

Some other time-saving rehearsal techniques for choirs!

When you must run notes, play each part in two octaves. Adding a lower octave decreases the amount of time it takes for the singers to learn their notes, and increases retention.

Have singers speak the text rhythmically while their parts are played on the keyboard. This is especially effective when (a) the rhythm is particularly challenging, and/or (b) the melodic/harmonic language is not typical of the music you usually program.

Count-singing (ONE-and-TWO-and-TEE-and, ONE-and, etc.). Singers usually don't like this very much, but if it was good enough for Robert Shaw, perhaps it's good enough for the rest of us. This technique helps the singers attain greater rhythmic precision. As Mr. Shaw was fond of saying, "The right note at the wrong time is the wrong note." Still in doubt? Consider this: Your students will learn the music faster, and perform it better.

Positive reinforcement. As grandma said, "you'll catch more flies with honey than with vinegar." When your singers do something right, let them know it. If they do something that isn't so great, try being encouraging.

When something isn't quite right, and you don't know what the problem is, address rhythmic precision first. If you've addressed and achieved rhythmic precision, and still can't figure out the problem, work from the bottom up. That is, make sure the bass part is perfect, then tenor, then alto, and finally soprano. Most conductors either work from the top down, or from the outsides in. Try this instead.

Having trouble with cut-offs? Have your singers snap their fingers on releases.

Having trouble with a complicated rhythm? First, have your singers mark the beats in their music, then have them clap the rhythm.

Have a written rehearsal plan. Even if you deviate from it, going through the planning process is important.

Become neurotic about wasting your singers' time. Adopt the attitude that rehearsal is a privilege (for you), and that every second of rehearsal time is golden.

Choosing the best and most appropriate music for your ensemble must be a top priority. Continuing to refine one's eye for the selection of proper music will solve or prevent most matters of discipline, motivation, expression and even intonation that may arise. The result: you'll save a *lot* of rehearsal time!

When speaking to your choir, choose language that reminds them they are one member of a larger group. Words like "we," "our," "us," "together," "all," "ensemble" and "unify" can help create an atmosphere of cooperation. Conversely, words and phrases like "I want..." or "Will you..." foster an adversarial relationship between you and your ensemble. For example, instead of saying "I want to start at measure 11," try saying "We need to start at measure 11." This helps with morale, which makes the singers more attentive, which saves rehearsal time.

Let your singers see the vision you have for a piece of music. Why did you choose it? What does it mean to you? What do you hope the singers will garner from its performance? What are its challenges?

One of the biggest wastes of rehearsal time is confusion among the singers as to who is singing, and where in the score they are expected to start singing. Try this sequence of instructions to help optimize rehearsal time: tell the choir WHO is singing, on what PAGE, SYSTEM, MEASURE and BEAT you expect them to begin, the TEXT, and then give them their starting PITCHES. For example, "Sopranos and tenors on page 3, bottom system, third bar plus a pickup, 'Alleluia'." Or "Everybody singing, starting on page 5, top system, second measure, beat 2, 'Praise'." A quicker way is to use a system not uncommon to English choirs: saying four numbers, as in, "Sopranos, 4-1-1-2," which meant, *Sopranos on page 4, first system,*

measure 1, second beat. You'll be surprised how easy it is for singers to pick up on this system, and how much rehearsal time it will save!

Speak through the piece rhythmically (on text, or using ta-ti-ti language) first and until perfect, on solfege next and until perfect, count-singing next and until perfect, and finally with the printed language.

Design warm-ups that focus the mind as well as train the voice. Unisons and octaves help a great deal with this.