

# RETHINKING ASSESSMENT IN CHORAL MUSIC EDUCATION



Al Holcomb  
Westminster Choir College

# TO ASSESS

## Origin

LATIN

ad-  
to, at

LATIN

sedere  
sit

LATIN

assidere  
sit by



ASSESSING =  
COLLECTING  
INFORMATION

WHAT IS MOST COMMONLY  
ASSESSED?





# Chorus Participation Grade

Name \_\_\_\_\_ # \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** Rate the quality of your daily participation in chorus in the following categories on a scale of 1-5. At the bottom, add it all up and write your total in the box. BE HONEST and your score won't be changed. For any category assume 1 point per day (i.e. if you were late 3 days you get 2 pts.)

Student...	Points (1-5)	8/27	9/3	9/10	9/17	9/24	10/1	10/8	10/15
1. Arrives on time to class	5								
2. Sits in assigned seat quickly upon arrival and remains in seat throughout the period	5								
3. Throws out gum on arrival to choir classroom	5								
4. Has required materials quickly when needed (pencil / folder)	5								
5. No food in class	5								
6. Remains silent when appropriate	5								
7. Works on using correct vocal technique, diction, & expression	5								
8. Put binders away neatly	5								
9. Sings with energy and enthusiasm	5								
10. Maintains good singer's posture, when appropriate	5								
<b>Please enter your total weekly points here</b>		50							

What the numbers mean	
Outstanding	5
Excellent	4
Satisfactory	3
Needs Improvement	2
Unsatisfactory	1

# WHAT'S MISSING?

- Assessing and recognizing individual student needs and differences
- Assessing individual musical growth
- Assessing individual dispositions
- Assessing student role in learning

# Informal Assessment

PROVIDES YOU WITH  
ALL THE THINGS YOU KEEP IN YOUR HEAD  
ABOUT STUDENTS  
BUT NOT IN YOUR GRADE BOOK



# **INFORMAL ASSESSMENT**

LEARNING **ABOUT** AND  
**FROM** STUDENTS



TO IMPROVE TEACHING  
AND LEARNING

# COLLECTING INFORMATION

OBSERVING

LISTENING

QUESTIONING

DISCUSSING

SURVEYING



- Hallway conversations
- Written responses (blogs, journals, OMPs, surveys)
- Performing alone or in small groups in a safe environment
- Random sampling
- Games

Nina Schmetterer regularly assesses students using digital audio recorders. Row leaders activate the recorder for their row, state their name and part, sing a few phrases, pass it to the next person, and collect the devices when their row has completed the task. Nina chooses which student performances to hear and evaluate based on her concerns about vocal skills, part assignment, etc.

Lynnel Jenkins regularly assesses musical understanding by asking students to show the highest notes of phrases, the line, phrases, and hand signs when recognized.

I engage students in developing rehearsal plans, leading warm-ups, and peer-teaching, allowing me to assess their understanding.

Jason Vodicka assesses the ability to predict musical problems and work in sections to address them.



# FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

- Sharing expectations and assessment criteria
- Monitoring evidence of understanding/growth
- Using multiple sources of and opportunities for feedback
- Reflecting
- Revising
- Providing opportunities for teachers to adapt and differentiate instruction

# SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS

- Often are basis of semester grade
- Measurement of learning to see if targets were achieved and/or how much growth occurred
- Standards-based
- Growth portfolios
- Tests
- Concerts?

# ASSESSMENT

- **Of** learning (summative, measurement and evaluation, criteria driven, teacher driven)
- **For** learning (formative, integrated, feedback, improvement)
- **As** learning (formative, developed and implemented by the students, portfolio with student-selected evidence, regular opportunities for reflection and revision)

Sheila Scott (MEJ 2012)

# WHAT DRIVES YOUR ASSESSMENT VALUES AND PRACTICES?

- School and state mandates?
- Lack of time or resources?
- Philosophical beliefs against assessment in the arts?
- Large numbers?
- Fear of turning students off to music?



What do you hope students will take away from their choral experience?

HOW WILL YOU KNOW?

WHAT DO STATE AND  
NATIONAL STANDARDS  
SUGGEST WE ASSESS?

# Assessments based on the THREE ARTISTIC PROCESSES

- Creating music (improvising and composing)
- Performing music (selecting, analyzing, preparing, presenting)
- Responding to music (comparing, evaluating, choosing to enjoy)



	Performing	Responding
<p><i>Imagining</i></p> <p>developing idea(s) (concepts, ideas, images)</p>	<p><i>Selecting</i></p> <p>choosing an artistic work (repertoire) to perform</p>	<p><i>Selecting</i></p> <p>choosing an artistic work and/or performance to experience</p>
<p><i>Experimenting</i></p> <p>experimenting, researching, and designing ways of presenting the idea(s) through artistic materials</p>	<p><i>Analyzing</i></p> <p>analyzing structure and researching background of work</p>	<p><i>Analyzing</i></p> <p>seeing/hearing and comprehending visual/aural features of the work and performance</p> <p>mentally assembling what is seen/heard into a whole</p>
	<p><i>Interpreting</i></p> <p>developing a personal interpretation of work (an idea of its expressive intent or potential)</p>	<p><i>Interpreting</i></p> <p>developing a personal response to (constructing meaning from)</p> <p>the expressive ideas of both the creator(s) and performer(s)</p>
<p><i>Rehearsing, Evaluating, Refining</i></p> <p>applying knowledge and skills/technique to bring idea(s) to life through artistic work</p> <p>evaluating quality and refining successive versions ("drafts") of the work</p>	<p><i>Rehearsing, Evaluating, Refining</i></p> <p>applying knowledge and skills/technique to bring personal interpretation to life through performance</p> <p>evaluating quality and refining successive versions of the performance</p>	<p><i>Evaluating</i></p> <p>evaluating quality of artistic work and its performance</p>
<p><i>Presenting</i></p> <p>presenting in performance or exhibiting completed work for others</p>	<p><i>Presenting</i></p> <p>Performing work for others</p>	

# REFLECT

1. How many of your secondary school students could select and prepare a solo for a wedding, memorial service, worship service, or talent show?
2. How many of your students could find a way to learn or harmonize a part with some sense of style and confidence?
3. How often do you use student-created arrangements in performances?
4. How often do you play and discuss recordings of diverse music that is not choral?

# CHECK OUT

- [NAfME.org](http://NAfME.org)
- Core Music Standards
- Model Cornerstone Assessments for Ensembles

# MODEL CORNERSTONE ASSESSMENTS

- Based on Core Music Standards
- Provide a framework into which teachers integrate their curriculum while using common learning expectations, with rubrics to monitor and document student growth
- Reflect what musicians do in the real world
- Tasks completed over time

# The processes promote:

- **collaboration**
- **flexibility**
- **goal setting**
- **inquisitiveness**
- **openness**
- **respect for the ideas and work of others**
- **responsible risk- taking**
- **self-reflection**
- **self-discipline**
- **perseverance**



# In addition to:

- Musical independence
- Producing informed music consumers (audience members)



FIVE SKILL LEVELS  
MAY IMPLEMENT MULTIPLE LEVELS IN  
ONE ENSEMBLE

*Novice – 2 years in an ensemble*

*Intermediate – 4 years in an ensemble*

*Proficient – 1 year of high school study*

*Accomplished – exceeds average students*

*Advanced – preparing for collegiate study in  
music*

# PERFORMING MCA

- Working alone, in small mixed groups, or in sections, students will select piece(s) to rehearse for a performance (solo, small ensemble, or full ensemble) documenting analysis, rehearsal, and refinement process.
- This MCA does not specify a particular notational or non-notational based performance medium and does not assess ability to sight-read.

- After some whole class preparation by the teacher, most of the work is student-directed and documented through written and audio/video evidence.
- Using materials provided, students are asked to engage in analyzing, interpreting, and planning and evaluating rehearsals, etc.
- Rubrics provide learning targets and are used to evaluate student thinking and products,

# CREATING MCA

- There are four assessment tasks in the Creating MCAs for **improvising** and **composing**, one for each of the basic components of the artistic process of creating:
- **imagine**
- **plan and make**
- **evaluate and refine**
- **present**

The MCA includes:

(1) Prerequisite Skills and Knowledge

(2) Teacher Preparation Instructions

(3) Assessment Environment Setup

(4) Assessment (responsibilities of the teacher). There are also *suggested*

worksheets for student use for the first three assessment strategies.

Students are asked to

- explain their choice of compositional devices with the aid of question prompts that are appropriate to their achievement level
- submit this explanation, along with a recording of a re-imagined musical motif/phrase.



CHOIR ROOM

THANK YOU  
FOR NOT  
IMPROVISING



Garry Whittow

# RESPONDING TO MUSIC MCA

- Can be administered within one instructional sequence or unit, or teachers may choose to spread the component parts across multiple units or projects or use it as an extension to the Performing or Creating MCA or to other aspects of the ensemble rehearsal.
- Students work individually or collaboratively.

Students are asked to choose one or more musical works to analyze from performing ensemble literature or music outside of the ensemble.

- *Novice, Intermediate, or Proficient* - one work
- *Accomplished* - two works
- *Advanced* - three works

- After locating recorded performance examples of the literature selected and researching the composer and the cultural/historical context of the music, students compare the performances by analyzing expressive and interpretive qualities.
- They then complete the *Responding Worksheet* and submit it to the teacher who assesses it using the rubric provided.

# IMPORTANT!

- It cannot be over-emphasized that the MCAs are simply assessment templates to be modified by music educators to fit the literature, schedule, curricular objectives, and students in a particular program.
- MCAs neither specify the outcomes of a national curriculum nor signal the beginning of a national music exam.

## **Feedback from a High School Choral Director who Piloted Performing: Intermediate Level MCA**

Since the nature of the MCA process placed much of the onus onto the students to work on their own across a series of tasks, I subsequently found myself shaping my instruction to reflect more student-driven initiatives.



As an educator, I was aware of feeling more comfortable and interested in creating activities and assignments that were more student led from standpoints as individuals, in groups, or in having one or more students serving in leadership roles with the full ensembles - all with a more independent flavor.



Essentially, after participating with the MCA assessments, I felt empowered enough to “let go” and allow my students to use their own capabilities and designed lessons that embraced this refined instructional outlook.

- Our MCA process was set up as a voluntary, enrichment activity, that any choral student could join.

- They noted increased awareness of their own capabilities and skills, increased confidence, and appreciative of the autonomy provided by the process.

They especially appreciated the process of selecting their own musical works for the study, enjoyed preparing the songs, and valued the feedback process from both peers and from me as their teacher.

# THANK YOU

- For more information, contact me at [aholcomb@rider.edu](mailto:aholcomb@rider.edu)
- Go to [NAfME.org](http://NAfME.org) to see standards and MCAs
- Powerpoint available on NJ ACDA website