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| **What are three things that stand out to you as positives when you judge a choral assessment?** |
| Good Facial expression/demeanor, Musical accuracy, Musical expression |
| A director that is excited about performing and that carries over to his students, Seeing an older director encourage a younger one., Feeling the excitement in the air. |
| 1. Clear attention to text in relation to musical context. How has the conductor used the text to assist in making the presentation musical. 2. Attention to consistent and clearly articulated entrances and releases. Is the ensemble clearly and demonstratively "together" 3. Do the expressive elements go beyond the obvious markings to show musician (conductor/ensemble) engagement in, and a commitment to, the piece beyond the basics. A common comment is "dynamic markings are the basic framework for expression, not an end to themselves". Text. text. text. |
| 1. Love the wide variety of repertoire I hear. Teachers seem to choose well to challenge, yet show off the best attributes of their choirs. 2. It's a pleasure to hear choirs from all over the district. It's so good that smaller choir programs will come to give their students opportunities for performing experience and to hear comments that can boost confidence and encourage paths to improvement. 3. In an age that honors competition, this is a chance to step away from competitiveness and provide a positive experience for singers as long as teachers keep the right mindset and judge’s critique to be encouraging and helpful. |
| Choosing appropriate, artistic literature. Age-appropriate, healthy, cultivated vocal tone. Artistic interpretive concepts expressively performed by the ensemble |
| The discipline of the singers. The beauty and consistency of tone. Attention to subtle details: nothing is present in the performance that distracts me from the music itself. |
| **What are three things you notice as a negative when you judge a choral assessment?** |
| Music choice for the choir (too difficult/not correct voicing etc.) Use of recorded accompaniment (when not warranted) Pitch and rhythm inaccuracies. |
| A director that is extremely nervous. A group that is not prepared. Singers in the audience that are talking. |
| 1. Lack of attention to expressive elements, and inconsistencies in ensemble articulation (phrasing, breathing, etc.) 2. Choosing music that is beyond the musical maturity of the singers. Lots of rehearsal on correct notes with little attention to expressive elements. 3. Lack of visual engagement with the music. You don't have to do a dance, but appropriate engagement - eyes, facial, ect.- can make a big difference in perception of the musical energy, and ensemble engagement. |
| It is noticeable when students are unprepared and skeptical of their performance; attire (either student or teacher) that is inappropriate for a performance; when students are clearly not enjoying the experience |
| 1. I've known some judges to be unnecessarily harsh as if to show off their credentials rather than support the music education of all students. 2. Some teachers are too intense and appear to put too much pressure on their students "to win." 3. I don't like hearing the same choir perform the same musical pieces year after year. |
| Literature choices that do not represent the the core values of music education. Literature that is not central to the cultural literacy of a diverse society and historically significant composers and genres. Incorrect pitches, rhythms. Inaccurate ensemble integrity in tempo, rhythm, text/pronunciation, harmonic/melodic tuning, Singing that lack expression |
| Musical performance that is underprepared or unrefined. Music that is too difficult for the ensemble to perform well. Slovenly behavior that distracts from the performance. Music chosen to impress technically rather than to explore and present music of stirring beauty (I like rhythmic, exciting music, too!) |
| I feel strongly that judges should not be talking into the recording devices while choirs are singing because it is impossible to truly hear the performance. Secondly, I dislike when choirs are mixed together in order of performance. I feel that the choirs should be judged in separate groups - one for developing choirs, and one for the more advanced groups. Lastly, I do not like when choir directors do not have their music memorized and look at their stand, but yet they expect their choir to have the songs memorized. The director should lead by example! |
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| **What is your favorite part of judging a choral assessment?** |
| Listening to all of the choirs! |
| Hearing great choral music. Taking note of a great song or two that would work for my chorus. |
| Hearing the best musical effort on the part of an ensemble regardless of how demanding the piece is. There is no hiding excellence in ensemble singing regardless of level. I love to hear the newest and most innovative literature. But, I love even more truly musical presentations regardless of whether they are standards or brand new. I also love hearing choirs from all the wonderful choral programs in the state. |
| I enjoy seeing a variety of repertoire and interpretations of the repertoire |
| Hearing choirs live up to their potential and singing with joy. |
| Hearing schools expressively perform great literature regardless of their size, geographic location, or cultural make-up. |
| I love to hear people singing together, and the shared sense of achievement that makes me want to write good things! |
| My favorite part is when I am able to give helpful and positive feedback, especially when the choir is developed enough to offer more technical feedback. |
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| **What is your least favorite part?** |
| In some circumstances, not having enough time to properly assess. |
| Hearing negative comments from students. A judge that acts like his judging is a job and not a pleasure. |
| Trying to assess to many choral ensembles in a day. Adjudicating is very exciting and exhausting. |
| Judging is stressful! Who am I to say what you are doing wrong and right in your classroom with your students? So, when I judge I try to provide suggestions rather than just critiques |
| Having to assign a number to choirs that could be discouraging. I always try to give encouraging comments. |
| Hearing performances that do not represent an accurate assessment of what is being taught and what should be taught in the contemporary public school arena. The primary defense for inclusion of music in public schools is to provide a valid educational activity with clearly stated goals that result in measurable achievement in: a) music literacy; b) cultural literacy; c) the cultivation of aesthetic expression. |
| When a group, for whatever reason, fails to meet its own goals for performance; different choirs have different potentials, so I am really only disappointed when a choir does not approach its potential in performance. Worse yet is when choirs with less potential for success compare their performances with choirs with greater potentials for success. I am a choral populist that likes to see everyone singing and singing as well as they can together. |
| **Any specific advice regarding programming?** |
| Yes: program for YOUR choir. There is so much music to choose from. Take the time to look at selections to find what will suit the particular choir. |
| Not trying to do a piece of music that is too hard. Choosing a contrast in songs. |
| Always choose contrasting pieces so as to demonstrate the musical breadth and flexibility of the ensemble. Pieces that demonstrate both the ability to sing a legato line as well as a rhythmically energetic one is important. Know your choir and choose literature that appropriately showcases their musical maturity, aptitude and musicianship. You are responsible for developing musicianship and helping them grow. Assessments are an avenue for that end. It is not a competition. |
| Choosing music for a group is difficult. Be sure to choose something that YOU believe in as the director. If you believe in it (even love it) then that love will translate through your students. |
| Select repertoire that shows off the most potential of your choir. There is a delicate balance between challenging literature and achievable literature. |
| At least one piece should be from the standard canon of classical literature (Renaissance through 21rst Century). Avoid performing the same pieces from year to year (or biennially). One piece should stretch the performance envelope of the ability level of the program so that over a series of years growth can be demonstrated. |
| A director should select music that matches the chorus' level of emotional maturity. A director should select music that creates intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth. A director should select music that is within the potential capability of the chorus' technical abilities. A director should balance their program selections so that the program has sufficient variety of style, but that also produces a dramatic arc in both text and music. |
| The program must be stylistically varied, and contrasting styles must be included. These may include contemporary works, Classical works, varying tempos, styles, etc. Directors must choose repertoire carefully to show off the choirs' strengths rather than weaknesses. Young voices must also be exposed to a wider tessitura to train their voices to improve over time. |
| **Any specific advice regarding visual aspect of performance?** |
| From the time you walk in to the time you walk out, you are being "judged". This is a good thing. Facial expression is one of the most difficult aspects of a good performance for a choir to understand. Work on this always (from the time you are learning notes until the performance). |
| Make sure the girls know how to walk in their shoes. Try to unify the level of formal in the group. |
| While clear engagement by the choir is a good thing, natural movement, facial expression, etc. It's important that it is not distracting from the musical presentation or that it appears contrived. Authentic engagement is essential. |
| Aesthetics are important. Be sure that the appearance of your students and yourself is what you want to communicate to your audience. The focus of any performance should be solely on the music, not students or conductors attire. |
| Watching a choir that clearly loves singing together excites me. Energy and appropriate facial expressions and posture that shows engagement always grabs my attention first. |
| Expressive faces |
| I like unity in apparel, as it lends a visual unity that reflects and coordinates with the musical unity the choir is trying to achieve. A little motion goes a long way. Memorization is no vice, but what is memorized should be performed all the more expressively, or else memorization is vain. If memorization improves a performance, then by all means memorize, whenever possible. If memorization hurts a performance by making it less secure, then use music! |
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| **Any other thoughts or advice you'd like to share with teachers regarding the assessment process?** |
| Both judging and performing is such a positive learning experience for your students. The goal should NOT be for the choir to earn a Superior. It is the process of preparing for the event and the knowledge you and your students gain from the performance and judge comments that is most important. The goal is to learn, not to compete! |
| Don't be scared. The judges are there to encourage, offer constructive criticism. Take the time to get your students on the risers, where you want them. Smile at your students before you start. Breath. |
| Carefully assess what showcases the best aspects of your ensemble and assists in growing musically. |
| Enjoy the experience. So often teachers are the boundary between enjoyment and the students. Remember, it should NEVER be about the rating but the experience. |
| Don't be afraid of assessment. Make it a positive learning experience for your choir. Show your own enthusiasm for music making. |
| Include a descriptive narrative of the size of the school, demographic, rehearsal schedule. Include program copies of performances for the current academic year and previous two academic years. All of this is to establish a perspective for the adjudicator.  For teachers who are in their first 7 years of a career there should be a separate adjudication sheet for comments on stick technique, programming choices and an evaluation of the program's development over time. All of this is geared towards helping the teacher improve their skill sets. This is a most important component to the assessment structure for rural schools where the ONLY evaluation of a teacher's competency comes from a principal (if that person even comes into the classroom) and there is rarely an arts supervisor. |
| Some say textual clarity is superior to tone, and some say that tone is more important. I agree! You have to work for projected and synchronized consonants, AND you have to work for vowel color and unity in the context of good resonance. When I hear a choir, tone is the first thing I notice. Then I notice clarity of diction. Finally, I notice whether or not the group seems to have a unified understanding of the text itself by the quality of its performance.  The singers should have a visual buoyancy about them, a certain confident ease displayed through their postures and faces that reflects their joy and love of the experience they are so lucky to be a part of! Finally, words, notes, rhythms, good tone, clear diction, musical expressivity, ensemble unity--these are "givens." What most impresses me is what I call "love in the sound," a spiritual quality that is hard to define; it comes when the singers are personally committed to one another in producing the best performances they can for the benefit of those who hear them; it amounts to a unified sense of purpose, and of sacrifice. |
| Have advanced choirs sing in one section, and the less developed choir sing during another section of time. |