

## AVOIDING REHEARSAL PARALYSIS

*18<sup>th</sup> Annual Da Capo Conference – Saturday, January 20, 2024*  
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When you are working with an ensemble in a rehearsal context, it may be difficult to know what to address, where to start, and how to engage everyone in the room. This session will dive into directed ensemble listening, rehearsal priorities, and active-learning strategies for developing musicians. Thank you, Vincent Massey Senior Band (Meaghan Graham, teacher), for joining us for today's session!

**Know your score. Even when score study time is scarce, know the work's highlights. A teacher should never be sightreading.**

*FORM, CADENCE POINTS, SCORING, STYLE, and INTENSITY LEVELS* are important immediately. There are never more than *three things* going on at once – find them and make sure students hear them.

### **TONE. TONE. TONE.**

Having beautiful characteristic individual tone is essential. Characteristic ensemble tone relies on it! All musicians need to think about fundamentals every time they play and not just when they perform.

### **Anticipate**

- challenges presented by an unfamiliar key signature or accidentals
- technical rhythmic passages in individual parts (these often affect tempo)
- instruments playing in extremities in high or low range
- large melodic leaps (mis-pitching in brass or tuning in woodwinds)
- less dense texture creates uncertainty in the ensemble; plan strategies for active learning

**Plan your warm-ups to check in on these anticipated problems.** (Scales and etudes in unfamiliar key, Rhythmic patterns, consistent articulations in variety or ranges, audiation exercises, etc.)

### **In your score study, find things that everyone can listen to:**

- a consistent "motor"
  - phrase length or phrase beginnings/endings (ex. use of the anacrusis to begin phrases)
  - a specific interval (ex. Perfect fourth)
  - form (ex. Folk song)
  - rhythmic consistency (ex. Triplets or sixteenth patterns)
  - articulations (ex. Staccato versus accented patterns)
- Ask musicians if there are any places they would like to rehearse or hear isolated parts. This develops leadership and increases ownership of progress and problem solving.
  - Remember, there are individual responsibilities for learning, and a conductor needs to hold students accountable. A student's action or inaction affects the entire group.
  - Take opportunities to model and practice effective personal practice habits with students so that they can develop tone and technique independently.

## BASIC REHEARSAL CHECKLIST

- \_\_\_\_\_ Rhythmic accuracy
- \_\_\_\_\_ Key signature and accidental accuracy
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tempo Consistency
- \_\_\_\_\_ Centered and Consistent Tone
- \_\_\_\_\_ Articulations (written articulations are not a suggestion)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Anatomy of Notes (BME – beginning-attack, middle-sustain, and ending-release)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Blend (within and between sections)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Balance (of melody, harmony, countermelody, etc.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Balance (between sections)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Intensity (Dynamics of notes, within phrases, and between sections)

## IN THE MOMENT

- let students play longer than you need them to so that you can formulate exactly what you will say when you stop
- stop conducting; get off the podium and listen and watch musicians play from a different angle
- eliminate parts; have a section play a part that you think is solid, and then layer in parts one at a time while the entire ensemble audiates their individual part and strengthens inner hearing
- keep everyone involved all the time (directed listening, air banding, clapping rhythm, audiating, air patterns, humming/singing, marking part, analyzing, etc.)
- avoid “do it again” unless there is a new instruction
- if it doesn’t get better after three attempts, let the ensemble know that you will rehearse again with some new strategies when you are together for your next rehearsal
- give students 30-90 seconds to individually practice a rhythm, passage, or articulation pattern

## A SAMPLING OF REHEARSAL STRATEGIES

- breathe together (“Breathe together, play together.”)
- verbalize and internalize subdivision (add percussion subdivision as a crutch)
- audiate rhythm or pitch (develop pitch memory)
- say/sing/hum then play (repeat as necessary)
- use numbers to pace phrasing or intensity (beats in a phrase or a crescendo/diminuendo)
- syllables (tu/du for articulation, ssssss for air pressure, etc.)
- isolate rhythm from pitch; isolate pitch from rhythm
- rehearse at a variety of tempos
- determine the “value” of all of the parts; what should emerge from the texture?

## TO GET BETTER

- take a video recording or rehearsal
- take an audio recording of a “run-through” and listen multiple times - then prepare for next rehearsal
- keep listening to wind band music beyond what you are working on with students
- here are some sites directed at quick tips for rehearsal – remember though, your own **execution, analysis, and reflection** form the most powerful resource for improvement as you refine your craft.

<https://teachband101.com/>

<https://banddirectorstalkshop.com/>

<http://www.selmer.com/en-us/education/resources>

<https://banddirector.com/>