

# Virginia Choral Directors Association

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## **Group Sight-Reading Assessment: Guidelines and Procedures**

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## **Sight-Reading Levels**

Six levels of sight-reading are available for groups to perform, with at least three different examples in each level and voicing. -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 sight reading levels should be selected based on the lowest level performance rating. Directors should use the chart below when choosing the appropriate sight-reading 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 3
5	At least level 3	At least level 4
6	At least level 4	At least level 5

## Sight-Reading Procedure with Script

After the ensemble has received the sight-reading exercise from the assistant, the adjudicator will read 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, if using paper copies.

*“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 and Second Study Period/ 120 seconds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establish tonality using piano and/or voice</li> <li>● Establish tonality by having the ensemble sing scales, patterns, and/or progression.</li> <li>● Provide students with starting pitch(es.) Directors may sing solfege and/or demonstrate Curwen/Kodaly hand signs for the starting pitch(es) only.</li> <li>● Set and/or keep tempo by snapping, tapping, clapping, counting, or conducting basic beat patterns.</li> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● Verbally identify errors without specific pitch, intervallic, or rhythmic information (<i>See Appendix C for additional explanation of verbal coaching.</i>)</li> <li>● Use their own timer or ask the adjudicator for time remaining</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Chant, clap, or sing individually, in groups, in sections, or as an ensemble with student leadership. 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>● Students may rehearse the entire example or individual sections within the example.</li> <li>● Speak to other members of the ensemble to answer questions or clarify uncertainties</li> <li>● Use rhythmic syllables, solfege, numbers, or neutral syllables.</li> <li>● Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Demonstrate rhythms or pitches (snap, tap, clap, hum, or sing) except to establish tonality</li> <li>● Mouth along with rhythmic syllables, solfege, or numbers.</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>● Facilitate a run through of the sight reading example in its entirety with the choir</li> </ul>
Run-Through/ Time elapsed and Final Performance (Minimum tempo quarter note = 60bpm)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establish tonality using piano and/or voice</li> <li>● Establish tonality by having the ensemble sing scales, patterns, and/or progressions.</li> <li>● Provide students with starting pitch(es.) Directors may sing solfege and/or demonstrate Curwen/Kodaly hand signs for the starting pitch(es) only.</li> <li>● Set tempo and keep the ensemble together by snapping, tapping, clapping, counting, or conducting.</li> <li>● Have the ensemble sing the exercise without stopping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sing scales, patterns, and/or progressions as an ensemble to establish tonality</li> <li>● Sing the exercise without stopping</li> <li>● Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sing along with the ensemble</li> <li>● Mouth along with rhythmic syllables, solfege, or numbers.</li> <li>● Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs</li> <li>● Give students any verbal cues once they have begun singing</li> </ul>

## Middle School Sight-Reading Levels

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
<b>Length</b>	8 measures				
<b>Tonality</b>	C, E-Flat, F			C, E-Flat, F, D	
	Begins and ends on low <i>do</i>				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> )
<b>Voicing</b>	Unison		2-part (SA,TB)	2-part (SA,TB) or 3-part (SSA, TTB, SAB)	3-part (SSA, TTB, SAB)
<b>Range</b>	<i>do-sol</i>	low <i>ti</i> to <i>la</i>			
<b>Melody</b>	Diatonic (no accidentals)				
	Stepwise motion	Stepwise motion and one instance of the tonic triad (ascending low do-mi-so)	Stepwise motion and at least two instances of the tonic triad (ascending low do-mi-so)	Will include tonic triad skips, in any order	
<b>Meter</b>	4/4			4/4, 3/4	
<b>Rhythm</b>	Whole notes Half notes/rests Quarter notes/rests No more than two pairs of Eighth notes on a repeated pitch	<b>Same as Level 1, add:</b> Dotted half notes/rest Two pairs of Eighth notes (may be on repeated pitch or stepwise)	<b>Same as Level 2, add:</b> Two pairs of Eighth notes per part	<b>Same as Level 3, add:</b> No more than four pairs of Eighth notes per part	<b>Same as Level 4, add:</b> No more than one instance of the Dotted quarter note followed by an Eighth note in each part
	No Syncopation				

- Rhythmic possibilities are only indicative of what could *potentially* be seen in an example.
- Eighth notes will not begin or end an example, or fall after a rest.
- ANY Sight-Reading example may be performed in an alternate key to accommodate for vocal range. If the director chooses to establish a key other than the one given, they must notify the judge prior to the first performance.
- Not all listed key signatures may be available.
- For unison examples, the example will be written in treble and bass clef on the same page/slide.
- For 2-part examples, SA and TB will be provided on the same page/slide, with ST being the same and AB being the same.

## High School Sight-Reading Levels

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
<b>Length</b>	8 measures					
<b>Tonality</b>	C, E-flat, F		C, F, E-Flat, D			
	Starts and ends on low <i>do</i>	Starts and ends on low <i>do</i> or <i>mi</i> (One voice should begin/end on <i>do</i> )	Starts and ends on <i>do, mi, or sol</i> (One voice should begin/end on <i>do</i> )			
<b>Voicing</b>	Unison	2-part (SA, TB)	3-part or 4-part (SSA, TTB, SAB, or SSAA, TTBB, SATB)			
<b>Range</b>	low <i>ti-la</i>		<b>4 Part</b> – Sop: B flat 3 – E5 , Alto: A flat 3 – C5, Ten: C3 – E4, Bass: A2 – C4 <b>3 Part</b> – Sop and Alto: same as above, Baritone: C3 – D4			
<b>Melody</b>	Diatonic (no accidentals)					Include <i>fi</i> and <i>si</i> (approached and departed stepwise)
	Stepwise motion and one instance of the tonic triad (ascending low do-mi-so)	<b>Same as Level 1, add:</b> Multiple instances of the tonic triad (ascending low do-mi-so)	<b>Same as Level 2, add:</b> Tonic triad skips (in any order)	<b>Same as Level 3, add:</b> Ascending Skips: R-F, F-L, S-T, D-F, S-D Descending Skips: R-T, F-R, F-D, D-S	<b>Same as Level 4, add:</b> Ascending or Descending Skips: All major and minor 3rds, R-S, R-L	<b>Same as Level 5, add:</b> Ascending or Descending Skips: All major or minor 3 <sup>rds</sup> , perfect 4 <sup>ths</sup> or perfect 5 <sup>ths</sup>
<b>Meter</b>	4/4	4/4, 3/4				4/4, 3/4, 6/8
<b>Rhythm</b>	Whole notes Dotted half notes/rest Half notes/rests Quarter notes/rests Paired Eighth Notes	<b>Same as Level 1, add:</b> Eighth notes No more than one instance of a Dotted quarter note followed by an Eighth note in each part	<b>Same as Level 2, add:</b> No more than two instances of a Dotted quarter note followed by an Eighth note in each part		<b>Same as Level 4, add:</b> groups of four sixteenth notes (not more than 1 per part) repeated or stepwise, entered and exited stepwise	<b>Same as Level 6, add:</b> Sixteenth notes In 4/4: E-SS, SS-E In 6/8: SS-SS-E, E-SS-SS, SS-SS-SS
	No Syncopation			Syncopation is possible	Instances of syncopation will be separated from sixteenth notes	

- Rhythmic possibilities are only indicative of what could *potentially* be seen in an example.
- ANY Sight-Reading example may be performed in an alternate key to accommodate for vocal range. If the director chooses to establish a key other than the one given, they must notify the judge prior to the first performance.
- Not all listed key signatures may be available.
- In 3 part voicing, the Tenor 2 range of TTB will be the same as the Baritone range of SAB.
- All skips of a P4 or greater resolve stepwise.
- For unison examples, the example will be written in treble and bass clef on the same page/slide.
- For 2-part examples, SA and TB will be provided on the same page/slide, with ST being the same and AB being the same.

## Appendix A

### 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. In 2019, the sight reading committee surveyed the state in order to make adjustments to the document that would better suit the VCDA membership. An updated document, voted on at the November 2019 VCDA meeting, includes the committee's recommendation to not form a new committee until Spring 2021, thus allowing two years to pass using the approved revisions.

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## **Appendix B**

### **Alternate Script for LCD Projection of Sight-Reading**

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

After the ensemble has entered the room, the adjudicator will read 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.

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

## Appendix C

### 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, let’s 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 D

### 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
- No meter changes within composition
- In examples with two or more parts, no more than 25% of the example is the same in two voice parts.



## Appendix E

### Recommended Reading compiled by the 2014 committee

#### 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.