

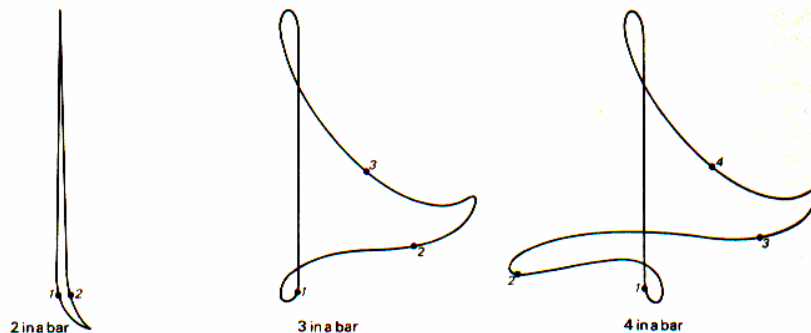
Liz Strasser, Principal at Wentworth Falls Public School, gives further tips for conducting and rehearsal technique.

Conducting

The purpose of conducting is to provide guidance for the group so everyone can start together, keep together and stop together.

There are many ways to do this. There is no right or wrong way but conventions have been developed which not only help keep the group together but indicate nuances in the music, such as shaping of phrases, dynamics and changes in tempo.

The basic conventions of conducting involve patterns for beating different numbers of beats in the bar. They include:



Please note that the upbeat always comes up away from your body, not in front of your body.

It is customary to beat time with your right hand and indicate other signals with your left. Indications can be made to show entry of parts, dynamic range, phrasing shape and cut-offs with your left hand. This co-ordination of right and left hands takes practice. Improving conducting technique is a lifelong process. Fortunately conductors can make up for what is not clear in conducting cues by employing good rehearsal technique.

Questions for conductors to consider:

1. Is the choir starting and stopping when I want them to?
2. Is the choir singing at the speed I think I am indicating?

3. Is the choir singing at the dynamic range I am indicating?

If the answers to these questions are in the negative then you should practise conducting in front of the mirror to see what you look like and adjust your signals to make them as clear as possible. When all else fails, tell your choir in rehearsal what you want in rehearsal. As your experience as a conductor grows, you will need fewer and fewer words to convey your meaning.

Rehearsal technique

If your choir is to make steady progress, it is important to make the most of rehearsal time. Consider the following points when planning each rehearsal.

Structure of rehearsal

- warm ups
- revisit known material
- introduce unknown material
- work intensively on one section
- sing through something in its entirety.

Pacing

- is everyone involved all the time?
- try not to let rehearsals drag. Apply your best teaching technique to keep interest level high.

Do I like the sound?

- encourage singers to listen to themselves
- try different ways to change the sound, for example, everyone sing really softly, change the vowel sound, experiment with the head voice and chest voice.

Can the choir follow my conducting cues?

- if not, explain to the group what you want them to do. Practise conducting in front of the mirror at home.

Exploring dynamic range

- dynamic range varies from group to group. *Forte* and *piano* dynamics are relative to each other within the context of any group.
- at the end of a warm-up session, gauge the dynamic range of the group by singing the same thing over and over, starting very softly and then slowly getting louder

- when applying the dynamic markings in the music, keep in mind the relative dynamics manageable by the group
- it may be necessary to remind singers that shouting is not singing.

Tempo

- the speed at which a song should be sung is sometimes indicated by a metronome marking included by the composer or arranger
- the meaning of the words often provides information as to how a piece should be phrased and at what speed it should be sung. The words should always be clear to the audience.

Tips for singing and conducting from Vocal-Ease Modules 3 and 4

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