

Using Rubrics In Choral Rehearsal
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In my experience as a high school choral director I have learned (sometimes the hard way) that expectations are the ultimate determination of how my ensemble performs. If I have concrete, realistic, attainable, yet challenging expectations of my singers they will rise to the occasion. A number years ago as a beginning conductor I began to wonder why some of my singers, although they were dedicated choristers, just didn't seem to "get it". They choose to join choir, they were passionate about music (although their passion may lie in rap, punk or screamo..hey - who am I to judge?) and they seemed to enjoy rehearsal; but something was missing. Where was their work ethic? Why didn't they stay more focused? What were they thinking whispering and writing notes to each other when I was working with the tenors? For the love of Mike, where were their pencils? Didn't they know that we could get so much more done, be such a great choir if they just figured it out? Why didn't they GET IT?!

That's when I realized something that has benefitted my teaching career more than just about anything else I ever learned about choral conducting. My singers didn't "get it" because they had no idea what "it" was. And for that matter, I wasn't sure how to explain "it" either...oh oh, was I ever in trouble. I decided to flip the tables and think as a singer, not as a conductor. What were the things that I did during rehearsal that I wanted my singers to do? How could I explain things in a concrete way that my students could understand? I sat down and started to think about my days as a singer and how I contributed to the rehearsal process and I came up with four things that I wanted my singers to do, rehearsal technique.

I decided to teach "Rehearsal Technique" to my students. If I was going to teach sight reading, music theory and vocal technique; why not rehearsal technique? It is an element just as essential as any other, yet those of us who are deeply passionate about music (and perhaps a bit more cerebral than some of our singers) take for granted that everyone will instinctually know how to behave in a rehearsal setting.

Over the years I have developed the following four elements of rehearsal technique and teach them to my singers.

Elements of Rehearsal Technique

1. Responsibility

Responsibility in rehearsal is putting your music in order, having your pencil, being on time and practicing sections of your music that needed work.

2. Responsiveness

Responsiveness means that you watch and listen to your conductor so you can respond to different conducting gestures. This is how choirs make music.

3. Active participation

Active participation means that you are always working on your music during rehearsal. If your director is addressing the needs of another section you are listening and taking notes in your score or possibly looking over a section you need to master or audiating your part. If discussion is taking place during rehearsal, listen to all questions and responses since most if not all of it will apply to you.

4. Goal setting

*We will always have a choral goal for each day for each piece of music we rehearse. What goals do you need to set as a singer to make the group goal happen? Do you need to work on a specific interval, modify your tone, improve your posture, breath more deeply? The choir cannot move forward without everyone setting individual goals. What do you need to do to make the music happen?**

Then I packaged the these elements into a form that all students are familiar with, a rubric. In the beginning of the year, I introduce each element separately to my new singers, brainstorm ways that each element can effect the rehearsal process and come up with positive and negative examples of each. Once they are familiar with all four elements I introduce the rubric to them.

The rehearsal technique rubric is a powerful self assessment tool that I use to help singers assess their rehearsal technique - thereby creating more independent musicians. (And let's face it, does anyone but Johnny know if he is staring at his music and thinking about Bach...or girls?) I use the rubric heavily in the beginning of the school year then as rehearsal technique becomes more second nature to them I use the rubric less often but continue to reference the elements constantly. I also may use the rubric to pull my singers back on track, for example in the spring when they are distracted by warm weather and impending graduation activities.

I find that since integrating the rehearsal technique rubric into my instruction I am much more likely to say, "Are you setting goals?", "Have you been responsible members of the choir?", "I'd like you to be more responsive", or "Tenors, are you actively participating?" instead of saying things like, "focus, stop talking, why don't you have your pencil? why aren't you following the new tempo? etc".

After using the rubric for several years my singers finally "get it", because concrete, realistic, attainable, yet challenging rehearsal expectations have been set in a way that they are familiar with and can understand.

A pdf of Mrs. Tep's Rehearsal Technique Rubric can be downloaded at www.acdocal.org
 *Thank you Dr. Goeffry Boers, University of Washington, "What do you need to do to make the music happen?" for this succinct and sagely piece of advice to my choirs.



Name _____
 Choir _____
 Date _____

Elements of Rehearsal Technique

- 1. Responsibility**
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- 2. Responsiveness**
 Responsiveness means that you watch and listen to your conductor so you can respond to different conducting gestures. *This is how choirs make music.*
- 3. Active participation**
 Active participation means that you are always working on your music during rehearsal. If your director is addressing the needs of another section you are listening and taking notes in your score or possibly looking over a section you need to master or audiating your part. If discussion is taking place during rehearsal you listen to all questions and responses since most if not all will apply to you.
- 4. Goal setting**
 We will always have a choral goal for each day for each piece of music we rehearse. What goals do you need to set as a singer to make the group goal happen? Do you need to work on a specific interval, modify your tone, improve your posture, breath more deeply? The choir cannot move forward without everyone setting individual goals. What do you need to do to make the music happen?

Circle the score you have earned (always, usually, etc.) for each element. Be honest. Mrs. Tep will double-check your scores. Total your score below and make sure to jot down your thoughts on how you can improve.

Time period (circle one) today's rehearsal this week's rehearsal other _____

Element	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Responsibility	3	2	1	0
Responsiveness	3	2	1	0
Active Participation	3	2	1	0
Goal Setting	3	2	1	0

Total score ____/12

How can you improve your score?
