

How can I be sure my students are prepared?

Without a doubt, student preparation is the key to a successful workshop experience. If students are not ready for the workshop material they can feel confused, frustrated and become distracted.

Here are some suggestions to help prepare your choir members:

1) Make sure all your students can name any note in the bass and treble clefs.

Suggested exercises:

- Photocopy some pages out of your fall repertoire and have students write the names of the notes for their part and one other part (in the other clef).
- You can begin in small groups and let students help each other and grade each other.
- Place a visual aid on the wall that shows the note names.
- Have them put their name and the date on the top to turn in for credit.

2) Use solfege with hand signs in every part of rehearsal

- Solfege through new songs both as part of sectionals/groups or regular rehearsal.
- Use solfege and hand signs in your warm ups and instructional activities.
- Copy repertoire pages and have students write the solfege name by the notes of their part (and a part in a different clef). Use D R M F S L T and + or – for raised or lowered accidentals. For example: An ascending harmonic minor passage would be L T D R M F S+ L.

3) Make sure students can work with key signatures and find 'do.'

1. You could put visual aids on the wall and/or give the students an instructional hand out for the rehearsal folder (if you don't have one – email me and I'll send you one)
2. The "4" rule version is used for the intermediate workshop:
 1. No #'s or b's means that 'do' is C
 2. 1 b means 'do' is F
 3. More than one b, next to last (second to last) b is 'do'
 4. Last sharp, then ½ step up is 'do'
3. The "3" rule version is used for the advanced workshop:
 1. No #'s or b's means 'do' is C
 2. The last b is 'fa'
 3. The last # is 'ti'

4) Teach a week long unit on accidentals and use your repertoire as the resource material.

- Students must understand key signatures and be able to find 'do' before the accidentals will make sense.
- Sing/model/practice these with solfege and hand signs.
- We use some common chromatic hand signs at the workshops: Thumb up for fi, thumb up for si (this means the thumb is not up for so), downward pointer for te. When in doubt – use the regular hand sign and sing the chromatic solfege syllable.
- Continue to reinforce these skills and concepts.

5) Teach students how to understand and perform choral rhythms. Many methods exist to do this.

- The workshops use fairly common rhythms
- Dotted quarter- and eighth-note rhythms
- Triplets

- Simple and compound meters
- Duple and triple meters

Build or expand the choral musicianship component of your high school choral curriculum.

- These exercises can become points in the grade book for choral musicianship.
- Remember – the more your students - know the better. It will help to build your program, student skill and enthusiasm.
- You will find students are more interested in learning new music.
- They will learn it faster and you will have more time to work on stylistic details.
- You will be able to go much deeper into music theory.
- Student awareness of what the “other” parts are doing will improve.

Be sure your advanced workshop singers are truly accomplished solfege/hand sign sight singers! This normally will require at least two years of diligent, consistent, and focused work in your program.

There are many approaches to teaching choral musicianship with sight singing. Each approach has positive aspects. The approach used in the Corban workshops is:

1. The key signature identifies the major ‘do’
2. All other modes are relative to ‘do.’ This means minor keys start on ‘la,’ not ‘do.’ A dorian mode melody would start on ‘re.’

Do not bring your students to the workshops to learn the pre-requisites. Prepare them. You can easily prepare any high school choir for the intermediate workshop in the first weeks of the fall semester before the workshop.

I hope you have great success in your efforts to teach choral musicianship through sight reading.

The Workshop Director,
Dr. Strauser