

# Virginia Choral Director Association

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*Group Sight-Reading Assessment:  
Guidelines, Procedures and Scoring*

*2013-2014 Committee:*

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## **VCDA District Performance Assessment Sight-Reading Committee**

On Saturday January 15, 2011 the VCDA District Assessment Sight-Reading Committee met to develop an initial plan for common state-wide criteria. On Saturday, August 3, 2013 the expanded committee met to revise the standards, procedures, and scoring. The following is what this committee submits:

The plan developed for school years from 2011 to 2014 -

- For school year 2011-2012: These guidelines would apply ONLY to groups attempting to obtain Blue Ribbon status.
- For school year 2012-2013: all performing ensembles would be required to sight-read, regardless of Blue-Ribbon attainment, following the same guidelines.
- For school year 2013-2014: all schools would be required to sight-read and the standards for each of the four levels would be more rigorous, including, but not limited to, additional length, more difficult rhythms and skips, more voicings, etc.

In years following 2014, revision will take place every three years by a committee made of one member of the executive board, appointed by the VCDA President, and three district representatives. This committee will solicit suggestions from districts following their Performance Assessment and will make, if appropriate, suggestions to the VCDA body for revisions.

To remain consistent throughout the state, a composer will be commissioned to produce all sight-reading work and, once created, will be distributed to the VCDA President then to all District Representatives. The commissioned composer will be given the same guidelines as directors in order to create equitable sight-reading samples. The composer will also be asked to provide one example per level for directors to view via [www.vcda.net](http://www.vcda.net).

### **Sight-Reading Levels**

There will be four levels of sight-reading available for groups to perform, with a different example per key. At check-in, directors will have the opportunity to quickly preview various examples and choose the sight-reading example for their ensemble(s). Directors may not choose the same sight-reading sample for multiple groups. The chart below shows the level that groups will sight-read based on their performance level.

<b>High School &amp; Middle School Sight-Reading</b>		
<i>Performance Level</i>	<i>Sight-Reading (non Blue Ribbon)</i>	<i>Sight-Reading (Blue Ribbon)</i>
1	At least level 1	At least level 1
2		At least level 1
3		At least level 2
4	At least level 2	At least level 2
5		At least level 3
6		At least level 4

## **Sight-Reading Procedure with Script**

After the ensemble has received the sight-reading exercise from the assistant, the adjudicator will state the following:

*“Welcome to the sight-reading portion of your district performance assessment. Please keep your sight-reading exercise face-down until I tell you to turn it over to begin. You will have two minutes to study the sight-reading after your director establishes the tonality. During the study period, you may sing alone, with one another, or in sections per your director’s instructions. However, you may not demonstrate TO one another.”*

The judge will then ask the director if they have questions about the procedures. Barring none, the judge will instruct the director and students to turn over the exercise and establish tonality. Time begins once the ensemble completes the establishment of tonality.

### **Two Minutes Pass**

*“Time. Your director may establish the tonality again before you begin your sight-reading.”*

Upon completion of the exercise, the judge will ask the director if they would like to use the initial performance for judging. If they do not, continue the script.

*“You will have two additional minutes to study the sight-reading after your director establishes the tonality.”*

Time begins once the ensemble completes the establishment of tonality or once the ensemble begins studying the sight-reading.

### **Two Minutes Pass**

*“Time. Your director may establish the tonality again before you begin your sight-reading.”*

Following the judged performance, the judge will thank the ensemble and collect the exercise.

*“Thank you. Please wait until we have collected all the sight-reading forms before you exit the room.”*

## Procedure as a Chart

Event/Time Elapse	The Director May: (in any order)	Students may: (in any order)	The Director May Not:
First Study Period/ 120 seconds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish tonality using piano and/or voice</li> <li>Establish tonality by having ensemble sing scale patterns, progression, etc.</li> <li>Provide students with starting pitch(es)</li> <li>Allow students to sing individually, in groups, or in sections (hum, sing, solfege, #s, etc.) Students may sing <b>with</b> one another, but not <b>demonstrate</b> to one another.</li> <li>Set tempo by snapping, tapping, etc.</li> <li>Verbally coach* without specific pitch, intervallic, or rhythmic information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sing individually, in groups, or in sections (hum, sing, solfege, #s, etc.) Students may sing <b>with</b> one another, but not <b>demonstrate</b> to one another. (i.e., individual students cannot teach the entire ensemble)</li> <li>Speak to other members of the ensemble to answer questions or clarify uncertainties</li> <li>Use solfege, numbers, neutral syllables, etc.</li> <li>Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actualize rhythms or pitches (tap, clap, hum, sing, etc.) except to establish tonality</li> <li>Mouth along with solfege syllables, numbers, etc.</li> <li>Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs, except during the establishment of tonality and giving beginning pitches. (Students may use hand signs).</li> <li>Rehearse areas of difficulty</li> <li>Allow students to sing, hum, etc. by <b>demonstrating</b> to one another</li> </ul>
Run-Through/ Time elapsed (Minimum tempo quarter note = 60bpm)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish tonality using the piano and/or voice</li> <li>Establish tonality by having ensemble sing scale patterns, progression, etc.</li> <li>Provide students with starting pitch(es)</li> <li>Have the ensemble sing the exercise without stopping</li> <li>Keep the ensemble together by conducting, clapping, snapping, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sing scale patterns, progressions, etc. as an ensemble to establish tonality</li> <li>Sing the exercise without stopping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sing along with the ensemble</li> <li>Mouth along with solfege syllables, numbers, etc.</li> <li>Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs</li> <li>(Students may use hand signs)</li> </ul>
Second Study Period/ 120 seconds (all groups)	Same as First Study Period	Same as First Study Period	Same as First Study Period
Final Performance (Minimum tempo quarter note = 60bpm)	Same as Run-Through Period	Same as Run-Through Period	Same as Run-Through Period

\*See Appendix B for additional explanation of verbal coaching

## Middle School Sight-Reading Levels

Level	Tonality	Voicing	Melody/Intervals	Meter/Rhythm*
MS Level 1 8 measures	C, E-flat, F**  Begins and ends on low <i>do</i>	Unison	Stepwise motion  Utilizes <i>do-sol</i>  Diatonic	4/4 Whole notes Half notes/rests Quarter notes/rests
MS Level 2 8 measures	C, E-flat, F  Begins and ends on low <i>do</i>	Unison	Stepwise motion  Range: low <i>ti</i> to <i>la</i>  Diatonic	4/4 Whole notes Dotted half notes/rest Half notes/rests Quarter notes/rests Paired Eighth Notes No syncopation
MS Level 3 8 measures	C, E-flat, F  Begins and ends on low <i>do</i>	2-part SA and TB will be provided on the same page/slide, with ST being the same and AB being the same	Stepwise motion  Range: low <i>ti</i> to <i>la</i>  Diatonic	4/4 Whole notes Dotted half notes/rest Half notes/rests Quarter notes/rests Paired Eighth notes No syncopation
MS Level 4 8 measures	C, F, E-Flat, D  Begins and ends on low <i>do</i>	2-part SA and TB will be provided on the same page/slide, with ST being the same and AB being the same	Range: low <i>ti</i> to <i>la</i>  May include skips involving the tonic triad  Diatonic	4/4, 3/4 Whole notes Dotted half notes/rest Half notes/rests Quarter notes/rests Paired Eighth notes No syncopation

\*Rhythmic possibilities are only indicative of what could potentially be seen in an example

\*\*ANY Sight-Reading example may be keyed in an alternate by the director. If the director chooses to establish a key other than the one given, they must notify the judge prior to the first performance.

## High School Sight-Reading Levels

Level	Key/Tonality	Voicing	Melody/Intervals*	Meter/Rhythm**
HS Level 1 8 measures	C, E-flat, F***  Starts and ends on low <i>do</i>	Unison The example will be written in treble and bass clef on the same page/slide	Stepwise  <i>ti-la</i>  Diatonic	4/4 Whole notes Dotted half notes/rest Half notes/rests Quarter notes/rests Paired Eighth Notes No syncopation
HS Level 2 8 measures	C, F, E-Flat, D  Starts and ends on low <i>do</i> or <i>mi</i> (One voice should begin/ end on <i>do</i> )	2-part SA and TB will be provided on the same page/slide, with ST being the same and AB being the same	Stepwise  <i>ti-la</i>  Diatonic	4/4, 3/4 Whole notes Dotted half notes/rest Half notes/rests Quarter notes/rests Paired Eighth notes No syncopation
HS Level 3 8 measures	C, F, E-Flat, D  Starts on <i>do, mi, or sol</i> and ends on <i>do</i> or <i>mi</i> . (One voice should begin/end on <i>do</i> )	SSA, SAB, SATB, & TTB	Tonic triad skips  Diatonic  See below for vocal ranges	4/4, 3/4 Whole notes Dotted half notes/rest Half notes/rests Dotted quarter notes Quarter notes/rests Eighth notes No syncopation
HS Level 4 8 measures	C, F, E-Flat, D  Starts and ends on <i>do, mi, or sol</i> (One voice should begin/end on <i>do</i> )	3-part or 4-part SSA, TTB, SAB, or SSAA, TTBB, SATB	Skips of a 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> , or 5 <sup>th</sup>  Diatonic  See below for vocal ranges	4/4, 3/4 Whole notes Dotted half notes/rest Half notes/rests Dotted quarter notes Quarter notes/rests Eighth notes Syncopation is possible

\*Ranges: 4 Part – Sop: B flat 3 – E5 , Alto: A flat 3 – C5, Ten: D3 – E4, Bass: A2 – C4  
3 Part – Sop and Alto: same as above, Baritone: D3 – D4

\*\*Rhythmic possibilities are only indicative of what could *potentially* be seen in an example

\*\*\*ANY Sight-Reading example may be keyed in an alternate by the director. If the director chooses to establish a key other than the one given, they must notify the judge prior to the first performance.

**Appendix A**  
**Alternate Script for LCD Projection of Sight-Reading**

**Sight-Reading Procedure with Script**

After the ensemble has entered the room, the adjudicator will state the following:

*“Welcome to the sight-reading portion of your district performance assessment. You will have two minutes to study the sight-reading after your director establishes the tonality. During the study period, you may sing alone, with one another, or in sections per your director’s instructions. However, you may not demonstrate TO one another.”*

The judge will then ask the director if they have questions about the procedures. Barring none, the judge will instruct the director to establish tonality and begin the study period. Time begins once the ensemble completes the establishment of tonality.

**Two Minutes Pass**

*“Time. Your director may establish the tonality again before you begin your sight-reading.”*

Upon completion of the exercise, the judge will ask the director if they would like to use the initial performance for judging. If they do not, continue the script.

*“You will have two additional minutes to study the sight-reading after your director establishes the tonality.”*

Time begins once the ensemble completes the establishment of tonality or once the ensemble begins studying the sight-reading.

**Two Minutes Pass**

*“Time. Your director may establish the tonality again before you begin your sight-reading.”*

Following the judged performance, the judge will thank the ensemble and collect the exercise.

*“Thank you. Please wait until we have collected all the sight-reading forms before you exit the room.”*

## Appendix B

### Clarification on Verbal Coaching

The director may:

- Identify measures with difficult material, either pitch or rhythmic, in it without providing the solution to the problem -
  - “Students, please notice the tricky rhythms in the second measure.”
  - “Students, there is a problem with a skip in the fourth measure.”
- Indicate in which voice part the problem is-
  - “The altos need to be careful of one specific pitch in measure three.”
- Have students chant through rhythms in the example in its entirety before the run-through or second study period, but only once. There is to be no stopping during the chanting nor is there to be group chanting of only select measures.

The director may not:

- Provide pitch, interval or rhythmic solutions to any part of the sight-reading example.
  - “In the first measure, there is a skip from *do* to *fa*, please make that correction. You are singing *do* to *mi*.”
  - “Be careful of the eighth note rhythms in measure seven. Remember, to count eighth notes like one-and, two-and, three-and, four-and.”
  - “The third note in the last measure is *mi* not *re*.”
- Practice with the students areas that are difficult or incorrect
  - “The pitches in measure three were incorrect, lets sing through it together.”

**When judging:** The rule for verbal coaching is that teachers may not intentionally provide any answers for students during the entire process.

## **Appendix C**

### **Composition Expectations**

#### **Formatting**

- Header coding: Schooling level, Level #, Key (For example – MS, Level 1, C Major)
- Landscape layout
- Measures are numbered

#### **Compositional Expectations**

- Cadences
  - IV – I
  - V – I
  - No deceptive cadences
- No voice crossing, but voices may sing unison
- All skips are within I, IV, and V chords only
- No meter changes within composition

**Appendix D**  
**Composer Commissioning Letter**

To: Possible composers for District Assessments Sight-Reading

From: District Assessments Sight-Reading Committee

Date:

Your name has been recommended to the Virginia Choral Director's Association committee on sight-reading for District Assessments, as a possible composer for sight-reading examples for the entire state in mid-March, 2013. The samples need to follow standard 18<sup>th</sup> century harmonic progressions, be singable using accepted choral practices and follow the parameters listed on the enclosed page. We also need these to be produced using a computer program such as Sibelius, Finale, or other easily readable music formats.

We are asking you to write 3 samples, 8 measures each, for high-school Levels 2, 3, and 4 which could be used as samples to send to all choral directors in Virginia in January if you are chosen. We need these examples of your work by \_\_\_\_\_. If your work is selected you will be asked to write an example of your work for middle school, Levels 1- 4 and high school Levels 1- 4 which will be sent to all choral directors in January

The due date for the final Virginia Choral Director's Association Assessment 8 measure compositions in required voicing is the first week in March. The parameter for each level is enclosed in this letter. If you are chosen as composer for the 2013 District Assessments you will be compensated.

Thank you for being willing to help Virginia Choral Directors establish state-wide standards for sight-singing.

VCDA Sight-Reading Committee

**Time-line**

Sept. \_\_\_\_ Three samples of High School Level 2, 3, 4 sent to \_\_\_\_

Jan. \_\_\_\_ One example for each level of middle school and high school sight-reading to be sent to every choral director in the state by our committee.

March \_\_\_\_ Three examples for each middle school and high school levels 1, 2, 3, 4 in each voicing listed. The same example may be used for different voicing by transposing the example.

## Appendix E

### Recommended Reading

#### Books

- Bluestine, E. (2000). *The ways children learn music*. Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc.
- Demorest, S. M. (2001). *Building choral excellence: Teaching sight-singing in the choral rehearsal*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gordon, E. E. (2003). *Learning sequences in music*. Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc.
- Krueger, C. (2011). *Progressive sight singing*. New York: Oxford University Press.

#### Articles

- Demorest, S. M. (1998). Sightsinging in the secondary choral ensemble: A review of the research. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 137, 1-15.
- Demorest, S. M. and May, W. V. (1995). Sight-singing instruction in the choral ensemble: Factors related to individual performance. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 43, 156-167.  
DOI: 10.2307/3345676.
- Henry, M. L. (2011). The effect of pitch and rhythm difficulty on vocal sight-reading performance. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 59(1), 72-84. DOI: 10.1177/0022429410397199
- Henry, M. (2001). The development of a vocal sight-reading inventory. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 150, 21-35.
- Killian, J. N. and Henry, M. L. (2005). A comparison of successful and unsuccessful strategies in individual sight-singing preparation and performance. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 53, 51-65.  
DOI: 10.1177/002242940505300105
- Norris, C. E. (2004). A nationwide overview of sight-singing requirements of large-group choral festivals. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 52(1), 16-28.

For more resources, refer to the bibliographies of these readings.