

The First Ten Minutes: Re-Imagining the Role of Warm-Up Activities in the Choral Rehearsal

Why: Infuse fun into every rehearsal... (Every day should be fun for YOU and YOUR STUDENTS!!!)

Golden Rule: Any rote activity can be made more fun with some creativity and play infused into it!!

Physical Warm-ups

Follow-the-leader (Energy, movement, body awareness, following, teamwork, FUN!)

Description: Students get into single file line behind you, instruct students to follow only the person directly in front of them. Lead them around the room: walk, hop, skip, spin around, etc. Phonate in different ranges, clap, sing, anything that gets students moving, following, and vocalizing.

Variation: Have students lead.

Clap With Me: (Focus, body awareness, movement, energizer, establish rhythmic patterns, FUN!)

Students follow your movement exactly as you do, at the same time as you. This is a great activity to get students moving and breaking down bad posture. Clap low, high, cross your body diagonally, etc.

Variation: Include phonation, singing with movement. You can also incorporate rhythmic patterns that students will see in the music in this activity.

Rhythmic Development

Counting Game (Steady beat, inner pulse, meter, vocal independence, focus, leadership builder, improv skills, FUN!)

Description: You will need four volunteers to begin. Each student represents a beat (1-2-3-4). You select a tempo and count them off. Each student then says their beat, in time. You can then remove beats, “beat two out” and that student stops saying their beat and it is replaced by silence. You can also add students back in with sound (replacing their number with any appropriate sound – this can and should be fun and silly) you might also encourage students to incorporate movement with their sound. This can be varied a number of ways. You can do different meters, you can subdivide, you can put different meters against one another. You can also do this activity with sections instead of individual singers. Be creative, make it your own.

Variation: Improv (percussion, bass line, hook, melody, rap, subject)

Class Composing (Reinforce solfege, leadership, improve skills, develop vertical listening, feature students “other” talents- rap, beat-boxing, etc, FUN!)

Extension of small group improv activity.

Four Beats Behind: (Focus, steady beat, rhythmic development and independence, ensemble, FUN!)

Description: Tap a four beat (or three, two, five, whatever meter you are working in) have students follow four beats behind. You can again reinforce rhythmic figures from your repertoire. Including snapping, clapping, stomping, singing, the YMCA, whatever you want to get your students moving, laughing and working together.

Variation: Students can follow in a round like fashion either in rows or sections, four, eight, twelve beats behind. (Hint: They just watch/follow the people four beats ahead of them).

Rhythm Card Games: (Notation identification, rhythmic reading skills, independence, steady beat, FUN!!)

Description: I use laminated rhythm cards and added magnets to the back so I could throw them up on the board whenever needed. There are a million variations of how to use these cards but I often tried to make it into a game or competition. You can assign certain rhythms to certain sections or rows (odd rows clap half and whole notes, even clap eighth and quarter, etc.). You can put the same number of cards on the board as you have in each row and each student must complete one card correctly before the next student can try their card, first row to get through all of the cards correctly wins. (This is great at reinforcing new rhythmic concepts because it allows for a lot of repetition.)

Variations: Telephone, Rhythm Master

Phonation/Vocal Warm-ups

Repeat After Me: (Non pitched vocal warm-up, register identification, head voice access, FUN!!)

Description: “No Game”: Model saying the word “No” in a variety of ways and have students repeat it back to you. Incorporate movement to match different ranges, and styles. I usually ended with a loud 2 year old tantrum no.

“Dad, Can I Borrow The Car” – or any other sentence. Repeat three times, the first time calmly and in a low voice, with each replication higher and more desperate. Great for helping developing male voices use their falsetto.

Solfège Football (or your activity of choice, I worked at a sports school): Reinforce hand sign practice, audiation, pitch matching, displacing octave (male changing voice), listening, physical movement, FUN!)

Description: Have all students sing a scale from Do–Do. You start by singing low “Do” then calling out a student's name and throwing a squishy ball (mine was a football) to that person. They must then sing re (with the hand symbol). If either the pitch or the symbol is incorrect, they must sit and are out. You can continue up and down the octave until everyone only two people remain. Then student begin the “lightening round” going as quickly as they can without making a mistake. The last person standing wins.

Variations: Five-note or Octave, intervallic leaps

Point to someone who... (5-note vocalize, tone, breath, line, energy, physical engagement, community building, FUN!!)

Description: Sing a 5-note descending pattern on the word “you” moving up or down by half steps. Each time you move by half step students should “point to someone who...” and choose a different descriptor for that day; is a great musician, always makes you laugh, you are glad to be in choir... etc. Students must then ENTHUSIASTICALLY point using their entire body at different members in the ensemble. This allows them to connect, give compliments and engage physically in their singing. Extra credit for the most creative pointing!

Half Step Add-Ons (Focus, engagement, vocal development, movement, humor, phonation, FUN!!)

Description: We often do warm-ups at the piano that move by half steps. Think about ways in which you can engage students and avoid “auto-pilot”. You can add a gesture in between each vocalize, students can stomp, or snap, or clap in rhythm. They can also high-five, etc. Experiment

and ask your kids for ideas. My students saw that Geico commercial with the camel in the office that kept asking, “Hey, What day is it today...” “Hump-Day”. This became our Wednesday tradition. Between each exercise students would say “Hump-Day” in the camel voice, lots of fun and a great way to access a different register while vocalizing.

Putting It All Together

Card-Game: I stole this from a Choral Journal article I read in my Choral Methods class, and I have used it in every class at every age level; adjust for concepts you are currently covering, level, skill, and age of students, repeat to improve “score”. Classes can compete against their own scores, or other classes. I did this at the beginning of the year with all 6 choirs (middle and high school), great motivator for middle school students to beat high school students, great reminder of important concepts and an easy way to teach material to students who have never been in choir without slowing down the class)

Variation: Partner to help one another at the beginning of the year, or anytime of year if you have students with varying skill levels or experience. Change out the cards as often as you need. (Can cover ANY topic and also, it’s really FUN!)

Other “Fun” Activities:

Sight-reading

- Rhythm Cards
- To “Real” music (different tempos, styles, dynamics) – instead of a metronome
- Game/competition: (Stand/Sit, Assign Different Rhythms, Telephone, Row Challenge, Rhythm Master-always reinforcing good sportsmanship & community)

Sectionals

- Rotate (Corners, just solfege pitches, no rhythm, just rhythm, both, text in rhythm, etc)
- Fastest section to...

Rote-teaching

- You will probably have to do some of this (or like most of us, A LOT of this, so make it FUN and useful!)
- Variety: Tempo/Dynamics, text, solfege, rhythms only, scaffold, sing in circles (circles that face each other, face away, etc)
- “Take-a-Step” – 2-4 parts – repetition – As they get closer, vocal independence will be harder