

**Intonation.** Intonation—playing in tune—is at the same time one of the most difficult and the most glorious aspects of string playing. When taught well and consistently from the beginning stages, string players, like singers, have the ability to easily make the slight adjustments in pitch that turn chords into beautiful, spine-tingling moments. While intonation is only one of several categories adjudicated, it affects just about every other category. For example, if intonation is poor, then the instruments do not resonate and this affects tone. Students must be able to play accurate finger patterns within a melodic line while adjusting their fingers as needed for the harmony. Good intonation is only achieved by your students when they are actively listening to themselves and comparing their pitch to the instruments within their section and throughout the orchestra.

We have adjudicated many ensembles that have played all the right notes, at the right time, with the right articulations, and the right rhythms. Unfortunately, some performances were only mediocre because intonation was poor. While we generally cannot expect middle and high school students to play with intonation that rivals professional orchestras, we can take steps to ensure that our students know the process of achieving good intonation.

Very young players can hear the difference between two notes that are in tune and two notes that are not. Start emphasizing intonation issues early on. This can start as early as the first few weeks of beginning instruction and will save countless hours in rehearsals later on.

**Balance.** All aspects of a piece must be heard in the proper proportion. We sometimes think that balance will take care of itself. It does not. Good balance requires active listening by the director and the students 100% of the time. Subtopics include blend, ensemble balance, melodic balance, and section balance.

It is extremely important for adjudicators to hear what they are supposed to hear in proper proportions. In order for that to happen, each part must be analyzed to fit its role in the scheme of a piece. Study your score.

When air bowing without the instrument, I prefer students hold the bow vertically, literally playing down bows and up bows. This minimizes the difficulty of holding the bow when the instrument is not there to support it. Most of the time I have students air bow without the instrument when checking difficult rhythms and/or bowings.

Once these spots are comfortable, employ air bowing with the instrument to silently “play through” a section of the piece. To air bow with the instrument, students can hold their instruments in playing position but place their bows under the strings, playing the tops of their instruments. If a violin or viola bow doesn’t fit underneath the strings, the bow can be turned upside down and played in the crook of the student’s left elbow. Now students are able to finger notes with the left hand while bowing with the right hand, again without making a sound. This simulation effectively prepares them for the actual performance about to occur.

**Sight reading requires musicianship, too.** The adjudicator in the sight reading room is looking to hear the same musical qualities as the adjudicators on stage. Expect your sight reading example to cover (and require!) similar elements of musicianship.

*Teach students to carry over the skills they learned on the prepared pieces to the sight reading music.*

There are seven elements students must observe in their music during the sight reading preparation time. It is a limited amount of time, so they will need to mentally process these items within 60-90 seconds! Practice this preparation list regularly.

1. **Key Signature.** Check the initial key and look for any key changes. Have students silently finger through associated scale(s) or the finger pattern on each string so they can get the key(s) under their fingers.
2. **Time Signature.** Make note of meter changes.
3. **Roadmap.** Look for repeat signs, D.S., D.C., and Coda.

## Preparations

**Selecting appropriate literature.** Selecting your program for adjudication may feel like the single most important work you do all year. The key to a positive adjudication experience is to select music that will showcase your ensemble's best abilities. Knowing your orchestra's strengths and weaknesses is essential.

- ◆ Avoid building your adjudication program around the talents of a single student. If that student becomes unavailable on the day of adjudication, your plans have sunk. Student solos are fine as long as you have a back-up soloist.
- ◆ Do not select a piece simply because you heard it played at your state conference (by one of the elite string programs) and you think it is a wonderful piece. It might be a wonderful piece, but if it is not appropriate to your students' skill level, they may crash and burn at adjudication.
- ◆ Avoid performing a piece solely because you think it is a good idea to expose your students to a particular style of music. You have other concerts during the year to explore a variety of genres. When you take your orchestra for adjudication, your three program selections should be challenging enough for your students to take them to the next level and display their expertise with confidence.
- ◆ Do not sabotage your orchestra by selecting music that is beyond their technical and musical capabilities. Consider your weakest player as well as your strongest player. Remember that your best players might get bored in rehearsal as you spend time going over difficult passages with your weaker players. Talk with directors who have had consistent success at adjudication. They get it and can offer you guidance.
- ◆ An equally serious mistake is to select music that is below the students' abilities just to end up with positive comments. Selecting music that is too easy will teach them very little. Students are not easily hoodwinked. They will know if you are sandbagging with

for success. All you need to do is open your laptop, go to a publisher's website, and listen to new music as you peruse sample scores. What an awesome resource we have today!

*If you think you finally have the ensemble to play the piece you have always wanted to play, run through it once without your first chair players, then evaluate if the orchestra is really ready.*

**Registration, paperwork, and fees.** It is critical that you send your registration forms and fees to the event host by the date expected. Period.

*Make a checklist or spreadsheet with a timeline so you can easily track the tasks associated with the adjudication event. Each week you'll know what needs to be done in order to stay on target.*

**Ordering adjudicators' scores.** Immediately after establishing your program, order your scores. You should do this six to eight weeks before adjudication day. Photocopied scores are not acceptable, and most adjudication sites will not allow your orchestra to be adjudicated if you have copied scores without special permission. Under no circumstances should you hand an adjudicator a photocopied score without an attached letter of permission from the copyright holder.

**Numbering adjudicators' scores.** Adjudicators need to have the measures numbered on your scores for quick reference. While most recently published music comes with measures already numbered, many older pieces do not. Also, published measure numbers can be very small and hard for adjudicators to locate. A nice gesture is to either number all measures in red or highlight them in a bright color.

**Percussion.** If you are working with a full orchestra, check with the site host to make sure you clearly understand specific aspects of the percussion equipment that is provided. Ask what type of timpani will be available. Timpanists can become flustered if the tuning mechanisms on the host school's timpani differ from ones they are used to.

## Adjudication Day

**Travel checklist.** Here is a list of things to bring with you on Adjudication Day. Better yet, you might print the duplicable travel checklist on page 60.

- ◆ Your conductor scores.
- ◆ Scores for the adjudicators with measures numbered.
- ◆ Seating charts and other forms requested by the host.
- ◆ A baton, if you use one.
- ◆ A tuner, in case the tuner in the warm-up area stops working or happens to be one with which you are not familiar.
- ◆ An emergency repair kit that includes:
  - ◇ Extra strings for each instrument
  - ◇ Rosin
  - ◇ Peg compound
  - ◇ Soundpost setter (if you are adept at using one).
- ◆ Remember to have Emergency Medical Forms, as required by your school/division. Bring inhalers, allergy medications, and/or any other emergency materials that you are required to carry. If possible, designate a reliable parent to handle first aid issues for the trip so that you can totally focus on the performance.
- ◆ Endpin stoppers for basses and cellos. Extra mutes, if needed. An extra violin shoulder rest or two is good to have on hand, as well.
- ◆ A first aid kit.
- ◆ The box of music folders. One way to insure no one forgets their music is to collect all of the students' folders after your last rehearsal, put them in a box, and place them on the bus yourself, especially if you have a middle school or elementary orchestra.
- ◆ Extra sets of music parts, just in case...

**Take roll on the bus before you leave school.** Here is another way to ensure that no music folder is forgotten. Go to each bus and get your students' attention. Take role by name having them hold up their folder and say to you, "Present! My instrument is in the overhead!" or "Present! My instrument is under the bus!" or "Present! My instrument is by my side!" You will have insured that everyone has his or her instrument and music folder.