

GREAT CHORAL REHEARSALS



REHEARSAL 101: Planning the Rehearsal

REHEARSAL 201: Leading the Rehearsal

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REHEARSAL 101: PLANNING THE REHEARSAL

Success in the choral rehearsal is a direct result of thorough planning. When planning, directors should seek to answer three essential questions:

What do I want this music to sound like? (PART 1: SCORE STUDY)

How do I get them to sing it that way? (PART 2: TEACHING STRATEGIES)

What I am doing at tonight's rehearsal? (PART 3: LESSON PLANS)

PART 1: SCORE STUDY -- "What do I want this music to sound like?"

After you select a piece for your choir, the first step is to thoroughly study the music. One conductor noted, "Your chorus will only sing as beautifully as you can imagine them singing." (T. Seelig, The Perfect Blend). The depth of your choir's musicality is directly linked to the depth of your score study. As you study, mark your observations in your score. You may also choose to list them on a separate sheet of paper (see template, p. 6). These musical observations will become your rehearsal goals and, eventually, your lesson plan. Observe and make decisions about the following:

a. Pitches and Rhythms

- Sing and play every vocal line
- Sing one part and play another, in every combination (S/B, A/T, etc.)
- Play accompaniment/obbligato instrument parts

b. Structure

- Observe texture
- Observe form
- Use "Bar-line" Analysis

c. Musical Elements

- Dynamics
- Phrasing
- Articulation
- Tempo
- Performance Practice

d. Elements of Great Sound

- Vowels
- Consonants
- Breath
- Soft Palate/Dropped Jaw
- Other

SCORE STUDY TIPS:

- Return to the piece weekly – new observations will emerge as you "live with" the piece.
- Interpret beyond the printed score – incorporate your own ideas for dynamics, phrasing, etc.
- When you struggle with a difficult interpretive decision, sing your options and find the one that feels right in your voice.
- Get together with musician friends and colleagues and discuss musical interpretation.
- Attend excellent concerts and listen to excellent recordings to gain new perspectives.
- Consult books and professional journals (see Bibliography)
- Attend professional conferences (ACDA, MENC, etc.)

PART 2: TEACHING STRATEGIES -- “How will I get them to sing that way?”

After completing your score study, you will need to turn to the question of teaching methods – what is the best way to teach your musical ideas? In advance of rehearsal, brainstorm two or three *different* teaching strategies for each musical goal that you outlined in your score study (see template, p. 6). By planning more strategies than you need, you are prepared to improvise and react to what you hear in the moment.

a. Include strategies from all three categories below:

- Auditory Teaching
- Visual Teaching
- Kinesthetic Teaching

b. Add to your “toolbox” of teaching strategies

- Steal them from other conductors (Appendix B, p. 17, observe rehearsals, sing in a choir, talk with colleagues, attend conferences)
- Learn them from books/journal articles (see Recommended Resources, p.14)
- Make them up yourself!

c. Use strategies that are efficient

- *Talk less, sing more.* The more you talk, the less they are singing and learning. Whenever possible, model what you want by singing it and having them echo.
- *Use more kinesthetic teaching techniques.* Singers respond to body movement more quickly and retain the ideas better from week to week.
- *Teach musical elements first.* Emphasize important musical features from the very beginning, before pounding out notes. The notes and rhythms will always come along with repetition, but it is much harder to add musicality at the end of the rehearsal process.
- *Build a culture of singer responsibility.* Teach your singers how to mark their music, so that everything you teach them is written down in their scores.
- *Build long-term musical and vocal skills.* By reinforcing the same musical/vocal concepts in every piece you sing (vowel shapes, what a good crescendo sounds like, clean cut-offs, etc.) you will teach your singers basic musical/vocal skills over time. Once singers master a skill, they can quickly replicate it in future literature.

PART 3: LESSON PLANS -- “What am I doing at tonight’s rehearsal?”

a. Establish a long-term plan for each piece

How many weeks do you have to prepare each piece? Using your structural bar-line analysis, block out which sections you intend to teach which weeks. Allocate the most time to difficult portions or tough transitions and plan to run through the entire piece several times. See the example below, in which the challenging section, “C,” is rehearsed the most:

FORM:	A	B	A	*C	A
Week 1					
Week 2					
Week 3					
Week 4					

b. Design tonight’s rehearsal plan

Because of your excellent score study and teaching brainstorm, assembling a lesson plan is now easy. Use the template on page 7.

- 1) Plan for prayer or a brief devotion to open/close rehearsal.
- 2) Brainstorm and write down any announcements or business to be handled and plan for efficiency in handling it. (Handing out music? Returning music? New members?)
- 3) Select the pieces you will teach (2-4 per rehearsal). Prioritize pieces for an upcoming service, while remembering to work ahead on more challenging anthems.
- 4) Put the pieces in an order. Teach more challenging pieces earlier in the rehearsal and always end with a piece that is fun and makes the singers feel successful.
- 5) Estimate the length of time you plan to spend on each piece.
- 6) Decide which section of each piece you want to focus on (i.e. pages 1-3) and select three or more musical goals (from your score study) that you wish to teach within that section.
- 7) Plan 2-3 different teaching strategies for each musical goal.
- 8) Select your warm-ups – one or more from each of the 5 categories - keeping in mind the needs of the repertoire you will be rehearsing. Plan for 5-15 minutes worth.

SCORE STUDY NOTES

Musical Observation	Page, Measure	Teaching Strategies
		1)
		2)
		3)
		1)
		2)
		3)
		1)
		2)
		3)
		1)
		2)
		3)
		1)
		2)
		3)
		1)
		2)
		3)
		1)
		2)
		3)
		1)
		2)
		3)
		1)
		2)
		3)

CHOIR REHEARSAL PLAN FOR: _____

Welcome/Prayer/Devotion (2-5 minutes)		
Warm-Ups (5-10 minutes)		
A. Physical/Mental	B. Breath	
C. Tone	D. Agility/Range Extension	
E. Other		
Piece #1:		Time:
Goal #1:		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Goal #2:		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Goal #3:		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3

Piece #2:		Time:
Goal #1:		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Goal #2:		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Goal #3		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Piece #3:		Time:
Goal #1:		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Goal #2:		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Goal #3		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Announcements/Prayer/Devotion (2-5 minutes)		
Dismissal		

CHOIR REHEARSAL PLAN FOR: _____

Welcome/Prayer/Devotion (2-5 minutes)		
Warm-Ups (5-10 minutes)		
A. Physical/Mental	B. Breath	
C. Tone	D. Agility/Range Extension	
E. Other		
Piece #1:		Time:
Goal #1:		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Goal #2:		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Goal #3		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3

Piece #2:		Time:
Goal #1:		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Goal #2:		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Goal #3		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Piece #3:		Time:
Goal #1:		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Goal #2:		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Goal #3		
Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Announcements/Prayer/Devotion (2-5 minutes)		
Dismissal		

REHEARSAL 201: LEADING THE REHEARSAL

This session will model a choir rehearsal using the lesson plan attached, emphasizing the concepts below.

REHEARSAL PRINCIPLES

1: Use Warm-Ups Properly

a. Purpose

- To prepare body, mind, and voice for singing
- To teach singing and musicianship
- To address musical concepts specific to repertoire
- To set the pace of rehearsal

b. Sequence

- Body/Mind
- Breath
- Tone (resonance, vowels, etc.)
- Agility/Range Extension
- Other – something from repertoire, balance, blend, intervals, sight-reading

“Never do a vocalise unless
you know the WHY.”

You are the only voice teacher
your singers will ever have!”

*-Timothy Seelig
The Perfect Blend*

c. Tips

- Each warm-up should have a teaching point that the singers understand.
- When accompanying, change keys confidently and keep a steady rhythm.
- Give constructive feedback on the sound frequently (every 3 repetitions or so).
- Teach new warm-ups by rote: sing it and have them echo you.
- Allocate 5-15 minutes at each rehearsal.
- Introduce a new warm-up every 2-3 weeks.
- Model with confidence: *“If you don’t own it, they’ll never buy it!”*

2: Teach Without Talking

Use “Non-Verbal” Teaching Strategies:

- Auditory
- Visual
- Kinesthetic

“Talk less, say more”

-Swedish Proverb

3: *Build Beautiful Sound*

a. Be a teacher

-- *not just a note-driller.*

- 1) of musicianship and
- 2) of singing

“Perfection in all musical aspects of a performance is for naught if the chorus sounds bad.”

-*Tim Seelig,*

The Perfect Rehearsal

b. Teach sound from the beginning.

The longer you rehearse a piece, the more it becomes set in singers’

“muscle memory.” It is much easier to teach musicality and great sound from the beginning than it is to tack it on at the end. Teach musical ideas at the same time as notes and rhythms.

- c. Learn to listen.** You can’t fix what you can’t hear. Work to improve your musical “ear” by listening beyond right/wrong notes, into the quality of the sound: Is the breath connected? Are the vowels tall and beautiful? Teaching is more than error-detection: move back and forth between fixing problems you hear and following a plan for what you intend to teach.

4: *Know Thyself....*

As a choral director...

“Build up your weaknesses until they become your strengths.”

-*Knute Rockne*

- a. You are a musician:** How much musical training do you have? Some may have college music degrees, while others may have sung only in

choirs or played organ. Invest in continuing education, read books, attend excellent concerts, or schedule a coaching with a musical friend or colleague.

- b. You are a singer:** How confident are you with your own singing voice? Perhaps you are an experienced musician on a different instrument, but have never studied singing. Take voice lessons! What you learn will help you and your choir sound better!

- c. You are a teacher:** Do you know what you want the choir to sound like but aren’t sure how to teach them to do it? Attend workshops, read books and journals, and most importantly, sing in excellent choirs where you can learn and steal teaching ideas from expert conductor-teachers.

- d. You are an individual:** Are you naturally funny or serious? Intense or laid-back? Personality traits are intensified when we’re on the podium, and can work for or against us. Watch yourself on video or ask choir members for honest feedback on your mannerisms and work to change them, if necessary.

REHEARSAL TIPS

Tips for reinforcing pitches and rhythms

- a. Have everyone sing the notes or speak a rhythm with the struggling section.
- b. Eliminate the text – sing on a neutral syllable like ‘loo’ or ‘pah’ so that singers can concentrate more on notes and tuning.
- c. Sing staccato on the syllable “bee” - this is like throwing a dart at the bulls-eye of each pitch and requires singers to be incredibly precise with pitches/rhythm.
- d. All sections hum their parts while one section sings on words.
- e. Eliminate the piano – when they sing *a cappella*, they will listen harder.
- f. Start at the end of the piece and work backwards.
- g. Try circle work (sections or whole group)
- h. Split into sectionals

Tips for introducing a new piece

- a. *Make a good first impression:* Find the most engaging/unique aspect of the music and teach that first (the “kernel”)
- b. *Simplify for success:* Isolate rhythm, melody, or text, so that singers can focus and experience early success with one aspect of the piece.
- c. *Involve everyone right away:* Find something that all the sections can learn together, to draw everyone in.
- d. *Start with musicianship:* Teach an important musical or vocal concept BEFORE pounding notes.

Tips for rehearsing efficiently

- a. Always start on time (even with 3 singers!) and always end on time (even just before Easter!)
- b. Follow a timed lesson plan and hold yourself to it.
- c. Establish routines - for distributing new music, getting rid of old music, picking up folders, borrowing a pencil, getting a tissue, using the restroom, singers who arrive late, singers who were absent last week, new singers, when fellowship and chatting takes place...
- d. Transition between pieces quickly. Write the rehearsal order of songs on the board/easel so singers can put their music in order before rehearsal starts.
- e. When the choir stops singing, always give feedback or direction *immediately* – this reduces chatting.
- f. Involve as many singers as possible as often as possible.
- g. Talk less! Give musical feedback in “7 words or less.”
- h. Avoid repeating refrains or easy sections –go directly to challenging sections and start rehearsing there.
- i. Never sing something “again” without articulating a specific goal.
- j. Work structurally: sing a section to establish context, work details, and sing again in context.
- k. Have singers number all of their measures and give directions succinctly: page #, system #, measure #, beat #/word, section of the choir.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- Adams, Charlotte and Archibeque, C. *Daily Workout for a Beautiful Voice*. Santa Barbara Publishing, 1991 [DVD and VHS]
- Albrecht, S. *The Choral Warm-Up Collection*. Alfred Publishing, 2003.
- Collins, Don. *Teaching Choral Music: Second Edition*. Prentice Hall, 1999.
- Haasemann, F. and Jordan, J. *Group Vocal Technique*, Hinshaw Music, Inc, 1982.
- Jennings, Kenneth. *Sing Legato*. Neil A. Kjos, 1982.
- Jordan, James. *Evoking Sound: Fundamentals of Choral Conducting and Rehearsals*. GIA Publications, 1996.
- Kesselman, Lee. "Score Study and Analysis for the Conductor/Teacher." (Manuscript: CME Institute for Choral Teacher Education, 1994.)
- Kosche, Kenneth. *A Novice's Guide to Directing the Church Choir*. Concordia Publishing House, 2003.
- McKinney, James C. *The Diagnosis and Correction of Vocal Faults*. Genevox Music Group, 1994.
- Miller, Richard. *The Structure of Singing*. Schirmer Books, 1996.
- Nesheim, Paul with Weston Noble. *Building Beautiful Voices*. Roger Dean Publishing, 1995.
- Rao, Doreen. *Circle of Sound*. Boosey and Hawkes, 2001.
- Sataloff, Robert T. "Vocal Aging and Its Medical Implications: What Singing Teachers Should Know." *The Journal of Singing*, September/October 2000.
- Seelig, Tim. *The Perfect Blend*. Shawnee Press, 2005. (Book and DVD).
- Seelig, Tim. *The Perfect Rehearsal*. Shawnee Press, 2007.
- Snow, Sandra, "Webbing." (Lecture: Choral Music Symposium, Michigan State University, Summer 2003).

CHOIR REHEARSAL PLAN FOR: Rehearsal 201: July 22, 2011

Welcome/Prayer/Devotion (5 min)		
<i>Session Introduction</i>		
Warm-Ups (25 min)		
F. Physical/Mental <i>Backrubs/stretching</i> <i>Mirror – posture</i> <i>Pulsed consonants with conducting and without</i>	G. Breath <i>Hands on ribs/belly: in 4, out 4 SHHH</i> <i>oo-sips</i> <i>lip buzz</i>	
H. Tone <i>Yawn sigh</i> <i>Humm-ah (helium balloon float)</i> <i>Wee-oh, wee-oh (pinch cheeks, vert/horiz hand)</i> <i>I love to sing (hand circles)</i> <i>Vowels – oo, ee, oh, eh, ah (peer-assess)</i>	I. Agility/Range Extension <i>Yah-ah.... (1-8-5-3-54321)</i> <i>Zee-eh-ah....(12345, 12345, 123456789876...)</i>	
J. Other <i>Scale on numbers – stopping to tune (lead in to a cappella song)</i>		
Piece #1: Were You There		Time: 25 min
Goal #1: High note for sopranos, m. 7		
Strategy 1 <i>SHHHH or lip buzz, then sing</i> <i>(all voices)</i>	Strategy 2 <i>Show space inside mouth with</i> <i>vertical hands</i>	Strategy 3 <i>Tennis racket</i> <i>(return to context, all on parts)</i>
Goal #2: Phrasing		
Strategy 1 <i>“oh” –no breath into “sometimes”</i> <i>(ask choir opinion)</i>	Strategy 2 <i>Breaths and “Lor-d” cut-offs</i> <i>(conducting, model and echo)</i>	Strategy 3 <i>“tremble” – syllabic stress</i> <i>(right/wrong); lessen dynamics</i> <i>with hand height</i>
Goal #3: Vowels		
Strategy 1 <i>“tremm-ble” – bad/good with</i> <i>“pac-man” hand</i>	Strategy 2 <i>“sometimes it causes me”</i> <i>Drop jaw into hand OR</i> <i>Fingers in cheeks</i>	Strategy 3 <i>“were you there”</i> <i>Call/response – no ‘rr’ OR</i> <i>Pinch corners of mouth</i>

Goal #4: <i>cleaning up notes, last phrase</i>			
Strategy 1 <i>All sing Tenor line</i>	Strategy 2 <i>Staccato "bee", add Alto, then all parts; freeze the chord</i>	Strategy 3 <i>All hum, Tenors on text</i>	Strategy 4 <i>Circles</i>
Piece #2: Psalm 23, NSS		Time: 8 min	
Goal #1: <i>Introducing the piece</i>			
Strategy 1 <i>Isolate Melody: Circles, on "noo," work toward unison sound</i>	Strategy 2 <i>Isolate Text: Chant text on one pitch with syllabic stress, point with fingers, articulate consonant sounds</i>	Strategy 3 <i>Isolate rhythm: Sway to triple meter</i>	
Piece #3: Halleluiah Chorus		Time: 12 min	
Goal #1: <i>Introducing the piece</i>			
Strategy 1 <i>Teach text: syllabic stress and vowels (call/response and pointing finger)</i>	Strategy 2 <i>Teach articulation: Two contrasting themes; Sing on pim vs. poh</i>	Strategy 3 <i>Teach form: discussion and score marking; raise hand or stand/sit with theme</i>	
Announcements/Prayer/Closing Devotion (10 min)			
<i>Discuss "Tips for Efficiency" and "Know Thyself" Q and A</i>			
Dismissal			

A CATALOGUE OF NON-VERBAL TEACHING STRATEGIES

What one experiences through movement
can never be expressed in words.

-Rudolph von Laban

Breath

- Ask the choir to sing the musical phrase on a “lip buzz,” then sing on text with the same energized feeling.
- “Use your hands in front of your body to show me the type of breath you are taking before singing this phrase.”
- Ask the choir to perform the musical phrase on the forte consonant sound “shhh.” (Be careful that they don’t lag intensity on long notes or ends of phrases!) Feel the muscular support required? Now, sing the phrase again, with that same breath support.
- Ask the choir to swing arms side to side or front to back (like pushing a swing) while singing a phrase. Add a “push-off” (release the motion) for a note which needs increased breath support.
- Ask the choir to rearticulate a neutral syllable (such as “doo”) on every eighth note of a long, sustained tone; then, sing the pitch normally, transferring that same underlying pulse of energy through the long note.
- Expand your hands in front of your abdomen before the choir sings to remind them to take a low, relaxed breath.
- Ask the choir to point their fingers in front of them toward the front of the room, as they sing. “Imagine your sound is an intense laser-beam.”
- Assign a rhythmic value to each breath that is taken before singing a phrase, “One and two and three and (SING)...” Choir should breathe evenly and deeply through all of the counts.
- “Put your hands on the sides of your abdomen and imagine wearing a swimming inner-tube; feel expansion against the inner-tube around you as you breathe.”
- If the choir sings flat on a descending melodic line, ask them to point their pointer finger up in front of them as they sing.
- If the choir sings flat on a descending melodic line, ask them to pretend that a helium balloon is under their hand. “Allow the balloon to lift your hand higher with every pitch you sing. The last note will be the highest and lightest.”
- “Imagine each note is a dot; connect the dots in the air with your finger as you sing.” (legato)
- “Pretend you are using your hand to put frosting on a large cake in front of you as you sing; make the frosting as smooth and even as possible.” (legato)
- “Swing an imaginary tennis racket with your arm as you sing the first pitch of a phrase (your backswing is your breath).”

Resonance

- “Start to yawn; replicate this feeling in the back of your mouth as you sing.” (lifted soft palate)
- Ask the choir to insert two fingers between their teeth horizontally and try to sing (this is the BAD way); to contrast, have them place the two fingers between their teeth vertically (the GOOD way). “This is the space you need when singing.”
- Cup your hand on your jaw/cheek and release your jaw into your hand; maintain this open, relaxed jaw feeling while singing.
- Pretend you have big marshmallows between your back molars and sing with that space.
- Ask the choir to visualize a marble sitting on the back of their tongue and sing a phrase; then visualize a ping-pong ball, and sing; finally, visualize an egg sitting on their tongue. Provide feedback on the changes in sound and allow the choir to discuss the experience. Replicate that open feeling when singing.
- Put your pointer finger in front of your lips like saying “shh.” Sing the vowel with that same height in the back of your mouth.
- “Your sound is bright yellow right now. Can you sing purple velvet?”
- Ask the choir to sing a phrase like they are in middle school; like they are in HS; like they are college musicians; finally, like they are professional opera singers. They will automatically increase resonating space with each visualization – provide feedback and discuss which sound was the best and why.
- Expand your hands vertically in front of you to show the choir the height you want to hear in their tone.
- “Feel as though you are opening an umbrella toward the back of your mouth.

Vowel Unification

- Assign hand gestures to each vowel sound and ask singers to use these motions to purify vowels during rehearsal, when necessary. Examples include:
 - “Pull a silver thread out of your lips as you sing ‘Oo.’”
 - “Pull a thread out of your forehead as you sing ‘Ee.’”
 - “Draw a circle around your lips as you sing ‘Oh.’”
 - “Pinch in the corners of your mouth as you sing ‘Eh.’”
 - “Lift your cupped hand by the side of your face as you sing ‘Ah.’”
- Begin teaching a piece on a neutral syllable (oo, oh, and ah vowels work best; consider syllables like “noo, loo, noh, mah, pah”) and refine that vowel before adding text. (Return to singing on a neutral syllable whenever necessary in the rehearsal process.)
- Ask the choir members to imagine they are holding a rubberband (or pass out real rubberbands for a great effect!) Stretch it parallel to the floor, in front of your mouth, and sing an “eee” vowel in that horizontal direction – this should feel like a tight “smile” (BAD way). Then, turn the rubberband to a vertical position, perpendicular to the floor, and sing the “eee” vowel in this vertical direction, feeling height inside the mouth and relaxed lips (GOOD way).
- This same activity can be done with Oreo cookies for kids (or big kids at heart!) Place the cookie on its side and place between the teeth to model the “bad” way, and then turn the cookie up to expand between the teeth for the “good” way.)
- “Show me, with your mouth, the shape of the first vowel you are about to sing... Keep the shape of that vowel as you breathe.”

Vowel Unification (cont.)

- When singing an “oo” vowel, imagine your lips wrapped around a straw (Or picture your lips protruding a little, like “fish lips.”)
- When singing an “oo” vowel, imagine an “oo” on your lips and an “oh” inside your mouth.
- When singing “ee” or “eh” vowels, maintain the exact same “oo” lip position (the tongue and space inside the mouth will change, but the lips should not.)
- Ask the choir to freeze on a word with a problematic vowel and continue to sustain that pitch; invite the choir to close their eyes, listen around them, and match the specific vowel sound they hear.
- “Sing half as loud, listen twice as much.”
- Stop on an “oo” vowel in a piece of music; have the choir continue singing the vowel, breathing when they have to; ask the choir to take an imaginary ping pong ball in their hand, and place it in the back of their mouth as they sing the vowel.
- Invite the choir to stand in four circles, one for each voice part; stop the music on a particular vowel sound, and ask the choir to look around their circle and try to match the mouth shapes they see in other choir members. (This will also work with one big circle of all choir members).
- Invite the choir to gently roll their heads, massage their shoulders, massage their jaws, and swallow during rehearsal, to make sure these tensions are released.

Rhythm

- Invite the choir to sway side to side to the beat as they sing (great in triple meter!)
- “Tap the beat somewhere on your body as you sing.”
- “Tap the beat on the shoulder of the person next to you as you sing.” (This creates a “train” of tapping and unifies rhythm throughout the choir.)
- Ask the choir to use a neutral syllable (doo, noo) to rearticulate every eighth note subdivision as they sing; then return to singing the written rhythms, recalling that “inner pulse” feeling.
- Assign ending consonant sounds and breaths specific rhythmic values.
- Invite the choir to perform a “karate chop” motion with their hands on a cut-off (or invent your own kinesthetic prompts!)
- Invite the choir to “count sing” (sing the pitches in the music with rhythmic counting instead of words: “One and Two and...”)
- Invite the choir to walk around the room freely as they sing, responding to changes in rhythms by changing their body movement.
- Invite the choir to snap the eighth note pulse as they sing, alternating each hand on each snap. Invite half the choir to snap and half to sing, and vice versa.
- Invite the choir to snap on the “off-beat” or “back-beat” while singing.
- Invite choir members to form an impromptu percussion ensemble and improvise on percussion instruments as you rehearse a piece.

Phrasing/Expression

- “Show me where the peak of the phrase is with your hand as you sing.”
- Label the dynamic spectrum on a scale from 1-10, 1 being softest; invite the choir to assign numbers to the dynamic changes in the music (this helps, especially, in pacing long crescendos or decrescendos).
- Ask the choir to imagine stretching an exercise band apart in front of them as they sing; pull your arms apart and feel the tension build as you sing the phrase, and release the exercise band at the peak of the phrase.
- “Where should this decrescendo start? Sing me the answer – you can’t be wrong.”
- Swing an imaginary tennis racket with your arm at the arrival point of the phrase (this motion will also help to connect breath energy to the sound!)
- Imagine the musical line to be the silhouette of a mountain in the distance. With your hand on the air, trace the contour up to the peak of the mountain and back down again, following the shape of the musical line (you can also draw these mountain-top shapes in your music as a reminder).
- In silence, use your conducting gesture to show a musical shape; invite the choir to sing the shape that they just saw.
- Have the choir break into partners. Have the partners hold hands. As they listen to you play or sing a musical selection to them, invite them to pull away from each other at the points of tension or dissonance in the music, and relax toward each other at points of release in the music. (This is a way for choir members to experiment with how the music feels for them; give them many opportunities to try different things and remind them, “there are no “wrong answers!”)
- Pretend to bounce a ball in front of you as you sing; as the musical phrase builds or releases, increase or decrease the size and weight of the ball you are bouncing (beach ball, volleyball, basketball, bowling ball, etc.)
- Stand with one foot slightly in front of the other, and lean forward into the crescendo and backward out of the crescendo.
- Pretend you have a pin in your hand and poke the balloons to pop them on the staccato note.

A CATALOGUE OF WARM-UPS

Physical/Mental

Physical:

- Stretching (neck, shoulders, arms, torso, sternum, etc.)
- Backrubs
- Lift arms over head to lift ribs, lower arms slowly to sides without dropping rib cage.
- Drop forward at the waist and hang limp, like a marionette; then, lift up slowly, one vertebrae at a time, until tall, aligned posture is achieved.
- Pull imaginary string at the top of your head to heighten posture.
- Sit with a “crystal glass” in your mid-section.

Mental:

- “You are my mirror” - tap different parts of your body with both hands, and ask the choir to mirror your actions.
- Pulse random patterns of consonant sounds in an eighth note pattern, and invite choir to echo you as they hold one hand on their abdomen to feel for diaphragmatic action:

Sh sh kk kk pp pp ff (choir echo: Sh sh kk kk pp pp ff)

(continue to improvise new patterns without pause and challenge choir to echo more and more complex patterns – this is also a BREATH warm-up!)

- Invite choir pulse a “sh” consonant to your beat as you conduct a four-pattern, feeling for diaphragmatic action in their abdomen. To create variety, ask the choir to switch to other consonant sounds, such as kk, pp, ff, mm, or dd. For an additional challenge, change your conducting, speeding up, slowing down, or changing to a 3 or 2 pattern.

Breath

- Invite the choir to close their eyes and breathe in and out slowly, following your prompt. Use a calming voice to direct their breathing (in and out) and ask them to become increasingly aware of any bodily tension they feel as they breathe. Calm, still breathing will relax muscle tension.
- Breathe IN over four counts, and EXHALE on “SH” over 4 counts, inviting the choir to expand their hands in front of their bodies as they breathe. Repeat, exhaling for 6, then 8, then 12 counts. “Breathe IN – 2–3 –4 and OUT – 2–3–4...”
- Pant like a dog, and feel the abdominal action.
- Place hands on mid-section and side; take a low breath, feeling for middle expansion; “hiss” out with continuous, laser-like stream of air.
- “Oo” sips
- Partner assessments – Invite the choir members to partner up and face one another. Singers should place their hands on their partners’ shoulders and assess one another as they breathe (shoulders shouldn’t move!)
- Lip buzzes
- Pulsed consonant sounds (see “Mental” category, above)

There are important distinctions between breathing and *conscious* breathing, movement and *intentional* movement, vocalization and *informed* vocalization

-Doreen Rao,
Circle of Sound

Resonance/Vowels

Soprano

oo ee oo ee oo
 (oh eh oh eh oh)

mm _____ ah
 (m m _____ ee)

I
 (How)

love _____ to sing!
 deep _____ the sea!)

Sing ee _____
 (use "ng" sound to focus vowel)

Zi Ah _____
 (hand motion: soft palate lift)

heep, heep, heep _____
 (keep height in "ee" vowel)

Zi Ah _____

fee _ fee _ fee _ fee _ fee
 (hand motion: brush one hand against another)

No ah no ah no ah no ah no

Thee eh ³ thee ah ³ thee oh ³
 (hand motion: lift cupped hand on top notes)

Zite nite nee _____

oo, ee, oh, eh, ah _____
 (Assign hand motion for each vowel sound)

Yah ³
 (feel muscular action in abdominals)

Yah _____
 (feel muscular action in abdominals)

Range Extension/Agility

Voice

Zee Eh Ah
 (perform while snapping, to maintain rhythmic clarity)

Zee ah Yah Ee
 (snap: up-middle-down-middle) (feel abdominal action on each note)

Yah Ee

Zee eh ah

Diction/Phrasing

Voice

Zite nite nee
 (Keep height in "ah" vowel while enunciating "t")

Zing a ma ma zing a ma ma zing a ma ma zing a ma ma zing zing zing

Bid i bid i Bee Bid i bid i bee Bid i bid i bee bee bee

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Zing a zing a zoo, Zing a zing a zoo, Zing a zing a zoo, zing a zing a zoo, zing a zing a zing a zing a
 (Change starting consonant to "ch, ff, kk, mm, etc.)

zoo.