

Virginia Choral Directors Association

Group Sight-Reading Assessment: Guidelines *and* Procedures

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VCDA District Performance Assessment Sight-Reading Committee

In 2011, the VCDA District Assessment Sight-Reading Committee met to develop an initial plan for common state-wide criteria. In 2013, the expanded committee met to revise the standards, procedures, and scoring. The following is what this committee submitted:

The plan developed for school years from 2011 to 2014 -

- For school year 2011-2012: These guidelines would apply ONLY to groups attempting to obtain Blue Ribbon status.
- For school year 2012-2013: all performing ensembles would be required to sight-read, regardless of Blue-Ribbon attainment, following the same guidelines.
- For school year 2013-2014: all schools would be required to sight-read and the standards for each of the four levels would be more rigorous, including, but not limited to, additional length, more difficult rhythms and skips, more voicings, etc.

In years following 2014, revision will take place every three years by a committee made of one member of the executive board, appointed by the VCDA President, and three district representatives. This committee will solicit suggestions from districts following their Performance Assessment and will make, if appropriate, suggestions to the VCDA body for revisions. **The following changes are what the 2017 Committee recommends to commence the 2018-2019 school year.**

- **Non-Blue Ribbon groups would be required to sight-read no more than TWO levels below performance level. Groups applying for Blue Ribbon status would be required to sight-read no more than ONE level below performance level. Any middle school group applying for Blue Ribbon and performing at level 6 will sight-read at high school level 3.**
- **In the case of a repertoire grade split, sight-reading level will be determined based on lower repertoire grade.**

To remain consistent throughout the state, a composer will be commissioned to produce all sight-reading work and, once created, will be distributed to the VCDA President then to all District Representatives. The commissioned composer will be given the same guidelines as directors in order to create equitable sight-reading samples. The composer will also be asked to provide one example per level for directors to view via www.vcda.net

Sight-Reading Levels

There will be **four middle school and six high school** levels of sight-reading available for groups to perform, with a different example per key. At check-in, directors will have the opportunity to quickly preview various examples and choose the sight-reading example for their ensemble(s). Directors may not choose the same sight-reading sample for multiple groups. The chart below shows the level that groups will sight-read based on their performance level. **This chart below reflects the changes for the 2018-2019 school year.*

High School & Middle School Sight-Reading		
Performance Level	Sight-Reading (non Blue Ribbon)	Sight-Reading (Blue Ribbon)
1	At least level 1	At least level 1
2		At least level 1
3		At least level 2
4	At least level 2	At least level 3
5	At least level 3	At least level 4
6	At least level 4	At least level 5

Sight-Reading Procedure with Script

*For an alternate script for LCD projection of sight-reading, see **Appendix A**.*

After the ensemble has received the sight-reading exercise from the assistant, the adjudicator will state the following:

*“Welcome to the sight-reading portion of your district performance assessment. Please keep your sight-reading exercise face-down until I tell you to turn it over to begin. You will have two minutes to study the sight-reading after your director establishes the tonality. During the study period, you may sing alone, with one another, or in sections per your director’s instructions. However, you may not demonstrate TO one another. **Student use of personal devices is prohibited.**”*

The judge will then ask the director if they have questions about the procedures. Barring none, the judge will instruct the director and students to turn over the exercise and establish tonality. Time begins once the ensemble completes the establishment of tonality.

Two Minutes Pass

“Time. Your director may establish the tonality again before you begin your sight-reading.”

Upon completion of the exercise, the judge will ask the director if they would like to use the initial performance for judging. If they do not, continue the script.

“You will have two additional minutes to study the sight-reading after your director establishes the tonality.”

Time begins once the ensemble completes the establishment of tonality or once the ensemble begins studying the sight-reading.

Two Minutes Pass

“Time. Your director may establish the tonality again before you begin your sight-reading.”

Following the judged performance, the judge will thank the ensemble and collect the exercise.

“Thank you. Please wait until we have collected all the sight-reading forms before you exit the room.”

***An audio file of the script will be distributed to District Reps for use at the event, if desired.**

Procedure as a Chart

Event/Time Elapse	The Director May: (in any order)	Students may: (in any order)	The Director May Not:
<p>First and Second Study Period/ 120 seconds</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish tonality using piano and/or voice ● Establish tonality by having the ensemble sing scales, patterns, and/or progressions, etc. ● Provide students with starting pitch(es.) Directors may sing solfege and/or demonstrate Curwen/Kodaly hand signs for the starting pitch(es) only. ● Set tempo by snapping, tapping, clapping, counting, or conducting etc. ● Allow the ensemble to chant or sing through the example in its entirety before the run-through or second study period, but only once. There is to be no stopping during the chanting/singing, nor is there to be group chanting/singing of only select measures. <i>(Moved from Appendix B.)</i> ● Verbally coach without specific pitch, intervallic, or rhythmic information <i>(See Appendix B for additional explanation of verbal coaching.)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chant, clap, or sing individually, in groups, or in sections (hum, sing, solfege, #s, etc.) Students may sing with one another, but not demonstrate to one another. (i.e., individual students cannot teach the entire ensemble) ● Speak to other members of the ensemble to answer questions or clarify uncertainties ● Use rhythmic syllables, solfege, numbers, or neutral syllables, etc. ● Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Actualize Demonstrate rhythms or pitches (snap, tap, clap, hum, or sing etc) except to establish tonality ● Mouth along with rhythmic syllables, solfege, syllables or numbers, etc. ● Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs, except during the establishment of tonality and giving beginning pitches. (Students may use hand signs). ● Rehearse areas of difficulty ● Allow students to sing, hum, etc. by demonstrating to one another
<p>Run-Through/ Time elapsed and Final Performance (Minimum tempo quarter note = 60bpm)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish tonality using piano and/or voice ● Establish tonality by having the ensemble sing scales, patterns, and/or progressions, etc. ● Provide students with starting pitch(es.) Directors may sing solfege and/or demonstrate Curwen/Kodaly hand signs for the starting pitch(es) only. ● Set tempo and keep the ensemble together by snapping, tapping, clapping, counting, or conducting etc. ● Have the ensemble sing the exercise without stopping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sing scales, patterns, and/or progressions as an ensemble to establish tonality ● Sing the exercise without stopping ● Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sing along with the ensemble ● Mouth along with rhythmic syllables, solfege, or numbers, etc. ● Use Curwen/Kodaly hand signs ● (Students may use hand signs) ● Give students any verbal cues once they have begun singing

~~*See Appendix B for additional explanation of verbal coaching~~

Middle School Sight-Reading Levels



Level	Tonality	Voicing	Melody/Intervals	Meter/Rhythm*
MS Level 1 8 measures	C, D , E-flat, F** Begins and ends on low <i>do</i>	Unison	Stepwise motion Range: low <i>do</i> to <i>sol</i> Diatonic	- 4/4 - Whole notes - Half notes/rests - Quarter notes/rests
MS Level 2 8 measures	C, D , E-flat, F Begins and ends on low <i>do</i>	Unison	Will include one instance of the tonic triad (ascending low do-mi-so) Range: low <i>ti</i> to <i>la</i> Diatonic	Same as level 1, plus: - Dotted half notes - Paired Eighth Notes - No syncopation
MS Level 3 8 measures	C, D , E-flat, F Begins and ends on low <i>do</i>	2-part***	Will include the tonic triad (ascending low do-mi-so) Range: low <i>ti</i> to <i>la</i> Diatonic	Same as level 2, plus: - Eighth note groups of 2 OR 4
MS Level 4 8 measures	C, D , E-Flat, F Begins and ends on low <i>do</i>	2-part*** or 3-part (SSA, TTB, SAB)	Will include tonic triad skips, in any order Range: low <i>ti</i> to <i>la</i> Diatonic	Same as level 3, plus: - 3/4 time signature

* Rhythmic possibilities are only indicative of what could potentially be seen in an example.


** ANY Sight-Reading example may be keyed in an alternate by the director. If the director chooses to establish a key other than the one given, they must notify the judge prior to the first performance.

*** For 2-part sight reading, SA and TB will be provided on the same page/slide, with ST being the same and AB being the same.

High School Sight-Reading Levels

Level	Key/Tonality	Voicing	Melody/Intervals****	Meter/Rhythm*
HS Level 1 8 measures	C, D, E-flat, F** Begins and ends on low <i>do</i>	Unison (The example will be written in treble and bass clef on the same page/slide)	Will include one instance of the tonic triad (ascending low do-mi-so) Range: low <i>ti</i> to <i>la</i> Diatonic	4/4 Whole notes Dotted half notes Half notes/rests Quarter notes/rests Paired Eighth Notes No syncopation
HS Level 2 8 measures	C, D, E-flat, F Begins and ends on low <i>do</i> or <i>mi</i> (One voice should begin/ end on <i>do</i>)	2-part***	Will include the tonic triad (ascending low do-mi-so) Range: low <i>ti</i> to <i>la</i> Diatonic	Same as level 1, plus: - 3/4 time signature - Dotted quarter note with unpaired eighth note
HS Level 3 8 measures	C, D, E-flat, F Begins and ends on <i>do</i> , <i>mi</i> , or <i>sol</i> (One voice should begin/end on <i>do</i>)	3-part or 4-part (SSA, TTB, SAB, or SSAA, TTBB, SATB)	Will include tonic triad skips, in any order See below for vocal ranges**** Diatonic	Same as level 2
HS Level 4 8 measures	C, D, E-flat, F Begins and ends on <i>do</i> , <i>mi</i> , or <i>sol</i> (One voice should begin/end on <i>do</i>)	3-part (SSA, TTB, or SAB) or 4-part (SSAA, TTBB, or SATB)	Skips of a major or minor 3rds, perfect 4th or perfect 5th See below for vocal ranges**** Diatonic	Same as level 3, plus: - Eighth notes with possible syncopation (eighth - quarter - eighth) - Sixteenth notes:  Pitches for sixteenth note rhythms to include repeated notes or stepwise motion.
HS Level 5 8 measures	C, D, E-flat, F Begins and ends on <i>do</i> , <i>mi</i> , or <i>sol</i> (One voice should begin/end on <i>do</i>)	3-part (SSA, TTB, or SAB) or 4-part (SSAA, TTBB, or SATB)	Skips of a major or minor 3rds, perfect 4th or perfect 5 th See below for vocal ranges**** To include <i>fi</i> and <i>si</i> (approached and departed stepwise)	Same as level 4, plus: - Additional sixteenth note combinations:  Pitches for sixteenth note rhythms to include repeated notes, stepwise motion, or tonic triad skips (no chromatics)

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HS Level 6 8 measures	C, D, E-flat, F Begins and ends on <i>do, mi, or sol</i> (One voice should begin/end on <i>do</i>)	3-part (SSA, TTB, or SAB) or 4-part (SSAA, TTBB, or SATB)	Skips of a major or minor 3rds, perfect 4th or perfect 5th See below for vocal ranges**** To include all chromatics (approached and departed stepwise)	Same as level 5, plus: - Additional sixteenth note combinations 
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* Rhythmic possibilities are only indicative of what could *potentially* be seen in an example

** ANY Sight-Reading example may be keyed in an alternate by the director. If the director chooses to establish a key other than the one given, they must notify the judge prior to the first performance.

*** For 2-part sight reading, SA and TB will be provided on the same page/slide, with ST being the same and AB being the same.

**** Ranges: 4 Part – Sop: B flat 3 – E5 , Alto: A flat 3 – C5, Ten: D3 – E4, Bass: A2 – C4

SAB – Sop and Alto: same as above, Baritone: D3 – D4

TTB – Ten 1: D3-E4, Ten 2: D3-D4, Bass: A2-C4

Appendix A

Alternate Script for LCD Projection of Sight-Reading

Sight-Reading Procedure with Script

After the ensemble has entered the room, the adjudicator will state the following:

*“Welcome to the sight-reading portion of your district performance assessment. You will have two minutes to study the sight-reading after your director establishes the tonality. During the study period, you may sing alone, with one another, or in sections per your director’s instructions. However, you may not demonstrate TO one another. **Student use of personal devices is prohibited.**”*

The judge will then ask the director if they have questions about the procedures. Barring none, the judge will instruct the director to establish tonality and begin the study period. Time begins once the ensemble completes the establishment of tonality.

Two Minutes Pass

“Time. Your director may establish the tonality again before you begin your sight-reading.”

Upon completion of the exercise, the judge will ask the director if they would like to use the initial performance for judging. If they do not, continue the script.

“You will have two additional minutes to study the sight-reading after your director establishes the tonality.”

Time begins once the ensemble completes the establishment of tonality or once the ensemble begins studying the sight-reading.

Two Minutes Pass

“Time. Your director may establish the tonality again before you begin your sight-reading.”

Following the judged performance, the judge will thank the ensemble ~~and collect the exercise.~~

~~*“Thank you. Please wait until we have collected all the sight-reading forms before you exit the room.”*~~

Appendix B

Clarification on Verbal Coaching

The director may:

- Identify measures with difficult material, either pitch or rhythmic, in it without providing the solution to the problem -
 - “Students, please notice the tricky rhythms in the second measure.”
 - “Students, there is a problem with a skip in the fourth measure.”
- Indicate in which voice part the problem is-
 - “The altos need to be careful of one specific pitch in measure three.”
- ~~Have students chant through rhythms in the example in its entirety before the run-through or second study period, but only once. There is to be no stopping during the chanting nor is there to be group chanting of only select measures. (moved to page 4)~~

The director may not:

- Provide pitch, interval or rhythmic solutions to any part of the sight-reading example.
 - “In the first measure, there is a skip from *do* to *fa*, please make that correction. You are singing *do* to *mi*.”
 - “Be careful of the eighth note rhythms in measure seven. Remember, to count eighth notes like one-and, two-and, three-and, four-and.”
 - “The third note in the last measure is *mi* not *re*.”
- Practice with the students areas that are difficult or incorrect
 - “The pitches in measure three were incorrect, let’s sing through it together.”

When judging: The rule for verbal coaching is that teachers may not intentionally provide any answers for students during the entire process.

Appendix C

Composition Expectations

Formatting

- Header coding: Schooling level, Level #, Key (For example – MS, Level 1, C Major)
- Landscape layout
- Measures are numbered
- For three part men's examples, the same examples should be provided in TTB and TBB format with no difference between them other than the clef for the middle voice.

Compositional Expectations

- Cadences
 - IV – I
 - V – I
 - Use of secondary dominants and deceptive cadences in high school levels 5 and 6 only.
- No voice crossing, but voices may sing unison
- All skips are within I, IV, and V chords only for all middle school levels and high school levels 1 through 4. High school levels 5 and 6 may contain skips within additional chords.
- No meter changes within composition

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Appendix D

Composer Commissioning Letter

To: Possible composers for District Assessments Sight-Reading
 From: District Assessments Sight-Reading Committee
 Date: _____

Your name has been recommended to the Virginia Choral Director's Association committee on sight-reading for District Assessments, as a possible composer for sight-reading examples for the entire state in mid-March, _____. The samples need to follow standard 18th century harmonic progressions, be singable using accepted choral practices and follow the parameters listed on the enclosed page. We also need these to be produced using a computer program such as Sibelius, Finale, or other easily readable music formats.

We are asking you to write 3 samples, 8 measures each, for high-school Levels 2, 3, and 4 which could be used as samples to send to all choral directors in Virginia in January if you are chosen. We need these examples of your work by _____. If your work is selected you will be asked to write an example of your work for middle school, Levels 1- 4 and high school Levels 1- 4 which will be sent to all choral directors in January

The due date for the final Virginia Choral Director's Association Assessment 8 measure compositions in required voicing is the first week in March. The parameter for each level is enclosed in this letter. If you are chosen as composer for the _____ District Assessments you will be compensated.

Thank you for being willing to help Virginia Choral Directors establish state-wide standards for sight-singing.

VCDA Sight-Reading Committee

Timeline

Sept. ____ Three samples of High School Level 2, 3, 4 sent to ____

Jan. ____ One example for each level of middle school and high school sight-reading to be sent to every choral director in the state by our committee.

March ____ Three examples for each middle school and high school levels 1, 2, 3, 4 in each voicing listed. The same example may be used for different voicing by transposing the example.

Appendix E

Recommended Reading

Books

- Bluestine, E. (2000). *The ways children learn music*. Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc.
- Demorest, S. M. (2001). *Building choral excellence: Teaching sight-singing in the choral rehearsal*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gordon, E. E. (2003). *Learning sequences in music*. Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc.
- Krueger, C. (2011). *Progressive sight singing*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Articles

- Demorest, S. M. (1998). Sightsinging in the secondary choral ensemble: A review of the research. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 137, 1-15.
- Demorest, S. M. and May, W. V. (1995). Sight-singing instruction in the choral ensemble: Factors related to individual performance. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 43, 156-167.
DOI: 10.2307/3345676.
- Henry, M. L. (2011). The effect of pitch and rhythm difficulty on vocal sight-reading performance. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 59(1), 72-84. DOI: 10.1177/0022429410397199
- Henry, M. (2001). The development of a vocal sight-reading inventory. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 150, 21-35.
- Killian, J. N. and Henry, M. L. (2005). A comparison of successful and unsuccessful strategies in individual sight-singing preparation and performance. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 53, 51-65. DOI: 10.1177/002242940505300105
- Norris, C. E. (2004). A nationwide overview of sight-singing requirements of large-group choral festivals. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 52(1), 16-28.

Appendix F

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