

Virginia Choral Directors Association

Group Sight-Reading Assessment: Guidelines, Procedures and Scoring

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VCDA District Performance Assessment Sight-Reading Committee

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

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. The following is what the 2017 Committee recommended:

- For school year 2018-2019: Non-Blue Ribbon groups will sight read at least TWO levels below performance level.
- For school year 2019-2020: Groups applying for Blue Ribbon status must sight read at least ONE level below performance level.

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.

Sight-Reading Levels

There will be six 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 charts below show the level that groups will sight-read based on their performance level in the 2018-2019 school year on the left, and the 2019-2020 school year and beyond on the right.

High School & Middle School Sight-Reading 2018-2019		
<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	At least level 3

High School & Middle School Sight-Reading 2019-2020 and beyond		
<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 3
5	At least level 3	At least level 4

6	At least level 4	At least level 4	6	At least level 4	At least level 5
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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. Student use of personal devices is prohibited.”

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:
<p>First and Second Study Period/ 120 seconds</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish tonality using piano and/or voice ● Establish tonality by having the ensemble sing scales, patterns, and/or progression. ● Provide students with starting pitch(es.) Directors may sing solfege and/or demonstrate Curwen/Kodaly hand signs for the starting pitch(es) only. ● Set tempo by snapping, tapping, clapping, counting, or conducting. ● Allow the ensemble to 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. <i>(Moved from Appendix B.)</i> ● Verbally coach without specific pitch, intervallic, or rhythmic information <i>(See Appendix B for additional explanation of verbal coaching.)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chant, clap, or sing individually, in groups, or in sections. Students may sing with one another, but not demonstrate to one another. (i.e., individual students cannot teach the entire ensemble) ● Speak to other members of the ensemble to answer questions or clarify uncertainties ● Use rhythmic syllables, solfege, numbers, or neutral syllables. ● Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Demonstrate rhythms or pitches (snap, tap, clap, hum, or sing) except to establish tonality ● Mouth along with rhythmic syllables, solfege, or numbers. ● Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs, except during the establishment of tonality and giving beginning pitches. (Students may use hand signs). ● Rehearse areas of difficulty ● Facilitate a run through of the sight reading example in its entirety with the choir
<p>Run-Through / Time elapsed and Final Performance (Minimum tempo quarter note = 60bpm)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish tonality using piano and/or voice ● Establish tonality by having the ensemble sing scales, patterns, and/or progressions. ● Provide students with starting pitch(es.) Directors may sing solfege and/or demonstrate Curwen/Kodaly hand signs for the starting pitch(es) only. ● Set tempo and keep the ensemble together by snapping, tapping, clapping, counting, or conducting. ● Have the ensemble sing the exercise without stopping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sing scales, patterns, and/or progressions as an ensemble to establish tonality ● Sing the exercise without stopping ● Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sing along with the ensemble ● Mouth along with rhythmic syllables, solfege, or numbers. ● Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs ● Give students any verbal cues once they have begun singing

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 Paired Eighth Notes No syncopation
MS Level 2 8 measures	C, E-flat, F Begins and ends on low <i>do</i>	Unison	Stepwise motion, but to include one instance of the tonic triad (ascending low do-mi-so) 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 and the tonic triad (ascending low do-mi-so) 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, E-Flat, F, 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 or 3-part (SSA, TTB, SAB)	Range: low <i>ti</i> to <i>la</i> Will include tonic triad skips, in any order Diatonic	4/4, 3/4 Whole notes Dotted half notes/rest Half notes/rests Quarter notes/rests Paired Eighth notes No syncopation
MS Level 5 8 measures	C, E-Flat, F, D Starts on <i>do, mi,</i> or <i>sol</i> and ends on <i>do</i> or <i>mi</i> . (One voice should begin/end on <i>do</i>)	3-part (SSA, TTB, SAB)	Range: low <i>ti</i> to <i>la</i> Will include tonic triad skips, in any order Diatonic	4/4, 3/4 Whole notes Dotted half notes/rest Half notes/rests Dotted quarter notes Quarter notes/rests 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 motion, but to include one instance of the tonic triad (ascending low do-mi-so) <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 motion and the tonic triad (ascending low do-mi-so) <i>ti-la</i> Diatonic	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 3 8 measures	C, F, E-Flat, D Starts on <i>do</i> , <i>mi</i> , or <i>sol</i> and ends on <i>do</i> or <i>mi</i> . (One voice should begin/end on <i>do</i>)	3-part or 4-part SSA, TTB, SAB, or SSAA, TTBB, SATB	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</i> , <i>mi</i> , or <i>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 major or minor 3rds, perfect 4th or perfect 5th 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 Sixteenth notes: eighth note, two sixteenth notes ONLY, repeated note or stepwise motion Syncopation is possible

<p>HS Level 5 8 measures</p>	<p>C, F, E-Flat, D</p> <p>Starts and ends on do, mi, or sol (One voice should begin/end on do)</p>	<p>3-part or 4-part SSA, TTB, SAB, or SSAA, TTBB, SATB</p>	<p>Skips of a major or minor 3rds, perfect 4th or perfect 5th</p> <p>To include fi and si (approached and departed stepwise)</p> <p>See below for vocal ranges</p>	<p>4/4, 3/4, 6/8</p> <p>Whole notes Dotted half notes/rest Half notes/rests Dotted quarter notes Quarter notes/rests Eighth notes Sixteenth notes: four sixteenth notes, eighth note and two sixteenth notes, two sixteenth notes and eighth note, repeated, stepwise or tonic triad Syncopation is possible</p>
<p>HS Level 6 8 measures</p>	<p>C, F, E-Flat, D a, d, c, b minor</p> <p>Starts and ends on do, mi, or sol (One voice should begin/end on do)</p>	<p>3-part or 4-part SSA, TTB, SAB, or SSAA, TTBB, SATB</p>	<p>Skips of a major or minor 3rds, perfect 4th or perfect 5th</p> <p>To include all chromatics (approached and departed stepwise)</p> <p>See below for vocal ranges</p>	<p>4/4, 3/4, 6/8</p> <p>Whole notes Dotted half notes/rest Half notes/rests Dotted quarter notes Quarter notes/rests Eighth notes Sixteenth notes: four sixteenth notes, eighth note and two sixteenth notes, two sixteenth notes and eighth note, dotted eighth note sixteenth note. Syncopation is possible</p>

* 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.

*** 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

In 3 part voicing, the Tenor 2 range of TTB will be the same as the Baritone range of SAB

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. Student use of personal devices is prohibited.”

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.”

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 Directors Association committee on sight-reading for District Assessments, as a possible composer for sight-reading examples for the entire state in mid-March, _____. The samples need to follow standard 18th 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 each high-school level 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 September _____. If your work is selected you will be asked to write an example of your work for middle school levels 1-5 and high school levels 1-6 which will be sent to all choral directors by January _____.

The due date for the final Virginia Choral Directors 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 _____ District Assessments you will be compensated.

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

VCDA Sight-Reading Committee

Timeline

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 levels 1-5 and high school levels 1-6 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.