

Creating the Successful Band Rehearsal

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Successful rehearsals are one of the most important aspects of any performing ensemble. A meticulous plan provides a roadmap to success in all areas of the rehearsal process. Several items should be considered when developing goals and plans for your daily rehearsals.

GOAL SETTING

- Long term vs. short term
- Long term can be a semester, year, or longer period of time
 - certain skills by certain age or grade
- Short term is generally a rehearsal, week, or month
 - the ability to play a passage with no mistakes for a repeated number of times at a certain tempo
- Goals must be written down and shared with the students
- Progress of goals must be monitored to assess progress
- These goals should determine your rehearsal plan and needed revisions

When determining goals, you must consider your community to include administration, parents, and students. It is important to include students in the decision-making process.

Items to be considered:

- Skills/concepts – tonal production/quality, intonation, rhythm, technique, articulation, dynamic range, style, blend, balance
- Private lessons
- Sectionals
- Solos & Ensembles
- Repertoire (curriculum vs. pieces)
- Music History and Theory
- Contests and Competitions
- Development of Independent Musicianship

NON-MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS WHICH CAN AFFECT REHEARSALS

Thinking about and planning the non-musical details surrounding a rehearsal are important. Something as simple as the air conditioning going off can derail a rehearsal quickly. Think through every aspect of the day to ensure your time in rehearsal is the most productive possible.

ROOM

- Set up the room in advance
- Ensure you have enough chairs and stands to accommodate the rehearsal
- Ensure the room is neat and tidy to convey a sense of orderliness
- Locate the music cabinet between the entrance and the rehearsal area
- Instrument room ideally should have one entrance and one exit to facilitate flow
- When rehearsing after normal school hours ensure:
 - Students have access to the room
 - The room is comfortable (air conditioning or heating)
 - The lights and power will remain on for the duration of the rehearsal

MUSIC

- Copied and put in folders in advance
- Write in alternate or unfamiliar fingerings in the parts
- Write style markings and additional or changed dynamics in the parts
- Save time by placing in students' chairs before rehearsal instead of passing out

CHECKING ROLL AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Take as little time as possible
- Take attendance using a seating chart or student helper or both
- Announcements and rehearsal order should be written in advance on the board or through a rotating PowerPoint

REHEARSAL ATMOSPHERE

Discipline – no need for fear – students must remain focused, but feel comfortable with the ensemble - positive reinforcement tends to yield great results

REHEARSAL ENVIRONMENT

- The director sets the tone for a successful rehearsal – leadership by example – be early and be prepared – just as you should expect from your students
- Consider temperature and order of the rehearsal room
- Procedure for entering the rehearsal should be clearly understood
- Order of music on the board – by composer name
- Consider playing recordings of great ensembles as players enter the rehearsal room
- Start rehearsals on time – if not everyone is there, begin anyway – they will get the message

PLAYER RESPONSIBILITY

- Play with a great tone, in tune, in time, and with great technique
- Bring musical ideas to the rehearsal
- Preparation of their individual part at the highest level – outside of your full ensemble rehearsal time
- Own a personal tuner and metronome
- Own a music stand and have a correct chair for home practice

REPERTOIRE

SOURCES FOR BAND REPERTOIRE

- READ – periodicals, books, internet
- LISTEN – CD or MP3 recordings, internet, promotional aids from publishers
- DISCUSS – conventions and colleagues
- STUDY – own your own scores and study them – even those that you might not program

SOME BASIC THOUGHTS

- While certain musical compositions may be of exemplary quality, not all may be appropriate for your ensemble.
- Music does not need to be highly complex to be of worth.
- Your personal taste should be considered in the selection process.
- Good music equals excellent construction and genuine expressiveness. It should be of high quality musically, intellectually, technically, and emotionally.
- Programming should take into consideration the sometimes-wide gap between composers & audiences.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHOOSING REPERTOIRE

- Basic - key signatures, time signatures, rhythmic complexity, melodies, harmonies, textures, and styles
- Instrumentation and ranges – substitutions possible - unusual instruments or parts
- Full score
- Ability to cover well written percussion parts
- Feature strong players while still developing weaker players
- Development of solo skills within the ensemble
- Musical expression contained as well as technique
- Adequate time to prepare the piece – time spent vs. musical reward
- The composition must be musically satisfying
- Ability of the conductor to teach and conduct the piece
- Conductor should benefit from studying, rehearsing, and conducting the piece

- Students should benefit from preparing and performing the piece
- Piece should represent one of the finest compositions in the repertoire at that level

SCORE STUDY

The goal of a conductor is to communicate the expressive potential of a piece of music to the ensemble. To do this, the conductor must have a clear, musical image in his or her mind. The only way to do this is through score study.

FINDING TIME

- Plan time equal to or more than the players will spend in rehearsal
- Avoid distractions and interruptions
- Plan ahead
 - Schedule a regular time to study
 - Choose music the summer before your concert season begins

LEARNING THE SCORE

- Learn as much about the piece as possible
 - Composer's biography, style period, why the piece was composed, any extra-musical influences
 - Based on this information, you can then make style, tempo, and volume decisions
- Begin studying the actual score by looking through and reading everything – translate any unfamiliar words
- Number your measures and have players do the same
- Read through the score following the melody to get an overall feel for the piece and make intuitive decisions about the character of the piece
 - To Listen or Not To Listen - There is some debate to whether a conductor should listen to a recording at this point. My feeling is to do whatever you need to create a mental image in your mind. If that means listening to recordings, then do it.
- Analyze the work to discover the overall form
- Analyze the phrases to aid in rehearsal planning and memorization

IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS BEFORE REHEARSAL

- Your ensemble will only sound as good as the individual players can play their parts
 - Go through each individual part so you know exactly what your players will encounter
- Mark areas where problems may occur
- Formulate solutions to those problems prior to your rehearsal
 - Give your players an opportunity to make mistakes before you begin teaching. You may be surprised to learn your students can figure many things out on their own thus saving valuable rehearsal time.
- Write in alternate fingerings – assist with intonation issues

WARM-UP

Most rehearsals will include a warm-up. While the main purpose is to warm-up the instruments and muscles, this is your opportunity to focus the ensemble on the musical work at hand. The warm-up period provides an opportunity to work on tone production, posture, playing position, intonation, blend, dynamics, and style. The time spent should always be purposeful and thoughtful and not spent mindlessly going through a routine.

- Long tones should be used to focus students' attention on tone quality, tuning between individuals and groups of instruments and dynamic control
- Scales and arpeggios can be used to increase technical fluency, flexibility, control, style, and articulation skills (this creates technique)
 - Students should practice all major scales and their arpeggios, working to increase both speed and range
 - Of great importance is the chromatic scale throughout the full range of the instrument
- Chorales can be used to work on ensemble sonority, tuning between sections, the tuning of chords, balance, and blend - chorales are also excellent tools for getting the group to watch the conductor and move together as an ensemble
- Don't forget to include the percussion
 - Long tones can be used for percussionists to focus on mallet rolls
 - Scales and arpeggios benefit percussionists no less than the wind players
 - Either as part of the full band rehearsal or in sectionals, percussionists should also have an opportunity to practice snare drum rudiments on a regular basis

SIGHT-READING

As an educator, our goal is for our students to become independent musicians. In life after secondary school, it is very difficult for students to be independent if they cannot sight-read.

- Each rehearsal should include time spent on sight-reading
- New music can be used, or etudes and exercises designed to increase sight-reading fluency

REHEARSING THE MUSIC

THE DAILY REHEARSAL

Music as craft (left brain)

- tone
- intonation
- rhythm
- technique
- blend
- balance

Music as art (in addition to craft)

“There is nothing more unmusical than a wrong note.”

- interpretation
 - inspiration
 - emotion
 - style
 - mood
 - understanding
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- Have a rehearsal plan – every day
 - Treat your ensemble with maturity and respect and they will respond in the same manner
 - Daily rehearsals should reflect an appropriate balance of music, sight-reading, and fundamentals
 - Make certain your voice is loud enough to be heard - stop the ensemble and immediately make your comments – keep your comments simple - most students have an attention span of only a few seconds – try to talk as little as possible – try to play as much as possible
 - Try to keep your comments as positive as possible – “You’re flat” vs. “Could you bring the pitch up a bit?”
 - Conduct from the podium – teach off the podium - walk into the players if necessary
 - If you are rehearsing musical passages that always sound great, you are working on the wrong material
 - Encourage your students to sing by being able to sing yourself – have students sing chorales, scales, and intervals during warm-up – during full rehearsal, sing melodic and counter melodic lines while the remainder of the band plays
 - Invite student input during your rehearsals
 - Who has the melody?
 - Who has the second most important part?
 - Who has the least important part?
 - How long is this phrase?
 - How would you shape this phrase?
 - Your rehearsal time is precious and valuable - try to find alternate ways of making announcements
 - For a change of pace, try rehearsing a piece from the back to the front
 - When defining a starting place in a piece – either “count with me” or use the rehearsal markings
 - Never blame the ensemble for your mistakes – “I am sorry I missed that meter change. Back to Letter D for me, please.”
 - Teach your players that unprepared parts are disrespectful to the composer, not the conductor
 - When players leave your rehearsal, they should be emotionally exhausted, but wanting more
 - Do not overlook the importance of laughter during a rehearsal
 - Keys to success = private lessons and sectional rehearsals

AFTER THE REHEARSAL

What you do after the rehearsal is critically important to the progress of your ensemble. This is the time for review and evaluation and to make your plan for the next rehearsal. You should ask yourself, “What went well, what did not go well, did we reach our goals, where do we need to focus more time, did my teaching techniques work or should I try something new?”

RECORD YOUR REHEARSAL

- Because of the multitude of things to think about during rehearsal, it is difficult, if not impossible, to hear everything that is being played
- Record your rehearsals on a regular basis
- Take time when you’re not in front of the ensemble to evaluate your recording
 - Thoughtfully and critically analyze your ensemble’s performance
 - Develop strategies to address shortcomings

HAVE A MENTOR

- Develop a relationship with one or more directors whom you trust and want to emulate
- Don’t wait until your ensemble is polished before you ask for opinions, “If it was perfect, you wouldn’t need me to listen to it.”
- Have this mentor listen to your recordings or visit your rehearsals
- Ask them what they hear and how they would go about fixing the problems they perceive

Dr. Timothy Rhea is currently in his 30th year at Texas A&M University, serving as Director of Bands & Music Activities. He serves as administrative head of the Music Activities Program, is conductor of the University Wind Symphony, and oversees the Texas Aggie Band. Dr. Rhea holds degrees in music education and conducting from the University of Arkansas, Texas Tech University, and the University of Houston. During his tenure at Texas A&M University, Dr. Rhea has conducted the Texas A&M University Wind Symphony for conventions of the Texas Music Educators Association, the College Band Directors National Association, the Midwest International Band & Orchestra Clinic, the Western International Band Clinic, and the American Bandmasters Association. Additional concerts have included Carnegie Hall, and five European tours with performances in Ireland, England, Italy, Austria, Germany, and the Czech Republic. The TAMU Wind Symphony has released several internationally distributed recordings. In addition to conducting, Dr. Rhea maintains a very successful career as an arranger and composer with an output of over 300 pieces, to include over fifty published works. Dr. Rhea maintains an internationally active schedule as conductor, clinician, and adjudicator having appeared throughout the United States, Europe, and Australia. He has received the Citation of Excellence from the National Band Association, was selected as the Texas Outstanding Young Bandmaster of the Year and has received the President’s Meritorious Service Award to Texas A&M University. Dr. Rhea is Past-President of the American Bandmasters Association, and currently serves as Vice-President/Secretary of the John Philip Sousa Foundation, in addition to positions with several related professional organizations. He recently oversaw the planning and construction of the new Texas A&M University White -Walker Music Activities Center which opened in July of 2019. In this new facility, the Dr. Timothy B. Rhea Concert Rehearsal Hall was named in his honor. In 2020, he received the Association of Former Students Distinguished Achievement Award in Administration from Texas A&M University.

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