

Sample Ensemble Routine

Listed below is a sample ensemble routine. It is designed for a program like mine at Joliet Central High School that does not require practice outside of school. This routine also accommodates sporadic attendance and emergency days. Ensembles such as orchestras, choirs, jazz groups and chamber ensembles can adapt and use this plan as well.

For the **first quarter** of the year, we focus on exercises for approximately 70% of the rehearsal time, and we approach the concert literature for about 30% of the rehearsal.

In the **second quarter** of the year, we start to reduce our routine to approximately 50% of the rehearsal. The remaining time is concert literature preparation and sight reading.

Semester two seems to start all over again. We go back to 70% routine, 30% literature. After a few weeks, we work back down to about 50/50. The band starts feeling good about themselves later on, and then spring break hits. We return, and for a week, go back to 70/30.

By the **fourth quarter**, we are preparing more for festivals, and we may work down to a 30/70 split. We also implement student conductors and senior soloists.

This format is not entirely strict and does fluctuate a bit — there are several days where we do not get to any concert literature. Other days, we may spend an entire class period on a specific lesson, such as note grouping, alternate fingerings or special techniques. Our rehearsal format intends to provide technical and musical exercises for individuals and the ensemble. We also focus on building strength and endurance for all musicians.

Sample Routine Format

1. Air Flow Exercises — Important Ingredients¹
2. Flexibility and Endurance (Warming Up)
 - a. Remington-type exercise/F Pivot
 - b. Lip Slurs – “Important Ingredients for Concert Band” (CB), “Foundations for Superior Performance for Band” (SB).
 - i. Brass buzz or use a buzzing resistance device for first passes, and then add in as written for additional options.
 - ii. Foundations include chromatics and harmonics for woodwinds, rudiments for percussion.

¹ <https://tofiv1.wixsite.com/danielmooremusic>

3. Tone, Balance, Intonation

- a. Descending Bb Major Scales from Bravo Winds Training — play with the drone.
 - i. Start with clarinets on third space C — hold tone for eight counts, rest for eight counts, descend to B natural.
 - ii. Repeat the exercise, adding flute and oboe; repeat adding all instruments or instrument groupings.
 - iii. Adapt by changing the scale to the key of one of the pieces.
- b. “Important Ingredients” — page 5
 - i. Hum/sing/buzz whole notes from a justified major and minor scale on Bb (or scale of choice), followed by playing the notes (with a drone).
 - ii. Perform major etude or minor etude against drone with pitch adjustments.

4. Articulation

- a. “Important Ingredients” — page 24
 - i. We work for a consistent articulation, and we work at slower speeds (60bpm-76bpm).
 - ii. Exercises can be adapted for other keys.
- b. “Foundations” — page 3
 - i. Perform the exercise as presented in the book (we work to agree on our articulation syllable).
 - ii. I have adapted this exercise to focus on articulation, tone, balance and intonation. Some other options:
 1. Separate brass/percussion and woodwind — play back and forth to “pass the tone” to the next person and avoid any seams.
 2. Replace the F with a pitch that is the tonal center of a concert piece; perform the exercise with a drone.
 3. Build and justify chords — have brass and percussion play the written F, and switch woodwinds to a C to tune fifths.
 - a. Adapt as necessary to your literature needs. We currently have a piece with an Ebmaj9. I’ll take a look at the score, and have those students perform the articulation exercise on those notes with adjustments; I will either dictate what the other instruments are playing or let them choose (keyboards always on the fundamental, however).

5. And back to tone, balance and articulation

- a. Chorales
 - i. “Important Ingredients” Chorales or “Foundations” Chorales
 - ii. If the melody is separated or is available for all transpositions, perform together for tone, balance and agreeance. Work two- to four-bar chunks that are repeated around the band (tubas, euphoniums next, trombones next, etc.). You can also write the melody out and project it on the board.
 - iii. Pencils out — analyze the chords with the students; next, write in arrows up or down for pitch adjustments (the bigger the arrow, the bigger the adjustment).

- iv. Perform the chorale; focus on breathing, tone, balance, intonation and phrasing. Separate chords, parts, etc. We focus on some articulation at this point, but we slur many exercises to make them more difficult to build endurance.
- v. Challenge mode: Transpose up one step (we instruct to read up a line and add two sharps). Find the first and last note together as a band, and then just go for it. Students may use the printed pitches as a guide and use their ear as well. Either way is beneficial.
- vi. Example of special technique time-saving option: Horns writing in fingerings for half-step below the written note and performing the chorale stopped, focusing on correct notes, tone and intonation with the special technique.

Remember — the imperfect system that you stick with is better than the perfect system that you abandon.