

DON'T JUST WARM-UP!

USE THIS TIME FOR ENSEMBLE SKILL DEVELOPMENT AS WELL

IT'S NOT JUST CONCERT F ANYMORE!

THREE CLINIC SESSIONS DEALING WITH GRADUATED ENSEMBLE SKILL DEVELOPMENT EXERCISES FROM BEGINNING THROUGH ADVANCED HIGH SCHOOL ENSEMBLES

Several disclaimers before beginning:

- 1) These exercises (or many like them) are found and explained in two band method books - Foundations for Superior Performance (King and Williams), and Essential Musicianship Ensemble Concepts (Green and Benzer).
- 2) The exercises that will be demonstrated do not include lip slur flexibilities, technique, or complex rhythmic responsibilities. At all levels these types of exercises are important and should have rehearsal time devoted to them.
- 3) These three sessions are most ideally suited for programs that are vertically aligned from beginners through high school seniors. Exercises demonstrated in the first two sessions exercises can stand alone depending on the age and development of the ensemble. The third and final session includes examples of exercises and increased mental demands that would be difficult to achieve without some previous experience.
- 4) Instrument pedagogy and individual skills are of primary importance in the grand scheme of things. However, developing highly competent ensemble skills will absolutely further individual control of the instrument.

Session 1 – Fundamental concepts for ensemble skill development for the beginner through first or second year of band (**So easy a Caveman - band director can do it**)

The initial part of any rehearsal should be much more than merely a daily warm-up period. Although the warm-up purpose is served, this portion of time should also contribute to the overall conceptual growth of the director and the ensemble. The exercises that will be presented in these sessions can be used to help achieve any ensemble tonal concept desired by director and students. There are a few elements, however, which are generally accepted no matter what 'wind ensemble/symphonic band' sound one is working toward:

- 1) An emphasis should be placed on breathing and breath control. The purpose is to develop a heightened sense of awareness on the part of the student relating to tension in the body and efficient use/control of air. In rehearsal students should not breath to live, but **breathe to play**.
- 2) Notes should be square, be still, should respond instantly, and be started and stopped as much together as possible.

- 3) Each note should have good core and body (solidity) to it, and the **sound should be as even as possible moving from note to note.**
- 4) Different types of articulation should be explored and should match within and between individuals and sections.
- 5) Matching pitch is possible to the extent that concepts 1, 2, & 3 are successful.
- 6) An emphasis should be made on making each exercise have as much musical sense as possible.
- 7) There should be constant reinforcement promoting the transfer of these ideas/concepts into the body of the rehearsal. **Does our music sound like our fundamentals or a buzz saw?** (Assuming you are not working on the traditional **buzz saw** concept of ensemble sound.)
- 8) Balance is critically important and can be taught and worked on conceptually.
- 9) These concepts will be successful only to the degree that both student and **director** are actively involved both mentally and physically.
- 10) Patience and persistence are absolutely essential for long-term progress. Procedure is very important but not as important as appropriate reaction by director and student.

THREE 10/12-MINUTE EXAMPLES OF BEGINNING ENSEMBLE TECHNIQUE EXERCISES

A 45-minute period is assumed.

All exercises involve procedure as well as goals/desired outcomes – Make sure procedure is always secure before asking them to concentrate on goals! As procedure becomes less of an issue begin talking about the goal or outcome that you want. Begin encouraging students to respond to what they hear as an ensemble. As soon as practical, don't use music on the exercises.

Example 1 – As soon as students make an acceptable sound on several notes and are relatively comfortable with the physical aspect of playing their instrument

- 1) Breathing – breathe through the nose in for four & out for four at a moderately slow tempo first standing and then sitting
 - a) How does body feel both standing and sitting?
 - b) Air never stops
 - c) Tongue is down in front of mouth
 - d) Breath in through the mouth and feel the same
- 2) Breathe in for 1 or two counts and play a concert F
 - a) How **do I want to sound?**
 - b) How **loud do I intend to play?**
 - c) **These two items should be a constant from this point forward**
- 3) Sing a concert F (remember to breathe) – try to sound pleasant

- 4) F around the room (remember to breathe)
 - a) Lowest to highest instrument group
 - b) Four counts in between groups
 - c) Add breathing responsibilities between groups if exercise is doing well
- 5) F descending/ascending follow through exercise (remember to breathe)
 - a) F down to Bb – two note exercise
 - b) F up to C – two note exercise

Example 2 – Second semester of first year into early second year—REMEMBER TO BREATHE

- 1) Breathing – breath through mouth for 4 counts in and out and use hand as visual reference
 - a) Same emphasis example 1
 - b) Hand movement reveals concepts of time and spatial awareness
- 2) Sing a concert F
- 3) Remington exercise in whole or half notes going down to Bb and up to C from concert F
 - a) Put a rest in between each three note sequence – F-E-F – whole rest
 - b) Even sound and smooth instant movement
 - c) Articulated or slurred
 - d) Pay attention to tuning adjustments – 5th positions, etc.
- 4) Articulation exercise
 - a) Start with whole note and go through touching eighth notes with rests in between
 - b) Don't space notes until the students are able to make a consistent, even sound on touching notes
 - c) Add breathing responsibilities
- 5) Simple interval exercise
 - a) Divide band into 2 groups and half play F or Bb then add the other half F or C
 - b) Play in whole notes, then a whole rest, then switch notes – sound the same

Example 3 – Second semester of first year (advanced) into second year – REMEMBER TO BREATHE

- 1) Breathing – same as example 2 but shorten the number of counts (for inhale)
 - a) Emphasize body posture both breathing and playing
 - b) Absence of sound when inhaling is critical
- 2) Sing the first five notes of the F scale
- 3) F around the room in articulated quarter notes
 - a) Same procedure as above - just adding articulation responsibilities
 - b) If advanced, try seamless with breathing responsibilities
 - c) Also on lifted quarters as ready
- 4) F descending/ascending follow through exercise
 - a) Full octave down to low F – two note exercise followed by scale in half notes

- b) Start extending range up from F but within reason – perhaps to the octave for most instruments
- 5) Lip vibrations on a single note – ww's to brass
- a) WW's play whole note F for 4 then brass answer for four
 - b) Incorporate whole note Remington as they become more advanced
 - c) Brass should hum the pitch for 2 counts as ww's play
 - d) This should be carefully monitored for quality of sound and pitch accuracy
- 6) Simple chorale – one or two phrases
- a) Transfer of fundamentals to music
 - b) Balance work – one on an instrument then all trying to fit in to soloist