

Art of Choral Techniques

SOME STRATEGIES FOR EXPERIENCE (SYNTHESIS) AND ANALYSIS

Experience (Synthesis)

*Engage students immediately and provide as complete a musical experience as possible.
Choose appropriate technique(s) to encourage a positive first impression and to inspire the desire to learn!*

- Active participation will focus, motivate, and inspire
- Sight-read a complete section (entire piece or excerpt or a few phrases) in unison or parts
- Sing piece to choir yourself to demonstrate feeling of whole and to model style
- Teach section through call and response
- If the piece is too difficult to sight-read, listen to a recording of the piece to develop “listenership”
- Play a recording of a piece in a similar style
- Show art works that relate or a video to immerse students in time/style period
- Read text (e.g., chant freely and expressively or consider using melodic rhythm of melody)
- Move while listening (e.g., conduct, keep steady beat by clapping, patsching, stepping, etc.)
- Discuss historical background and/or inspire with an interesting story;
- Make meaningful connections for students to “get into it”; teach historical context of the work

Analysis

*Analyze possible problems, listen for them, isolate and work on them.
Increase students’ awareness and sensitivity to the musical material.*

- Use score study (sing every part) to develop your aural image of the piece and anticipate problems
- Teach with energy to accomplish these formal learnings
- Use research to build your foundation of knowledge about the piece and share interesting tidbits
- Use a rehearsal plan and be as specific in your preparation as possible
- Avoid boring mechanical repetition; make this phase educational, enjoyable, and musical
- Use “warm-ups” to teach vocal technique, ensemble sensitivity (listening, tuning, vowel modification, etc.) and to introduce new concepts to be encountered in the repertoire; build repertoire of canons, patriotic songs, folksongs, Gregorian chant, madrigals, vocal jazz favorites, etc. to include in this portion of the lesson.
- Use solfege and Curwen hand signs to internalize pitches and tonal relationships and to improve reading skills
- Use neutral syllables (e.g., [du], [da], [tu], [lu], [ta], [du bi], etc.) to refine pitch and rhythm
- Use staccato [du] or text to refine articulation and enunciation; economical and direct expression
- Use “shadow singing” for parts not actively in focus; keep everyone busy!!
- Use movement to heighten awareness of pulse, rhythm, and other musical elements
- Use pulsing [du] or count-singing to energize singing and feel inner pulse
- Use [zing] to encourage zesty breath energy and flow
- Use raspberries or lips bubbles (on pitch) to find connection to low breath energy and to encourage breath flow and free phonation
- Use music and singing (and less talk) to teach musical concepts, vocal technique, style and feeling
- Use fewer words in directives and explanations; let the music do the teaching!
- Use piano as a scaffolding device, if necessary, especially to establish early musical momentum; fade it ASAP to lessen student reliance on this percussion instrument!
- Use conversational call/response or rote singing to teach subtleties: vocal model = 1,000 words
- Use effective imagery, metaphors and similes to help students relate to musical concepts, including vocal techniques, timbre, style); be interesting, creative and immediate

Experience (Synthesis)

As complete a musical experience as possible; should definitely be better than the first experience!!