. At least one scientific study indicates that, of the two, changes in volume are more important (a judgment that may be open to dispute). Others include vibrato and changes in tone color.
- Tabuteau's numbering system can be very helpful in conveying the desired shape of a phrase.
- The first of a pair of slurred notes ordinarily receives the primary weight.
- The last note of a phrase is often the softest.
- Beware “ballooning.” (I'm talkin' to you, trumpets!)
- This is possibly the most subjective aspect of music. There are no immutable laws. (And aren't we glad!).
- Cultivate the habit of listening to exemplary models, both live and recorded (and not only band), preferably with a score in hand.

## Factors determining speed and amplitude of vibrato

- Register (higher=faster)
- Character of the music
- Intensity
- Personal taste
- Vibrato of other players
- Especially to be avoided: 1) “Nanny-goat” vibrato; 2) Slow, heaving vibrato
- Discretion regarding when and where vibrato is to be used, and by whom, is of utmost importance, but not subject to any inviolable rules.
- Careful with vibrato at the end of a phrase; it's often more effective with straight tone. Likewise, it's frequently effective to start a long note with a straight tone, then ease into the vibrato.

# Eastman Counting System

## Simple Meter

Any note starting on a beat is designated by the number of the beat on which it falls. Any note starting on an upbeat is called "te" (pronounced "tay"). A note falling on any other division of the beat is called "ta" ("tah").

## Compound Meter

The second and third divisions of the beat are called "la" and "li" (pronounced "lee"), respectively. Any note falling anywhere other than on one of the three principal divisions of the beat is called "ta."

**Special Note:** Only one-beat triplets would be called "one-la-li." A half-beat triplet starting on an upbeat would be "te-ta-ta." Six even notes in a beat could be thought of as either "one-ta-la-ta-li-ta" or "one-ta-ta-te-ta-ta," depending on whether the accent is desired on the 1st, 3rd and 5th notes (triplet feel) or 1st and 4th notes (duplet feel).

2-beat triplet

4-beat triplet

## Asymmetrical Meters

When a measure contains beats of unequal duration, such as 5/8 or 7/8 (even such meters as 8/8 with a construction of 3+3+2, for example, or 9/8 with three 2s and a 3), those beats with three 8th-notes are considered to have an extra "te." A 6/8, 3/8, etc. occurring in this context would be "one-te-te, two-te-te" rather than "one-la-li, two-la-li."