

Conductor self preparation:

Taking the time to prepare for each rehearsal can maximize the progress of your group and keep your rehearsals productive and inspirational.

Here are some basic guidelines to follow:

- Have a full working knowledge of the score. Mark the scores and check music already marked and add/delete if necessary.
- Keep your rehearsal flowing! Plan your music far enough in advance so you can rehearse difficult sections over several weeks of rehearsing.
- Planning your gestures and conducting patterns will maintain clarity with players.
- Mark the cues in your score so you will not be caught by surprise.
- Recognize the potential musical problems and plan your strategy to accomplish them.
- Important: If you make a mistake during rehearsal (wrong cue, etc.), admit it. It's ok to show some vulnerability. Respond with grace and honesty (and maybe a little humor).
- Fix individual problems by working with the entire section.

Know how to rehearse each piece of music. It is the key in maintaining a quality and diverse rehearsal. One method of rehearsing will not necessarily work effectively on every piece.

You can rehearse a piece by starting from the end or from a tutti section that has the most players involved. This method works well with arrangements you have read a few times but still need to woodshed. Divide the piece by key changes, time changes, transitions and/or phrases. Mark those "break" points and start on the last section and play to the end. Repeat that sequence until you have played through each section. You can vary the sequence by playing two sections together, etc. This approach works well during the middle to the end of your rehearsal when your players are more focused on the task at hand.

Keep talking to a minimum during rehearsal. The players came to play and receive instruction and not listen to you talk.

Compliment often. Your expectation level can be high and you can correct your players calmly most of the time.

Display an emotional response to the music during the rehearsal. Players respond to the emotional content of the music by watching your emotional display.

Move your body parts to emphasize cues and rhythm as well as emotion. · Bend your knees - Three reasons; 1) Makes you shorter or taller for sudden changes in dynamics, 2) You will be more relaxed, and 3) Locking your knees over an extended period of time may cause your legs to give out.

· Use your elbows - Moving your elbows toward and away from your body can aid greatly in dynamics. Pull elbows in for decrescendos, quick tempo and quiet passages, elbows out for crescendos and full-bodied sound (loud and big).

· Twist and/ or bend at your torso - Twist at the waist for cueing and long conducting patterns (rallantandos as well). Bending is more suitable for dynamic changes, mostly decrescendos.

Caution your players to not tap their feet to keep time. They must watch you for time, especially the rhythm players'. You are the only timekeeper. If players must tap, tap the toe inside the shoe.

How you set up your rehearsal will determine the progress and success of your group. Players can be worn out, mentally and physically, by arranging the order of the rehearsal incorrectly.

#1 Rehearsal Start Up And Flow

1. Although difficult at times, establishing a routine or starting your rehearsal within three minutes of the start of the period regardless of the number of students seated and ready, will eventually get your rehearsal up and running with a minimum of late arrivals.
2. Moving announcements to some point later in the rehearsal or posting announcements that can be read later by the students, will keep the focus on rehearsal goals.
3. Listing the music selections on the board that will be practiced in the day's rehearsal allows the students to have music ready.
4. Bowings can be posted on a bulletin board where students can enter them on their own parts during free periods or times other than rehearsal. This will reduce the time lost and discrepancies in bowings.
5. If every student has their own copy of the music at the stand, any changes or markings to be during the rehearsal can be added.
6. Make sure the room is read. Have ample room for people and instruments and stands. Adjust the room temperature when possible. Ample lighting for reading is a must.

#2 Tuning and Warm up

Tuning

1. Elementary/ middle school - having students report to the conductor upon arrival for tuning and then go to their seats,
2. Middle school/high school – making use of students who are able to tune well, assist with the tuning. Should the students who are assisting have any difficulty with a tuning, they send that instrument to the conductor to tune rather than risk damage to the instrument.
3. Tuning from the bottom up (i.e. basses, then cellos, then violas, etc.) The lower strings maintain a drone as upper strings add on. (This drone technique can be applied to playing a scale as well.)
4. Having the concert tuning note sound as students enter the rehearsal. This will allow those who can tune to start tuning on their own immediately as well as reinforce what the tuning note sounds like.

Warm up

Depending on the size of the and level of the group, try to start the warm up within five minutes of the start of the period. Any tuning that has not been completed can be done during the warm up.

If you warm up with scales, incorporate a mix of intonation, rhythmic and harmonic instruction in the scale performance.

- Play the scale over a drone from the bass section.
- Play the scale as chords or in intervals.
- Use jazz styling (swing, etc.) in the performance of the scale.
- Utilize a rhythm from the music to be rehearsed.

Start with an easier (or already rehearsed) piece as a warm up.

#3 Rehearsing The Music

Selection of passages to be worked on for the rehearsal:

- a) Select a work that can be used for warm up that will establish a technique you wish to emphasize for the rehearsal such as dynamics, but is not technically too challenging. Spend a few minutes on the warm up to reinforce the desired goal.
- b) Isolate the section or sections that are the main focus of the rehearsal. Once the desired technique and goal have been accomplished for that passage, expand the passage on either side so that students can comfortably flow into and out of the target passage.
- c) Before going to another composition, solidify the passage by playing in context straight through the target section starting from the preceding section and ending after the targeted section.
- d) Use scales and other techniques that directly relate to the compositions and passages that will be addressed in the rehearsal.
- e) If possible, close with a composition in whole or in part that has the entire ensemble playing together and is not too technically challenging. (similar to a cool down after a workout.)
- f) Bowings can be posted on a bulletin board where students can enter them on their own parts during free periods or times other than rehearsal. This will reduce the time lost and discrepancies in bowings.

#4 Physical Changes To The Rehearsal

Physical changes to your rehearsal:

1. Repositioning the sections of the orchestra is the easiest physical change to make. Switching the location of the violas and cellos, 1st and 2nd violin sections, and moving the bass section, can provide your student musicians with a new perspective on how they fit in to the total harmonic picture. Just placing the viola section between the 1st and 2nd violins increases the awareness of the role of the viola in the harmonic and rhythmic structure of a particular composition. Placing the basses and cellos inside the other sections gives the lower strings a clearer picture of the role they play in solidifying the movement of the other sections.
2. Splitting the orchestra into two orchestras.
 - a) Assigning numbers to players (i.e. group 1, group 2) without moving seats, then designating which group should play as you proceed through a composition. This shows your students the value of following along in the music even when they are not playing and aids in teaching them how to re-enter a passage using aural skills.
 - b) Setting up the rehearsal the orchestra divided into two separate groups on opposite sides. This can make use of the competitive approach whereby they compete to see which orchestra plays the most musically, uses the most dynamics, has the best visual presentation (bowing, posture, etc.)
3. Dividing the sections into small groups resulting in several mini ensembles within the larger orchestra. This should be done with care so that none of the ensembles have an overabundance of weaker, less confident members. This technique, although possibly more time consuming in set up, reinforces the need for all members of the ensemble to be productive and secure in their parts.
4. The roving conductor – walking through the sections of the orchestra while they are playing gives: the conductor a more accurate picture of how each student is doing and enables him/her to make suggestions or corrections to individuals without interfering with the general flow of the composition.

Rehearsal set ups to increase the growth and cohesiveness of the individual and ensemble.

Ending your rehearsal:

The end of the rehearsal is often neglected.

Although as conductor's we like to get the most time to rehearse, a little time spent on reinforcing instrument care at the end of rehearsal, can reduce problems with instruments in future rehearsals.

- Remind your players to clean their instruments before putting them away.
 - Swab woodwind instruments to remove moisture.
 - Empty spite valves for brass
 - Remove rosin from strings and wipe down fingerboards
 - Loosen bows.
 - Retract end pins.