

RULES FOR EXPRESSIVE SINGING

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Use of higher order thinking in rehearsal provides a wonderful means of structuring independence in singing expressively: start with basic knowledge and successively ask singers to perform/evaluate more sophisticated tasks with the music. One method that works very well with developing choirs is the use of rules to structure transfer of knowledge.

Rules for Transfer

- **The Rule of the Steady Beat.** When singing any note value longer than the steady beat value, singers should crescendo slightly.
- **The Rule of Consonant Releases.** This rule might structure using the last full beat, or the last half of the beat, or whatever is appropriate for the song and counting ability of the ensemble.
- **The Rule of Diphthongs.** Even beginning singers who do not yet self-monitor their vowel sounds can quickly apply this rule. Identifying diphthongs and prescribing a method for performance (e.g., sing the first sound throughout most of the value and then quickly add the second sound) serve to educate and prevent most errors.
- **The Rule of Punctuation.** This rule requires a lift or break for every punctuation mark throughout the piece. The reverse is also true: do not break if no punctuation exists (perhaps the greatest benefit).
- **The Rule of the Slur (and other articulations).** Although most students can explain a slur, a surprising number of singers cannot sing one correctly. This rule requires a *tenuto* over the first note under the slur, followed by all other notes in the pattern sung without a *tenuto* marking.
- **The Rule of Word Stress.** Informing students about *singing* words as we might *speak* words addresses the issue of word stress. Singing louder or with slight emphasis on important words or syllables is a simple idea, but not something that automatically occurs with all novice singers.

Other rules a teacher might opt to use include:

- The Rule of Dissonance (crescendo and resolve);
- The Rule of Dynamic Contrast (sometimes the key variable for expressive performance);
- The Rule of Voicing (bring out important motifs from the choral texture);
- The Rule of Repetition (dynamic scheme for a text or music sequence);
- The Rule of Managing the Passagio

Developing singers may not know every important aspect about the music they are performing, but given information by the teacher/conductor, it is very possible for them to make decisions, be held accountable (assessment), and sing beautifully.