Achieving Success at ISSMA Sight-Reading - from an Adjudicator's Perspective

Wednesday, June 26, 2024 - 11:00-11:50 am

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Disclaimer 😀

There will be things which work for you and your program which are not mentioned here, because I haven't thought of them or heard of them! Please feel free to share them at the end of the presentation. We can all learn from each other!

This is not an official ISSMA presentation of techniques. This is only a discussion of things which worked for me in 35 years of teaching or things which I have observed in judging sight-reading for ISSMA.

Rules questions should go to Scott Bradford. 😁

Basics and ISSMA Resources!

1. Read the ISSMA manual online! (You'd be amazed at the number who don't!)
    a. If you are going to play the game, know how the game is played.
    b. Ask questions of Scott Bradford or colleagues!
2. Read the fall communication from ISSMA concerning any changes.
3. Review the rubric/sight-reading adjudication sheet (in the ISSMA manual).
4. Consider your choir - in what Group should they be entered? (consider sight-reading, too)
5. Purchase past years' ISSMA sight-reading exercises and use them with your students!
6. Don't wait until second semester - practice ALL YEAR!

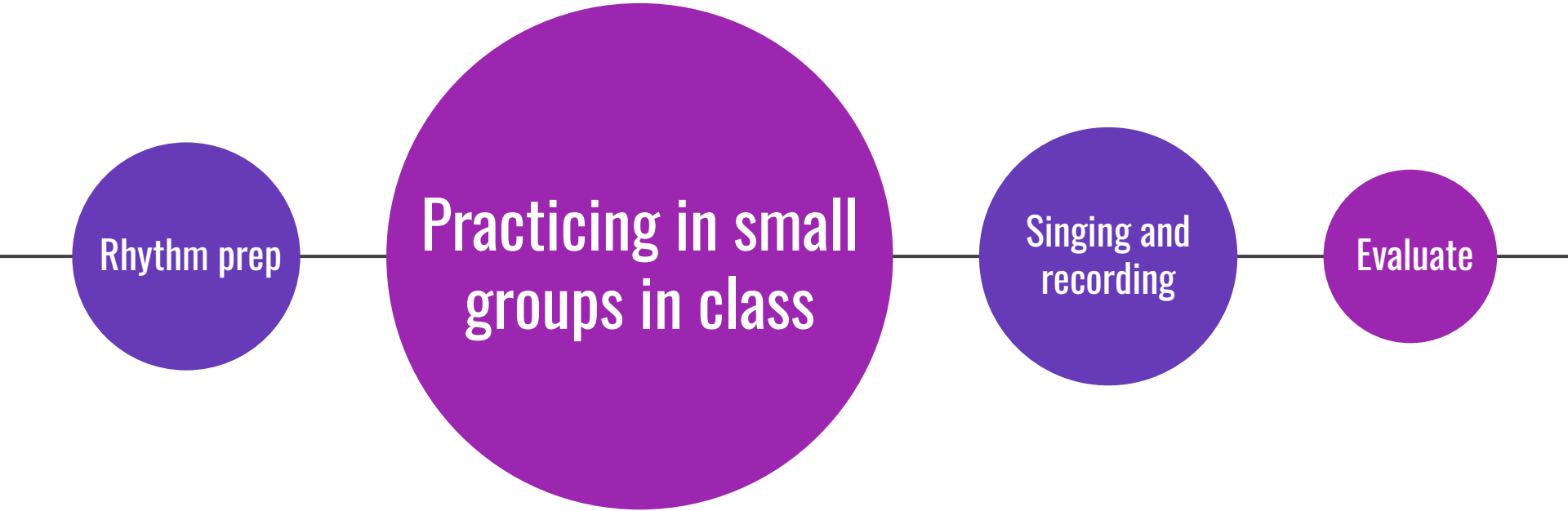
Basics and ISSMA Resources!

7. Review the Senior Choral Sight-reading Guidelines to know what can be expected on the exercises - https://issma.net/downloads/seniorchoralsrguidelines.pdf .

8. Are you near a state quals site? Volunteer to be the judge's helper in sight-reading room!

9. Professional leave to visit another choral program and see how they do sight-reading.

It’s an all-year preparation (not just second semester or when you think of it!).



Repeat process with different exercises. Repeat. Repeat.

KNOW AND PRACTICE THE PROCESS

PRACTICING THE PROCESS IN CLASS: RHYTHMIC EXERCISE

USE A SYSTEM & USE STANDS - at eye level

DO NOT CLAP - it shows all errors and tends to rush!

SILENT PRACTICE, THEN COUNT-SING IT - unison (“do” of melodic exercise?)

ALL KEEP PULSE - tap leg or chest

PRACTICE LINE CHANGES - easy to lose place

DIRECTOR - announce tempo, time signature, and then EACH measure number.

CONDUCT from the front center!

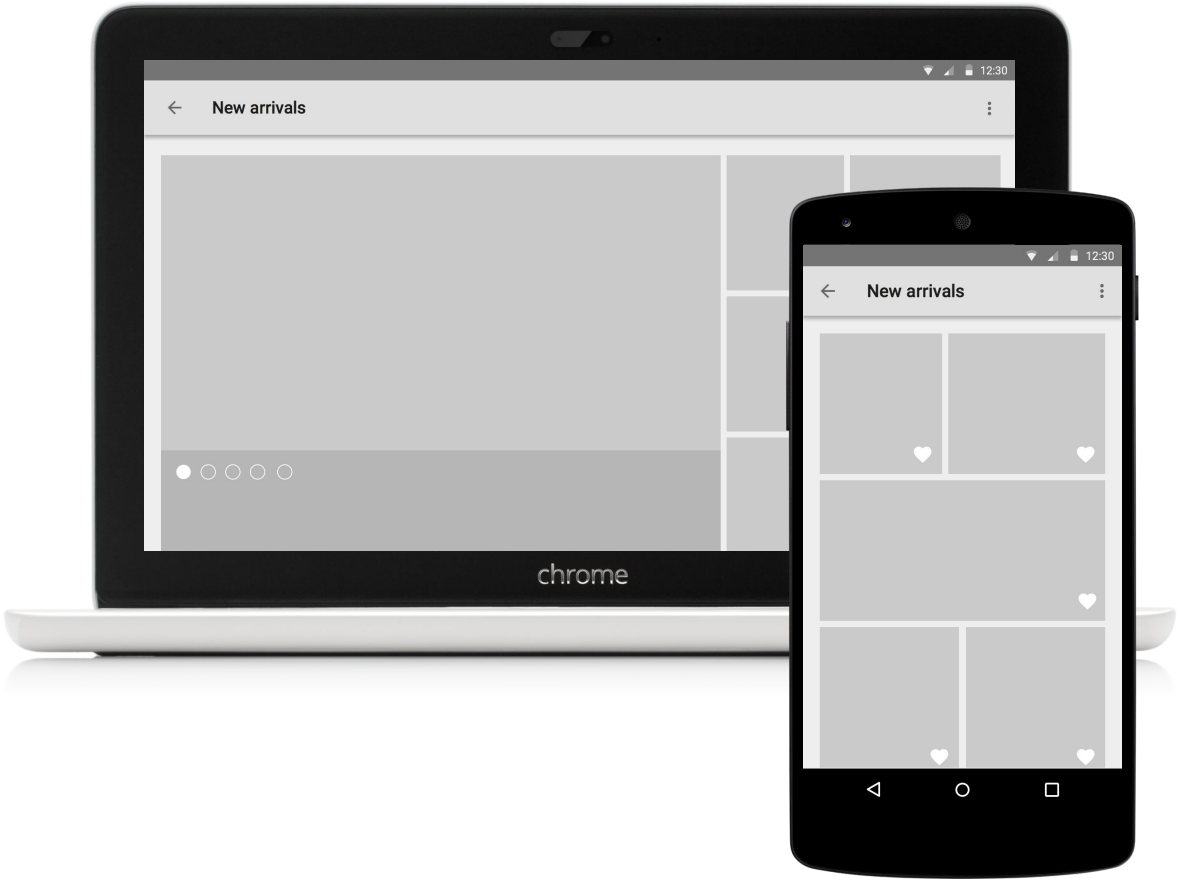
Have students record & evaluate themselves!

In class, when the group performs a rhythmic exercise, have each student record themselves.

Have them listen to themselves, identifying how well they performed the exercise.

Strengths and weaknesses?

This could also be an assignment (graded or ungraded) so that YOU see how they do individually.



PERFORMING AT ISSMA: RHYTHMIC EXERCISE

ARRANGE STUDENTS (in hallway). Don't plan to rearrange the chairs.

USE STANDS, at student eye level. Students sit, director stands.

MENTION any patterns and oddities before (silent) audiation time.

DIRECTOR - announce and use suggested tempo; call EACH measure number while CONDUCTING from the center!

ALL KEEP PULSE - tap leg or chest or <u>silently</u> tap foot.

HAVE STUDENTS COUNT-SING the rhythm - unison ("do" of melodic).

PRACTICING THE PROCESS IN CLASS: MELODIC EXERCISE

Practice in assigned small groups (2 or 3). Place your stronger readers judiciously.

Focus first on rhythms in the exercise. Otherwise, they will bog down singing the exercise.

Downward intervals are often problematic, as are movements from staff to staff.

Practice unison a lot! (Only sopranos are accustomed to singing the melody.)

Convince them to not all start at m. 1!

Point out potential problem spots, and LET THEM PRACTICE!

PRACTICING THE PROCESS IN CLASS: MELODIC EXERCISE

USE THE SYSTEM YOU HAVE PRACTICED, and practice using it! Time: two minutes!

TALK MINIMALLY - but always announce time signature and problem spots.

HAVE STUDENTS VOCALIZE AT OUTSET - I-IV-V-I or other solfege pattern

ALL STILL KEEP PULSE - tap leg or chest or <u>silently</u> tap toes/foot.

DIRECTOR - use suggested tempo and then call out EACH or AS NEEDED measure number.

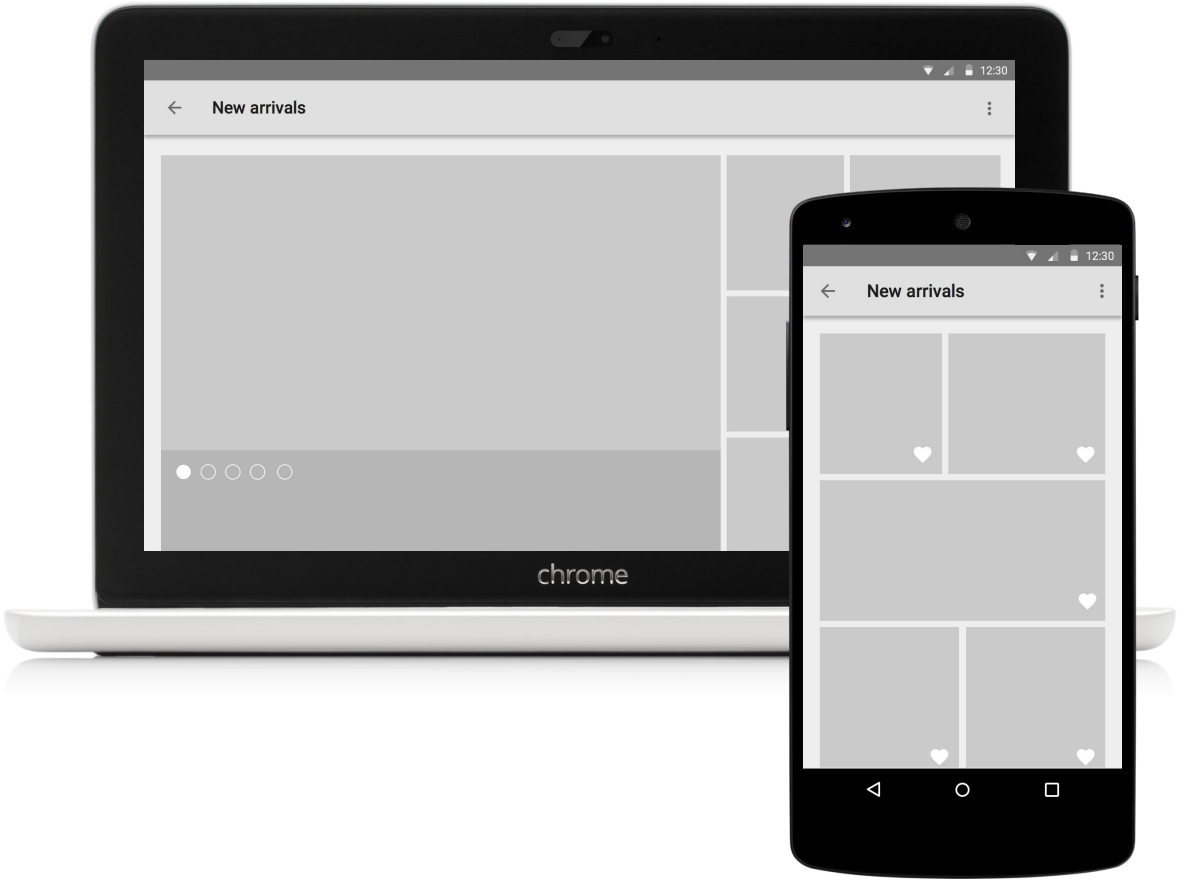
CONDUCT from the group's center!

Have students record & evaluate themselves!

As students practice in small groups and perform the melodic exercise in class, have them record themselves.

Have them listen to the recording. How much did they SING while practicing and then how well did they perform the melodic exercise?

Use as an assignment? Note progress or common errors for future instruction.



PERFORMING AT ISSMA: MELODIC UNISON

Students should be in small groups as practiced. Do what you've practiced.

Point out the time signature and key signature.

Point out potential problems at LINE CHANGES - easy to lose place.

Point out problematic rhythms and downward intervals in the exercise. Can you surreptitiously insert the intervals into your warm-ups?

Then LET THEM PRACTICE SINGING, not TALKING.

PRACTICING THE PROCESS IN CLASS: HARMONIC EXERCISE

Use ISSMA time constraints (3 min.).

Assign them to small groups within their sections which best utilize strengths. Practice this way in class.

Always announce time and key signature.

Mention problematic rhythms and intervals in the exercise. If they don't get the rhythms, they will not be successful singing the exercise.

Point out potential problem spots, and LET THEM PRACTICE!

PRACTICING THE PROCESS IN CLASS: HARMONIC EXERCISE

When practicing in class, get them accustomed to singing confidently in their small groups. No one will remember the mistakes, but all will remember the successes.

Move/separate sections/small groups?

Encourage them all to start strongly, so if they fade, it won't be silent. Help them to listen to other parts during performance of the exercise.

Don't let them stop - force them to recover from mistakes.

PRACTICING THE PROCESS IN CLASS: HARMONIC EXERCISE

Group III mixed - decide which exercise to use. (SA/TB is not always the best option, depending upon your group; try ST/AB?)

Establish their starting pitches and have them vocalize the pitches before starting as a group.

Record the group and play back while they watch the music. Let them hear successes, recoveries, and failures.

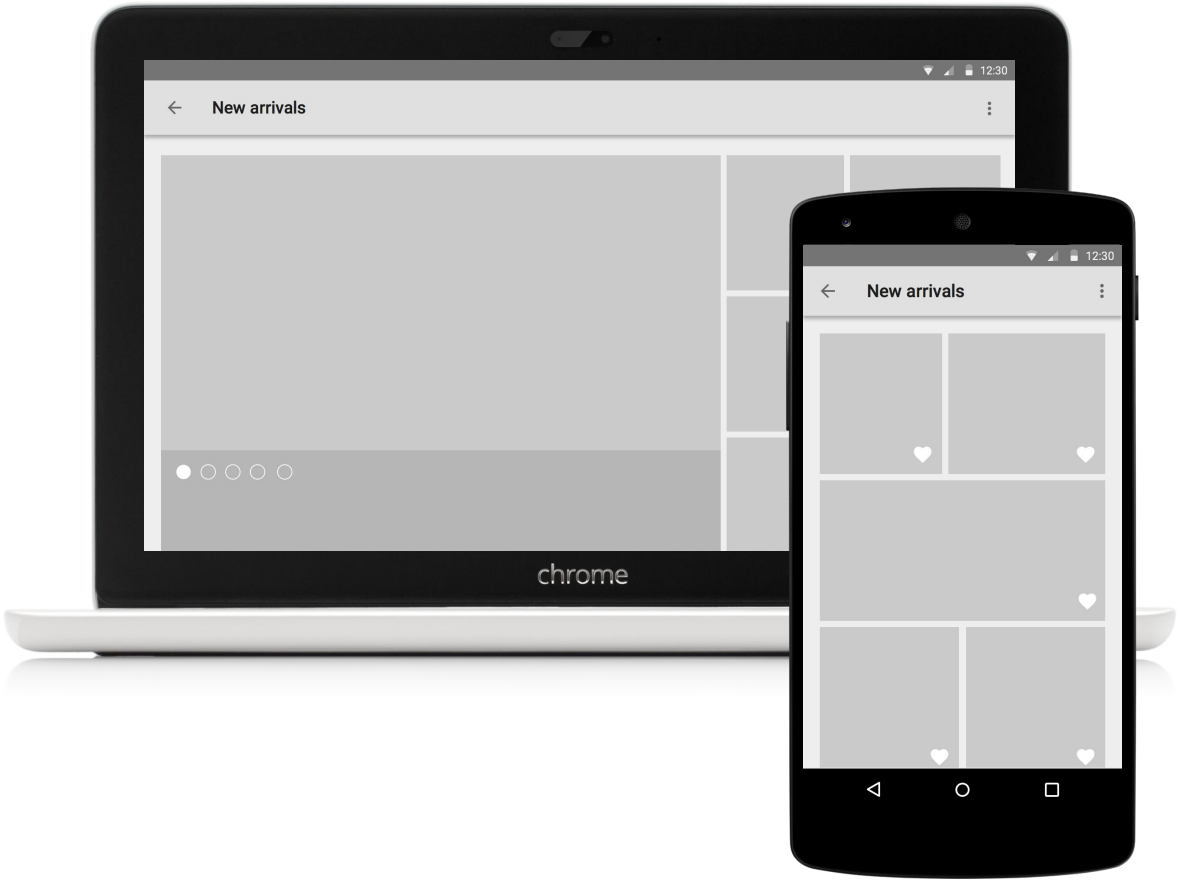
All skills only improve with practice.

Have students record & evaluate themselves!

As your students practice and perform in timed small groups in class, have them record themselves.

Have them listen to themselves, identifying: how much did they SING (vs. TALK) while practicing and then how well did they sing their part?

Use this to guide future instruction.



PERFORMING AT ISSMA: HARMONIC EXERCISE

If they need to move into different small groups from unison, they can, but it's during the 3-minute prep period.

Announce time signature and key signature.

Mention problematic rhythms in the exercise. If they don't get the rhythms, they will not be successful singing the exercise.

Remind of possibly problematic intervals and line transitions, and point out any patterns/repeated material.

PERFORMING AT ISSMA: HARMONIC EXERCISE

Group III - choose which exercise your SAB groups should use (you will be given that opportunity in the room) and tell the group several times where they should look.

Give/sing I-IV-V-I progression of key and/or whatever you have practiced.

Trust them to do what you have taught them!

They should sing more than they talk.

Once they start practicing, stop telling them things - it can raise their stress and may be counterproductive.

PERFORMING AT ISSMA: HARMONIC EXERCISE

USE STANDS, at student eye level. They sit, you stand/conduct in center.

MENTION any patterns and oddities.

DIRECTOR - announce and use suggested tempo; call EACH measure number.

ALL KEEP PULSE - tap leg or chest or <u>silently</u> tap foot.

HAVE STUDENTS SING *mf/f* at least to start!

We have to strive to make our singers listeners. They think, they sing; they don't listen to each other.

- Becky Osborn, ISSMA Sight-Reading Adjudicator

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Questions? Comments? Discussion? What works for you?

Contact: Bill Niederer
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