



Tips for the Sight-Reading Room from the Composer's Perspective

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TIPS FOR THE SIGHTREADING ROOM

...from the Composer's Perspective

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Texas Bandmasters Association 2014

Over the past decade, I've watched and studied many band directors go through the sight-reading process with their ensembles at UIL contest. Here are just a few perspectives/suggestions from the "non-involved" observer's standpoint.

1. Why I became interested in "studying" the SR process...

- a. To hear actual live performances by students
- b. To get ideas and make adjustments for future works
- c. To gain feedback from directors and judges

2. A few tips for developing strong sight-reading skills...

- a. Know your ensemble inside and out – properly and thoroughly assess strengths and weaknesses
- b. *Read something every day!* It doesn't have to be a full piece of music
- c. You don't have to go through the "process" every day (introduce it a few weeks out)
- d. Have your students finger through the parts – develop this practice over time
- e. Rehearsal marks can serve as musical "checkpoints"
- f. *Encourage your students to **watch** – look up occasionally!*
- g. Get your students excited about sight-reading – make it a fun time

**Always remember; student improvement, NOT the rating should be the ultimate motivation! Success at contest is simply a "by-product". It is the tangible manifestation of what you should be doing anyway. As with taking a written test, if you invest time and effort in studying, you'll most likely pass with flying colors whereas if you don't, you simply won't!*

3. The sight-reading room (in most cases) is an "informal-formal" setting.

- a. You actually interact with judges in SR, as opposed to concert
- b. The SR room generally offers a more relaxed atmosphere
- c. Believe it or not, the judges are on YOUR side!
- d. Never be afraid to ask questions

4. Do a few things to help yourself....

- a. Drink some water
- b. Remove your tie/ jacket if you wish – be comfortable
- c. RELAX! Breathe deeply; sit for a moment; stretch, etc.

**Be ever-mindful that your ensemble will always take on your personality/moods. If you're tense and uptight, they will be also. So "be cool", and help your kids have a great experience!*

5. Preliminary Score Study

- a. Get familiar with key signatures, time signatures and tempos
- b. Brush over the entire score first, and then go back for the “particulars”
- c. Don’t just focus on the melody. Spend time on secondary parts as well
- d. Devote a bit of time to your percussion (often neglected)
- e. Trumpet and flute *DO NOT* always carry the melody!

6. Preparing for the experience

- a. Get your students seated correctly and comfortably – be flexible with the set-up
- b. Train and prepare your students to be “set-up” flexible as well
- c. Make sure the correct folders are distributed to the correct instruments
- d. Don’t get bogged down with needless, time-consuming protocol

7. The Explanation Period

- a. Clearly identify key signature, time signature and tempo
- b. Be concise – don’t spend too much time in one area
- c. Stop and point out the pertinent elements (dynamics, tricky rhythms, etc)
- d. You don’t have to start at the beginning (middle, toward the end, etc)
- e. *Encourage your students to watch – look up occasionally!*
- f. Speak the same “language” in the SR room as you do in your band hall

**It’s best to get through the entire piece during the explanation period as it will help you be more productive with the summary*

8. The Summary Period

- a. TAKE YOUR TIME (in a hurry)! Move quickly, but don’t rush - *speed kills!*
- b. Be sure to spend some time with the percussion players (often neglected)
- c. As you transition from the explanation period, be sure to keep your pace
- d. *Encourage your students to watch – look up occasionally!*
- e. Be sure to go back and touch on transitions and tricky spots

9. The Performance

- a. Prepare a concise, pre-performance warm-up
- b. Be very clear with your preparatory beats
- c. Play on the conservative side of the tempo (too slow is *always* better than too fast)
- d. Cue the rehearsal marks (prepare your students for this in class)
- e. Hopefully at this point, *your students are watching – looking up occasionally!*

BEST WISHES FOR GREAT SUCCESS!