

Documenting Success in Your Choral Program
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Defining Success and Rationalizing Mediocrity

To frame our definition, let's begin with this question: What factors influence success? Parents, Administration, Students, Societal, Professional, Personal Goals versus Goals for the program, other?

Successful programs are goal-oriented.

Your goals should not be a secret from your groups.

- Where do you want to take them?
- What is your plan for getting them there?
- What do you want them to be able to do as young musicians?
- What do you have planned for their future if they choose to stay in your program?

Successful programs publicize the program and the success of its students.

- National Anthem for ball games
- Sing for Community Organizations—Senior Citizens Ball in Eldon, MO.
 - Good for 2 reasons—makes connections between the kids and the community's elderly (good for the kids) and the elderly are more likely to support school bond and tax issues.
- Orchestral Ball and Flamingo Ball at Luther College.
- Web pages are very popular, try including a link that provides a sound clip.
- Get the students pictures in the paper often. **Parents love things to put in their kid's scrapbooks.**
- Choir Flyers, posters, and advertisements. Don't forget the radio blurbs.
- Choir shirts—cheap uniforms for informal settings and great PR.
- "Informances" where you involve the audience in what you do with a choir.

Successful programs tend to be highly organized--Organize so that you are free to teach and so that your students are free to learn.

- How do you organize your rehearsals? By concert? By educational need? By theme? Are they progressively harder?
- Do you make long-range rehearsal plans? Planning which sections of the music to cover in each rehearsal will give you and your students a sense of vision, purpose, and progress.
- WRITE DOWN your plans. DOCUMENT your intentions and give your students and their parents a copy of it. Provide a signature spot for the parent's signature to acknowledge receipt of the document—it's great insurance when they say they didn't receive it. Also be sure that you mention its existence at your first concert or public outing to insure that they know about it.
- Use a pre-concert checklist to be sure everything is done in a timely manner? This list should include: press release for radio and newspaper (TV, if appropriate), poster and flyer advertisement deadlines, equipment needs and when to set up, and student job assignments, which brings us to the next line...

Successful programs foster leadership and teaching skills among the students.

- Train student helpers and give them real responsibilities. That can be particularly difficult for those of us who have problems relinquishing control of everything. Determine what you are willing to delegate to others then train them for success. They can, in turn, train the next generation of helper.
- Help them develop their own leadership qualities. A number of the students that we get at VanderCook College of Music have helped their own instrumental and choral directors with rehearsals, equipment, and leadership. That is what hooked them on teaching and inspired them to join us in the field of music education.
- Make sure those students are recognized in print—awards concerts, concert programs, be sure it's some sort of public acknowledgement.

Successful programs are developing well-rounded amateur musicians.

- The primary goal of a well-rounded music education curriculum should be something more than the creation of successful singers or performers and should include, especially at the high school level, some form of musical experience for the non-performing students (but that is the topic for a different session). A well-rounded curriculum should foster a life-long need for some kind of informed musical participation in each human being.
- What skills are needed to create such a young musician?
 - Listening Skills
 - Singing—vocal production
 - Rhythmic and Pitch reading

- Music literacy rather than sight reading skills. (Nolker/DeMorest)
- A sense of personal responsibility for the ensemble's success. It's very easy to get "lost" in a large group of singers.
- Don't do anything in isolation—have both a musical reason and a curricular one for every decision you make.

Successful programs have effective assessment strategies to document student growth.

- Function, format, and fit.
 - Group vs. Individual Skills
 - Sight-Singing skills vs. Music Literacy Skills
 - Record student scores
- Tiered Evaluation (Scott. *MEJ*, 11/98: 17)
- Checklists
- Self-Assessment
- Authentic Assessment
- Rubric Writing (Nelson/Anderson, *Choral Journal*, 11/95: 42 and Whitcomb, *MEJ*, 5/99: 26)
- The problem of large numbers—the larger the group the more precise the assessment tool needs to be. Reading 150 essay questions can be almost as unpleasant as listening to each of your singers individually.

Successful programs incorporate the National Standards.

1. Sing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
2. Perform on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvise melodies, variations, and accompaniments
4. Compose and arrange music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music
7. Evaluating music and music performances
8. Understanding relationships between music, the arts and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Choral Assessments:

All students are required to purchase a hand-held cassette recorder. In the same way that you record private lessons, you are expected to record yourself in choir. This can be very helpful in learning parts and detecting your own errors. Only your best efforts should be on the tape at any one time. These recordings will be randomly selected and assess by the instructor twice during the semester. Additional assessments will be used to develop each singer's ability to detect and fix errors in pitch and rhythm. During the semester, the instructor will randomly choose 6 to 8 tapes to listen to spot check the student's work. These assessments will include:

September 20	Self-assessment of part accuracy with suggestions for remediation
September 27	Concert Reflection
October 4	Reflective Assessment of Section (recorded in 4 parts of the room)
October 11	Within-section assessment of recorded part-singing
October 18	Test over Rhythmic Diction
October 25	Individualized recorded test
November 1	Outside-the-section assessment of recorded part-singing
November 8	Individual Sight-reading Examinations (half of class)
November 15	Reflective assessment of ensemble progress (what needs worked?)
November 22	Individual Sight-reading Examinations (half of class)
December 6	Concert Reflection

Self-assessment form—Part accuracy and Tonal production
Rubric for Taped Performance Quality (25 points)

September 20, 2002

Name: _____

Music Performed: _____

Tone Quality: _____

5=Even tone quality throughout the required vocal range; 4=Acceptable quality with some inconsistency in the required vocal range; 3=Audible difference between head and chest registers with a few incorrect pitches; 2=Poor tonal production (breathy, unsupported tone) in some sections; 1=Poor tone production much of the time.

Examples:

Note Accuracy: _____

5=Virtually note perfect; 4=Strong performance with minute flaws; 3=Generally accurate singing with some note/pitch flaws; 2=Recognizable but with several incorrect or out of tune pitches; 1=Basically not the correct part and showing lack of preparation.

Examples:

Rhythmic Accuracy: _____

5=Correct rhythms and steady pulse; 4=Minute rhythmic errors but a steady pulse; 3=Some rhythmic and/or pulse errors; 2=Inconsistent pulse with several rhythm errors; 1=Unsteady pulse and few correct rhythms.

Examples:

Expressive Quality: _____

5=Consistent performance of musical line, phrasing, and nuance markings; 4=Fairly consistent awareness of line, phrasing, and nuance; 3=Lacking in conviction of expression; 2=Technically accurate without much expression; 1=Performance flaws overshadow expressiveness.

Examples:

Diction and Articulation: _____

5=No difficulties due to diction or articulation; 4=Some difficulties with double consonants or double vowels; 3=Inconsistent articulation of ending consonants and elided consonants; 2=Inaccurate articulation according to markings given in rehearsal or in the score; 1=Sloppy articulation and diction.

Examples:

Written Assessment Rubric—up to 25 points based on the following criteria:.

- **Specific references to the music, including measure number.**
- **Detailed description of the musical passage of success or difficulty.**
- **A proposed solution to any problem or reason for its success.**
- **Goals for achieving better results.**
- **Legible writing and complete sentences using correct grammar.**

Please confine your responses to the space provided in each category:

Tone Quality (*overall control, warmth, clarity, and consistency*)

Pitch Accuracy and Intonation (*accuracy and intonation of all pitches in all registers*)

Rhythmic Accuracy (*steadiness of beat and accuracy of the printed rhythms*)

Musical Interpretation (*musicianship and presentation of musical ideas such as phrasing, tempo, style, and dynamics*)

Articulation and Technique (*precision of marked articulation, releases, diction, and appropriate interpretation of markings*)

Goals for Personal Improvement (*specific ways that you can improve upon any aspect covered above and how you can personally contribute more to the large-group setting*)

Concert Reflection—September 27, 2002
Concert Choir, VCM Singers, Both (Circle one)

Name: _____
25 points possible based on rubric

In the space below and on the back, if necessary, discuss your experience in preparing and performing last night's *Prism* Concert. Include in your discussion such things as what you have learned about choral singing, which sections of the music were most difficult for you to learn and why, how you think you have grown as a musician, and how you intend to improve for the next concert.

Within-Section Assessment Form—Part Accuracy and Tonal Production
Rubric for Taped Performance Quality (25 points)

Name: _____ Assessor: _____

Music Performed: _____

Tone Quality: _____

5=Even tone quality throughout the required vocal range; 4=Acceptable quality with some inconsistency in the required vocal range; 3=Audible difference between head and chest registers with a few incorrect pitches; 2=Poor tonal production (breathy, unsupported tone) in some sections; 1=Poor tone production much of the time.

Examples:

Note Accuracy: _____

5=Virtually note perfect; 4=Strong performance with minute flaws; 3=Generally accurate singing with some note/pitch flaws; 2=Recognizable but with several incorrect or out of tune pitches; 1=Basically not the correct part and showing lack of preparation.

Examples:

Rhythmic Accuracy: _____

5=Correct rhythms and steady pulse; 4=Minute rhythmic errors but a steady pulse; 3=Some rhythmic and/or pulse errors; 2=Inconsistent pulse with several rhythm errors; 1=Unsteady pulse and few correct rhythms.

Examples:

Expressive Quality: _____

5=Consistent performance of musical line, phrasing, and nuance markings; 4=Fairly consistent awareness of line, phrasing, and nuance; 3=Lacking in conviction of expression; 2=Technically accurate without much expression; 1=Performance flaws overshadow expressiveness.

Examples:

Diction and Articulation: _____

5=No difficulties due to diction or articulation; 4=Some difficulties with double consonants or double vowels; 3=Inconsistent articulation of ending consonants and elided consonants; 2=Inaccurate articulation according to markings given in rehearsal or in the score; 1=Sloppy articulation and diction.

Examples:

Outside-the-Section Assessment Form—Part Accuracy and Tone Production
Rubric for Taped Assessment—(25 points)

Name: _____

Assessor: _____

Music Performed: _____

Tone Quality: _____

5=Even tone quality throughout the required vocal range; 4=Acceptable quality with some inconsistency in the required vocal range; 3=Audible difference between head and chest registers with a few incorrect pitches; 2=Poor tonal production (breathy, unsupported tone) in some sections; 1=Poor tone production much of the time.

Examples:

Note Accuracy: _____

5=Virtually note perfect; 4=Strong performance with minute flaws; 3=Generally accurate singing with some note/pitch flaws; 2=Recognizable but with several incorrect or out of tune pitches; 1=Basically not the correct part and showing lack of preparation.

Examples:

Rhythmic Accuracy: _____

5=Correct rhythms and steady pulse; 4=Minute rhythmic errors but a steady pulse; 3=Some rhythmic and/or pulse errors; 2=Inconsistent pulse with several rhythm errors; 1=Unsteady pulse and few correct rhythms.

Examples:

Expressive Quality: _____

5=Consistent performance of musical line, phrasing, and nuance markings; 4=Fairly consistent awareness of line, phrasing, and nuance; 3=Lacking in conviction of expression; 2=Technically accurate without much expression; 1=Performance flaws overshadow expressiveness.

Examples:

Diction and Articulation: _____

5=No difficulties due to diction or articulation; 4=Some difficulties with double consonants or double vowels; 3=Inconsistent articulation of ending consonants and elided consonants; 2=Inaccurate articulation according to markings given in rehearsal or in the score; 1=Sloppy articulation and diction.

Examples:

Reflective Assessment of Your Section: Name: _____

Written Assessment Rubric—up to 25 points based on the following criteria:.

- **Specific references to the music, including measure number.**
- **Detailed description of the musical passage of success or difficulty.**
- **A proposed solution to any problem or reason for its success.**
- **Goals for achieving better results.**
- **Legible writing and complete sentences using correct grammar.**

Tone Quality: Consider resonance, control, clarity, focus, consistency, warmth

Intonation: Consider accuracy of printed pitches and their effect on the section and the ensemble.

Rhythm: Consider accuracy of note and rest values, duration, pulse, steadiness of subdivision, correctness of meter.

Balance, Blend: Consider likeness of qualities, awareness of ensemble, role of the section in the musical passage.

Technique: Consider artistry, attacks, releases, control of ranges, musical/technical skill

Interpretation, Musicianship: Consider style, phrasing, tempo, dynamics, emotional involvement.

February 27th Concert repertoire:

Salmo 150—Aguiar

Lamentations of Jeremiah—Stroope

Aftonen—Alfven

- 2/4 Opening of Alfven (1-19)
 Aguiar
 Stroope—text and chant in rhythm (18-42)
- 2/6 Aguiar
 Sectionals on Stroope (18-42) pitches and rhythms; Alfven (hum)—25 minutes
 Stroope beginning to 42
 Alfven (32-end)
- 2/11 Sectional on Stroope (61-91)
 Stroope (42-91), then review opening to 42
 Aguiar—speaking (25-26, 19-20), review with pitch, perform from beginning
 Alfven (20-31)
- 2/14 Aguiar
 Sectionals on Stroope (18-42, 61-91)
 Stroope sing (1-17, 43-61, 92-107)
 Alfven run through focus on 2nd section
- 2/18 Stroope—run through, then focus on slow sections
 Alfven—run through unaccompanied, re-work shapes
 Aguiar
- 2/21 Concert order
 Aguiar
 Alfven
 Stroope
- 2/25 Pre-concert Run

Name: _____
Assessment Level: 1 2 3 4

Fr. So. Jr. Sr.
Semester: _____

Vocal Test: *My Country 'Tis of Thee*
Comments: _____

baseline

Self-assessment 50 points: _____

Concert Reflection 25 points: _____

Reflective Assessment of Section 25 points: _____

Within-Section Assessment of part-singing 50 points: _____

Written Exam—Rhythmic Diction 25 points: _____

Individual Tests of Sight-Singing 25 points: _____

Outside-the-Section Assessment of part-singing 50 points: _____

Vocal Test: *My Country 'Tis of Thee* 50 points: _____

Total points (300 possible) total points: _____

Comments: