

**IMPROVING SIGHT-READING SKILLS**  
**AN ADJUDICATOR'S POINT OF VIEW**

I. Worksheet Observations

- A. My objectives and goals as an adjudicator
- B. Historical experiences and observations
- C. Using my worksheets as general guidelines
  - 1. Comments based on worksheets
  - 2. Comments based on actual sight reading performances
    - a. Don't be specific i.e. measure numbers
    - b. Use written examples i.e.  played 
    - c. Comment on interpretation category
    - d. Give useful, practical aids they can apply daily at home

II. Oral Comments

- A. Highlights of my observations since group entered the room
- B. If appropriate, rehearse the group to further illustrate a concept as may have been noted above.

III. Non-singing Groups

- A. Comments and other aspects
  - 1. Set-up
  - 2. Tuning
  - 3. Planning ahead
  - 4. Big 4
  - 5. Clapping
    - a. Advantages
    - b. Disadvantages
  - 6. Refer to my worksheets as needed
- B. Those who play exceedingly well
  - 1. Awareness exercises
  - 2. Communication, function, role, responsibility
  - 3. Response to baton technique, facial expressions
  - 4. Use the sight-reading music to illustrate the point

IV. Singing Groups

- A. Comment from worksheet
- B. Scientifically proven effective
  - 1. Feeds the brain
    - a. Visually
    - b. Physically
    - c. Mentally
  - 2. Provides for longer retention

V. Directors Comments / Adjudicator's Observations from MSBOA Festivals

VI. CODA

- A. One cannot teach sight-reading in 10 easy lessons
- B. The only way to teach sight-reading is to sight-read
- C. The sight-reading instructional period capsulizes the entire teaching year into 10 minutes

A SATISFYING PERFORMANCE – THE FIRST TIME  
SIGHT READING – THE FIRST TIME

Maxims

When you see it – do it

See it before you play it

Look up, down, ahead

When in doubt, play it out

There is strength in numbers – be confident alone

Don't be afraid to be wrong

Tone and intonation are the first musical ingredients to suffer

Director – be general – things everyone has

Students - be specific – things only your instrument has

Rests are active silence – not vacations

IDEAS THAT WILL HELP US ALL

Don't ignore the percussion section

Plan ahead – who plays what in the percussion section

Plan ahead – who plays what in the wind section, especially cornets and clarinets whose parts are often divided 1 2 3 or 1 2

Tune before you play – influencing factors have changed since the concert and an acoustical check is helpful regarding dynamics

Percussion – hands in the air or on your knee quietly playing your rhythm and singing loudly.

Winds – instruments in playing position, hands on, fingering as you sing loudly

Strings – bow in crook of arm – cello, bow on lap underneath instrument

Breathe together on the first downbeat, especially percussion

Everyone use the first 30 seconds to study the big 4

The "Big 4" = Key Signatures – Time Signatures – Style and MM Markings – Roadmap (Repeats, Coda, D.S., D.C., etc.) Use your finger in contact with the staff. Notice unusual rhythms, solos, cues. Try to do this on your own for 30 seconds, then your Director can cover other details more thoroughly.

Director – ask questions, Group – respond in unison, loudly.

## WAYS TO DEVELOP SIGHT-READING SKILLS

Sight-read on a regular basis – it's 50% of your grade

Introduce basic concepts on day one (Sept.), adding each session

Vary materials 2/4 – 6/8 marches for example. Work on pick-up notes

Discuss typical rhythms of marches, use a rhythm study

Start with easy music, and then get more challenging

Play some numbers a grade level or so below your level

Use stick, not verbal communication – Stacc., Leg., F, P, Phrasing, Sing

Finger instruments in playing position as you sing – air playing

Sing Slurs “ahhh” - no tongue

Count rests out loud, (rest, rest)

Director – listen to band sing note length – be sure note length is accurate then be sure they play the same way, especially regarding style, length articulation

Director – watch the score and the percussion (don't ignore them)

Director – know what the percussion is doing - are they air playing?

Students – listen to the total group as you sing – absorb what's going on around you

Playing slow tells you: 1. Tone quality; 2. How musical the group is. 3. Basic weaknesses

Listen to ☺

Watch Director on all tempo changes and fermatas

## IF THE DIRECTOR DOES IT ALL

Students will think they are supposed to have what they hear the director singing. If the Director skips from instrument to instrument the Students will hear what they are not seeing. Hence, confusion.

If the Director points out a certain rhythm and fails to identify that instrument, much time will be wasted by Students trying to figure out what the Director is trying to say.

If details are well covered by the Director, the Judge will probably mention this. However, if the Students cannot grasp those details, the band will not read very well.

If Students develop the sight-reading skills as outlined above, they will be aware of the details as much as the Director. Then the Director can spend time on general items involving the total ensemble, while the various sections concentrate on their specific needs.

Results: A satisfying musical performance the first time.

Students sing more

Director sings less

Director doesn't play, students do.

Let the Students carry the weight when they sing – they have to when they play.

\*\*\*\*\*AWARENESS EXERCISES\*\*\*\*\*

How to integrate your sound into that of the ensemble

SIGHT                      SOUND                      FEELING                      UNDERSTANDING

VISUAL AWARENESS

Notice which musical voices the Conductor is gesturing toward (Melody, inner voice, rhythm, bass line).

Watch and notice how the Conductor's facial expression, hands, body, and baton reflect the meaning the Conductor wants to draw from the particular voice he's conducting.

Watch the physical movements of the other members of your section as they prepare for an entrance.

With your eyes a little out of focus, see how many different aspects of the performance you can watch without focusing on one particular object. Your music? Yourself? Your posture? How you handle your instrument? The Conductor? The performance space? The stand? Your own section?

Notice when your visual attention is drawn specifically to one of these areas.

SOUND AWARENESS

Be aware of the pitch of the other instruments that are closest to your own range. What are the intervals created?

Notice whether your attacks and releases are ahead of, with, or behind the rest of the section.

FEELING AWARENESS – BE SENSITIVE

Notice any feelings of resistance or tension in your hands, arms, body, as you play.

Notice how much feedback your body can give you with regard to pitch and rhythmic accuracy.

KNOWING AWARENESS

Pay attention to the personal background of the Composer, the history of the work, and the time in which the piece was written. How can this be reflected in your own playing?

These exercises will help You to feel more fully involved in your playing in larger and smaller groups, add color and precision to your performance, add to your experience and enjoyment of the music you are playing, and hopefully, BRING BACK SOME MORE OF THAT MUSICAL MAGIC THAT CAN TURN ENSEMBLE PLAYING FROM SOMETHING THAT YOU TAKE FOR GRANTED INTO A CHALLENGE AND A DELIGHT!