

Planning For Choir

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I don't claim to be an expert on planning for choir, but I do find that some planning early in the year can make life so much easier as the year sails by.

Here's what I do...

Long Term Planning

- ♪ Create a table with the songs down the left and the weeks across the top
- ♪ Block out any weeks that we'll miss a rehearsal (eg. school closures, camps, excursions)
- ♪ Look at the Teaching and Assessment Guide grid
 - what songs need to be known first? These need to be kept in mind as a priority
- ♪ I mainly focus on unison songs for the first few weeks, as I don't split my choir into Sopranos and Altos until I've got definite numbers (students can have a go for a few weeks before they make their decision and pay for their choir book and CD)
- ♪ Work out how many songs I can generally cover in a rehearsal – this may depend on rehearsal length, number of students involved, abilities of the students, etc.
- ♪ Write into the table which songs I plan to cover each week, keeping in mind which songs I need to focus on more, or have finished by the end of the term
 - which bits of each song we'll learn
 - which bits we'll revise
 - which bits are for homework

Once I've completed the planning for the term, I give students a copy of the planner – it has their homework marked in, as well as the songs we are covering each week. This means that if students are away, they still know what was covered in rehearsal and what their homework is. It also allows any studious students to prepare for the weekly rehearsal by listening to the songs we'll be covering.

Week By Week Planning

Once I've done a long term plan for the term, I find that the weekly planning is much easier! I know which songs/sections I need to work on, it's just a matter of working out the order and exactly how I'll teach each one. I write my rehearsal plan into a book, that way, I can sit down at the end of the rehearsal and mark in anything we didn't get to finish, so that I've got a record of what we've achieved.

My rehearsal plan usually follows this basic formula...

- ♪ After a warm up, the first song I sing will be something that the students are familiar with - it will just be a sing through/revision of work already done - something that allows them to have a good sing
- ♪ Next we'll tackle the most difficult part of the rehearsal - the song/section that will require the most work - I find that it's best to do this early in the rehearsal while the students are still fresh
- ♪ After this, I'll choose a lighter song, either revision or something fairly easy - this gives students a break after the hard work of the previous song
- ♪ Keep alternating between trickier and easier songs for the remainder of the rehearsal.
- ♪ If you have time in your rehearsal for a game, put it 3/4 of the way through the rehearsal (with only fairly light/simple things afterwards)
- ♪ Finish the rehearsal on a high - maybe coming back to something the students sang well during the rehearsal, or a favourite song
- ♪ Before students leave, give them any notes/reminders for the week (if you've got lots of information to talk them through, it's probably best to do this before the last songs, so that they still go out on a high)

A few little rehearsal hints..

- ♪ Make sure that students have earned their game - have the word "GAME" written on the board at the start of the rehearsal - if students are too chatty during rehearsal, they may lose a letter. When I get to game time in the rehearsal, if the word is incomplete, they miss their game
- ♪ Students like to know what's next, so if I'm able, I write the basic rehearsal plan on the board – just the song name and page number. This also gives them an idea of how much work they've done and how much they've still got to do
- ♪ Tell students to bring their drink bottles and a pencil to rehearsals – the drink bottle will ensure that they don't need to leave the room to get a drink and the pencil is to mark any tricky bits/reminders in their books
- ♪ Ensure that students have allocated seating, based on voice and behaviour. Mix your stronger voices throughout the group (maybe in pairs), so that the quieter, less confident singers can hear them and be inspired to join the sound. Try to ensure that the stronger singers can also hear each other.